The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal 2020
Through subtle shades of color, the cover design represents the layers of richness and diversity that flourish within minority communities.
The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal 2020

A collection of scholarly research by fellows of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program
Preface

It has been my sincere honor and pleasure to work with the talented authors of the 2020 edition of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) Journal for the first time as Editor-in-Chief. The goal of the MMUF program is to directly address one aspect of inequity within higher education by taking deliberate measures to increase diversity within the faculty of colleges and universities writ large. Since 1988, the MMUF has supported over 5000 undergraduate students from marginalized backgrounds with research funding, professional development, and the opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor, among other experiences, to best prepare Fellows to enter a PhD program in the humanities or social sciences in the near future. For the past 25 years, as a branch of the MMUF program, the MMUF Journal has served to provide Fellows with an avenue to publish their original research. Going through the academic publication process—from submitting an article, to revising one’s work through the peer review process, to ultimately preparing and polishing a piece for publication—is a crucial step in the life of a budding scholar. Our hope is that through this experience, our authors feel empowered to continue to publish their work as they progress in their respective academic careers.

The 2020 Journal features contributions by 30 authors from 24 colleges and universities that are part of the MMUF’s member institutions. These articles often started as seminar papers or adapted chapters of senior theses and exemplify the breadth and depth of the humanities and social sciences, particularly emphasizing the interdisciplinary work that we find in so many fields today.

Though the Journal is open to scholarly work from all time periods and disciplines, we received a noteworthy amount of submissions this year deconstructing and critiquing issues of the present day. The papers presented here thoughtfully and powerfully analyze and reflect on many issues of (in)equality and inclusion within contemporary society from several different perspectives and points in time. In the 2020 Journal, several authors bring buried voices and experiences of marginalized groups to life, including overlooked women in history, contemporary college students of color, and black girls in education. Others explore social activism through the arts. Yet another group interrogates the immigrant experience and the political barriers that prevent some from not only U.S. citizenship, but also safety and security within their own homes. Persistent investigation into topics such as these will remain timely, relevant, and crucial to empower desperately needed change in the U.S. for many years to come. The voices of our authors will continue to be strong and powerful through the words and ideas captured on the pages of this Journal even after they have moved on from their tenure as an MMUF Fellow.

It has been a privilege to work alongside these promising scholars as they prepared their work for publication. I am in awe of their bravery and tenacity to take on through their work such important topics that are all too crucially relevant to issues of equity, access, social justice, and racism within the United States—and the world—today.

We are excited and proud to share their work with you!

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Malintzin: The Buried Voice of the Spanish Conquest
Jasmine A. Abang, California State University, Dominguez Hills

Abstract

The Mexican Conquest is one of the most significant events in world history. However, for centuries, the dominant narrative has been a Eurocentric portrayal that presumes Hernán Cortés and other conquistadors to be heroic, noble, and competent enough to maneuver through México with little to no opposition. Additionally, the dominant narrative silences Indigenous voices of the 1519 Spanish Conquest and omits the acknowledgment of Indigenous contributions to Spanish success. Matthew Restall’s *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* pushes against the dominant Eurocentric narrative of the Conquest. In particular, Restall brings an Indigenous woman, Malintzin, the interpreter of Hernán Cortés, to the forefront. With support from translated Nahuatl texts and pictographs and sixteenth-century Spanish sources, Malintzin’s voice becomes visible. Two core Indigenous sources that molded Restall’s arguments are the *Florentine Codex*, a Mexica source created a generation post-Conquest, and the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, representing an Indigenous ally perspective also from the mid-sixteenth century. Through the analysis of these sources I will demonstrate how Malintzin emerges as a central figure with a linguistic multi-skill set of quick language acquisition, the ability to navigate high-risk scenarios, the skill to interpret with cultural mediation and sensitivity, plus the utilization of different linguistic registers. Her skills allowed her to make a conscious decision to become Cortés’ interpreter and proved to be indispensable when it comes to Spanish-Indigenous communication during the Conquest.

Acknowledgements

A big ¡Muchísimas Gracias! to Dr. Doris Namala. For the past three years, you have been in my corner as a teacher, mentor, advisor, and biggest supporter. The knowledge and guidance you provide me are invaluable, and I cannot wait to show you all that I accomplish in the future!

A warm thank you to Dominguez Hills’ History Department coordinator Raúl Rubio, Mr. Bruno Dell’Erba, and Liza Bakewell at Mesolore. You all worked during your winter break to help me obtain the permission needed to use images in my scholarship. Without those images, my scholarship would not be what I envisioned!
conquistador who had been shipwrecked and enslaved among the Mayans and became the Spanish to Mayan language interpreter to Cortés.

Malintzin utilizes her bilingual abilities to her advantage during the Conquest’s move inland, away from the Mayan-speaking Yucatán into Nahuatl-speaking central México. Frances Karttunen notes in “Rethinking Malinche,” that Cortés observed Malintzin speaking to the Nahuatl speaking groups the Spanish encountered. Malintzin’s interactions not only illustrated her ability to speak Mayan with Aguilar but also confirmed that she spoke Nahuatl. Competency in two languages extended to her options to not remain a concubine, nor a slave but also confirmed that she spoke Nahuatl. Interactions not only illustrated her ability to speak Mayan language of Castile (Spanish).8

Codex, Malintzin can be observed using the Eighteen of the spoken. According to the Nahuatl text in Book XII, Chapter Seventeen, the conversation around the Spanish attempt to detain the powerful Mexica tlatoani Tlaxcalans planning ambushes and Cortés threatening to use violence if the tlatoani Tlaxcalans did not come to negotiate peace.11 Malintzin’s aptitude to quickly learn Spanish becomes essential to the Conquest as Cortés relied on Aguilar to translate the Spanish Conquest. However, not one image of the tapestry shows Aguilar translating. Aguilar’s absence in the Lienzo cements Malintzin as the only interpreter for communication across Nahuatl, Mayan, and Spanish languages, naturally placing a heavy dependency on her by Cortés. Despite the pressure, her trilingual proficiency proved successful as Cortés detained and isolated the Nahua tlatoani and began to exercise his control in México-Tenochtitlán. Even beyond Tenochtitlán, Malintzin continued as Cortés’ interpreter, making more of her linguistic proficiencies visible during encounters with other Indigenous altepetl (Indigenous communities).

We return to Camilla Townsend’s book Malintzin’s Choices as she highlights Malintzin’s ability to learn Spanish with the help of her fellow interpreter Gerónimo de Aguilar.9 Malintzin’s aptitude to quickly learn Spanish becomes essential to the Conquest as Cortés relied on Aguilar of his interpreting services when he observed him struggling to understand conversations in Nahuatl. With the dismissal of Aguilar, Malintzin became the primary agent who handled all interactions spoken in Mayan, Nahuatl, and Spanish.10

The Lienzo de Tlaxcala further verifies Malintzin’s quick acquisition of language. The Lienzo, a tapestry commissioned by the cabildo (town council) of Tlaxcala, one of the Spaniards’ most important Indigenous allies, offers a pictorial account of the Spanish Conquest that starts with the arrival of Cortés at Tlaxcala through the fall of Tenochtitlán and then continues with campaigns across Mesoamerica. The Lienzo frequently presents Malintzin in the middle of both Spanish and Indigenous parties interpreting. However, we return to Camilla Townsend’s book Malintzin’s Choices as she highlights Malintzin’s ability to learn Spanish with the help of her fellow interpreter Gerónimo de Aguilar.9 Malintzin’s aptitude to quickly learn Spanish becomes essential to the Conquest as Cortés relied on Aguilar of his interpreting services when he observed him struggling to understand conversations in Nahuatl. With the dismissal of Aguilar, Malintzin became the primary agent who handled all interactions spoken in Mayan, Nahuatl, and Spanish.10

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Figure 1. Malintzin translating between Spanish and Moteucçoma. Folio 26 in Book XII of the Florentine Codex. Digital image provided by the World Digital Library.
an expectancy of Malintzin to continue mediating Spanish-Tlaxcalan negotiations. Her effectiveness was significant as she ushered in the Spanish-Tlaxcalan alliance.

Malintzin’s presence during the negotiations with the Tlaxcalans is further encapsulated in the memoirs of Bernal Díaz, a Spanish Conquistador under Cortés. Díaz describes that after the bloodshed ceased, Tlaxcalan caciques (local native leaders) would meet with Cortés, referring to him as Malinche. Book XII of the Florentine Codex also attests to Indigenous references to Cortés as Malinche, symbolizing a visibility to Malintzin’s voice as her name transposes on to Cortés since she spoke on his behalf. The Indigenous reference placed upon Cortés meant the caciques of Tlaxcala equated Malintzin’s interpreting with being worthy of much importance and respect. Díaz also adds in his memoirs that other Indigenous encountered by the Spanish referenced Cortés as Malinche, equating communication with Cortés with his Indigenous interpreter.

Cell 14 (Figure 2) from the Lienzo de Tlaxcala exemplifies another dangerous scenario and an expectation of Malintzin to interpret. Figure 2 depicts Malintzin in the middle of an enclosed area surrounded by warriors identified as not being from Tlaxcala. Wartime dress, shields, obsidian-swords, and bladed weapons establish the difference between the two Indigenous groups. The physical danger is evident as Malintzin is positioned further back in the building and shielded by Spanish-Tlaxcalan forces who protect her from the opposing warriors. However, despite the conditions, Malintzin’s presence proves that there is a Spanish need for her regardless of the possible violence afflicted towards her.

Malintzin also displayed another linguistic strength, interpreting with cultural awareness and sensitivity. The land conquered by the Spanish and their allies during the Conquest stretched from Veracruz to Tenochtitlán, according to the map provided in Frances Karttunen’s “Rethinking Malinche.” It was inevitable that the Spanish would face with Nahua and Mayan cultural practices, as well as a variety of local dialects. In her youth, Malintzin had to navigate between different Indigenous cultures; now she learned to do the same with the Spanish culture. Townsend notes, “She had an extraordinary gift to assess situations.” Because there is no telling whom the Spanish would be facing at any point of the Conquest, Malintzin’s gift was invaluable.

As discussed previously, the peace treaty between the Spanish and the warring altepetl of Tlaxcala exemplifies Malintzin’s capacity to interpret with cultural mediation and sensitivity. When the Tlaxcalans were ready to make peace with the Spanish, Malintzin was the mediator of the negotiations. However, Malintzin not only had to translate what Cortés was saying in Spanish to one tlatoani, but Tlaxcala’s four tlatoque (plural for tlatoani), all of whom were involved in the negotiations. The talks of peace represented an extremely complicated mediation and a delicate Indigenous political arrangement with five individuals speaking at one time. Because of Malintzin’s experience with both cultures, she was the only individual to be culturally and linguistically prepared for this encounter. Díaz further attests to her uniqueness in his memoirs proclaiming, “Without her, we couldn’t do anything.”

Malintzin’s cultural awareness is again evident when interpreting during Cortés’ encounter with Moteucçoma. From a Mexica perspective, without Malintzin, interaction with Moteucçoma was impossible for Cortés. Karttunen mentions that any subjects in Moteucçoma’s presence would never let their eyes come up from the ground. Malintzin maintains communication between Cortés and Moteucçoma without having to keep her eyes on the ground, informing him that Spanish forces were about to arrest him. Although a detrimental situation for the Mexica tlatoani, this example depicts Malintzin’s strength to maneuver through Indigenous culture practices while meeting the Spanish objective of capturing Moteucçoma.

A final component of Malintzin’s linguistic efficiency, and perhaps her most significant asset overall, was her ability to switch between informal and formal registers of Nahuatl. Karttunen, author of “To the Valley of Mexico: Doña Marina, “La Malinche” (ca. 1500–1527),” notes that Malintzin, as a noble woman, was able to understand a linguistic register known as rēcpillabōlli (lordly speech). A register exclusive to Nahua nobles only obtainable through education. The Nahua māchēhualtin
(commoners) did not have access to education and therefore did not possess the ability to understand or utilize the grammatical complexity of the register. Malintzin’s ability to utilize a noble register traces back to her father, who was a noble of Coatzacoalcos, related directly to a tlatoani or through the lineage of a tlatoani.

The Spanish months-long stay in Tenochtitlán confirmed Malintzin’s capacity to use técpillabōlli. Figure 3 illustrates a moment after the capture of Moteucçoma with Malintzin, interpreting between Cortés and a Nahua noble who is identified by the slicked-back knot of hair at the top of his head.

![Figure 3. Malintzin translating between Cortés and a Mexican pilli (noble). Folio 29 in Book XII of the Florentine Codex. Digital image provided by the World Digital Library.](image)

Cortés relied on Malintzin to give commands to Moteucçoma’s noble class, which is depicted by the finger pointing signifying the power and authority of “he who speaks.” This frank exchange was essential for Cortés, because without Malintzin’s knowledge of the lordly register communication with the Tenochca pilles (nobility) would be impossible.

Malintzin’s voice is one that finds itself being drowned out by the dominant Eurocentric narrative of the Spanish Conquests in México. With the use of two core Indigenous sources, the Lienzo de Tlaxcala and the Florentine Codex, we see that her presence was indeed, significant. Sixteenth-century Spanish memoirs like that of Bernal Díaz de Castillo further attested to the value of Malintzin’s linguistic skills, making it hard to deny the importance of her quick language acquisition, ability to navigate high-risk scenarios, interpreting with cultural mediation and sensitivity, and the utilization of different linguistic registers in Spanish-Indigenous communication. Undoubtedly, her contributions were a contributing factor to Spanish successes. Perhaps more importantly, they were proof of her agency and the ability of an Indigenous woman to shape one of the most significant events in world history. Native language-driven research has in fact impacted the writing of not only Mexican Conquest history but extended into the Colonial Period and the exploration of Indigenous women and Mesoamerican gender ideologies as well.

**Endnotes**

1 Matthew Restall, Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquests (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2003).
4 Ibid., 63.
6 Ibid., 302.
9 Townsend, Malintzin’s Choices, 58.
10 Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” 301.
12 Townsend, Malintzin’s Choices, 61.
14 Ibid., 176.
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17 Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” 190.
18 Townsend, Malintzin’s Choices, 158.
19 Ibid., 107.
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21 Díaz de Castillo, Historia verdadera, 280.
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Visible from the Veil: Subalternity as Agency in the Life of Mother Ignacia del Espíritu Santo, 1660–1750
Joshua Acosta, California State University, Long Beach

Joshua Acosta is a senior at California State University, Long Beach where he is majoring in History and has a minor in Religious Studies. His main research area is early modern Pacific history and how systems of colonialism were subverted by narratives of agency among subaltern populations. He is also interested in studying the ways material and visual culture serve to construct representations of Pacific Islander and Asian culture across maritime worlds. Joshua plans to pursue a PhD and focus on how cultural identities spanned across the Pacific and how cross-cultural encounters between various peoples have shaped identities in the vast ocean.

Abstract

In 1684, Ignacia del Espíritu Santo, a woman of Chinese and native mestiza descent, created one of the first religious communities for native and mestiza women in the Spanish Philippines. However, within the colonial social hierarchy, natives and mestizas were considered the subaltern, those at the bottom of the hierarchy of power. Hierarchies emerged from the constructs imposed upon the colonized by the Spanish based on ethnicity to emphasize Iberian superiority. Despite rigid ethnic hierarchies and religious norms imposed by the Spanish colonial period, Mother Ignacia’s story reflects an effort of subaltern counterculture by showing how religious women sought to subvert and negotiate social spaces for themselves within colonial society. This case study examines her efforts to increase the visibility of religious women regarded as inferior in the public sphere and contests the narrative of colonialism and power in the early modern period.

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My most profound gratitude goes to my mentor, Dr. Guotong Li, for her time and effort to support my research project. Her dedication to my scholarly pursuits has been an important part of this journey. I also thank Dr. Abigail Rosas for providing clear feedback and suggestions to develop this work and all my Mellon Mays peers for their encouragement.

Introduction

The arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century marked the beginning of over three centuries of imperial rule in the Philippines. Spanish colonialism was closely tied with the religious aims of the Roman Catholic Church as various missionaries journeyed to the newly claimed lands acquired by conquistadors during the height of Spanish exploration across maritime worlds. The Catholic Church remains an integral structure within Filipino society, having largely shaped education, governance, and various cultural norms. However, the evangelization of the indigenous communities and the Chinese merchants, referred to as sangleyes by the Spanish, and the mestizos, or mixed races, was greatly nuanced. Hindered by secular racial hierarchies and religious patriarchal domination, religious mestizas challenged colonial hierarchies by using their religious vocation as a platform for ethnic and gendered activism. Using the story of Mother Ignacia del Espíritu Santo (1663–1748), I argue that subaltern religious women actively collaborated with each other to create and define their own spaces within their colonial society. I describe this agency as “subaltern counterculture” which manifested in the formation and charism of their religious orders. The notion of subalternity denotes populations left outside of the hierarchies of power as a result of colonization or other structures of domination imposed upon a given population. As such, it is the central theoretical framework of this study.

Spanish Colonialism in the Philippines

Much like the events across the Pacific where the Spanish had claimed large swaths of territory in the Americas, the Southeast Asian archipelago that would be named Las islas filipinas (after the reigning monarch of King Philip II, 1556–1598) was subject to the rule of their new Iberian conquerors. The period of colonization was dubbed as the process of “hispanization” of the Philippine Islands by historian John Ledyd Phelan. In The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565–1700, Phelan denotes how indigenous tribes were organized by the Catholic clergy bajo de campana (under the church bells). This highlighted the importance of the religious authorities in the manifestation of the imperial state with the multiplicity of churches and the involvement of the clergy throughout the period of colonization. The Spanish imposed two central components of colonial domination: racial stratification and religious conversion.

As in the Americas, the Spanish created various structures to govern their subjects. Racial hierarchies were central to the colonial administration. According to Richard Chu, “the Spanish colonial government built an administrative structure distinguishing these groups along socio-cultural and political lines. The Spanish colonizers classified the natives as ‘indios’ and the Chinese as ‘sangleyes’ . . . and they established a separate and legal category called ‘mestizos’ to categorize the growing number of creole offspring of intermarriage between the Chinese and indigenous women.” These racial rankings were collectively known as the casta, or caste system. The encomiendas, or systems of labor, classified different groups of people, composed mainly of indigenous tribes and other ethnic groups not of Spanish descent, into a societal hierarchy that networked...
the economic infrastructure of the colonial administration. Chinese merchants who had been long-established traders, sojourning from nearby Fujian province in mainland China for centuries, were also subjugated by the Spanish government. Manila contained many ethnic enclaves, particularly for the sangleyes, who were confined to a portion of Manila known as the parián. The Chinese community had a substantial presence in the city with an estimated population of 20,000 by the end of the seventeenth century, whereas the Spanish who numbered no more than approximately 2,000 within the same time period. As a result, the Chinese community in Manila was an integral sector in the archipelago. Many of these sangleyes were carpenters, shopkeepers, bakers, fishermen, and domestic servants. The preoccupations of being outnumbered coupled with their imperial hubris led the Spanish to distrust the Chinese settlers. This led to the Spanish colonial authorities to stifle any significant cultural and economic influence among the Chinese merchant sojourners.

Secondly, the process of Spanish colonization cannot be divorced from the mission of proselytization to convert native and surrounding Asian populations to Catholicism. Religious orders had established their own administrative norms and led the campaign to initiate conversions such as the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and the Franciscans. The dispatching of nuns in the colonies was decreed in the litany of instructions by King Philip II where he instructed the Governor of the Captaincy General of the Philippines, Gomez Perez Dasmariñas (1539–1593), that a convent was to be established to educate and foster Spanish girls. This directive ushered in the presence of beatas, or holy women, in the 1600s to serve and teach there.

An important figure in the introduction of nunneries was Jerónima de la Asunción (1555–1630), a Spanish-born nun from the Order of Saint Claire, who arrived with a small cohort of sisters to Manila in 1621. Under the patronage of the Franciscans, Jerónima established the royal convent of the Franciscans, Jerónima established the royal convent of Saint Claire. However, under colonial law, any person who did not possess limpiede de sangre, or those who did not possess the “pure blood” of being a Spaniard were forbidden from admission into religious orders. This law resulted in the total exclusion of the subaltern and led to an incident in which a Spanish-speaking Filipina was barred from entering religious life at the Santa Clara Monastery. This was a common requirement for Spanish officials, whose concerns with racial purity had monopolized ecclesiastical ordination by excluding their colonial subjects from the structures of authority. Assumptions propagated by Spanish prelates that neither native islanders nor even the Spanish-born colonials had the tenacity to take on theological and moral studies remained fervent. However, mestizos de sangleyes defied this hegemony.

The Profile of Ignacia del Espíritu Santo

The intersection of gender and ethnicity serve as important modes of analysis in understanding the plight of subaltern religious women during Spanish rule. The notion of mestizaje (miscegenation) as a condition of subalternity demonstrates how the flexibility and ambiguity of their identity allowed mestizos to create spaces for themselves. Faced with the colonial systems of power that centered on the importance of Spanish Catholicism and ethnic superiority, they were presented with a quandary. Although pressured by male clergy to convert and embrace a life of piety, they found limited vocational options in the existing colonial order. Mestizas and mestizas de sangleyes (native and Chinese descent) were often relegated to the fringes of the religious community as they were barred from various aspects of the conventual hierarchy. However, the case of Ignacia del Espiritu Santo besets the established colonial modus operandi by subverting the ethnic and gender monopoly of socio-religious power. Her life was chronicled by Pedro Murillo Velarde (1696–1753), a notable Jesuit author known for his condescending views on the native peoples. In 1749, he authored Historia de la Provincia de Filipinas de la Compañía de Jesús: Segunda parte, que comprende los progresos de esta provincia desde el año de 1616, hasta el de 1716, an encyclopedic-like tome where the principal biography of Ignacia del Espiritu Santo is contained.

Jesuit scholar John Schumacher has critically analyzed the biography of Mother Ignacia found in Father Velarde’s writing. He concluded that although Velarde’s biography seems based on memories happening decades after his reported encounters with Mother Ignacia, his biography presents an important account that gives key details of her life, a personal admiration of her sanctity despite his detestation of the native indios, and the context of the attitudes of the Spanish clerical community surrounding Mother Ignacia’s life. Born to a Chinese father from Amoy (now Xiamen) and a native Filipina mother in the section of Manila called Binondo, Ignacia embodied both ethnic identities categorized on the Spanish colonial casta as subaltern. Velarde states that “In 1684, the House of Recogidas began to form . . . to help the women who frequently attended to hear mass, to confess, to receive communion, and to perform works and other acts of devotion. Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, a maiden of twenty-one years, was determined to enter the Beaterio de Santo Domingo as a nun despite the urging of her parents to marry.” Mother Ignacia’s story points to the importance of her identities which challenged the colonial ethnic hierarchy and the patriarchal religious spaces of the Catholic missionaries.
Velarde’s account of Mother Ignacia presents a unique point of view. Despite his notorious disdain of native peoples, he nevertheless recalls how native \textit{beatas} under Mother Ignacia were able to negotiate their participation and inclusion into Catholic religious society.\textsuperscript{12}

They were aware of the restrictive institutions of their society and found avenues to circumvent these barriers. In his historical survey of religious communities for women in the Philippines’ colonial period, Luciano P.R. Santiago notes Mother Ignacia’s conscious strategies:

- They learned to surmount the conflicts with the agencies of the miter and the crown not only at the spiritual but also at the pragmatic level. Aided by their religious benefactors, whether friar or prelate, they appealed directly to the king for special protection which they invariably obtained though not as a religious house—which they would have preferred—but as a school for girls.\textsuperscript{13}

This suggests that the \textit{beatas} were cognizant of the law and networked with colonial and ecclesiastical officials to exploit the rigidity of the colonial caste system.

Under the guise of a school, the \textit{beatas} created a space to practice their religious vocation while involving themselves in secular charity by educating young women. The nuns sought to make themselves acceptable to the secular authorities while also cultivating their own vision for religious community. They surmounted the Spanish monopolization of the public sphere and repurposed their lives to indirectly foment change through education and spiritual activism. By being acknowledged as a school for girls, the \textit{beatas} were given annual subsidies through donors, particularly from the Jesuits. This strategy allowed them to maintain and expand their convent. This helped them to further accommodate newer members and increase their visibility.\textsuperscript{14} In this sense, the idea of conversion and acculturation into Catholicism provides a vantage point for Mother Ignacia and the women who sought admission into religious life. These acts transcended the hierarchical labels that excluded them from participation in the colonial Catholic Church. According to Vicente L. Rafael, “conversion requires one’s submission to and incorporation of the language and logic of Christianity as the condition of possibility for defining and subsequently overcoming one’s prior state of subordination.”\textsuperscript{15} The case of Mother Ignacia’s adoption of the Catholic faith serves as the locus for her agency, centering on shifting the perception of \textit{mestiza} nuns by colonial society as integral agents of socio-cultural change.

Known for her fervent asceticism, Mother Ignacia built a community of sisters with the founding of the \textit{Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesús} in 1684 (known today as the Congregation for the Religious of the Virgin Mary or R.V.M.), a community of \textit{mestiza} sisters who manifested their charism in spiritual exercises and works of charity such as the education of young girls, nursing the infirmed, and caring for the elderly.\textsuperscript{16} This further elucidates the visibility of the sisters who saw the necessity to solidify their community in the public sphere. The R.V.M. became a space that catalyzed “subaltern counterculture” as the central ethos of the \textit{beatas} in their vocational motivations. By establishing a congregation of sisters from the fringes of the \textit{casta}, Mother Ignacia had reoriented the discourse of subalternity, allowing for a unique domain previously unknown to colonial spaces where women could organize as well as garner recognition for their contributions to society.\textsuperscript{17}

The institutional structure of the R.V.M. offers an insight on the values of the sisters and how they sought to challenge the ethnic monopolization of secular and religious power perpetuated by colonial rule. In 1726, Mother Ignacia promulgated a constitution to govern the sisters’ way of life and formalize the ethos of their community. Critical to this document was the codification of her spirituality and how she sought to form the R.V.M.’s vocational character as noted in an excerpt on religious sisterhood:

> Those who live in community should avoid all sort of partiality; they should not show more inclination nor friendship for one or the other, but love all in Jesus Christ our Lord; much more should those who govern observe this, those who should show to all equal benevolence and assist them in all that they need, bearing their imperfections and correcting them with motherly love.\textsuperscript{18}

Enshrining communal equality within her religious community posed in stark contrast to the conventional norms that were found in her contemporary Catholic orders. In repudiation to \textit{limpieza de sangre}, the R.V.M. fostered a subaltern counterculture in response to the structures of coloniality. Embedded into their constitution was the specific provision of solely admitting pure native Filipinas or the daughters of \textit{mestizas de sangleyes}.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, the consent of the sisters was required through a process of voting to allow the admission of Spanish women.\textsuperscript{20} This was a reversal to that of the Santa Clara convent in upending the customary \textit{limpieza de sangre}. Thus, a shift of agency emerged in two ways. Firstly, the sisters of the R.V.M. claimed the rights of self-governance to reposition the authority that they possessed in their religious communities. Secondly, in doing so, Mother Ignacia and her \textit{beatas} addressed the patriarchal customs of religious orders and the ethnic disparity perpetuated by the upper echelon of the \textit{casta}. 
Conclusion

The legacy of Mother Ignacia conveys an important discourse on history and memory for the subaltern. In 1948, the Religious of the Virgin Mary became among the first Filipino religious communities to be conferred Pontifical approval of its constitutions. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI lauded the virtuous impact of Mother Ignacia, stating that she is “found to possess to a heroic degree the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity toward God and neighbor as well as the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude."21 The commemoration of Mother Ignacia’s contribution to the reorientation of religious spaces for women in colonial society remains a pertinent reflection on the narratives of subaltern women and their impact within contemporary spheres. Her case shows how mestizas navigated colonial spaces that were often restricted and how they independently created an ethos that allowed them to define their own agency, being “visible from the veil” within the public sphere.

Endnotes

1 The term “subaltern” was coined by Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), an Italian Marxist author and theorist who was imprisoned by the Mussolini Regime. His use of the term referred to working class populations exploited by the hegemonic ruling class. Subaltern came to be defined by those demographics that are oppressed, marginalized, and disenfranchised by structures of dominations such as colonization. See Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory (1999) by John Beverley, Can the Subaltern Speak? (1985) by Gayatri Spivak, and Domination without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India (1997) by Ranajit Guha.


5 Ibid.


9 Ibid., 121.


13 Santiago, To Love and to Suffer, 96–97.

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Abstract

One of the most transformative shifts in the way television functions in the modern day is the conception and explosion in popularity of streaming services. This method of consuming media allows for new conceptions of time and queerness within the highly regulated, routinized norms of the TV industry. This paper uses two episodes of the science fiction anthology series Black Mirror as a case study to discuss the emerging conceptions of queer time that streaming makes possible. The interplay between the limitlessness and scarcity of time in each episode is used to consider the tensions between disruptive and standardized time in both streaming and traditional TV formats.

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Introduction

Queer temporality, as defined by Kara Keeling in Queer Times, Black Futures describes the “dimension of time that produces risk . . . that dimension of the unpredictable and the unknowable in time that governs errant, eccentric, promiscuous, and unexpected organizations of social life” (Keeling 64). At first glance, queer temporality seems wholly unconnected from the realm of television, which thrives on the expected, the routine, and the minimization of risk. In fact, television and queerness appear to be diametrically opposed on many fronts, a tension that Lynne Joyrich captures in her piece “Queer Television Studies: Currents, Flows, and (Main)streams.” She writes:

Television has, for decades, been taken as the very determinant of the mainstream, and it is still typically seen as the most ordinary, everyday, and commonplace of our media forms. Conversely, queer is defined precisely as the subversion of the ordinary, as the strange, the irregular, which would seem to necessitate some sort of disruption to ‘our regularly scheduled programming.’ Does this then make the very notion of queer television—and, perhaps by extension, queer television studies—impossible, or does it make this nexus particularly productive, since this combination is itself defined in and as contradiction, thus making it necessarily queer? Might that implicit queerness then help to explain some of the shifts in TV? (Joyrich 134)

These shifts in TV are precisely where my focus lies. One of the most transformative shifts in the way television functions in the modern day is the conception and explosion in popularity of streaming services. Three aspects of the “insulated flow,” or the method of consuming media “characterized by extended and focused attention on one text” (Perks xxiv) that streaming allows, fit into a queered conception of television’s temporality. First, the advent of binge-watching as a regular mode of content consumption; second the conscious choice required to opt-in to shows, and specific episodes of shows, available on streaming services; finally, the removal of standardized lengths for things like advertisements, release dates, and episode duration in shows created directly for streaming platforms. I plan to use Black Mirror, an incredibly popular science fiction anthology series now produced by Netflix, as a case study to analyze the ways that streaming opens and closes possibilities for disruption within television’s norms. Specifically, I will look at the episodes “San Junipero” in Season 3 of the series and “Striking Vipers” in Season 5, both of which confront questions of queerness and temporality within their storylines. Examining the ways that the two episodes explore non-normative relationships and concepts of queer eternities, I show how the possibility or impossibility of queered time in each of these episodes corresponds to streaming’s potential for disrupting the expectations of the TV industry.

Why Black Mirror? “San Junipero” and “Striking Vipers”

Queer Relationships

Black Mirror is particularly well-positioned to explore the queer potentialities of streaming as a show that has itself transitioned from being produced for traditional TV to being produced for a streaming platform. Beginning as a Channel 4 production, Black Mirror was picked up by Netflix after two (critically acclaimed) seasons in 2015 (IMDb). This deal made Black Mirror the first show in which a streaming platform successfully outbid a commissioning broadcaster for exclusive production rights (Ritman,
Roxborough). This journey mirrors a larger shift within the landscapes of TV production and consumption that is significant to considerations of streaming’s disruptive potential. Furthermore, Black Mirror’s anthology format and near future setting fit it within a larger tradition of science fiction stories serving as a microcosm of larger cultural shifts. This makes it a fitting show for considering the effects of the technological advancements that made streaming’s current popularity possible. Much like its predecessor The Twilight Zone, Black Mirror’s explicit focus on the human impact of new technologies allows each episode to explore the way relationships can be redefined through and by these tools. “San Junipero” and “Striking Vipers”s only plot-based connection lies in the TCKR systems device that both use to gain access to hyper-realistic virtual realities. However, the two episodes share a few other important similarities within the landscape of Black Mirror’s collection of stories. They are two of the only episodes in the series that deal with explicitly LGBT+ relationships and storylines and are two of a handful of episodes in the gritty, cautionary show that consider the positive outcomes of evolving technology.

In “San Junipero” two sick and dying old women fall in love in a virtual reality simulated party town of the ’80s. The two women are given the option to choose to “pass over” into San Junipero permanently after their death by uploading their consciousnesses to the cloud-based reality. One of the women, Yorkie, views San Junipero as a heaven, as it allows her the freedom to experience the life she never could as a quadriplegic in the real world. The other woman, Kelly, feels that to stay in San Junipero for anything longer than a visit would be a betrayal to her husband and daughter who both died without passing over into the town. The story ends with Kelly deciding that she is ready “for the rest of it” and being euthanized to pass over to San Junipero and spend an eternity with Yorkie.

The queer relationship in “Striking Vipers” is a little less straightforward. The story centers on two long-time friends Karl and Danny who spent much of their young adulthoods playing the video game Striking Vipers together. Years later, Karl buys Danny a copy of Striking Vipers X, the newest installment of the video game that utilizes TCKR’s cutting edge VR technology to make a fully immersive game experience where “the game emulates all physical sensations.” The two end up using the game to start a sexual relationship between their two characters Lance and Roxie, one of whom is a woman being controlled by Karl. The relationship between Karl and Danny spirals and begins to interfere with Danny’s real relationship with his wife, Theo, who suspects he is cheating on her. Their relationship is queered not only by the virtual space in which the two interact but by the gender play inherent in the two men engaging in “heterosexual” sex that they believe “don’t feel like a gay thing,” even as Karl confesses that he loves Danny (or Lance) during one of their sexual encounters in the game. The episode ends in an unexpected compromise between Danny and Theo where he is allowed one day a year, his birthday, to engage in a sexual relationship with Karl within the video game while his wife goes to pursue an extramarital relationship of her own.

The History of Queer Eternities

The examples of Black Mirror’s “San Junipero” and “Striking Vipers” as portrayals of queerness and queer relationships do not fall within a vacuum of queer representation in film, text, and image. In fact, examining these episodes in the context of queer media, especially its historical ties to death and eternity, adds a new dimension of richness to the way that time functions in each episode. Pre-dating filmic representations of queerness, there is a long literary tradition of queer characters and relationships, going as far back as the Renaissance period and undoubtedly even earlier. Recovering past conceptions of queerness, even in a time predating film, has tangible effects on the ways that queerness is expressed on the screen in the 21st century. An example of this comes from Valerie Traub’s analysis “The (In)Significance of ‘Lesbian Desire’ in Early Modern England” and Alan Bray’s discussion of mythical and supernatural conceptions of homosexual acts in his book Homosexuality in Renaissance England. Both authors are concerned with the proliferation of homoerotic representations in Early Modern literature and life and how that is possible in environments where homosexual acts are criminalized. The two authors come to similar conclusions as well, that homosexual acts were never the problem, and that people engaged in those acts do not become threats until there is the possibility of a disruptive queer future, specifically one that is not foreclosed upon in favor of an eventual heterosexual union. This idea of queer relationships as a “viable if ultimately unstable state” (Traub 69) echoes throughout the history of queer cinematic representations. For example, the well-documented “Bury Your Gays” phenomenon often serves to end the possibility of queer future relationships by killing off half of the couple and forcing the other half to mourn them (TV Tropes).

When the storylines of “San Junipero” and “Striking Vipers” are factored into this historical context, they become more than just stories about queer sex and love. The first provides viewers with an eternal lesbian relationship achievable only through the death of both queer characters. Acting conversely to the idea of lesbian desire needing to end in a reproductive heterosexual space, Kelly leaves behind the restraints she places on herself on behalf of her dead husband and daughter and chooses to stay in San Junipero with Yorkie. Their story also plays with the “Bury Your Gays” trope in an interesting way because the continuation
of their relationship is only made possible by the deaths of both women. “Striking Vipers” appears to fit more readily within the historical framework for queer relationships. The in-game relationship between Danny and Karl is only an interruption to the lasting heterosexual marriage that Danny and Theo share. When their relationship begins to threaten the continuation of Danny’s marriage, the two men abandon the possibility of eternity and get almost the opposite, one scheduled day every year.

The TCKR virtual reality system that is central to the plot of both episodes represent highly routinized and regulated spaces. The time that characters have in these spaces are constructed to always be counting down, creating multiple moments in both episodes where one of the pairs are abruptly pulled out of the space at emotionally climactic moments. Visitors to San Junipero are only allowed to use the device for five hours, once a week and are refused access to the alternate reality at any other points for fear that they will lose touch with the real world. Even further regulation occurs in the space in who has access to legally sanctioned euthanasia that will allow sick or dying people to pass over into San Junipero as a permanent alternative to their current lives. A central point of the story is the fact that Yorkie requires her family’s written permission, in addition to authorization from the state and hospital, to gain full access to San Junipero, regardless of her own wishes. In “Striking Vipers,” the TCKR video game is not regulated by a medical or state apparatus but is rather controlled by the confines and habitual flows of Danny's family life. It is implied that over the course of four to five months, Danny carries on his virtual affair with Karl illicitly after his wife has gone to bed or when she leaves the house for a social function or work event. This creates a temporal scarcity to the meetings of Kelly and Yorkie's, and later Kelly's, choice to stay in San Junipero full time grants them access to the possibilities contained within that space at their leisure for an eternity. The moment where Yorkie gains the power to opt-in to this eternity is granted through the institution of marriage, one granted by a very austere and bureaucratic appearing man who presides over the ceremony (see “San Junipero,” 46:24). In this moment their marriage is both disruptive and normative. They must work through predetermined channels but making space within that system for individual connections and autonomous choice makes their marriage a meaningful opposition to the regulations of the medical system.

**Traditional Television as Temporal Scarcity**

The idea of scarcity is foundational to the way that linear TV operates. Amanda Lotz describes this concept in her chapter “Theorizing the Nonlinear Distinction of Internet-Distributed Television.” She describes how:

A single channel can only distribute 24 hours of programming a day. That is a significant limit to what can be “on” in any day. Thus, the channel’s ability, or requirement, to select the one thing available at any time very much defines linear television.

Linear television is consequently characterized by two related attributes: capacity constraint (limited content available) and time specificity (content available at a particular time). (Lotz)

This illuminates a dichotomy within the realm of television, and arguably the larger world, between the limitlessness and scarcity of time. The interplay between these two ideas is a productive nexus within Television Studies, and one in which streaming plays a critical role. Neither episode of *Black Mirror* examined in this piece engages with only one half of this split, just as streaming does not exist only as that which is limitless and standard TV only as that which is limited/scarcie. To get at the meanings of these interactions, we must view the episodes in dialogue with one another and take a closer look at the way time functions differently between them.

In San Junipero, Kelly’s decision to marry Yorkie in order to allow her to pass over and gain unrestricted access to the virtual reality permanently disrupts any attempts at regulating this space for the two of them. Their marriage is an act of resistance within the confines of their world because it grants Yorkie access to eternity. For Yorkie, who was already scheduled to be married to a male aide at the hospital, the marriage represents everything her parents have denied to her: the possibility of a queer life that she gets to control. The rebellion that they are staging does not end with Yorkie’s family though. When Kelly decides that she wants to marry Yorkie instead of the nurse Greg, she is placed in the position of having to convince him to let her into San Junipero outside of visiting hours. The moment when Kelly proposes should have never happened according to the rules that govern the TCKR system; thus when Kelly is able to create that time for the two of them, “she subverts the hospital’s authority as a gatekeeper” (Constant 218). Yorkie’s, and later Kelly’s, choice to stay in San Junipero full time grants them access to the possibilities contained within that space at their leisure for an eternity. The moment where Yorkie gains the power to opt-in to this eternity is granted through the institution of marriage, one granted by a very austere and bureaucratic appearing man who presides over the ceremony (see “San Junipero,” 46:24). In this moment their marriage is both disruptive and normative. They must work through predetermined channels but making space within that system for individual connections and autonomous choice makes their marriage a meaningful opposition to the regulations of the medical system.

**“Striking Viper’s” Hopeful View of Scarcity**

If “San Junipero” exemplifies a break from the regulation of virtual spaces, the ending of “Striking Vipers” holds up an even more entrenched standardization. The couple’s agreement to a scheduled once a year allowance for
Danny and Karl’s virtual relationship is an unexpected, if not somewhat unfulfilling twist. Danny and Karl do not get an eternity to explore the complex layers of their relationship in the virtual haven that TCKR creates. Their single day per year is the ultimate creation of constraint and time specificity, an allowance that makes the standard more visible. It is like finding a favorite show being marathoned on cable that one could sit down and watch all day, before returning to the channel’s scheduled programming the next day. Yet the end of the episode does not feel like a foreclosure. As the credits roll on the episode, a love song starts playing, “Not One Minute More” by Earl Grant. It is a song about eternal, undying love. The song starts in the middle of an interaction between Danny and Theo, the moment when they exchange Danny’s birthday present. He gets access to his TCKR remote control and Theo in return gets a ring box and permission to retire her wedding band for the night, marking her as available. But the song continues into the credits as we watch Danny and Karl reunite within the game for the first time in presumably a year. As the pair embrace behind the faces of their characters, Grant sings:

I’ll only love you as long as the sea
Rolls on endlessly to the shore
I’ll only love you till there’s only night
And the sun, the sun gives no light as before
I’m gonna love you till then, not one minute more
—Don Robertson

As viewers, we do not know right away if this song is intended to be about the relationship between Danny and Theo or Danny and Karl. However, the setup of the episode’s final shot helps to further illuminate some possible interpretations of the song. As Danny and Karl embrace, the camera zooms out to an extreme wide shot of the imagined cityscape on which they have chosen to rendezvous. The shot (see “Striking Vipers,” 1:00:18) feels charged to the brim with possibility. It is a whole world that the two men have to themselves alone, even if it is only for one day. This moment, though fleeting, ends the episode on a note of hope that the love shared by the pair can transcend the strict boundaries of time placed upon them, or at the very least that the time they spend together is shared, created, and consumed.

Conclusion

Despite its newness, it is apparent that streaming plays an invaluable role within the discourse of Queer Television Studies. A consideration of streaming’s interactions with traditional TV places both systems into a new light. However, if we return to Kara Keeling’s definition of queer temporality as time that produces risk, the question must be asked of just how much risk streaming services are taking on as a disruption to the norms of linear TV. At this point it is undoubtable that streaming platforms are a profitable enterprise. In 2018, Netflix alone brought in an annual revenue of $16 billion and grew its net income to $1.2 billion (The Motley Fool). Looking at the industry as a whole, we can see that the room for disruption and non-normativity must remain profitable for those running them, fitting these streaming entities into a largely normative, capitalist system.

Looking back to Black Mirror as an analogy, would it then serve to view the industry of streaming in relation to the TCKR corporation itself? While “San Junipero” never specifically states whether the TCKR system is a state-run program or a private company, “Striking Vipers” shows us that the tech giant has hands in industries ranging all the way from medical to entertainment. Like TCKR, streaming as an industry allows room for reinvention and innovation in many ways. There are foundation-shifting changes in the way that revenue is collected as well as the way that content is shared, created, and consumed. Yet these changes serve
the same purpose, to attract viewers and generate profit, a venture that is not so queer to us after all.

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"Become Black with God!": A Black Theological Response to Afro-Pessimism
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Abstract

This paper, an excerpt from my senior Religion thesis, responds to the existential “hopelessness” being communicated through afropessimist discourse on Blackness. I draw insights from the “first generation” of Black theology to demonstrate (without diminishing the severity of anti-Blackness) that positive emancipatory action is conceivable and possible for Black folk. Afropessimism claims that Blackness is an ontological condition that one cannot be liberated from. Black theological reflection expands the narrowly secular limits of an afropessimist political imagination by grounding the concept of Black political liberation in theology. Black theology’s response, to “become Black with God,” names a social, ethical project that affirms Blackness through working to liberate Black folk from civil conditions of non-personhood.

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The suffering that Black folk endure is an inexplicable quandary. The historical duration and obscenely grotesque nature of antiblackness demand its immediate obliteration. Where some Black sufferers cry out for divine help, others make meaning from God’s silence. For religious skeptics like William R. Jones, the “inordinate” quality and ubiquitous presence of Black suffering requires us to reassess God’s qualities of supreme Good and Love. Perhaps God turns a blind eye to Black pain. Perhaps God might just be a divine racist.1 Echoing the 22nd chapter of Psalms, Pulitzer Prize-winning rapper Kendrick Lamar similarly asked “Why God, why God, do I gotta bleed / Every stone thrown at you is resting at my feet.”2 Black suffering potentially indicates a complacent God, a God who scapegoats Black bodies, or a God who revels in Black suffering. It, then, is not difficult to see why some contend that the situation for Black people is hopeless.

Such is an afropessimist position. Afropessimism self-describes as “a theoretical lens for situating relations of power, politically and libidinally.”3 Its central axiom is that Black people, by nature of their suffering, are non-human in order for non-Black people to participate in humanity. To break this relationship between Blacks and non-Blacks requires resistance to white people and their institutions as well as a total rejection of the categories and concepts that whites have used to name and defend present antiblack socio-political arrangements. They further argue that Black non-being is fundamental to the construction and maintenance of Western modernity. Cynical regarding the prospects of total revolution, afropessimists are hopeless that Black people (remaining enslaved to modernity’s definition of Blackness-as-slaveness) can ever be free. This leads to the central questions: Can antiblackness totalize what it means to be Black? Is there anything to be done that either redresses antiblackness (political/liberatory praxis) or preserves the humanity of Black people (a positive affirmation of Blackness)?

An answer lies in the Black theological tradition. Black theology locates Blackness outside of the limitations of the world, squarely in the nature of God’s divinity. Its invitation to participate in God’s nature, to become Black with God, affirms Blackness by destroying one’s participation in Black oppression and one’s enjoyment of the demonic fruits that Black suffering fertilizes. This paper develops the theoretical bridge that enables conversation between Black theology and afropessimism by exploring the similarities between their ontological descriptions of Blackness. I argue that a closer examination of Blackness as an ontological category in both discourses corrects the afropessimist assumption that anti-Blackness could ever totalize what Blackness is. From that resolution, Black theology then provides the means for a positive embrace of Blackness where individuals strive to forge a world that does not require Black people to be less than human for other’s benefit.

Black Theology: Context, Purpose, Accountability

Black theology is “God-talk” done from the condition of Black people. Black theology is committed to the Black community since it understands God to be presently at work within the community. Vincent Lloyd notes that the first generation of American Black theologians emerged contemporaneous with the development of “Blackness as a category.”4 Such theologians understood Blackness as more than “an identity in need of affirmation” but more so as a “privileged mode of existence.”5 James Cone’s works during this period assign theological significance to the condition of Blackness. Black Theology and Black Power (1969) defends Black Power as an authentic location of divine action in the world while A Black Theology of Liberation (1970) systematizes...
Black theology according to revised understandings of God, liberation, revelation, and the human through a framework of Blackness. Cone’s social, ontological definition of Blackness channels both the “universals and particulars” of Black experience that make it the rich location to begin any theological project.

Black theology is the religion of Black power. Black theology mandates a project of “complete emancipation . . . from white oppression by whatever means Black people deem necessary.” While Blackness commonly refers to people with African ancestry, Cone names Blackness as a paradoxical condition of oppression inseparably resonant with God’s ontological freedom. Cone states that Blackness is “an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America.” For Cone and other twentieth-century theologians, symbols are particular descriptors—embedded in culture—that resonate with a key characteristic of an otherwise indescribable thing since “symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate” through approximation. The generalizable condition that Blackness points to is the universal condition of unfreedom due to oppression. Ontological descriptions of Blackness communicate that a fundamental component of what it means to be Black is to experience “social, economic, political, and psychic alienation.” Ontological Blackness recognizes extreme humanity amid extreme attempts at dehumanization: this living tension, of life and death, names Blackness as a paradox. The Black experience is a “moment of irresolution” where freedom stands in uneasy tension with experiences and material conditions that attempt to make Black people accede their rightful freedoms. For Black theologians like Cone, Blackness resonates with the divine nature of unrestricted freedom by striving for freedom against all odds.

On “Afropessimism”: Oxymoronic “Black Humanity”?

“Afropessimism” elides an easy explanation. It claims far-reaching genealogy to the works of Frantz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, and Orlando Patterson. It argues that the fundamental nature of Blackness is as an objectified, socially dead, non-Human abjection necessitated by whiteness. Such is the pessimism; Blackness can never be positively embraced, and liberation will likely not come. Not entirely without reason to get up in the morning, afropessimism accedes that Black people “have no good reason to get up in the morning.” Such is the hopelessness. In sum, afropessimism states that Blackness is the absence of humanity since it names the excess of inhuman qualities. Given that rational capacity separates humans from other non-humans in Western thought, afropessimists note that “Blackness” signifies excess desires that cannot be controlled by reason alone. Common examples include signifying Blackness to represent excess criminal, fleshy, or licentious “desire.”

Afropessimism’s raison d’etre is to translate how violence by humans against Black folk shapes Blackness as its necessary non-human excess. This task lies at the core of its critique: it exposes the integral role of anti-Blackness in the maintenance of the modern world. Western concepts of humanity attempt to parade as if they appeared out of a transhistorical, natural “nowhere,” justified by the natural laws themselves. But, as Sylvia Wynter points out, “Man” emerged from a historicized Euro-Western intellectual heritage defined as much by slavery and colonial dominance as it was the Enlightenment. Exploring how slavery historically and conceptually constructed the modern concept of Blackness as (in)human excess clarifies what it means to understand Blackness as a marker of social/political objecthood. This historical dimension clarifies part of why afropessimism “ontologizes” Blackness similarly to Black theology, and is helpful in understanding where afropessimist discourse fails to critically capture the humanity of Black people.

Cone asserts Blackness to be “an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America.” Since Cone’s works draw from twentieth-century examples of American antiblack oppression, it is easy to narrowly assume that instances of “societal enslavement” solely refer to the urban ghettos and brutal policing practices he names directly in the text. Yet he follows that Blackness stands “for all victims of oppression who realize that the survival of their humanity is bound up with their liberation from society.” Between both afropessimism and Black theology, Blackness names a universal process of creating social non-persons for the benefit of others while paying homage to the unique nature of the world-historical oppression of Blackness in the construction of the modern capitalist world order.

Across the African diaspora, patterns of antiblackness varied across time and geography. Then what similarities, if any, exist in the nature of individual experiences of antiblackness? If the particular instances of social/political oppression on Black people varied greatly, both historically and culturally, then that indicates a range of existential responses categorizable as Black. If Black existential expressions are initially sutured by antiblack suffering, this does not mean that they can be reduced to this suffering. Such a claim implies that Black people are nothing more than their suffering. This is what afropessimism claims in response to Black suffering. Yet, to respond to one’s condition of suffering does not mean that their human fullness is limited necessarily by their suffering; rather, their suffering is but one factor of who they are. It is not all they are. This faulty assumption rests on a misinterpretation of Fanon.
Examining Fanon highlights that Western thought does not capture the internal fullness of Black self-conception; it does not mean that Black people are nothing.

Fanon’s famous chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks* centers how afropessimists understand Black ontology as unapproachable through Western metaphysics. Fanon states that:

**Ontology—one it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the Black man. For not only must the Black man be Black; he must be Black in relation to the white man.**

Fanon’s insert is crucial; the ontology being discussed is not existential. It is not concerned with the perennial existential state of Black people qua themselves. It is about representation proper; about how Black people exist in relation to others. Fanon states that ontology “does not permit us to understand the being of the Black man,” meaning that the notion of Black ontology proper cannot be communicated to non-Black others. That does not necessarily mean it is *not*, as afropessimists at times claim. Wilderson’s reading of Fanon states that Black experiences of suffering are “without analog in the suffering dynamics of the ontologically alive,” meaning that Black people occupy no order of being because of the suffering they experience. However, this is not what Fanon writes.

The second part of Fanon’s claim regarding ontology is qualified “in relation to the white man.” Fanon furthers that Black folk are unaware of their inferiority “until it comes into being through the other.” Black inferiority, Blackness-as-slaveness, Blackness-as-human-absence does not emerge *ex nihilo*; such perspectives are shaped by discourse, history, and cultural interaction. Fanon is not saying that the totality of Black experience relies on whiteness; rather, whiteness sutures Black experience, rendering Black experience that is separate from whites altogether unintelligible to *non-Blacks*. However, in the gap between Black interiority, separate from whites, and Black exterior experiences of suffering, there is room to contest what is assumed about Blackness’ fundamental nature. Afropessimist Frank B. Wilderson assumes that the severity of Black suffering in response to antiblackness negates the possibility of liberating Blacks since he assumes the fullness of Black humanity, of Blackness itself, is existential suffering. Wilderson does not recognize a Black humanity worth fighting for, and his misread of Fanon justifies this claim. Black theology’s ontological conception of Blackness preserves the radical human-ness of Black people. Afropessimism’s ontological Blackness exaggerates their object status in relation to whites.

The similar notion of social non-personhood appearing in Cone develops existentially from Black experiences of absurdity during instances of antiblack oppression. Cone states that “absurdity arises not from Black person’s perceptions of themselves, but only from the attempt to reconcile their being with the white world.” A number of forces attempt to “define truth in terms of human slavery,” namely, using economic oppression and socio-political ostracism to bully Black folk into accepting the world in white terms. Cones notes how white America in the 1960s attempted to use police force, urbanization, anti-black education, and anti-black theology to attempt to make Black folk believe what was said about them. These attempts ring unsuccessful because Black life contests the categories the white world has used to mangle it. The chief concept securing the humanity of Black people in Black theology is a reclamation of God to be a just, loving, free, Black God. This understanding forms the basis for Black theology’s political project. Thus, to “become Black with God” is to struggle to secure freedom for Blacks by ending the antiblackness that causes their suffering.

**“Become Black with God!”: A Social, Ethical Maxim**

Black theology’s invitation, “to become Black with God,” means adopting God’s traits of love, justice, and Blackness. This means manifesting God’s commitment to Black people into political action on their behalf. To become Black with God does not mean placing oneself in a condition of suffering analogous to Black suffering (assuming such a masochism to be possible for non-Black folk); rather, it means working to eradicate the suffering of Black people by championing their freedom as political agents of it. If ever a world should arise where antiblack structures are defeated, political actors remain Black by maintaining vigilance against the possibility of antiblack oppression ever occurring again.

God’s Blackness is symbolic of God’s core ontological trait of love manifest as justice. There is a need for God to be Black. Since Blackness identifies social non-personhood, then God must be Black to be just. If God does not side with Blackness, then God is complicit in antiblack racism. While Blackness names a particular group defined by their history as the descendants of “human money,” Blackness “cannot be separated from the community which it represents.” Yet this does not matter based on the relation of Blackness to the construction of Modernity. It names a particular so deeply universal to the world that it is an appropriate location from which to deracinate idolatrous white discourse and the violence such discourse mobilizes.

Put into these terms, it is easier to understand Black theology’s response to the hopelessness that afropessimism
grows. Black theology refutes the claim that such suffering disavows political action. The only way to assert the humanity of people racialized as Black is to act politically on their behalf. The nature of the human is of one who struggles against forces of social non-being. Humans do not need to directly experience such structures in the same brevity and style to resist social non-being. Persons not racialized as “Black,” as well as those who are, must become Black with God. Echoing the Hebrew Bible, Cone states that “to be human is to be in the image of God.”22 God is a loving God of justice working against domination. Realized humanity likewise loves others and works against domination. Part of humanity’s resonance with the divine nature is that humans must “revolt against everything opposed to humanity.”23 Part of that revolt is not just the rejection of whiteness but an embrace of Blackness. Whiteness names megalomania: it represents deranged individuals who “claim sole authority to declare what is real and what is right.”24 To love Black people is to love Blackness. To love Blackness is to oppose whiteness. To love Blackness and to work for the liberation of Black people is to “become Black with God!” Such is the social, ethical command of Black theology.

This necessarily manifests as the destruction of whiteness by all for all. Cone states that to become Black with God means far more than to “identify” as Black. It also opens the possibility for whites (read: “non-Blacks”) to become Black with God. In both cases, it requires one to “reorient one’s existence” away from structures and privileges derived from the social non-personhood of Black people. To “become Black with God” names the maxim: to divest from gains bought through someone else’s inhumanity. To become Black with God is to work on behalf of those experiencing social non-being, to secure their liberation as authentic humans and not as property or chattel, and to resist the comfortable naiveté that believes legislation, policies, or conditional emancipation stands in as proxy for the realization of humanity for all. To be human is to be Black, and to be human is to engage in praxis aimed at participating in “societal structures for human liberation.”24

Conclusion

Black Theology offers a word of relief to those grappling with the pain of antiblackness. Where afropessimism constructs ontological Blackness to represent the severe inhumanity of Black people who are treated as objects rather than people, Black theology’s ontological Blackness outlines a vision for Black people to realize their humanity immuno-

the embrace of Blackness as divine struggles demands revolution and dispels the sensation of hopelessness that Black suffering welcomes. Black theology presents hope at the possibility of revolution. Not because the event is already won, nor because victory is assured. Black theology offers a necessary word of hope, namely, because we cannot breathe otherwise.

Black theology clarifies that afropessimism in particular, and a refusal to participate politically on behalf of Black people more broadly, accedes Black humanity to the attempts that try to dehumanize Black people. The question of possibility resolves into a question of justice. Since Black theology clarifies that political action is possible, it is now a matter of justice, not hope, regarding whether one will abandon the benefits of antiblackness to realize humanity in the world.

Endnotes

5 Ibid., 133.
7 Ibid., 8.
11 Frank Wilderson, interviewed by Jared Ball, Todd Steven Burroughs and Dr. Hate, “We’re Trying to Destroy the World,” Ill Will Editions, 2014. Transcript.
12 Defining Blackness as inhuman excess of fleshly, material desires trace an intellectual genealogy to how Christianity (and Islam) understand sinfulness. Sin names alienation from God, the encroachment of fleshly desire in direct contestation of God’s moral law. The etymology of the word “wretched” carries a heathenistic tone; it is ironic but not unintentional that it is used to name those in material poverty in current scholarship. For more information, refer to J. Cameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account* (2008).
14 Ibid., 95.
15 Ibid., 8.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 104.
20 Ibid., 9.
21 Ibid., 99.
23 Ibid., 109.
24 Ibid., 94.

**Works Cited**


Anger and Territory: Revolutionary Politics and Non-Figurative Metaphors in the Poetry of Chrystos

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Abstract

This paper takes the work of Menominee poet Chrystos as a jumping off point for thinking through the revolutionary potential of poetry. Given that hegemonic, colonial ideology not only prescribes a set of values but also defines our very notions of reality, metaphors and their apparent departure from reality may in fact call attention to the constantly constructed nature of said reality. In the case of Chrystos's work, I name these critical metaphors 'non-figurative metaphors' to indicate their accurate articulation of structures of domination that are constantly invisibilized by the language of U.S. colonization. As a paradox that reflects the impossibility of 'treaties' during genocide, 'non-figurative metaphors' are angrily deployed by Chrystos to condemn the U.S. nation-state project. This paper also positions anger as not only characteristic of but tactically central to her poetic project in order to reject reformism and disruptively claim territory on the plane of ideology.

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In her poem on violence against women, "There is a Man Without Fingerprints," Chrystos writes, "This is not a poem it's a newspaper a warning written quickly/ Always be on guard." As an Indigenous queer woman and a political radical who experienced economic, racial, and gender oppression throughout her life, Chrystos forefronts the reality of violence and brings the urgency of her politics to bear on her poetic craft through the use of anger. With the understanding that her political project is one of territorial reclamation aligned with the uncompromising nature of radical indigenous movement work, I contend that anger is not only characteristic of, but tactically central to, her poetic project as a tool to disruptively claim territory on the plane of ideology. Through the deployment of what I name “non-figurative metaphors,” this anger insists on the psychosomatic element of repression whereby history is embodied by racialized and gendered subjects. In this regard, Chrystos understands subjectivity as a product of material conditions. Although she is a poet, her politics are not merely metaphorical. Her poetry must be read as not only displaying anger because she is unfree but also as using anger in the service of creating freedom.

At times, scholars have derided revolutionary aesthetics as crude realism in the service of propaganda. However, poetry occupies a unique position from which an understanding of the revolutionary potentiality of art may be expanded from the mimetic to the generative. Poetry is materialist in its concern with the devices of language beyond the practically communicative. As the literary theorist Terry Eagleton writes, "in a world of instant legibility, we have lost the experience of language itself." In other words, the relationship between signifier and signified has also been demoted to one of mimesis, with language attempting to approximate the world.

Poetics make a contradictory claim, whereby the signifier itself constructs meaning. This foregrounding of language's materiality is analogous with the demystification of ideas that materialism provides. In The German Ideology, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels criticize idealists for how they “consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men.” Marx and Engels argue that “consciousness is . . . from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.” The political potency of poetry is not limited to mimesis nor even its opposite, the sensuousness of “imagining otherwise.” In fact, interpreting poetry’s revolutionary potential as the ability to reconfigure one's imagination is an idealist usurpation of poetry's materialist possibilities. Rather, just as ideas are not separate from the world, the world is not separate from our language for it; thus enters the power of ideology. Ideology is the Euclidean space-time of one's life, plotting the coordinates of how we experience ourselves and the world while remaining invisible and presumed. If the materialism of poetry can invert hegemonic ideology through language, perhaps we may begin to see where the coordinates of our subjectivities lie and move them, expand them; in other words, claim territory as Chrystos does in her writing using historicized anger.

The anticolonial writer and thinker Frantz Fanon proposes a discerning theoretical analysis from which to read Chrystos's poetry as material, territorial, and dialectical.
Anger, history, and territory are some of the key concerns of Fanon’s seminal work, *Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon’s concern is primarily tactical: how can we make revolution happen? He argues for the seizure of land and violence as its necessary tactic; alongside violence, the incendiary force of hatred and anger play a vital role. In addition, Fanon identifies the pathologizing effect colonization has on the colonized as an impediment towards the full realization of subjectivities. Thus, the prescriptive to claim ideological territory for the sake of psychosomatic freedom is enmeshed in the injunction to claim land territory. Although Fanon’s case study was the Algerian independence movement against French colonization in the 1960s, reading his work into the U.S. context illuminates the oft-forgotten reality of the United States as a colonization project that never ended.

Therefore, Chrystos must be understood not merely as an indigenous person grappling with the legacy and past trauma of colonization, but rather as a colonized subject resisting the threat that the enduring condition of colonial occupation poses to indigenous life and subject realization. Chrystos was born in San Francisco in 1946 and is a lesbian, Menominee activist, and poet. Her writing is contemporaneous and aligned with the American Indian Movement, the movement for Indigenous people in North America to organize for better education, preservation of culture, and Indigenous land-based autonomy. In the occupation of Alcatraz Island from November 20, 1969 to June 11, 1971, Native Americans held Alcatraz Island until they were forcibly removed by the federal government. Territorial rights were the rhetorical crux on which their occupation rested; activists cited the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) that returned out-of-use federal land to the Sioux tribe. Physical territory was clearly at stake, yet the struggle for ideological territory was not forgotten by the occupiers. In their official proclamation, the activists occupying Alcatraz satirically invert U.S. ideology by stating that they will “give to the inhabitants of this island a portion of that land for their own, to be held in trust . . . by the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs to hold in perpetuity.” The proclamation sardonically emphasizes that America’s right to land is a total invention; the strangeness of a “Bureau of Caucasian Affairs” highlights the strangeness of a “Bureau of Indian Affairs” that contains and categorizes as Other the original inhabitants of the land.

In her poem “I Have Not Signed a Treaty with the U.S. Government,” Chrystos uses a tone of anger to a similar effect. As the title of the poem indicates, the definition of the word ‘treaty’ as a consensual agreement is antithetical to U.S. history. However, the U.S. uses the word to describe its land theft and legitimize its imperialist project, and thus the title of the poem makes visible the contradictions invisibilized by language. In the following lines, Chrystos presents the world of U.S. ideology as being illegitimate:

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We don’t recognize these names on old sorry paper
Therefore we declare the United States a crazy person
nightmare lousy food ugly clothes bad meat nobody we know
No one wants to go there This U.S. is theory
illusion
terrible ceremony The United States can’t dance
can’t cook
has no children no elders no relatives.
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In the line “Therefore we declare the United States a crazy person,” Chrystos employs a poetic performative utterance. Classic performative utterances change the nature of the reality in which they are stated. Here, Chrystos “declares” U.S. ideology as delusional, and instantly in the next line the U.S. is transformed from its self-fashioned image of prosperity to one of pathetic lack. Normally, the marginalization and poverty of Indigenous people exists as an afterthought within the ideology of American exceptionalism. This afterthought becomes reality writ large across Chrystos’s poetry as she claims ideological territory. The device of the performative utterance foregrounds the relationship with language that is innate in both poetry and ideology: meaning and truth are not conveyed by the manipulation of language, but rather created by it. Her ideology-rupturing language goes even further with the line “This U.S. is theory illusion.” With this line, Chrystos names the United States itself as an invention of ideology. The use of metaphor is not a symbolic flourish, but rather reflects a coherent politics of Indigenous autonomy that reject reform, assimilation, or the amelioration of the conditions of Indigenous people within the juridical mandates of the U.S. state. This non-figurative metaphor makes an expansive claim in ideological territory rooted in the right to claim actual land base. Furthermore, Chystos’s claim and the coordinates of its territory are Indigenous. The U.S. has no “elders” or other forms of Indigenous communal legitimacy and is thus illegible to Indigenous recognition (“We don’t recognize these names . . .”). Therefore, “We’re going to tear all this ugly mess / down now.”

The claim for territory is tied up in an explicit project of expulsion. In her “Go Away Now,” Chrystos writes “Gosomewhereelse & / build a McDonald’s, ” and other lines of aggressive aversion to reconciliation. This approach embodies a Fanonian understanding of the colonial-nation state. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that “the colonist always remains a foreigner” and therefore the...
colonized can only resolve this fully by “ejecting him outright from the picture.”\textsuperscript{16} Although he is describing literal expulsion, Fanon also writes that “the supremacy of white values is stated with such violence . . . that as a countermeasure the colonized rightfully make a mockery of them.”\textsuperscript{17} This mockery serves to reaffirm the dignity of colonized people and “bring about the collapse of an entire moral and material world.”\textsuperscript{18} The moral world is determined by the battle for ideological territory whereas the material is determined by the battle for physical territory. Through her palpable anger and its poetic devices of performative utterance and metaphor that sharpen the tensions between language, meaning, and reality, Chrystos carves out a space of ideological territory that denaturalizes nationalist images of the U.S. espoused by the state and its ruling class, centers the material conditions of Indigenous people, and redefines who the rightful owners of the land are.

In her poem “I Walk in the History of My People,” Chrystos describes how colonial containment is reproduced in the body. She writes:

\begin{quote}
There are women locked in my joints
For refusing to speak to the police
My red blood full of those
arrested in flight
My tendons stretched brittle with anger
do not look like white roots of peace
\end{quote}

The symbol of the tendons and metaphor of the joints adantly layers vivid, psychosomatic imagery. Those tough, wiry strings that hold one together are to the point of breaking in Chrystos’s body. The stressed “t” in tendon is mirrored in the delicate and unstressed “t” in brittle, interweaving weakness and strain, vulnerability and anger. As the strong fibers linking muscle to bone, tendons simultaneously evoke the sturdiness of the skeleton and the movement of the muscle. Brittle tendons result in both inflexibility and loss of strength. In his chapter in \textit{Wretched of the Earth} on “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” Fanon details case studies of the psychosomatic effects of colonization on colonized people.\textsuperscript{19} One pattern he identifies is of “patients who have difficulty making certain movements such as climbing stairs, walking, or running . . . passive bending of the lower limbs is practically impossible. No relaxation can be achieved . . . He is constantly tense, on hold . . .”\textsuperscript{20} Fanon theorizes that this results from the fact that “the colonial subject is a man penned in . . . the first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits.”\textsuperscript{21} In the poem, the metaphor of locked joints works non-figuratively in reference to a concrete condition of colonized people, similarly to how the non-figurative metaphor “the U.S. is theory” in Chrystos’s poem “I Have Not Signed a Treaty with the U.S. government” references a concrete politics of Indigenous sovereignty.

Although a non-figurative metaphor appears to be a paradox, it is a tool of the political poet that redefines what is concrete (i.e., structural) beyond what is visible. This poetic perspective, although operating in the realm of language, is analogous with Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism that invisibilizes the processes which bring the tangible (commodities) into being.\textsuperscript{22} As Terry Eagleton writes, “it is a mistake to equate concreteness with things. An individual object . . . is caught up in a mesh of relations with other objects. It is this web of relations and interactions which is ‘concrete,’ while the object considered in isolation is purely abstract.”\textsuperscript{23} Extended to language, it is a mistake to diminish metaphor, imagery, and symbol as strictly abstracted and aestheticized representations of reality when language is constitutive of reality. The “tendons stretched brittle” and “women locked in [her] joints” may not be physical “things” before us, but they are an articulation of the very real network of social factors that create all the “things” we do see. Articulating them as physical reality through the device of the metaphor reverses the invisibilizing nature of ideology, thereby dialectically negating the negation.\textsuperscript{24} The work that Chrystos and other radical poets create highlights that language is not a medium of representation; it is a process of world-making. Eagleton writes:

\begin{quote}
What had started out as a matter of clear representations, now touched on the very essence of the poetic imagination, which combines, distinguishes, unifies, and transforms. Moreover, if our knowledge of reality involved the imagination, then imagery was cognitive, not merely decorative. It could no longer be dismissed as so much superfluous embellishment.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Is an Indigenous poet writing about her stretched tendons and locked joints any less concrete or real than the U.S. calling its genocidal maneuvers “treaties”? Non-figurative metaphors are always around us in the form of what Fanon refers to as “colonial vocabulary,” presenting poetic equations guised as empirical truth.\textsuperscript{26}

If ideology obscures itself in language, poetry can achieve the opposite. It shows itself in language through its devices that foreground the materiality of language and emphasizes the everyday phenomenon of the world-making power of words. The worlds that Chrystos constructs are defined by the material conditions of poor Indigenous women and denaturalize the language of dominant ideology to claim territory within this invisible but concrete realm. Poetry is often perceived as a poet’s interpretation of the world and thus an abstraction resulting from the creativity of the individual. The poetry of Chrystos pushes back on this assumption by highlighting the malleability of
what the ‘world’ is and by understanding her subjectivity as being materially constituted, not individually interior. She challenges and inverts ideological assumptions and creates work in alignment with revolutionary social movements. She writes of herself as a historical being, incorporating Fanonian understandings of the psychosomatic toll of racial oppression and containment. The anger she expresses and her unapologetically rhetorically aggressive approach to claiming ideological territory is necessary for the work of making the camera obscura of ideology visible. Through making visible the invisible logics of white supremacy and empire that structure our notions of meaning, Chrystos adeptly shows how the language of treaties in the service of empire is just as crucial to world-making as the metaphors of power is just as crucial to world-making as the metaphors of

Endnotes


2 This materialist approach has been of defining importance within multiple radical intellectual traditions, perhaps most famously in the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, later developed by thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Georg Lukács, and Frantz Fanon. The materialist approach is also present in the contemporary refrain of “the personal is political” coined by 20th century radical feminists and later incorporated into Black feminism by Claudia Jones.


6 Ibid., 44.

7 For more on this “imagining otherwise” approach to theorizing the power of aesthetics, see Marcuse’s “Aesthetic Dimension” cited above. Marcuse’s emphasis on art’s transcendence of social conditions marks a decisive break from the materialist analysis that I seek to employ, as well as my central metaphorical understanding of ideology as a territorial plane that must be lost or won. I agree with Charles Reitz’s contention that “Marcuse’s non-Marxist and even anti-Marxist philosophical abstractions deplete our efforts to understand ourselves and to extricate ourselves from the oppressive conditions of our social existence.” Charles Reitz, Art, Alienation, and the Humanities: A Critical Engagement with Herbert Marcuse (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 8.

8 In their account of the compositional model of ideology, Jennifer Ponce de León and Gabriel Rockhill write, “Instead of simply being a set of illusions or false ideas, ideology operates as an all-encompassing sensorium that emerges from the actual life-processes of huma faber. It composes an entire universe through the collective and historical production of a shared world of sense that is at one and the same time physical and mental.” Jennifer Ponce de León and Gabriel Rockhill, “Towards a Compositional Model of Ideology: Materialism, Aesthetics, and Cultural Revolution,” Philosophy Today 64, no. 1 (2020): 100.


11 Ibid.

12 Generally speaking, the “Other” is a subject whose divergence from norm defines the normative Self; the “Other” is thus often marginalized and/or derided as part of the self-definition of a person or group. In this case, I am using “Other” to refer to the racialized counterpart against which white settler power defines itself. In The Melancholy of Race, Anne A. Cheng writes, “Racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others. The national topography of centrality and marginality legitimizes itself by retroactively positing the racial other as always Other and lost to the heart of the nation.” Anne A. Cheng, The Melancholy of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10. For more on the racialized “Other,” see Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Random House, 1979), G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

13 A performative utterance, as defined by the language philosopher J.L. Austin, is an “illocutionary act” that brings about a consequence. Common examples include “I do” (weddings), “I name you,” “I resign,” etc. Performative utterances are particularly applicable to thinking about ideology insofar as they are not truth-evaluable; their ability to shape reality is not beholden to any pre-existing ‘truth.’ Similarly, I propose that Chrystos claims ideological territory not by representing truths hidden by ideology, but rather by recomposing the world through metaphor. J.L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

14 To say that the U.S. is an invention of ideology is not to say it is merely ideological, unreal, or immaterial, but rather that nation-state metaphysics should be understood as an ideological construction with socioeconomic realities. Chrystos’s line highlights how the idea of a U.S. nation undergirds the state’s claim to rule on behalf of a collective body-politic of settlers. Along these lines, Nicholas de Genova writes, “If borders are productive of differences in material and practical ways, then it is crucial to note that they not only involve a physics (through the mobilization of various practices and material technologies of bordering) but also sustain a definite metaphysics . . . borders constantly reinforce the ideological image of a world composed of “nations” and “national” states, to which all territory and importantly, all people—must consistently and exclusively correspond.” Nicholas de Genova, “The ‘Crisis’ of the European Border Regime: Towards a Marxist Theory of Borders,” International Sociology, no. 150 (2016): 54.

15 Fanon, Wretched, 5.

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Ibid., 8.

18 Ibid., 9.

19 Fanon broadly understands these psychosomatic effects to be a manifestation of how “the core of despair crystallized in the body of the colonized.” Wretched, 219.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 15.


23 Terry Eagleton, How to Read, 142.


25 Terry Eagleton, How to Read, 141.

26 Fanon, Wretched, 7.

27 Marx and Engels, “The German Ideology.”
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Dancing Together Apart: Comobility and Performance in Quarantine
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Abstract

This article was conceived as dance studios across the world shuttered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For dancers, the loss of a shared physical space presents a significant change to performances. I argue dancers cannot approach digital creativity in lieu of physical spaces in the same way we approached creating movement for live, in-person performance, and that the sense of liveness present in a theatre is best created online through comobility technology. This article uses a combination of dance performance literature and space theory to argue for digital space as a site-specific performance space. When we approach digital space as a site, comobile digital dance presents a new and unique type of site-specific performance.

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Dancing Together Apart: Comobility and Performance in Quarantine

As dance studios across the world shuttered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, rehearsals and performances moved to the internet. For dancers and audiences, the loss of a shared physical space presents a significant shift. Socially distant dance performances often take the form of prerecorded shows that lack the liveness and ephemerality audiences experience from a live performance. Using Jen Southern and Chris Speed’s term “comobile,” defined as “being mobile with others at a distance,” I created the phrase comobile digital dance, which I use to describe the current phenomenon of live dance exhibited via Zoom and other technologies.1 In this paper, I argue that comobile digital dance offers the best combination of safety, compelling visuals, and liveness for dancers and audiences to experience art during a global pandemic. Comobile digital dance multiplies and redefines space, makes the position of dancers in different locations a phenomenon, and ultimately offers audiences insight into their own experience interacting over digital space. When we approach digital space as a site, comobile digital dance presents a new and unique type of site-specific performance, with the capacity to shape both space and people.

The Necessity of Liveness

For the dancer during COVID-19, making dance for an in-person audience has essentially ceased. If rehearsal and performance are not masked and distanced, then the process is unsafe for the dancer.2 It is logistically challenging for choreographers to build dance with more than one performer where every performer is six feet apart without the dance becoming about everyone being six feet apart. Therefore, a conscious move toward virtual rehearsal and remote viewing opportunities are important for dancers’ safety.

For most audiences still looking to experience dance, the practice of viewing has moved online. Common methods to adapt dance to a screen include livestreamed in-person dance, prerecorded in-person dance, and dance film. Livestreamed in-person dance is a live recording of a dance created for an in-person audience. Typically these are livestreamed from the back of the theatre during a performance, creating distance between the camera and the stage. It is often challenging for the online viewer to discern intimate details of the performance; depending on the image quality, it is sometimes impossible. Because viewers online are watching a real-time performance, livestreamed in-person dance maintains some sense of liveness, unlike prerecorded in-person dance, which is just a film of a performance from the audience’s view.

Still, most dances adapted to screen were first created for an in-person audience, whether prerecorded or livestreamed. Their lack of liveness, in the case of prerecorded performance, as well as distance between the camera and the performer in both forms, make dances created for in-person audiences but presented online less exciting for remote audiences. For the audience, why watch a filmed dance that was created for in-person viewing as opposed to remote when they could just watch a movie?

A performance created for digital viewing will always be better suited to digital viewing, which prompted
the development of dance film, or dance for the camera: movement created specifically for a high-definition, cinematographically artistic movie. With a camera, it is possible that “a viewer . . . may participate in the dynamic of the performer’s space in a most intimate way.” For example, directors can use a camera close to a dancer’s body to highlight what might not be noticeable in a real-time performance space, but when zoomed in on, becomes incredibly emotionally powerful. Instead of creating and filming dance as if it were for a proscenium stage performance, creators can record what it feels like to perform the dance. Dance film is an exciting way to watch dance performances from a distance; however, the form sacrifices liveness for image quality and cinematography.

Comobile digital dance presents the opportunity to combine the image quality of a dance film with the liveness of in-person performance while keeping all dancers in their own space to follow CDC guidelines. In his haunting performance (re)current unrest, which explores the history of Black performance, protest, and sociopolitical activism, choreographer Charles O. Anderson explored a partial version of comobile digital dance with some dancers in shared space and some contributing in isolation. Full comobile dance would include keeping all dancers at a distance at all times during the process; Anderson’s partial comobility used livestreams and prerecorded elements to keep some dancers distanced, but not all. The hour-long performance was livestreamed—using multiple cameras for close-up shots—for two evenings in late October through the University of Texas Theatre and Dance department. Anderson’s (re)current unrest was both artistically stunning and unprecedented in its use of multiple media forms to create an exciting live performance specifically for remote viewing.

For the dancers, (re)current unrest was valuable not only because of the relation of its subject matter to current events, but because the dancers got to experience moving together at the same time, part of the draw of comobility. The lack of collaboration and performance opportunities since early March has weighed heavily on the dance community and Anderson’s work was an example of the ways dancers could collaborate in quarantine. For the audience, (re)current unrest presented a new way to experience art during COVID-19. It was both live and ephemeral—the audience watching on Friday had a completely different experience than those watching Saturday, not because the choreography changed, but because the camera angles and the dancers they focused on changed dramatically from night to night. With multiple cameras capable of capturing dancers close up, Anderson could explore more than with a few dancers on a proscenium stage, all spread six feet apart. Anderson described (re)current unrest as an attempt to “bring the audience inside of what’s occurring.” He engaged the audience in a live performance experience that was deeply immersive and extremely successful.

Part of the importance of liveness, for both dancers and the audience, is response presence. Sociologist Erving Goffman describes the immediacy of proximate interaction as “response presence,” a catch-all describing the “non-verbal aspects of interaction such as body talk, line-of-sight, intensity of involvement and levels of engagement in the interaction as well as mood, ease and wariness.” When two people are present together, their bodies are vulnerable to each other’s response presence. Vulnerability to response presence is an essential feature of dance performance: it is the ability to react to different qualities of expression in your fellow performers. When this reaction is live, it is exciting and desirable to observe. Response presence is the reason it is often more satisfying, and more vulnerable, to video chat with someone instead of just calling them. (re)current unrest is an example of performance for a remote audience that kept the thrill of response presence because it was live and captured close enough for audiences to see the quality of performer’s bodies changing in response to one another.

The liveness of Anderson’s (re)current unrest was as close to live dance performance as one could get for remote viewing. Still, it entailed the frequent gatherings of dancers who did not live together. While the dancers were masked and distanced, there was still potential for COVID exposure—ultimately, COVID infection delayed the performance of Anderson’s work, halting the rehearsal process for fourteen days, and “many dropped out of the work out of anxiety” of exposure. Anderson and his cast created an unbelievably moving and effective remote live performance. But to create dance during a pandemic without risk of COVID transmission, performers need to explore the potential of full digital comobility.

**Digital Comobility**

Recorded dance performance was one of the first attempts by dancers to imitate in-person performance; however, as previously stated, recordings lack liveness and real-time feedback. In an attempt to replicate liveness, dancers and choreographers should explore creative uses of comobility, described by Jen Southern and Chris Speed as simply “being mobile with others at a distance.” The ability to see friends move on apps like Find My Friends, for example, is comobility: The specified location of other people is not as important to the concept of comobility as is their movement and their peers’ ability to follow and react to their real-time motion. There is a “sense of liveness” that is offered through the “real-time feedback of data.” Dancers perform comobility when they dance over Facetime or Zoom with each other, inhabiting the same digital space while they move.
separately. This idea of “virtual copresence,” the ability to make space and relationship through technology, is key to creating socially distant dance.  

Digital Space as Site Specific Environment

The way we make dance for a live stage does not work in digital space, nor does dance film provide the liveliness necessary to create satisfying digital performance, but together they help us conceptualize comobile digital dance as site-specific performance. In David Rosenberg’s essay “Video Space,” he argues that video is a site-specific space as dance on film is created specifically for video space. Now, rather than focus on video as a performance site, we need to focus on comobile digital space as a performance site.

Site-specific dance is created for an alternative or non-traditional performance space and typically engages with the history or context of the site. Some site-specific work is created so the physical location of the work is inseparable from the work itself, and some is created to be adaptable to various non-traditional spaces. Unlike in-person site-specific performance, comobile digital dance can be both—it must be created specifically for the physical location of digital space, but it can also be reimagined for live audiences and in-person spaces. Comobile digital dance constructs a new kind of site-specific performance space where the space is not physical, but digital.

Opening Possibilities: Multiplying “Here and Nows” and Redefining Spatiality

Digital dance performance opens up more possibilities for performers to explore different types of space. Geographer Doreen Massey argues that as opposed to a singular “present,” we exist in a constant process of producing “here and nows.” Dance scholar Victoria Hunter connects Massey’s work to site-specific space, arguing that in the creation of a site-specific dance performance, dancers draw on their body’s lived experiences and interactions with a site and embody those responses in the moment, in a “here and now.”

Over digital space, the body experiences a dual “here and now” response: to the experience of digital space and the experience of the site where one is recording. As a result, using digital platforms for performance multiplies space, creating more possibilities for bodily expression as dancers create and respond to multiple spaces at once.

Performers in digital dance performances experience multiple “here and nows” during the performance. First, their bodies experience a here and now in the moment, dancing on a stage. Second, they experience a here and now that includes the knowledge they are being recorded. Finally, they produce a here and now which the audience experiences, different from that of the dancer. If they were in real life, that observed space would have been the same, but because it is remote, it is distinct.

In her book For Space, Massey asserts that space is the product of interrelations: identities (people), their interrelations (interactions), and their spatiality (positions) create each other. Dance is a product of these identities, their interrelations, and their spatiality onsite, and right now we are challenged to completely redefine spatiality. Does live online dance performance render spatiality obsolete, because we are perceived as only being on a computer screen, or does it open up new possibilities for exploring specific spaces and how we interact and create our identities through them?

For this paper, I define spatiality as the site of the entire performance, rather than the position onstage that a dancer might occupy at any given moment of the performance. Dancing together over Zoom, two dancers constitute their digital space, as opposed to the physical space they are both inhabiting, through their digital interaction. Rather than obsolete, their position is a phenomenon, especially if their physical position is far apart. For example, there is a unique quality to the digital space created by a dancer in New York and a dancer in Beijing, who constitute the same digital space while being 12 hours and 6 thousand miles apart. In the midst of a global pandemic, this simultaneous distance and connection is highlighted. Each dancer and their community will experience the pandemic in unique ways; nonetheless, they will experience it in relation to thousands of other dancers and their communities. Borrowing from Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto, comobile dance in digital space creates a “hybrid of machine and organism,” a way of experiencing humanity through the digital that is both alone and shared.

Digital Dance as a New Form

The “here and now” interaction with a digital space is dramatically different than that of a theatrical space, so it is impossible to impose a work choreographed for an in-person audience in a theatre onto a digital space. Hunter notes that “theatre’ dance vocabulary is created for a performance within a very specific environment encompassing a range of spatial and presentational codes and conventions.” Theatrical dance intentionally creates a relationship between content, environment, and audience distinct from site-specific performance. I extend the observation of this variation to digital space. There are expectations for a performance onstage that cannot be the same for a performance being displayed over a screen. Practically, there is a smaller range of movements a dancer can perform that can be seen on a screen. There is also a change in sensory
response a dancer experiences while in their personal space, e.g. their bedroom, and their screen space shared with other dancers than the sensory response they experience in a theatre space. Hunter argues for a divergent approach to site-specific work from theatre dance work: in site-specific dance, “the work develops in collaboration with the site as opposed to imposing itself upon it.”

When effective, “the audience receives the site through the site-specific dance performance.” In the case of comobile digital dance, the digital space is the site.

When we create performance in conscious collaboration with digital space, the audience will receive insight into their own digital experience through these performances. For example, Erica Gionfriddo, artistic director of ARCOS Dance, created a live movement project with students in their Projects in Dance Performance and Repertory rotation at UT Austin in conscious collaboration with digital space which offered the audience reflection into their own experience online. The piece involved several dancers exploring their bedrooms, improvising all over their space simultaneously in a dozen or so squares on Zoom. While watching them, I became increasingly aware of my relationship with both of the spaces I was in: the space I took up seated on my bed, and the space I took up digitally in Zoom. Watching dancers jump on their beds while seated on my own, I wanted to explore my own furniture and open the intimate space of my bedroom to public performance as everyone on screen had done. As the piece continued, dancers came close to their cameras, experimenting with their hands in relation to the screen. It seemed as though they were trying to touch the audience through digital space. Their hands were nearer to me than any had been recently due to the quarantine—I felt close to them. Through Gionfriddo’s project, I became aware of the rich potential of digital space to cultivate connection between people during times of distance. Comobile digital dance expands the potential for what interactions can be shared online, creating space for tenderness and closeness through the camera.

In a moment when our lives, business and personal, are increasingly conducted through computers, site-specific dance will allow us to experience digital space differently, finding nuance in on screen interaction. Through performance, digital space is altered; the performance challenges the conventions of the space and opens the audience to new and different interactions within it.22 Recalling Massey’s notion of the “here and now,” the choreographer and the audience’s concept of the digital site evolves through familiarity, innovation, and repeated negotiation in the moment, allowing us to bring increased awareness of our inhabited digital space forward in our everyday lives.

When thinking about comobile digital dance, imagination is crucial. We must not only be able to imagine a completely socially distant live performance, entirely online, but we must also be able to imagine a future when that performance could be adapted into a production for in-person audiences. Comobile digital dance is a new and different type of site-specific dance, and needs to be approached as such. Dancers need to begin creating performance together in digital space, with the digital site inseparable from the work itself. Dance already has the capacity to shape physical space beyond its normal context—now comobility allows us the opportunity to creatively manipulate digital space as well.

Endnotes

2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDC recommends personal safety guidelines to help slow the spread of disease. As of December 2020, these guidelines include staying at least six feet from those who do not live with you and avoiding crowds and indoor spaces as much as possible. All three of these guidelines are challenging in a typical performance space.
6 Southern and Speed. “Sharing occasions at a distance.” p. 133.
8 Southern and Speed. “Sharing occasions at a distance.” p. 131.
9 Ibid., 133.
10 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 106.
22 Ibid., 109.

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Beyond Physical Limitations of Kin: How Chronically Ill Ethiopian Immigrant Women Utilize Social Media to Contend with the Disruptive Effects of Migration

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Meklit Daniel is a recent graduate of Williams College, where she studied Anthropology and Public Health. Her scholarly interests lie in East African migration histories, intergenerational migration and health experiences, and applied medical anthropology. A recipient of the Dr. Herchel Smith Fellowship, Daniel is currently an MPhil student in the Health, Medicine, and Society program at the University of Cambridge. She aspires to shed more light on the migration experiences of first- and second-generation East African immigrants in the U.S. and to advocate for their health and well-being.

Abstract

Migration engenders the loss of familiar social structures, values, and networks (Bhugra & Becker 2005). Expectedly, immigrants mourn these deprivations, but they also contend with the disruptive social effects of migration through social media. Drawing upon my ethnographic senior honors thesis, I present a case study of two elderly Ethiopian immigrant women living with chronic illnesses to demonstrate that they are active agents in asserting control in their lives and restructuring their social networks by drawing upon social media and technology. I show the innovative and meaningful ways in which Ethiopian immigrant women rebuild their social worlds and foster community.

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To my advisor Professor Lisa Koryushkina, thank you for supporting me throughout this long, arduous journey. To my interlocutors, I am humbled by your compassion, kindness, and strength. You all inspire me to pay it forward to future generations of Ethiopians. Lastly, I thank my parents, whose stories about growing up in and leaving Ethiopia gave birth to this project. Your experiences give me purpose, and you have shaped me into the woman I am today.

Introduction

In the summer of 2019, I rode the Washington, D.C. Metrobus each Sunday afternoon to interview Redeat and Tigist.1 The one-hour ride ended at the bottom of a hill, which I steadily trekked to its apex in the humid D.C. heat. Upon entering the lobby of Redeat’s apartment building, I was greeted by the familiar scents of injera (stew) and gabi (cotton blanket) over her legs. After greeting her with three cheek kisses, I settled at the foot of Redeat’s daybed with Tigist nearby, and we all discussed the past week. Oftentimes, Tigist and Redeat paused our conversation to offer me injera beh wat (sour fermented flatbread with stew). But having just eaten lunch earlier, I kindly refused, acceding for a cold bottle of water after a few persistent requests.

Sundays with Redeat and Tigist were a highlight of my week, but I was saddened by what I observed—two elderly Ethiopian immigrant women dealing with the long-term effects of migration and chronic illness. Redeat is 66-years-old and has type 2 diabetes and kidney disease, which have made her reliant on a walker. Redeat’s health issues are, in fact, what made her leave Ethiopia for the U.S. in 2007 to get lifesaving treatment, ending her 30 yearlong marriage and accountant career. Tigist, who is 58-years-old, also has type 2 diabetes. Due to political issues, she involuntarily left Ethiopia in 2006, where she worked in the media sector. Tigist is now a home caregiver. Migration radically changes Redeat’s and Tigist’s social networks. Redeat’s world is physically and socially isolated to her studio apartment and caregiver. As for Tigist, she mainly interacts with her husband and children, patients, and church friends. These social alterations have greater implications on Redeat’s and Tigist’s health as “health is interconnected” just like people (Smith and Christakis 2008, 405). Chronically ill immigrants, particularly the elderly, are put at a disadvantage with drastically changed social ties; yet, it is misleading to only examine these individuals’ physical networks. With the rise of social media, elderly immigrants like Redeat and Tigist have embraced technology, reaching beyond the physical limitations of social relations and connecting with other Ethiopians both domestic and abroad.

This article draws upon my ethnographic senior honors thesis in which I explored chronically ill Ethiopian immigrant women’s health experiences in the greater Washington, D.C. area. In this paper, I examine how elderly Ethiopian immigrant women with chronic illnesses confront the disruptive social effects of migration by utilizing social media. Migrants are physically deprived of familiar social structures and practices when they relocate (Bhugra and Becker 2005). For those who are chronically ill, social networks become even more important as they provide support and comfort that might be less available due to relocation (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2006; Hombrados-Mendieta et al. 2019; Njeru et al. 2020). Social media provides creative ways for building new social networks and maintaining old ones. In this article, I demonstrate that Ethiopian immigrant women are active agents in rebuilding their social worlds with the help of virtual media and technology. Marginalized because of their legal status, race, and gender, these women
persevere and assert control in their lives. I write this article as a second-generation Ethiopian American woman with the goal of conveying the innovative ways in which Ethiopian immigrant women foster community. A focus on virtual networks provides a better understanding of the challenges that affect long-term care patterns, and it can offer more nuanced insights on different social matrices’ effects on health.

**Ethiopians in the U.S.: How Migration Affects Social Networks**

With around 256,032 residents, first-generation Ethiopian immigrants are the second largest African immigrant group in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2019). Although 60% of Ethiopian immigrants relocated to the U.S. after 2000, their first significant wave of resettlement occurred during the 1980s and 1990s (Migration Policy Institute 2014). These decades were critical times in Ethiopian history as the country endured an oppressive political regime, droughts and famines, and a civil war. Accordingly, many Ethiopians resettled in nearby Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya for refuge while others relocated to Europe, North America, and Australia. From 1981–1993, the U.S. resettled about 1,000 Ethiopians annually (Capps et al. 2014).

The Ethiopian diaspora is widely distributed across the U.S. with the D.C. metropolitan area having the largest concentration of about 35,000 Ethiopian-born immigrants (Migration Policy Institute 2014). D.C. is considered a gateway for Ethiopian and other African immigrants as it is a cosmopolitan city, a place for global work, and the U.S. capital (Wilson and Habecker 2008). More significantly, the development of immigrant enclaves draws new migrants to established cultural institutions (Wilson and Habecker 2008; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1993). The social networks of these communities become strengthened, and they expand in part because of social media usage to maintain both local and transnational ties (Wilson and Habecker 2008, 444). Altogether, these social ties affect immigrants’ health.

Social networks influence people’s health and well-being. Studies show that people with low levels of social support have higher risks of mortality than those with stronger support networks (Wright 2016; see also Cohen et al. 2000). Positive social support can also reinforce healthy behaviors while negative social support can deter healthy behavioral changes (Wright 2016). Accordingly, individuals’ health outcomes depend not just on their physiology and actions but also on their surrounding biology and behaviors (Smith and Christakis 2008; Wright 2016). Social ties often change due to major life events, and this phenomenon is most drastic for immigrants. Migration affects the strength of immigrants’ social networks, which are further tested with the addition of chronic illnesses. Chronic illnesses are not just the daily experiences of pain and suffering; they are inseparable realities in sick people’s life worlds (Kleinman 1988). Making sense of changes related to migration, for example, is difficult, but social media helps immigrants contend with these alterations through innovatively formed communities.

Immigrants create fluid notions of community as they use social media to restructure their social networks (Plaza and Below 2014). Houda Asal (2012) contends that virtual technology enables immigrants to establish and sustain connections with their homeland, host countries, and each other. Immigrants keep up with and participate in their native country’s current affairs despite being physically distant from home (Asal 2012). Similarly, Ethiopian immigrants foster their transnational identities on media platforms. As a relatively “new” immigrant group in the U.S., first-generation Ethiopian immigrants maintain strong ties with the people, culture, and affairs of their home country through virtual platforms. On these sites, Ethiopian immigrants contend with the geographical separation, cultural differences, and emotional effects that arise from relocation within the greater context of Ethiopia’s social and political history. One type of online response is cultural mourning.

**Cultural Mourning on Social Media**

Cultural mourning on social media is one way immigrants, in this case chronically ill Ethiopian immigrant women, grapple with the fragmented effects of migration. As mentioned earlier, migration engenders the deprivation of the familiar, like language, values, and social networks, for relocated people (Bhugra and Becker 2005). Expectedly, migrants grieve their losses, experiencing what Dwaine Plaza and Amy Below (2014) call cultural mourning—“feelings of alienation and marginalization in . . . respective country[ies] of settlement” (37). Social media is a two-sided platform that can reinforce this anguish within immigrants or help them confront it as seen with Tigist and Redeat.

When I visited Tigist and Redeat on certain Sundays, I was welcomed by Tigist’s rapid Amharic chatter on the phone. I would have difficulty parsing out her conversation, but I could tell she was talking with a relative. After Tigist hung up, she would sigh and mumble about “issues in Ethiopia” before joining Redeat and me. Though social media is often associated with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, telecommunication applications, like WhatsApp and Telegram, are key platforms utilized by elderly Ethiopian immigrant women. “Calling home” allows them to maintain and fortify their social networks in Ethiopia. Grasping onto what they have lost, these women stay updated with their family and friends’ lives as well as Ethiopian current affairs.
and cultural changes. For Tigist, calling home reinforces the pain of having to leave Ethiopia involuntarily. She is reminded of the enjoyable aspects of her life in Ethiopia, like being near her loved ones and having a dynamic professional life. Tigist also remembers the distressful social and political climate that made her family relocate and continues to affect other Ethiopians. When I asked Tigist if she ever considered living in the U.S., she refuted strongly:

[B]ack home, I have my own business. I'm doing research. I'm giving a training [sic]. . . . I travel to different European countries, African countries. So honestly speaking . . . never. Even when my friends are asked me [sic], I would say,) “Me? Don't kidding me [sic].” No, because I worked the work which I liked. I like it.

Though Tigist stays updated with Ethiopian news through social media, this exposure reinforces her grief of being physically separated from Ethiopia and unable to participate in these broadcasting activities. She mourns her loss of home and its consequences. Calling home is a way for Tigist to maintain contact with her loved ones, strengthening those social ties at the cost of intensifying the wounds of loss and alienation.

While Tigist was on the phone, I would greet Redeat seated in her wheelchair in front of her TV, watching a YouTube broadcast of the International Ethiopian Evangelical Christian Church's (IEECC) service. As I prepared my voice recorder and interview questions, Redeat would gently sway her head to and hum along with the church songs with a smile on her face. Redeat deals with her physical and social isolation through technology, namely YouTube Ethiopian church broadcasts. These videos fortify Redeat's social ties with Ethiopian Evangelical religious practices. Undoubtedly, these broadcasts engender sentiments of loneliness within Redeat, who left Ethiopia due to unanticipated life events. Similar to Tigist, Redeat never thought she would live in the U.S., and she desires to return to Ethiopia quickly: “If I am okay, I wish I will go [to Ethiopia] tomorrow [sic]. If I am okay but God knows at what time I can go . . . Maybe I will go there. I will saw my parents, my brother, and sister [sic].” The YouTube church videos address these feelings and help Redeat confront cultural mourning. She develops social and cultural comfort through the IEECC broadcasts that practice traditional Ethiopian Evangelical religious customs. More importantly, these videocasts offer spiritual solace for Redeat. She reinforces her faith in God, finding the strength and inner peace to deal with the physical, social, and emotional effects of migration. In some ways, this virtual connection is more important than real life communication because the former is at Redeat's fingertips at any moment. She can tune into past IEECC services, listen to Ethiopian Protestant music, or watch other Ethiopia-related videos when she feels lonely. Despite being physically distant from Ethiopia, Redeat reinforces her cultural ties through social media, maintaining her well-being and confronting the isolating sentiments of cultural mourning.

In these two examples, we see the dual effects of cultural mourning on social media. Tigist and Redeat both fortify their social networks in and with Ethiopia. These processes, however, sharpen the pains of involuntarily leaving Ethiopia for Tigist while enabling Redeat to contend with the alienating effects of her relocation. I examine cultural mourning in these contexts because it provides my interlocutors a larger sense of community, one that is geographically displaced for Tigist and another that is spiritually driven for Redeat. These different experiences allow Tigist and Redeat to connect with each other and maintain their virtual networks. Though migration compromises their physical social networks, Tigist and Redeat are able to rebuild these connections on the basis of shared cultural loss. Ultimately, these similarities support Tigist and Redeat's well-being. Both women reaffirm their cultural identities and attain psychological comfort, pointing to social media's empowering effects.

Nurturing Social Empowerment and Building Interethnic Networks

Ethiopian immigrant women utilize social media to strengthen and expand newly established social networks within community associations. Tigist is part of a social organization that consists of the women who reside in her apartment building. This group is a grassroots association that acts in part like social clubs, but its goals go beyond socializing to provide financial, emotional, and cultural support for its members. At least once a month, the women in Tigist’s apartment building meet to discuss important infrastructural, financial, or personal issues related to their place of residence. Tigist describes this group as a “women's empowerment association,” which has become a beloved family. Two years ago, the organization members successfully reversed a couple's eviction from the apartment by tapping into their social and cultural capital to win this case. That is, the members utilized online platforms like Facebook to contact other Ethiopian immigrant women who have experience in dealing with this issue and to find other resources related to this problem. This example demonstrates how Ethiopian immigrant women use social media to challenge structural obstacles in the U.S. These women educate themselves about their rights in this unfamiliar country, strengthening their self-confidence and empowering their counterparts undergoing similar issues.
This stride toward greater community development pushes Ethiopian immigrant women to build interethnic social networks. When Tigist described her apartment’s women association, she showed me a picture of the group celebrating their win for the tenants’ case. There were about 20 women in the image, most of whom were Ethiopian smiling in their colorful kemis (Ethiopian dress). Dispersed throughout the photo, however, were Latina immigrant women. I was surprised by this appearance, knowing that a majority of Tigist’s apartment residents are Ethiopian. When I asked Tigist about non-Ethiopian women in the group, she asserted that the organization “doesn’t discriminate against residents. We welcome all.” The apartment building is a shared inhabited place in which these women raise their families and rebuild their lives in the U.S. The apartment is a physical manifestation of the social and financial capital these women have accumulated as they adjust to American society. Having overcome structural and cultural barriers to have a place of their own, these immigrant women are bound by their similar experiences and are motivated to support each other regardless of their national origins. Together, the Ethiopian and Latina immigrant women learn new values and practices from each other, fostering a more meaningful sense of community beyond ethnic boundaries. Just as the apartment building is a shared interethnic space, social media platforms enable engagement across ethnic divides and further each residents’ causes. 

Conclusion

It has been about a year since I last visited Redeat and Tigist, and I often think about that lasting image I have of them in Redeat’s studio apartment—two elderly Ethiopian immigrant women dealing with the long-term effects of migration and chronic illness. I contemplate how this disheartening image does not truly convey my interlocutors’ agency in utilizing social media to exceed the physical limitations of social networks. These platforms enable chronically ill Ethiopian immigrant women to mourn the lives, memories, and loved ones they have left behind and to face this pain directly. Additionally, social media empowers Ethiopian immigrant women, like those in Tigist’s apartment association, to strengthen newly created networks that help construct interethnic social ties. In all, this article shows that chronically ill Ethiopian immigrant women resist structural and cultural obstacles and assert control in their lives. Further research is needed, however, to examine the relationships and significance of virtual networks, migration, and health. Most kinship studies focus on physical social networks and their effects on immigrants’ psycho-physiological well-being, but virtual networks are no less powerful in offsetting the social losses generated by migration. Social media and technology undoubtedly play important roles in people’s everyday lives. These systems should be integrated in researchers’ understanding of social networks’ impact on immigrants’ physical health and mental well-being, especially among immigrants who are relatively “new” in their countries of resettlement. Such studies will accentuate the dynamic and meaningful ways in which immigrants reconstruct their social worlds.

Endnote

1 I have anonymized the names of my interlocutors.

Works Cited


"The President Told Us All to Go Shopping": Ambivalent Immigrant Recovery in Ling Ma’s Severance
Paula Del Toro, University of Chicago

Paola Del Toro graduated from the University of Chicago with Special Honors in English in 2020. She won the Chicago English Department’s Janel Mueller Thesis Prize for her thesis on immigrant estrangement and consumer attachments in Ling Ma’s Severance. She is currently an research assistant and data analyst for Chicago’s GenForward Survey and the Violence, Law, and Politics Lab, focusing on youth political identities, political redistricting, and racial capitalism in the U.S. She is applying to graduate programs in English, where she hopes to continue studying U.S. capitalism and culture.

Abstract

Contemporary scholarship on the immigrant novel often focuses on instances of vulnerability and precarity that rupture immigrant lives, or it emphasizes the instances of political reclamation that immigrant writers use to form identities in the face of narrative or historical rupture. This paper, through its reading of Ling Ma’s apocalyptic immigrant novel Severance, supplements these conversations by demonstrating how immigrant and diasporic subjects manage the historical and everyday crises in their lives through ambivalent, apolitical attachments to consumer spaces. I argue that immigrant narratives are not only a result of constant vulnerability or active reclamation, but also depend on ambivalent attempts to organize daily life under crisis.

My close readings, which take place in shopping malls, a KFC restaurant, and department stores, cast immigrant survival strategies as ambivalent and consumption-based, not just as cognitive attempts at identity-formation or protest. I engage with Lauren Berlant’s work on ambivalence and citizenship as well as Bharati Mukherjee’s work on the immigrant novel to show how consumer-based attachments are strategies of survival that simply make life more bearable, despite the complicated capitalist relations that they imply.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In Ling Ma’s apocalyptic immigrant novel Severance (2018), the protagonist Candace Chen goes on a trip to Hong Kong and proceeds to shop until she loses her mind. Candace is unable to handle the constant, “aching stream” of vendors and products in the Hong Kong outdoor night market, even saying “I shopped so much I felt like I was losing my mind,” so she jumps into a nearby store for relief (103). Yet the place in which she finds relief is just as neon, just as consumerist as the dizzying night market: “Across the street,” she narrates, “a 7-Eleven magically mirrored in front of me, a beacon of American summer, and I ducked inside for reprieve” (103). Candace is only able to make sense of the night market after ducking into a different type of market. This act in Severance stages the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the novel’s attachments to capitalist consumption, particularly with respect to its immigrant characters. By close reading scenes in which immigrant experience and capitalist consumption collide, I show how Severance’s subjects develop affective attachments to forms of capital in order to cope with immigrant and capitalist crises.

Contemporary genre theory on the immigrant novel has often focused on instances of vulnerability and precarity that rupture immigrant lives, or it has emphasized the instances of political reclamation that immigrant writers use to form their identities in the face of narrative or historical rupture.1 My reading of Severance supplements these conversations by demonstrating how immigrant and diasporic subjects manage the historical and everyday crises in their lives through ambivalent, apolitical attachments to commodities and consumer spaces. In other words, immigrant narratives are not only about either constant vulnerability or active reclamation, but also about ambivalent attempts to organize daily life under crisis. In her theorization of the immigrant literature of “New Arrival,” Bharati Mukherjee describes how contemporary immigrant literature captures the “anguish of separation from family and homeland” (695). For immigrants who flee oppressive conditions in their home country, she writes, “to survive in life is to endure the pain and inevitability of ‘unhousement,’” and to write an immigrant novel is therefore to negotiate a process of “rehousement” (683, 695). Yet by focusing on the rupture and trauma of immigrant experience, the framework of un/ rehousement is unable to account for immigrant narratives of subjects who were never fully “housed” anywhere, who grow up “adrift” as Candace does.2 Furthermore, this framework for analyzing immigrant literature tends to emphasize the “broken narratives of disrupted lives” at the expense of studying the ways in which immigrant subjects employ various strategies to repair the ruptures and traumas of their lives (684). In this paper, I argue that Severance stages ambivalent strategies for survival and stability—like Candace running...
from the night market to the 7-Eleven—that attempt to repair severed connections from home or create new connections entirely. I argue that these strategies are often contradictory or ambivalent attempts to make sense of life under immigrant or capitalist crises. These crises range from oblique references to the 2008 financial crisis, to Candace's emotional distress as an orphan without ties to her extended family in China, to the apocalyptic plot device of Shen Fever that drives the novel as a whole. These crises necessarily overlap; indeed, I argue that the inability to enumerate each crisis as a discrete experience is itself a cognitive crisis experienced uniquely by the novel's diasporic characters.

While some discourse on immigrant narratives discusses how immigrants reject American culture or attempt to create hybrid traditions, my readings, which take place in shopping malls, a KFC restaurant, and supermarkets, cast immigrant survival strategies as also ambivalent and consumption-based, not only cognitive attempts at identity-formation or protest. To this end, I first argue that shopping malls specifically are a site of both generic consumption and specific familial connection, making it a space where characters form contradictory attachments to its consumer offerings. I then discuss the relationship between consumerism and citizenship. I demonstrate that this connection is not always an overtly political rejection of the nation but an ambivalent production of normalcy. Finally, I study the relationship that Candace's mother Ruifang has with shopping and specific familial connection, making it a space where memories of Candace's mother inserted in the text reflect connections entirely. I argue that these strategies are often repair severed connections from home or create new connections from the night market to the 7-Eleven—both as a specific kind of transactional relation, and as a type of scene that is place-based, such as at a mall or a boutique store—frequently offers temporary relief to the characters in _Severance_. This relief takes place both on the level of plot, as the novel resolves in large part at an Illinois shopping mall where the Shen Fever survivors take refuge, and on the level of character, as Candace recovers memories of her “dimming” genealogical ties through commodity relations at the shopping mall. At 7-Elevens and beauty counters, Candace forms commodified, affective attachments to make sense of her life when she feels disconnected. Studying these affective attachments and micro-interactions pushes us to think beyond the active efforts that immigrants make to reclaim their family histories in the immigrant novel and turns our attention to the “banal” and “politically incoherent” strategies that provide temporary stability (Berlant xii, 3). At a Hong Kong beauty counter during one of Candace's business trips, for example, Candace engages in a simple commodity-based transaction that also serves as a site of connection with family memories.

Candace's experience at the mall beauty counter is at once transactional and deeply personal. Ma stages pacing to wed the transactional nature of the exchange with Candace's memories; in the midst of Ma's clipped writing style and the frequent reassurances made by the saleswoman at the beauty counter, Ma slows the pace of the scene with longer sentences and a more serious tone, taking the reader back to Candace's childhood. In this memory, we learn that Candace's mother Ruifang used to go to Hong Kong for a cosmetic procedure. Ruifang was teased by her sisters, who called her a “spotted leopard” (101). Candace adds, “I've always been told my skin is too dry,” placing herself in a lineage of family criticism and self-scrutinization with which both mother and daughter cope by using cosmetic procedures and skincare regimens (101). The memory ends with the futility of her mother's effort; she came home with white spots instead of moles, still “marked in the places she desired to be unmarked” then without warning, the next paragraph begins: “I took out my credit card and paid for the cleanser” (101). These immediately adjoining sentences make the sentence “I took out my credit card” read like a direct response to “She was still marked,” as if Candace not only corrects her own skin insecurities by buying the skin product, but her late mother's, too. The sudden, intimate memory of Candace's mother inserted in the text reflects how an otherwise generic mall is imbued with genealogical reconnection in the novel. Studying the affective charge of this otherwise mundane scene reveals how Candace connects to her family history at the shopping mall and more generally how sites of consumption can stage affective ties for otherwise disconnected immigrant subjects.

As the beauty counter scene shows, the moments of genealogical connection that Ma presents in the novel are not always conscious acts of immigrant reclamation, but subtle flashbacks that invite the specific memories of an ambivalent protagonist into a scene. Scholars of the immigrant novel such as Caren Ir have noted the ambivalence of certain immigrant texts, particularly with texts under the category of “The New Nomads,” a label that might fit a rootless protagonist like Candace (672). Yet even this theorization of ambivalence towards a homeland or a “national belonging” is based on readings of non-market, non-consumer spaces such as engagements with music, art, or language (673). In _Severance_, one's immigrant past seeps into market-based, consumer spaces: sometimes, as Candace's father says, “the solution is shopping” (177).

**The Victory Lap**

In addition to providing access to familial memories, shopping in _Severance_ facilitates or constitutes participation in a given place, sometimes even as a practice of citizenship. Ma stages various attitudes or non-attitudes towards
shopping in scenes that feature political speeches, family bonding, and Candace's own theories of consumption. Putting these different voices in conversation reveals how shopping serves as both a form of national participation and an ambivalent routine. Katie Daily-Bruckner's study of the "waning allegiance to America" in immigrant narratives suggests that twenty-first century immigrant narratives emphasize the "choice to reject an antiimmigrant social climate and disaffiliate from the American nation" (12.11). Yet reading Severance's shopping scenes reveals the need for an analysis that goes beyond this affiliation/disaffiliation dichotomy to instead consider the contradictory attachments to capital and nation that immigrants make, even as both capitalism and citizenship produce disconnection and harm in their lives. As Shen Fever worsens, Candace observes a 9/11 memorial ceremony taking place outside her office, during which she recalls, "after it had happened, President Bush told us all to go shopping" (212). Bush positions consumerism as an American value, making the shopping mall a site of national healing and participation. Lauren Berlant writes that the process of citizenship involves "the orchestration of fantasies" about the nation in which "people are asked to recognize certain practices and ways of life as related to the core of who they are" (1). The line "President Bush told us all to go shopping" therefore underscores shopping as a fraught practice and "fantasy," as Berlant writes, that is embedded in the nation's "logic of mass culture" and fundamentally exclusionary practices of granting citizenship (Berlant 2). And yet, as we have and will continue to see, Candace and her family do plenty of shopping.

After her father Zhigang passes his U.S. citizenship test, Candace goes to KFC with him, and remembers there how delicious fried chicken tasted when she arrived in America as a child. She thinks to herself that her mother will be upset that they will have spoiled their appetites for dinner at home. Yet she knows that "KFC was his victory lap and I couldn't interrupt it" (189). The "victory lap" scene at KFC pairs a mass consumer experience with American citizenship. Here, the formality of citizenship alone is not enough to confer the feeling of participation in the nation; Zhigang has to complete the experience by going to KFC, a national corporate chain restaurant. The delicious taste of the chicken and the quiet celebration between father and daughter eliminate any trace of cynicism in the passage. Participation in mass consumer culture is therefore not simply a negative or positive act; it serves as a form of attachment that makes life slightly more livable.

Candace herself metabolizes both Bush's plea and her parents' consumer habits in ultimately ambivalent ways. "To live in a city is to consume its offerings. [. . . ] To shop at its stores. [. . . ] To pay its sales taxes" she reflects at the end of the novel (290). As opposed to George Bush's call to action for Americans, Candace's theory of consumption is not an enthusiastic one, while it is also not as subtle as Zhigang's unspoken victory lap at KFC. Yet it has clear influence from both sides, making her relation to consumption an ambivalent one. Not a fervent American consumerist nor a disaffiliated dissenter to American culture, Candace places no value judgement on the act of shopping and consuming a city's "offerings," instead seeing it as a mode of participation, of ambivalent attachment to the world.

The Cure for Homesickness

In addition to pushing back against the framework of immigrant disaffiliation discussed above, my reading of Severance also complicates scholars' focus on the "choice" to affiliate or not affiliate with the national culture. Recovering a sense of self or stability often entails ambivalent practices of engaging with the world that are not always a matter of choice or political will. In The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture, Lauren Berlant describes how subjects can take actions that show an "ambivalence about aspirational normativity and not a pointer toward unrealized revolution" (25). Due to their political marginalization, immigrants and their narratives are often read for their ability or inability to point towards "unrealized revolution," when in fact, some strategies for immigrant survival are better read as strategies for "aspirational normativity." When it comes to Candace's mother, Ruifang, the text is explicit about her attitude towards consumption, because Ruifang coped with the transition of immigrating to the U.S. with shopping: "Her homesickness eased in department stores, supermarkets, wholesale clubs, supermarkets, places of unparalleled abundance," Candace describes (177). M. locates Ruifang's relief in generic places of consumerism and Candace spends no time psychoanalyzing her mother's motives. Instead she simply lists the places—department stores, supermarkets—that her mother frequents. Ruifang, in other words, is not ideologically interested in the motives or capitalist ramifications of her choices. Yet this lack of explanation and ambivalence is itself a form of attachment to the world. Berlant writes that people "live their fantasies incoherently, in uneven practices of attachment," such that the feeling of ambivalence felt by Ruifang and Candace is in fact "an intimate attachment and a pleasure in its own right" (2, 9). Shopping, through its ability to temper Ruifang's homesickness, is a commodified relation of relief, even if it props up the same economy that has contributed to Ruifang's severance from home in the first place.

Conclusion

While Ruifang's comfort takes place within large chain stores, Candace herself describes passing a Starbucks
“where, for a whole disgusting summer, [she] used to buy a Frappuccino a day” (272). In each example, the women attempt to produce a sense of normalcy and their actions show how capitalist structures both make life impossible and provide the moments of palliative affect that make it tolerable. Candace, herself a theorist of consumption and attachment, summarizes it best: “To live in a city is to take part in and to propagate its impossible systems. It is also to take pleasure in those systems because, otherwise, who could repeat the same routines, year in, year out?” (290). Consumption in Severance produces the normalcy, even the pleasure, that its diasporic subjects crave. The inability to form coherent connections under late capitalism lead Ma’s characters to make attachments to the world where they can, not as acts of immigrant defiance or acquiescence, but as people tasked with being people.

Endnotes

1 As I discuss below, scholars Katie Daily-Brucker and Tim Prchal respectively discuss “individual immigrant empowerment” and strategies of “immigrant adjustment” that emphasize how immigrant subjects reclaim their pasts or politically rail against the expectations of an American citizen. These concepts leave little room for the non-cognitive, apolitical attachments that Ma’s immigrant characters forge to make sense of their lives. While Caren Irr does open the possibility for ambivalent immigrant narratives, Irr does not address how these narratives rely or don’t rely on capitalist consumption as Ma’s novel asks us to consider.

2 Candace represents Severance’s staging of a dual dynamic in which both capitalism and immigrant experience collide to produce disruption and crisis. She is therefore both a “fragmented” subject under late capitalism, as Fredric Jameson theorizes, but also “adrift,” as Jiayang Fan describes her in The New Yorker, due to her disconnection from her genealogy.

3 As I will discuss below, Katie Daily-Brucker’s discussion of “individual immigrant empowerment” and Tim Prchal’s discussion of “immigrant adjustment” are concepts that imply premeditated, cognitive moves on the part of immigrant subjects to reclaim their pasts or push back against “the American nation.” Daily-Brucker also discusses how some immigrant narratives emphasize “the choice to exit America for positive, identity-driven reasons” (13). I seek to supplement these concepts with an understanding of the non-cognitive, apolitical attachments that Ma’s immigrant characters forge to make sense of their lives.

4 Ruifang’s character is in conversation with Berlant’s question in The Female Complaint: “What are the political consequences of a commoditized relation among subjects who are defined not as actors in history but as persons who shop and feel?” (13).

5 This reading of the novel is indebted to Lauren Berlant’s “cruel optimism,” a relation of attempted reciprocity with the world that is unstable and itself an obstacle to one’s “flourishing” (1, 12).

Works Cited


Islamic Reformism and Political Thought in Nineteenth Century West Africa

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Abstract

The Sokoto Jihad, the Islamic reformist movement initiated by Usman dan Fodio in nineteenth-century Central West Africa, is a pivotal example of complex African state-society making. The four main intellectuals of the Sokoto Jihad: Usman dan Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, Mohammed Bello, and Nana Asma’u, authored over two hundred landmark texts in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani on these state-making processes. In this essay I critically analyze selected English translations of the Sokoto reformists' written works. Specifically, I investigate the subjective doctrine on which these indigenous pre-colonial African rulers rationalized and legitimated their political-religious project in the context of nineteenth-century Hausaland, Africa’s largest and most diverse ethnolinguistic region.

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Introduction

Africans constantly engaged in complex state and society making processes before European colonization. A dominant Eurocentric perspective on traditional African political systems contends that pre-colonial African communities were incapable of building complex state-society systems. However the Africana historical archive proves this prevailing Western assumption wholly inaccurate. The Islamic intellectual tradition in Central West Africa offers landmark written texts to explore the intricacies of African state-society systems before the imposition of colonial rule in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing specifically on these state-society processes in a vast and heterogeneous West African region, in this paper I critically analyze a few major works from the leaders of Africa’s most notable Islamic reformist movement, the Sokoto Jihad in the nineteenth century. The Sokoto Jihad, the Islamic reformist movement initiated by Usman dan Fodio in Central West Africa in 1804, underscores the importance of indigenous African knowledge production as an integral component in the discourses of power, governance, and state-society making in pre-colonial Africa.

When Usman dan Fodio declared jihad—holy war—on Central West Africa’s Hausa kings in 1804, his intellectual world extended throughout West Africa, North Africa, and the wider Muslim world. Focusing on the complicated relations between state-society in the diverse Central West African region, I explore the following interrelated issues. First, I interrogate how the Sokoto Muslim reformists invoked their connections to other Muslim civilizations across time and space when constructing their political-religious project in the first half of the nineteenth century. Second, I provide a brief analysis of how the Sokoto reformists mobilized their discursive connection to historical Islamic communities and empires to confront the dominant sociopolitical structure of nineteenth-century Central West Africa. While their references to Islam’s genesis reified the reformists’ claim to orthodoxy, their methodology in establishing discursive connections to past Islamic civilizations suggests that they constructed Islamic orthodoxy according to their needs as rulers in nineteenth-century West Africa. Finally, I contend that the Sokoto Muslim reformers’ written works exemplify Africana political thought’s sophisticated nature, connecting expansive African social, religious, political, and intellectual spaces.

Western scholarship on African diasporic peoples often expropriates their legitimating doctrines and institutions to their encounter with the West, especially since the Enlightenment. Intended to refute this prevailing perspective in African and African Diaspora studies, this work is not meant as a conventional historical or political study on the virtues or vices of the Sokoto Jihad. Rather, I investigate the subjective doctrine on which indigenous pre-colonial African rulers rationalized and legitimated their political-religious project in nineteenth-century West Africa.

Literature Review

The secondary scholarship on the Sokoto Jihad falls into three successive historical waves. During the period of British colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century, British colonial administrators in Northern Nigeria were responsible for the first wave of scholarship on the Sokoto jihad. They collected and translated some of the Sokoto Muslim reformists’ notable written works from Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani into English. Key translations from this first wave include British administrator E. J. Arnett’s The Rise of the Sokoto Fulani: Being a paraphrase and in some parts
Ngom extends Kane's argument to emphasize that the
is only being critically reexamined in recent years (2014).
obscured by colonial European hegemonic discourses and
teenth century. Kane situates the Sokoto reformers in a
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religion, scholarship, and statecraft in Africana thought.
linguistically diverse audiences of men and women, Asma'u's
written works in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani, to address her
Sokoto reformist movement. By presenting her extensive
of Usman dan Fodio, among the works of the leaders of the
ical structure on which the British grafted their problematic
Sokoto Caliphate as a pivotal pre-colonial socio-political
post-colonial Nigerian nation-state, these works locate the
reformers' written works and the socio-political tensions
the relationship between the complexity of the Sokoto
reformers' written works and the socio-political tensions
of nineteenth-century Central West Africa (Ochonu, 2014;
 Vaughan, 2016). Analyzed in the context of the crisis of the
post-colonial Nigerian nation-state, these works locate the
Sokoto Caliphate as a pivotal pre-colonial socio-political
structure on which the British grafted their problematic
colonial project in Nigeria's northern region. Works on
women and gender, notably Callaway (1996), Mack and
Boyd (1997), and Mack (2011), analyze the critical place of a
prominent woman intellectual, Nana Asma'u, the daughter
of Usman dan Fodio, among the works of the leaders of the
Sokoto reformist movement. By presenting her extensive
written works in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani, to address her
linguistically diverse audiences of men and women, Asma'u's
works underscore the intersections of gender, language,
religion, scholarship, and statecraft in Africana thought.
More recently, several scholars have presented the works
of the Sokoto Muslim reformers within the broader con-
text of the vast Muslim scholarship on the West African
 Sahel, especially from the seventeenth century to the nine-
teenth century. Kane situates the Sokoto reformers in a
millennium-old African-Islamic literary tradition that was
obscured by colonial European hegemonic discourses and
is only being critically reexamined in recent years (2014).
Ngom extends Kane's argument to emphasize that the
reformers' Ajami works—local languages written in Arabic
scripts—especially Nana Asma'u's, are a critical element
of their literary archive (2016). Finally, Lovejoy contends
that through enslaved African Muslims in the Americas, the
political thought of West African Islamic reformist move-
ments was just as influential as Western legal theory in the
formation of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth-century
Atlantic world (2016). These three major waves of scholar-
ship provide historical and political contexts for any critical
textual analysis of the works of the four preeminent Sokoto
Muslim intellectuals: Usman dan Fodio, the founder of the
Sokoto Caliphate, his brother Abdullahi dan Fodio, his
daughter, Nana Asma'u, and his son Mohammed Bello, the
first Caliph—successor.

Constructing the Pious State

In this section, I offer a close textual analysis of
English translations from the written works of Usman dan
Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, Nana Asma'u, and Mohammed
Bello, the four preeminent thinkers of the Sokoto Jihad.
Additionally, I incorporate secondary scholarship on the
Sokoto Jihad's historical development to articulate how the
reformers evolved their state-building project according to
the Jihad's changing socio-political circumstances. By ana-
lyzing English translations of the Sokoto reformists' written
works in Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani, I adopt Noah Salomon's
hermeneutical approach to Islamic politics. According to
Salomon, “it is through a hermeneutics of Islamic politics
that we can come to understand its own ontologies, its own
categories of understanding, and thus the life-worlds that
Islamic politics makes possible.” By discursively establish-
ing Islam as the ideological basis of their state and society,
the Sokoto reformers ensured that all aspects of Islam, from
religious practice to civilizational discourse, took on polit-
deral dimensions where the clerical opinions of Usman dan
Fodio's were fundamentally tied to their political authority.
My hermeneutical approach engages the Sokoto reformers
writing from the Islamic literary world as I interrogate how
the reformers argued that their form of Islam was the only
just and pious state in Central West Africa.

The Sokoto reformers rooted their state's bureau-
cratic structure in their origins as a clerical Muslim clan.
Specifically, the Sokoto reformers identified as a class of
Fulani scholars known as the Torodbe, originating in the
Futa Toro region of Senegambia. Usman dan Fodio's clan
name, Toronkawa—meaning from Futa Toro—signaled his
Torodbe lineage in Central West Africa's Hausa speaking
kingdoms, known as Hausaland. In his Tayzin Al-Waraqat,
Abdullahi dan Fodio insists that their ancestor Musa Jokollo,
“migrated from the country of Futa Turadubbi” and initi-
ated the Toronkawa's settlement in Hausaland. Modern
scholars agree that Musa Jokollo arrived in Hausaland
in at least the fifteenth century. Thus, Abdullahi could meaningfully introduce himself in his *Tayzin Al-Waraqat*, as “Abdullah b. Muhammad b. Uthman the Turudi by lineage, Hausa by province and by country.” The Sokoto reformists showcased their Toronkawa identity to critically reify their claim to political authority as Muslim rulers. As a clerical Muslim clan, they saw themselves as perpetuating the global vision of an Islamic society dating back to the community of the prophet Muhammad. Still, Usman dan Fodio and his followers could only initiate their reformist movement by meaningfully translating their global vision into Hausaland’s local political life.

Reformist sources indicate that addressing Hausaland’s socio-political structures was paramount for justifying their jihad. Moses Ochonu finds that Usman dan Fodio’s son Mohammed Bello was actually the first person to discursively formalize the term Hausa to describe the inhabitants of Central West Africa’s seven Hausa-speaking kingdoms. In his *Infaq’l Maysur*, Mohammed Bello describes the “land of Hausa,” as “inhabited by the Sudanese . . ., Fulani, and Tuaregs.” Olufemi Vaughan emphasizes that even though Hausa operated as a *lingua franca* for the diverse peoples of the central Sahel, a person’s actual identity referred to their city-state kingdom of origin. Within the city-states across Hausaland, Vaughan explains that Hausa speakers were further stratified into castes with the local Sarki king at the top, followed by the Masu Sarauta land-owning aristocrats, and the masses of Talakawa commoners at the bottom. Accordingly, Mohammad Bello’s use of the term *Sudanese* reflected the reformists’ broader need to categorize the people living in the area on which they sought to inscribe their state-making project.

For Usman dan Fodio, the Hausa Sarkis’ syncretic practices lay at the root of their misgovernance, ultimately making jihad the only recourse against them. Despite certain proselytizing from clerics like members of the Toronkawa, the overwhelming majority of Hausa Talakawa commoners continued to practice their indigenous beliefs called Bori, and many Fulani practiced their traditional belief systems as well. Even the Sarki kings often mixed elements of Bori into their religious and governmental practices. In his *Kitab al-Fiqh*, Usman dan Fodio enumerates the practices of the Hausa Sarkis that he claimed constituted unbelief:

One of the ways of their government is the building of their sovereignty upon three things: the people’s persons, their honour, and their possessions; and whomsoever they wish to kill or exile/ or violate his honour or devour his wealth they do so in pursuit of their lusts, without any right in the Shari’a. One of the ways of their government is their imposing on the people monies not laid down by the Shari’a, being those which they call janghali and kurdin ghari and kurdin sulla . . . Therefore do not follow their way in their government, and do not imitate them, not even in the titles of their king.

Rather than list critiques based on theoretical aspects of Shari’a—Islamic law—Usman roots his polemic in the violations committed by the Hausa Sarauta aristocracy against the Hausa Talakawa commoners and Fulani pastoralists. Within these violations, Usman critically links the oppressive conditions the Hausa Talakawa experienced to those the Fulani faced under the Hausa Sarauta. Mervyn Hiskett contends that taxation was one of the factors most contributing to the jihad, “not primarily because it was contrary to the Shari’a, but simply in so far as it was oppressive.” These tangible grievances manifested Usman’s claim that the Hausa aristocracy built their sovereignty on “the people’s persons, their honour, and their possessions” and enabled the reformists to unite their movement with politically disaffected Hausa Talakawa commoners and Fulani clans.

The work of Usman dan Fodio’s daughter, Nana Asma’u further embodies the totalizing nature of the Sokoto reformists’ politico-religious project. In her writing, Asma’u used Hausa ontologies such as *Hakika* or the Divine Truth to discursively engage Bori, the indigenous religion practiced by the majority of Hausa people. For Asma’u, Bori could not lead to the ultimate goal of Divine Truth in religion. Instead, Asma’u argued that Divine Truth as revealed through the reformists’ specific form of Sufism—Islamic Mysticism—manifested in people’s temporal prosperity. Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd emphasize that “Asma’u was well aware of people’s need to turn to metaphysics when there is no relief elsewhere.” During the major upheavals to Central West African life caused by the Sokoto Jihad, Asma’u offered her own metaphysical power and that of the reformist movement as the means of achieving prosperity. In her poem, “A Prayer for Rain,” written during a prolonged drought in 1857, Asma’u warns:

Repent of using magic, attending bori, and gambling. /Hell fire will be the reward of those who do not. /Let us return to the Path of the Sunna and be redeemed.

To redirect Hausa people’s spiritual devotion towards Islam Asma’u prescribed certain metaphysical remedies that could aid them. She specifically incorporates remedies for women in her work “Medicine of the Prophet”:

Sural al-Haqqah Sura 69 [The Prophet Muhammad] (may God bless and protect him) said: “Whoever reads Sural al-Haqq will be judged leniently by God. If it is worn by a pregnant woman, then she will be protected from all ailments.”
Through tangible benefits like these, Asma’u provided incentives for Hausa commoners to adopt the Islamic reformist’s principles. Asma’u backed her textual arguments with physical action by organizing some of the many Sufi women scholars throughout Hausaland into a group known as the Yan Taru. According to Mack and Boyd, the Yan Taru “undertook responsibilities, organized food for the army, brought up orphans, distributed goods to the poor, gave religious instruction, sorted out problems and related well to everyone willing to respond, regardless of their background or status.” These actions reified the Sokoto Caliphate’s legitimacy in the eyes of the common people and ensured Nana Asma’u’s popularity in Hausaland. Today Hausaland remains an overwhelmingly Muslim region of Northern Nigeria and Niger.

Conclusion

When we understand the socio-political complexity of nineteenth-century Hausaland, we can appreciate the sophistication of Usman dan Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, Mohammed Bello, and Nana Asma’u’s written works. The Sokoto Muslim reformers’ written works elucidate the dialectical processes through which West African Muslim rulers constructed complex states and societies in tumultuous nineteenth-century West Africa. By leveraging classical Islamic texts drawn from an expansive Muslim world to address specific geopolitical issues in Central West Africa, the Sokoto Muslim reformers consistently demonstrated that their West African world was tied to the globality of Muslim ideas and knowledge production. Engaging the confluence of local, regional, and global intellectual traditions in West African civilizations, this paper is grounded in Black/Africana studies’ expansive intellectual worlds from across the Sahara and Sahel to the Black Atlantic. My motivation to study the Sokoto Muslim reformers’ written works arises from the need to understand how Black people build states and societies on their terms. In Silencing the Past, Michel-Rolph Truillot notes that dominant western historiographies and epistemologies on the African Diaspora have overemphasized the West as a reference point for Black people’s intellectual frameworks. By interrogating how Africans constructed their societies beyond western ideas, hegemony, and domination as the fundamental reference point and point of departure, we are better positioned to act on the political thought that members of the African diaspora articulate in their perspectives and experiences.

Endnotes

2. Ibid., 9–10.
5. Kane, Beyond Timbuktu. 34.
7. Kane, Beyond Timbuktu. 34.
8. For example, Last only interrogates the role of male bureaucrats such as the Waziri in legitimizing the Sokoto Caliphate throughout Central West Africa, despite women scholars from that period having contributed over a hundred works reifying the Caliphate’s legitimacy in the early nineteenth century. For further discussion of Women’s role in constructing the Sokoto Caliphate see Mack, “Muslim Women’s Knowledge Production in the Greater Maghreb.”
17. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 99.
25. Here Asma’u makes a special reference to the Sunna or the practices of the Prophet Muhammad as passed down by generations of Muslims. For further discussion see Mack and Boyd. Collected Works of Nana Asma’u. 248.
27. Ibid., 16.
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Primary


Secondary


The Maestrapiece: Zora Neale Hurston’s Creation of Souths Unseen in Barracoon
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Abstract

In December of 1926, Zora Neale Hurston traveled to Plateau, Alabama to interview the last living survivors of the Middle Passage. Her resulting work, entitled Barracoon, was not published until 2018. This paper analyzes Barracoon as a discipline-transcending work, exploring how Hurston engages with literature and anthropology as she tells the story of Kossula. Throughout, I argue that Hurston’s approach, through perhaps unconventional, explores “Souths unseen,” collapsing traditional borders of chronology within the American historical imagination.

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The Maestrapiece: Zora Neale Hurston’s Creation of Souths Unseen in Barracoon

When Zora Neale Hurston stepped off the train from New York to Plateau, Alabama in December of 1926, she arrived as a woman on a mission. Sent by the noted anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston intended to interview Cudjo Lewis, whom she believed to be the last living survivor of the American trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹ For reasons unknown, Hurston’s initial pilgrimage to Lewis’s home proved a challenge. Perhaps Lewis was unwilling to share his experiences with a young anthropologist from New York City, or perhaps he was simply too busy tending his garden and serving as sexton at the Union Missionary Baptist Church. Regardless of the reason, Hurston apparently found herself at a dead end on her first journey to Lewis’s door. Intent on returning to Columbia University with sufficient notes to publish a paper on Lewis, Hurston turned to the Mobile Historical Society, where she unearthed Emma Langdon Roche’s Historic Sketches of the South, published in 1914. With the discovery of Roche’s work, Zora’s luck changed and within months she published her first scholarly article, “Cudjo’s Own Story of the Last African Slaver” in the Journal of Negro History.² The paper relied heavily on Roche’s interviews with Lewis; by one count, as many as 49 of the paper’s 67 paragraphs were directly plagiarized from Historic Sketches of the South.³ Autumn Womack notes that “apparently neither the publishers nor Hurston’s benefactors ever discovered the odd act of piracy” in “Cudjo’s Own Story.”⁴ After Hurston returned to Plateau the following year and successfully interviewed Lewis, also known as Oluae Kossula, she compiled her initial article, interviews, and experiences in Plateau into an anthropological account, titled Barracoon. Posthumously published, Barracoon retains the pirated sections of “Cudjo’s Own Story.” Yet Hurston’s plagiarism is notable not only for its theft, but for how she selectively presents Roche’s writing alongside her own. Ultimately, Roche’s text serves as a foundation through which Hurston collages a new story of Cudjo Lewis; Hurston as ethnographer becomes the gatekeeper of Lewis’s narrative. Moreover, Hurston’s engagement with Lewis’s narrative is considerably informed by her training under Boas. As a result, the tone of salvage anthropology heavily underscores Barracoon, and Hurston uses her role as ethnographer to shape Kossula’s narrative accordingly.⁵ Through this decisive framing of Kossula’s story, Hurston centers Kossula as a symbol of Black resilience, while defining him as the last survivor of a lost population, thereby unearthing a rapidly-dissolving “South unseen.”⁶

Both Hurston and Roche locate Kossula as the last survivor of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in their respective works. Indeed, almost the entire “Introduction,” in which Hurston describes the events, practices and people that forcibly brought Kossula to America are plagiarized from Roche’s text. Despite the presence of pirated paragraphs in Barracoon, Roche’s and Hurston’s framing the story of “the last human cargo” differs substantially. Throughout Historic Sketches, Roche presents the experiences of the Clotilda survivors in Africa as amusingly exotic and, at times, barbaric. Describing the coffles and march to the sea, Roche depicts, in immense detail, the “dangling heads of relatives and friends,” whose remains were later “smoked” by the Dahomeyans and “heads raised on poles above the huts and skulls, grinning white.”⁷ Roche’s descriptions reveal the white colonial fascination with African culture, exotising the experiences of the Takars from a paternalistic standpoint while glorifying the violence of the slave trade. In Roche’s retelling, Kossula’s individual lived experience is somewhat obscured by the author’s interest in framing his forced journey to the slave ship as part of a “performance” of exoticism.

Contrarily, Hurston presents Kossula as both the lone survivor of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and as the last living link between a modern African American identity and African history. Hurston’s work aims to preserve Kossula’s narrative as a crucial relic in global history and as a case study in the intersections between African and African American identity, rendering Barracoon a work of salvage ethnography.
Generally associated with Boas and his students, “salvage ethnography,” refers to the “explicit (anthropological) attempt to document the rituals, practices, and myths of cultures facing extinction from dislocation or modernization.” Kossula’s status as a “link” is central to Hurston’s mission of preservation; concluding her introduction, she writes:

How does one sleep with such memories beneath the pillow? How does a pagan live with a Christian God? How has the Nigerian “heathen” borne up under the process of civilization? I was sent to ask.9

Though Hurston’s voice is absent from much of Barracoon, her introduction illustrates her fascination with Kossula’s experience at the intersection of Africa and America and reveals the ways in which she seeks to shape Kossula’s identity within her work. Describing him as a “pagan (living)” with a Christian God,” Hurston separates Kossula from American-born freedmen by explicitly connecting him with the practice of African traditional religions, though Kossula himself identifies as a Christian. Later, Hurston appears to challenge this; when Kossula insists that he “Thanks God I on prayin’ groun’ and in a in Bible country,” the anthropologist counters, “But didn’t you have a God back in Africa?”10

Hurston’s interjection considerably shapes Kossula’s identity in the eyes of her reader, rendering Kossula “Other” relative to his African American contemporaries; despite his adherence to Christianity, Hurston encourages her subject to focus on the African aspects of his identity as he tells his story.11

Depicting Kossula as “the Nigerian ‘heathen,’” Hurston simultaneously reckons with white racism and paternalism while nevertheless foregrounding Kossula’s foreignness to her reader, further setting him apart from his American-born contemporaries. Notably, Hurston places the term “heathen” in quotes, thereby countering the paternalistic white gaze that underscores Roche’s depiction of Kossula and his fellow survivors. While Roche’s fascination with “what contact with the whites had done for the negro,” informs her telling of Kossula’s story, Hurston’s addition of questions after the plagiarized introduction depicts Kossula as a symbol of Black resilience.12

The question “how does one sleep with such memories beneath the pillow?” illustrates the endured trauma of slavery while locating Kossula as a “buried point of origin.”11 In this sense, Kossula represents a “South unseen,” as his survival dismantles the notion of a purely “chronological” history. Hurston strives to locate Kossula as a symbol of the Black past, present and future, introducing her subject as:

The only man on earth who has in his heart the memory of his African home; the horrors of a slave raid; the barracoon; the Lenten tones of slavery; and who has sixty-seven years of freedom in a foreign land behind him.14

In a single sentence, Hurston depicts Kossula as experiencing generations of African American history through his lived experience. Through Hurston’s framing of Kossula’s transcontinental narrative, Kossula occupies a “South unseen” as a transgenerational manifestation of African American collective memory; he is simultaneously the “specter of the African that perished and yielded the African American” and a modern Black American surviving in the Jim Crow south.15 Hurston thus relies on Kossula’s narrative as a means of simultaneously understanding the ancestry of African Americans and their intergenerational oppression within what Saidiya Hartman has termed the “afterlife of slavery.” Defining the afterlife of slavery, Hartman writes:

If slavery exists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery-skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.16

While Roche presents Kossula as exotic yet contentedly static within the post-slavery South, Hurston engages with his narrative as representative of this afterlife and the “social death of slavery” that engenders it. Although both Hurston and Roche include Kossula’s story of asking Captain Meaher to provide the survivors of the Clotilda with land, Hurston assigns greater agency to Kossula, reporting that he said “I say, now is de time for Cudjo to speak for his people.”17 Given that the tale appears to be plagiarized from Historic Sketches, it is likely that Hurston invented Kossula’s dialogue here. In doing so, Hurston presents her subject as a symbol of Black power, fighting the social death that enslavement inflicts on him and his people. Thus, as Hurston “salvages” Kossula’s experience as the “link” between African American collective identity and Africa, she further shapes his narrative by emphasizing his resistance to the afterlife of slavery. Hurston’s emphasis on the ways in which Kossula’s transition from slavery to ostensibly freedom demonstrates the convergence of African and African American identity within the afterlife of slavery, as Kossula and his family ultimately experience “limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.”18

Ultimately, Hurston’s own identities as author and ethnographer proved to clash within Barracoon. Although her voice is largely absent from the work, the questions she asks of her subject and her selective framing of his narrative shape his place as a “buried point of origin.” Hurston’s emphasis on Kossula’s status as the lone survivor of the trans-Atlantic slave trade apparently necessitates salvage.
ethnography as a means of preservation. Yet Hurston’s desire to assert Kossula’s historical importance as the singular link between the African and African American experience led her to suppress other survivors’ experiences. In a letter to Langston Hughes, Hurston shared a secret: “Oh! almost forgot. Found another one of the original Africans, older than Cudjoe about 200 miles up state on the Tombigbee (sic.) river. She is most delightful, but no one will ever know about her but us. She is a better talker than Cudjoe.”

Hurston was likely referring to a woman known as Redoshi Smith, who also arrived on the Clotilda and died in 1937. Yet, despite her being “a better talker” than Lewis, Hurston chooses to remove Redoshi from her story entirely, heralding Kossula as “the last survivor” of the Middle Passage. Thus, even as she unearthed an unseen South through Kossula’s story, Hurston’s commitment to telling a good story obscures elements of the very history that Kossula’s narrative illuminates.

Endnotes

1 Redoshi (also known as Sallie Smith), was later found to be the last living survivor of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the U.S. Durkan, Hannah. “Finding Last Middle Passage Survivor Sally ‘Redoshi’ Smith on the Page and Screen.” Slavery & Abolition, 40:4, 631–658, DOI: 10.1080/01440409X.2019.1596397, 2019.


6 According to Zandra F. Robinson, “Southerns unseen are those deliberately ignored by those in power that flash in the recesses of the southern psyche.”


10 Ibid., 18.


12 Roche, 146–147.


14 Barracoon, 15.

15 Sexton, 197.


17 Barracoon, 62.

18 Ibid.


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Agent or Subject? The Civilizing Mission of Hadassah Medical Organization (HMO) Nurses in Palestine, 1913–1940

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Ari Forsyth is a senior at Rice University, majoring in History with a minor in Sociology and Jewish Studies. Her research interests include the formation and transformation of Jewish racial/ethnic identity, American Zionism(s), Zionist settlement in Palestine/Israel, 20th century American history, and women’s activism and unpaid labor. Ari is currently completing her honors undergraduate thesis in history, which seeks to characterize the particular form of Zionist ideology and method practiced by Hadassah, the American women’s Zionist Organization, in the United States and Palestine between 1912 and 1947. After their undergraduate work, Ari plans to pursue a PhD in History.

Abstract

In the early twentieth century, Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, set out to “bringing Jewish Palestine into the front ranks of civilization” by establishing a Jewish system of healthcare in Palestine as the Hadassah Medical Organization (HMO).

Many scholars have addressed how the HMO employed the discourses of hygiene and public health as a means of civilizing indigenous Palestinian populations. This paper seeks to confirm and complicate these arguments by demonstrating how the initial targets of Hadassah’s civilizing mission were the Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish women that Hadassah recruited and trained as nursing staff. Under Hadassah’s form of feminized cultural Zionist ideology, Eastern European Jews were seen as both agents of Hadassah’s civilizing mission in Palestine and as subjects in need of Westernization and modernization. Through the case study of the Hadassah Nurses’ Training Schools, Hadassah’s pupil nurses are revealed as both first the willing targets of Hadassah’s civilizing mission, and later, as “co-partners with other pioneers in bringing Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization.”

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Introduction

In the early twentieth century, when most Zionist organizations concentrated on political lobbying and land development in Palestine, Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, developed a radically different approach: establishing a Jewish system of healthcare in Palestine. While most American Zionists envisioned projects in Palestine as philanthropy primarily on behalf of European Jews, Henrietta Szold, Hadassah’s founder, saw Zionism as a tool for the revival and modernization of Jewish life, and for the transformation of Jews, particularly Jews living outside of the United States and Western Europe, into “dignified members of human society.” On Hadassah’s 25th anniversary, Szold summarized Hadassah’s enduring “purpose” as a twofold Zionist mission: “the healing of the daughter of their people, physically in Palestine, spiritually in America.”

In this paper, I hone in on Hadassah’s “physical healing” of Jewish women in Palestine by analyzing the activities of Hadassah Medical Organization (HMO) nurses and medical staff in Palestine from 1913–1940. This research is a part of a larger undergraduate thesis seeking to characterize the particular form of Zionist ideology and practice of Hadassah in the pre-Israeli state period of Zionist activism. In Hadassah’s own words, the aim of the HMO was to “bring Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization,” an objective which required both recruiting Jewish people to Palestine, so that it could serve as a center of Jewish diasporic life, and “healing” Jewish people in Palestine who were perceived as uncivilized, unhygienic, and non-Western. By analyzing the case study of the pupil nurses at Hadassah’s Nurses’ Training Schools in Palestine, I demonstrate how the Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish women that Hadassah recruited and trained as nursing staff were expected to serve as the primary targets of Hadassah’s civilizing mission: “bring Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization.”

Unpacking the Myth

Most histories of Hadassah reproduce the popular mythology of Hadassah’s origin by beginning with Henrietta Szold’s so-called conversion to Zionism during her first visit to Palestine in 1909. According to this mythology, Szold was so distraught by the rampant disease, poor healthcare, and nonexistent sanitation that she observed among the women and children in Palestine that she “returned to New York with a new-found vigor to enact change in the region.” In order to accurately characterize Hadassah’s Zionist ideology, however, it is important to parse the myth from the facts.

In reality, Szold did not need to be converted to Zionism in 1909. In fact, she had been a Zionist for most
of her life. She was an early charter member of Baltimore’s proto-Zionist Shavei Zion and Hervarat Zion societies in Baltimore, and perhaps more crucially, and she was an early follower of the cultural Zionist Ahad Ha-am, even acting as one of his first English-language translators. Szold identified with Cultural Zionism, the belief that Zionism held the potential to revive the spirit of Judaism. For Szold, Zionism was not simply a project of territorial acquisition or nationalistic politics, but rather a movement for the cultural and spiritual revival and modernization of Jews in the diaspora.

Szold delivered her first public support of Zionism in a speech on the revival of the Hebrew language before the Baltimore branch of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) on January 26, 1896. In her speech, Szold refers to Zionism as “a movement that epitomizes the finest Jewish impulses of the day.” Zionism, she continues,

“[Is a] movement organized to extend practical aid to all inclined [to], I do not say return to, but to establish themselves in Palestine. Its promoters advocate self-emancipation along with self-respect and self-knowledge. It is their belief that the Jew can be a dignified member of human society only if he has a stable center towards which the scattered of his nation shall gravitate in perilous times.”

As we can tell from Szold’s earliest public address on Zionism, Szold did not understand Zionism as a movement which necessitated the immigration of American Jews to Palestine. If Palestine could be established as a Jewish nation, it could serve as a “stable center” of Jewish diasporic life. The “self-emancipation” Zionism offered, however, was not generated by the acquisition of Palestinian land, but through the transformation of “the Jew” to a “dignified member of human society.” That Jews would remain unacceptable was the lack of “self-respect” and “self-knowledge” Szold and other cultural Zionists perceived among contemporary Jews.

In contrast to the mythologized account of Hadassah’s origin, sources from Szold’s early life and personal writing reveal that Szold understood Zionism, not simply as straightforward philanthropy in Palestine, but as a means by which to revive and modernize Jewish spiritual and cultural life, and by extension, a means by which to transform all Jewish people into “dignified” members of human society. As Szold reflected at 60 years old, “I became converted to Zionism the very moment I realized that it supplied my bruised, torn, bloody nation, my distracted nation, with an ideal that is balm to the self-inflicted wounds and the wounds inflicted by others.” This conception of Zionism as a form of “healing” for Jewish people is a crucial aspect of Hadassah’s Zionist ideology, because it explains why the primary targets of Hadassah’s Zionist work in Palestine were Jews themselves, particularly the Eastern European Jewish women Hadassah recruited and trained as nursing staff.

**Wave One: Hadassah Nurses in Palestine, 1913–1915**

In January of 1913, Hadassah sent its first two American nurses, Rose Kaplan and Rachel “Rae” Landy, to Jerusalem to establish the first of a series of district nursing settlements in Palestine. Strongly inspired by the Nurse’s Settlement in New York and the model of the American Settlement House, these early nurses dedicated their efforts to educating Palestinian mothers and children in basic healthcare and hygiene. These early ranks of Hadassah nurses in Palestine were made up of entirely American women, trained at American hospitals, under one- or two-year contracts at most.

Hadassah’s early ranks of nurses acted as agents of Zionism in two ways: first, as agents of hygiene and modern healthcare in Palestine, and second, as agents of Zionist propaganda in the United States. Hadassah nurses were charged with charged with civilizing the backwards Orient through the introduction of modern hygiene and medicine. Szold believed that that Zionists could not “hope to build up a sane, healthy life in Palestine until the problems of Palestine are looked squarely in the eye and corrected in a modern, systemic way.” Pointing to a lack of Western-style healthcare infrastructure—“but one maternity hospital in the whole of Palestine”—Hadassah argued that its nurses acted as agents of Western-style civilization and modernization in the Orient. As Szold disclosed in her address to the 16th Annual Congress of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA): “We decided upon sending district visiting nurses to Palestine in the hope that having trained women on the spot we should receive a collection of facts observed with looking at matters with an American bias . . . if we are to work in Palestine we had better have facts presented to us from an American viewpoint.” In The American Journal of Nursing, Hadassah lauded its nurses for working “in an age where magic was not a conjuring trick, but a determining factor in the day-to-day lives of the women they were sent to serve.” Through the discourse of hygiene and public health, Hadassah was able to draw a racialized distinctions between unhygienic indigenous Palestinian populations and modern, hygienic Jewish American nurses clad in green and white. In this sense, Hadassah nurses were seen as agents of modern civilization, “bring[ing] Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization” through medical care and education in public health.

Hadassah nurses also acted as agents of Zionist propaganda among American Jewish communities. In Hadassah’s first annual report in 1913, Szold claimed that “practical
philanthropy exercised in Palestine ... offers the Zionist woman the opportunity for the best sort of propaganda with the non-Zionist women on behalf of Palestine, which is the heart of the Zionist movement." Hadassah’s nurses acted as liaisons between Jews in Palestine and Jews in the United States, and in fact, Hadassah’s leadership seems to have valued the success of these early nurses as much for their ability to inspire domestic support for the Zionist cause than for its impact upon local populations. For instance, seven months after arriving in Jerusalem, Nurses Landy and Kaplan reported to Hadassah’s Board of Directors that they had so far treated 10,000 cases of trachoma as of September 8, 1913, and that they intended to treat 9,000 more. The Board praised their work, but also requested more frequent updates and voted to send extracts of the nurses’ letters to Hadassah members between meetings. 20 As a letter from the Board to nurses Kaplan and Landy explained, it is difficult to overstate “how valuable letters from Palestine are as propaganda material.” 21 Hadassah’s early nurses did not need to be Zionists in order to be agents of Zionist propaganda. So long as they did their jobs, their reports would act as propaganda on their behalf.

Although Hadassah’s first wave of nurses were largely viewed as agents of Zionist propaganda, Henrietta Szold believed that they could be subjects of Zionist propaganda as well. Szold believed that nursing could function as a means of practical Zionist propaganda. She recognized that “Jews still [had] a sentimental interest in the Holy Land,” and thus believed that it was “possible to stimulate even those [Jews] who are unsympathetic with Zionism to participate in the betterment of conditions among their brethren in the ancient home.” 22 This revelation explains why, perhaps surprisingly, many of Hadassah’s early nurses did not identify as Zionist. When Rose Kaplan was selected to be one of the first two nurses Hadassah sent to Palestine in 1913, Kaplan reportedly told Henrietta Szold, “I am a nurse but not a Zionist.” Unperturbed, Szold responded, “What we want is a nurse. We want a woman with initiative, with love, with desire to adapt herself; we think that when you have worked with your own people you will become a Zionist.” 23 Working as a nurse in Palestine was intended to strengthen the bond between Jewish American women and the land and people of Palestine, intimately transforming hard-working female philanthropists into dedicated Zionists, willing to offer labor, capital, and social support to the Zionist cause until 1915, when World War I forced a temporary closure of the Jerusalem nurses’ settlement.

Wave Two: Hadassah Nurses’ in Palestine, Post-1918

In the wake of World War I, widespread concern for the health of Palestine’s Jewish communities rallied international Zionist support for the intervention of healthcare professionals into Palestine. From a small system of district visiting nurses the HMO expanded to include the American Zionist Medical Unit (AZMU), a 44-member medical unit of American doctors, nurses, and healthcare administrators which expanded to include vast network of associated clinics and hospitals across Palestine. The AZMU’s centerpiece was the 90-bed Meyer de Rothschild Hospital in Jerusalem, which was widely-lauded as the first American-style hospital in Jerusalem to be headed by specialists. The AZMU was desperate for skilled labor, so in November of 1918, Hadassah organized its first Nurses’ Training School in Jerusalem, Palestine. 24 A sister school with identical curriculum, recruitment, and mission in Safed, Palestine opened six months later. 25 By June 1919, the AMZU nursing staff had been augmented by a large number of pupil nurses trained at the Hadassah Nurses’ Training Schools: 30 in Jerusalem and 10 stationed first in Tiberias and later in Safed. 26 By 1920, 113 young women had graduated from the Hadassah Nurses’ Training Schools. Most went on to work for Hadassah hospitals or in Hadassah-affiliated healthcare services in Palestine serving Arab and Jewish settler communities. 27 This new system of hospitals and nursing schools allowed Hadassah to recruit and train women as nurses, which greatly expanded the population of Jewish women Hadassah was able to recruit as nurses.

Hadassah specifically recruited poor, Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish women to the Hadassah’s Nurses’ Training Schools in Palestine, where they were trained to be “dignified members of human society.” 28 In a significant departure from Hadassah’s first wave of nurses in Palestine, who were exclusively Jewish-Americans, trained at American hospitals the majority of women recruited to the Hadassah Nurses’ Schools were poor, untrained Jewish women from Eastern Europe. In promotional and recruitment materials, Hadassah argued that the Nurse’s Training Schools were necessary for three reasons: first, “to provide trained nurses for Palestine and the Orient,” second, “to open a field of occupation in Palestine, where professions for women are limited,” and third, “to raise the standard of education for Palestinian women.” 29 These nurses were charged with the same tasks as Hadassah’s earliest nurses: to act as agents of Zionist propaganda and of Western civilization, bring Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization. Unlike the first wave of Hadassah’s American-trained nurses, however, these new nursing recruits needed to be instructed in “the amenities of the West” before they could serve as “co-partners with other pioneers in bringing Jewish Palestine to the front ranks of civilization.” 30 Of an annual pool of roughly 100 applicants, 30 to 35 young women were typically selected to the Nurses’ Schools each year. 31 Successful applicants were required to be in “perfect health (physically and mentally)” and in possession of a
“pleasing personality,” capable of being molded into civilized subjects.12

By virtue of their Ashkenazi ethnic background, which they shared with many American Jews, Hadassah's Eastern European nursing recruits were considered to have the “superior mental capacity and book education.”13 Yet unlike Jewish American women, these old-world Eastern European nursing pupils lacked the “knowledge of the manners and habits of the Western world.”14 For instance, in an article on the necessity of educating new mothers on infant care, published in the March 1924 Hadassah News Letter, Hadassah officer Irma Kraft specifically cautioned that “superstitions—East European or West Asian—are no substitute for knowledge.”15 Here, the side-by-side reference to “East European” and “West Asian” superstitions demonstrates how Hadassah understood the civilization of its own Eastern European Ashkenazi staff as in the same terms as the civilization of non-Jewish Arabs. Yet because Hadassah was specifically invested in “Jewish Palestine,” the civilization of Jews was a priority that far outweighed the civilizing of Zionism's non-Jewish others.

Moreover, because Hadassah used a characterization of Arab communities as backwards and nonhygienic to serve as evidence for the need for Zionist healthcare intervention, any unhygienic or uncivilized behavior by Hadassah's own Eastern European nursing recruits could pose a challenge to Hadassah's racialized distinction between native Arab populations and Jewish nurses. Hadassah's nursing school curriculums of modernization and Westernization were intended, not only to function as medical training, but also to function as a means by which to transform Eastern European Jewish women into modern, hygienic subjects, further cementing Hadassah's claim that Ashkenazi Jews were racially distinct from, and superior to, indigenous Palestinian populations.

At the Hadassah Nursing Schools, Hadassah used the Hebrew language as a means to consolidate the diverse cultural identities of its pupil nurses around a shared Jewish language and to further solidify the divide between Jewish and non-Jewish Palestinian residents. Although Hebrew was neither the spoken language of Palestine's Arab population, nor of Jewish women from Eastern Europe, Hadassah's Nurses' Training Schools insisted on Hebrew as the sole language of instruction.16 Thus, prospective nursing students were required to demonstrate mastery of the Hebrew language. Once admitted, students were instructed in basic English so that they could work in English hospitals but heard lectures in Hebrew by Hebrew-speaking physicians, including Dr. Alfred Segal who served in the Zionist Medical Unit, and received practical lessons in Hebrew at the Rothschild Hospital in Jerusalem, itself maintained by the HMO.17

The use of Hebrew as the language of instruction at Hadassah's Nursing Schools is a fact rendered more meaningful by the knowledge that, when the schools were first founded, there were no Hebrew language nursing textbooks in existence. It took almost a decade to produce the first Hebrew textbook for nurses because the necessary technical medical terms did not yet exist in the Hebrew language. The first Hebrew language nursing textbook was published by the HMO in 1927.18 Entitled, The Eye, it was written by Dr. Aryeh Feigenbaum, the Chief Ophthalmologist of the HMO.19 Thus, HMO did not simply instruct Nursing students in Hebrew, it also became the earliest publisher of Hebrew language nursing textbooks. The dominance of Hebrew in Hadassah's Nurses' Training Schools and medical institutions virtually assured that Hebrew, the language of the proposed Jewish state, would become the language of Palestine's future healthcare system. It also created a common language shared by Ashkenazi Jewish settlers in Palestine, assimilating the variety of diasporic languages, cultures, and traditions of Hadassah's early nursing recruits into a single, cohesive Zionist model of cultural identity.

Conclusion

Until recently, most scholars have minimized the political character of Hadassah's work in Palestine, characterizing the activities of the HMO as philanthropic interventions Palestinian public health. In the past decade, however, a new generation of feminist scholars have re-valued Hadassah's role in place in Zionist political and intellectual history, asserting the influence of the Hadassah School of Zionism in shaping contemporary Zionist ideology and practice, and pushing back against the characterization of Hadassah as a purely philanthropic organization. From Szold's own speeches, it is clear that Szold never intended for Hadassah nurses to be philanthropists. As she argued before the 16th Annual Convention of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA):

We Zionists have been fighting the word charity. We do not care to have our movement connected with philanthropic activity . . . [nor do we] pretend to do this work as a piece of Palestinian work. We do it as a piece of Zionist work, for the reason that Zionism is a movement, and we wish to attach ourselves to a great movement.20

At a time when it was a widespread belief among male Zionists that women were simply incapable of conceptualizing the intellectual, political, and philosophical tenants of the Zionist project, Szold was able to justify the place of women in the Zionist movement by appealing to the belief that women possessed an inherent capacity for philanthropy and care work, and thus, that female Zionists in Palestine acted as philanthropists rather than political actors.
In studying Hadassah’s early history, it is important to keep in mind that the contemporary concepts of Zionism(s), race/ethnicity, and gender vary greatly from that of the early twentieth century. Face-value readings of the activities of the Hadassah’s Nurses’ Schools in Palestine, for instance, demonstrate the perceived ethnic and cultural difference between Hadassah’s first-wave of American nurses and second-wave of Eastern European pupil nurses in Palestine, but fail to grasp the constructedness of this ethnic divide. In truth, the Eastern European nursing recruits Hadassah deemed lacking in modern civility were, by in large, ethnically, culturally, and religiously equivalent to Hadassah’s own professional nursing staff. Henrietta Szold and her sisters were themselves the first generation of her family to be born outside of Hungary, and the only generation at the time afforded the privilege of an “American viewpoint” on Palestine. In fact, one of the only major sociodemographic differences between Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Palestine and to the United States in the early twentieth century was that Jews who were able to emigrate to the United States possessed on average, slightly more money. As the Hebrew newspaper Ha-Yom reported in 1906, “On the whole, the current of immigration brings us only poor people, as those that have some capital stay at home [in Russia] or go to America.” Far from bounded, pre-discursive social entities with visible racial traits or distinct cultures, ethnic identities in Palestine in this period were discursively constituted, consciously articulated though shifts in social formations and the structural changes wrought by Zionist settler configurations. Hadassah was one of many Zionist organizations which became invested in producing and reifying new formations of Jewish ethnic and cultural identity according to Western European notions of race, nation, and empire in the twentieth century.

Through the case study of the Hadassah’s Nurses’ Training Schools in Palestine, I have demonstrated how under Hadassah’s form of feminized cultural Zionist ideology, Eastern European Jews were seen as both agents of Hadassah’s civilizing mission in Palestine and as subjects in need of Westernization and modernization. Through the discourse of hygiene and public health, Hadassah was able to draw a racialized distinction between Jews and non-Jews which served as a racialized distinction between the colonizers and the colonized. This racialized thinking, however, was a double-edged blade, which demanded that the first subjects of the Zionist civilizing mission be Jews themselves, who had to transform themselves and their culture to fit the Western European ideal. The feminized cultural Zionist ideology and practice of the HMO in Palestine is a field of study which offers rich insights into schemes of civilized and settler colonialism, racialization, and the role of women-led Western philanthropy and healthcare initiatives in shaping and reifying colonial structures of race, class, and gender in the early twentieth century.

Endnotes

4 Ibid.
7 Szold, “Hebrew: A Century of Jewish Thought.”
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
14 These perceptions were driven by Orientalism, a hegemonic conception of an imagined Orient in contrast to a local Occident, wherein the Western identity, culture, and history is conceived of as superior to Oriental backwardness. As Said (1977) has argued, the superiority afforded to the West in Orientalist thought privileges the Western perspective, making the Orientalist at once both default and expert on the East despite the Orientalist’s antiquity.
15 Szold, “Miss Szold’s Address,” 204.
19 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.


29 Junior Hadassah, A Primer on the Nurses’ Training School of Jerusalem, 2–3 Note: Here, the phrase “Palestinian women” refers not to indigenous Palestinian women, but to female Eastern European, or Ashkenazi Jewish settlers in Palestine.

30 Hadassah Medical Organization, “The Hadassah School for Nursing at Jerusalem.”


32 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


36 At the end of the nineteenth century, Hebrew had had benefited from a revival, due in part to Zionist interest in Hebrew as the national language of the future Jewish state in Palestine. In the United States, an increasing trend to supplant Yiddish with Hebrew as the language of Jewish Palestine was led by the powerful Federation of American Zionists dominated by bourgeois German Jews. In the initial layout of the ZOA’s monthly publication, The Macabee, for instance, each issue had concluded with a Yiddish section, but less than a year from the journal’s inception, the section was cut, and Hebrew became the default language of Zionist activity among the ZOA and its partners, including Hadassah. (Imhoff, “The Courageous Diaspora: Masculinity and the Development of American Zionism,” 1983)

37 Junior Hadassah, A Primer on the Nurses’ Training School of Jerusalem, 2.

38 Hadassah Medical Organization, “The Hadassah School for Nursing at Jerusalem,” 1094.

39 Ibid.

40 Szold, “Miss Szold’s Address,” 203–4.

41 Ibid., 204.


Listening to Records of Resistance: A Methodology for Remembering the Legacies of Latinx DJs in Los Angeles

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Abstract

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, transgressive Latina/o/x subcultures emerged in the form of backyard parties and underground raves, claiming its space and sound across the global city of Los Angeles. However, at the turn of the 21st century, rampant commercialization of culture and privatization of space washed over the Latina/o/x topographies of Los Angeles. To counter the institutional amnesia surrounding the cultural legacies of working-class Latina/o/x communities, this project documents the knowledge and histories embedded in the archives of Chicanx/Latinx DJs and collectives in Los Angeles. How has record collecting and mixing been used as a method for self-preservation among Latinx communities in the face of historical erasure and displacement? I approach my inquiry through a mixed methodology that involves documenting oral histories and an analysis of ephemera (event flyers, vinyl records, photographs). The focus of this project is to understand DJs as archivists who unearth underground Latinx sounds, histories, and geographies.

Acknowledgements

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Listening to Records of Resistance: A Methodology for Remembering the Legacies of Latinx DJs in Los Angeles

In 1992, South Central Los Angeles was the site of a racially charged uprising after the acquittal of officers who partook in the arrest and brutal beating of Rodney King. Following the riots, LA legislators and policy makers began to impose policies that would further criminalize and hyper-police low-income communities of color, such as gang injunctions, the ‘three strikes law’ (1994), and the STEP Act (1996) (González & Portillos 2007). During this time, discursive resistance in the form of transgressive subcultures allowed criminalized Black and Brown youth to transcend their racialized realities and restrained circumstances. Despite mainstream American media outlets’ designation of this scene as dangerous and delinquent, it offered disenfranchised Latinx teens a creative outlet for self-expression, a sense of familial kinship, and a temporary break from their realities of social immobility.

The scene was characterized by the eccentricity and creative efforts of Latinx youth—claiming, transforming, and disrupting space along with the social status quo of their racialized reality. Within high schools that were predominantly composed of Latina/o students, truancies became a common occurrence when Latina/o high school youth began organizing “ditch parties” (Arce 2016). The party crew scene further transgressed normative culture through the eccentric fashion and styles of teenage “rebels” and “groovers.” The rave and party crew scene that surged throughout Southern California in the 1990s was manifested by young Latina/o/x DJs who were disseminating the blaring noises of Latin Hard House and Techno music.

This project illuminates the stories of Latinx DJs in Los Angeles who lived through the Party Crew scene in hopes of remembering and remapping the stories and places that are archived in their music, memories, and bodies as they continue to resist cultural and hegemonic erasure in the realms of nightlife and club culture through their craft. Collecting, sharing, and mixing music has historically been used as a platform for marginalized communities to engage in discursive forms of resistance, communication, and self-preservation. It is an active practice of spatial entitlement by occupying sonic space (Johnson 2013), connecting the past with the present, and passing down embodied knowledge. My research project explores the following question: How may studying record collections of Latinx DJs based in Los Angeles help us in cutting across and pasting together lost Latinx geographies, histories, and narratives throughout the rapidly gentrifying, whitewashed landscapes of Los Angeles?

Beyond the scope of this project, I also hope to gesture towards larger questions surrounding the process of knowledge production; specifically, where and how alternative forms of knowledge production can occur and be validated outside the realm of academia. I feel that it is imperative to acknowledge that as a DJ myself, I have formed personal ties and relationships to the disc jockeys and collectives that are included in this project prior to conceptualizing it. As
both a researcher and an insider of this community of DJs, I actively try to avoid flattening out the voices and stories of the DJs who are the lifeblood of this project under a pre-conceived subjectivity, especially since the process of documenting personal narratives and synthesizing them in a particular way for an academic institution to validate can often-times feel intrusive, hierarchical, and utilitarian.

The approach of this project is inspired by scholars2 and artists3 who prioritize the embodied experiences of Latinx communities and the knowledge that stems from them (Boyd & Ramirez 2012, Blackwell 2016, Alvarez Jr. 2019)—I use the platform I have been given as a scholar to explore how bodies of knowledge are co-created, archived, and inherited in ways that stem outside of institutions that hold a monopoly over how knowledge is produced and validated. One of the most common ways that knowledge is produced within the social sciences tends to be in the form of extracting information from specific groups of focus and treating these “subjects” as a utility and repository. This project hopes to push the boundaries of how the process of knowledge production is commonly understood and conceptualized in academia by rooting the main artery of my methodology in documenting oral histories and building strong foundations of trust.4

Through explorations of physical (vinyl records) and ephemeral (memory) sites of memory, this project draws on oral histories as a means of mapping the hidden histories of a Latinx Los Angeles and understanding the embodied experiences of the DJ as an archive within itself. This project prioritizes and validates the ways of knowing that are brought to the surface through acknowledging vinyl collecting as a form of knowledge preservation and the DJ’s live performance as dissemination; it recognizes how the poetics embedded in the act of collecting vinyl records, or “digging through the crates,” are helpful in articulating the relationship that music has to location and collective memory.

Photograph of Carlos Morales. Retrieved from @crasslos on Instagram.

In telling these stories, Carlos would jump from various genres, ranging from old mixtapes of Latin Oldies he collected at swap meets to the Techno and Rave music cassettes he was exposed to as a child when his older sisters snuck him into teenage house parties. One of the records he came across during our conversation about the party crew scene was a track titled “Dub 1” by the Acid House group Paranoid London. He noted:

“They have this one line in their song that says, ‘The streets are where I’m from its where I really feel at home.’ The first time that I ever heard that it just pulled a string with me.

In a time where finding a sense of home is lost when constantly being surveilled under a police state that criminalizes their existence, youth of color in Los Angeles often find their sense of place in transient moments that temporarily break them out of their repressed realities. The poignant lyrics layered under the pulsating ‘four on the floor’ structure of this House and Techno song resonated with first generation Latinx youth like Carlos, who found a sense of community and home outside of his conservative Christian family within the Hardcore Punk scene and Party Crew Subculture.

Notions of kinship and chosen family emerged through my conversations with Carlos, as he shared that he found his sense of queer community through the people he met in the Los Angeles hardcore punk scene. One of his most formative influences was the queer punk-singer of Los Crudos, Martin Sorrendeguy. “It made so much sense to me because I never identified with mainstream queer culture . . . Martin kind of became like a mentor, an older figure to me,” he describes. Punk artists like Sorrendeguy and the formation of his band Limp Wrist embodied the emergence...
of queercore as a sub-genre in Los Angeles. Utilizing his commanding stage presence to spread messages of sexual liberation among queer punks of color, Sorrondeguy’s music and performance pushed the heteronormative boundaries for marginalized identities within the subculture while simultaneously disrupting constructions of whiteness and homophobia that were perpetuated within the punk scene. Meeting people other who existed within intersections of their brown, queer, and punk identities was where Carlos was able to find a sense of self. During the interview he would reminisce about Martin's house parties and the music being played:

You would think ‘Oh yea, Martin Crudo’s house! They’re gonna play the best punk stuff’—all of a sudden you’d hear a Deep House song being played, like Ralphi Rosario’s ‘You Used to Hold Me,’ followed by Hi-NRG . . . that was the first time where I felt like I was part of a queer community, which was inside a bigger community, the hardcore punk community.

The Chicago House single “You Used to Hold Me” contrasts the harshness exhibited by punk music, a sound that explicitly channels its subversion of normative culture through the anti-establishment sentiments in its lyricism and short-lived nature of intensity in its music. Rosario’s track embodies something softer, yet still potent in its transgression within this context. It is reminiscent of the sounds that stem from queer Black and Brown communities (Van Langen 2010), offering Carlos a way to tap into queer forms of intimacy and embodiment that were not as accessible in the face of the punk scene’s internalized homophobia. These moments allowed him to imagine ways of being that not only disrupted the exclusivity of the white-heteropatriarchal punk scene and the violent sociopolitical projects of xenophobic America, but also to fathom new ways of preserving his selfhood and culture.

Carlos is a founding member of ‘La Disco Es Qultura,’ a collective formed in 2016 that organizes monthly queer parties at the Melody Lounge in Chinatown—known for playing all vinyl sets and prioritizing emerging fellow QTPOC DJs. Driven by shared visions and mutual appreciation for vinyl, their collective creates spaces that counter the homonormative rhythm of queer Los Angeles nightlife; spaces that prioritize and invest in queers of color. A ‘successful’ night for La Disco is not measured by the amount of money they make or publicity they get, but rather by the creative outlet one taps into when playing their own set—a perspective he gained in the punk scene as a teenager. Michelle Habell-Pallan explains that many of LA-based punk artists were not really concerned with the “politics of destination,” but rather the construction of alternative routes to fathom and exist in “alternative worlds” where they find a sense of agency through dissonance (2005). The primary desire was not to make it in the music industry, but rather to create a place for public self-expression. Similar to the way Latinx punk shows and party crews were characterized by their D.I.Y. attitude and sensibilities, ‘La Disco’ provides a welcoming platform for people with minimal experience into the craft of DJing. Parties like theirs aim to open up their platforms and make them accessible through “open tables,” bar nights that they host where they center QTPOC to play their own records.

“...”Carlos begins to laugh as he tells me about the DJs that he’s connected with, taught, and learned from, in a half joking, half sincere tone. Although he refers to the “Haus” he made by connecting with younger, newer DJs as an inside joke, it still carries a reference to the historic houses that exist in queer ballroom culture— it resonates with the intergenerational relationships they’ve formed among and outside of their collective. Carlos encourages individuals with no background in DJing to spin during their nights at the Melody Lounge: “I’ve said to people, ‘Oh come on just do it! Come over to my house a little bit we can practice with my mixer a little bit and we can teach you and you can just DJ’ . . . and they had a blast doing it. Like, some of them still DJ.” Carlos offers the knowledge he has accumulated and access to platforms of expression he engages with when giving space for aspiring DJs and community
members who are interested in the craft of collecting and playing records. He understands the act of sharing these sensibilities and practices as a way to secure the futurity of these spaces after his retirement through future generations of creatives and artists he has helped nurture.

The whole point of this [mentoring other DJs] is, eventually I’m getting older—and I don’t know how much longer I’m going to keep doing this. I could just stop, but I don’t want people to stop creating these spaces and I don’t want people to stop being weird or taking these chances in what they play.

The practice of collecting rare music and records is an act of archiving, preserving, and inheriting history and culture. There exist sonic constellations—sounds that are able to catalyze the retelling of history, conjuring untold stories, and cultural productions. Through his ongoing practice of collecting and sharing records, Carlos actively participates in the making of an archive that preserves the histories that trace back to memories, moments, and narratives embedded into an understudied Latinx Los Angeles.

This project is necessary not only because it documents how DJs create room for collective community care and kinships among chosen queer family, but also because it provides an alternative representation of what resistance can look and feel like. Part of this resistance involves imagining spaces of self-preservation in the face of their absence. When nurtured, these spaces have the potential of dismantling institutionalized structures of violence and homogenization. As I conclude this article, I want to gesture to the ways that these DJs are adapting in light of our current reality, a pandemic that severely impedes on the lives of many local entertainers and artists, who depend on nightlife as a means of survival. Since the “safer at home” orders were put in place throughout California, engagement and interaction with audiences feels different for DJs these days—what was once the engulfing sound of cheers from a packed dance floor is now a mass text of heart emojis in the comment section of a live stream. Some of them began hosting virtual Zoom parties from home, a few started to stream their sets on Instagram live, while others are trying to mail out personalized mixtapes to listeners. Although the seemingly endless threads of comments signals their unwavering support, the pandemic raises questions about how these communities and moments can survive through the platform of digital space. As these DJs continue to reject the repression of a global pandemic by virtually broadcasting from home, they embody the portals that allow us to tap into often forgotten realms of the past and the gravitational pull needed to create new worlds on the horizon.

Endnotes
1 I use the term “Latinx” because the DJs in this project stem from collectives and affiliations comprised predominantly of Queer and Trans Latina/o/x identifying individuals, whose mission statements that express the intention of creating safe spaces for their communities and preserving culture through sharing their music.
3 LA-based artist and archivist Guadalupe Rosales’ builds counter-narratives of the Latinx party crew culture through her ongoing project “Map Points”—a predominantly visual-based digital archive of the 1990s Party Crew scene in Southern California. https://www.instagram.com/map_points/
4 In this vein, I draw from Horacio Ramirez and Nan Boyd’s concept of “body-based knowing,” positing that the sexuality of the body (i.e., bodily desires) is an important, indeed material, aspect of the practice of doing oral history. They argue that their methodology of queer oral history can be especially useful not only when documenting the relationship between trauma, activism, and public memory, but also when establishing intimacy during “the physical encounter between narrator and researcher.” Boyd, Nan Alamilla, and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez. 2012. *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Oxford University Press.
5 The club music genres of New York Disco, Chicago House, and Detroit Techno developed out of predominantly Black and Brown underground club scenes in the late 1970s and 1980s.
6 Queer Trans People of Color.
7 In considering how to draw connections between DJ collectives and communities (across generations) by tracing the genres they intentionally choose to play, I refer back to the theoretical work of cultural historian and scholar Gaye Theresa Johnson and her concept “constellations of struggle,” in which she identifies and parses through connections that allow us to trace a genealogy of empowerment and enables us to take seriously the intersections between marginalized bodies’ social identities and the larger historical developments that are happening right now.

Works Cited


Anger as a Useful Tool: An Analysis of Black Girls’ Resistant Anger in a St. Louis Public Charter School

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Nya Hardaway is a recent graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, where she majored in African and African American Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She currently works at the Missouri Historical Society as Outreach Coordinator in the museum’s African American History Initiative. Nya is also a certified full-spectrum doula. Her research focuses on the lived experiences of marginalized women and girls, particularly at the nexus of race, class, gender, and the law. Nya plans to enroll next fall in a joint JD/PhD program in Black and sociological studies. In her graduate program, she hopes to use her socio-legal research for the abolition and reformation of various aspects of the criminal legal system.

Abstract

The Sapphire stereotype, or angry Black womxn trope, has been thoroughly examined in multiple fields as an illustration of the oppressive constraints on Black womxn across the diaspora. The angry Black womxn trope is consistently weaponized against Black womxn and girls to silence and invalidate their understandings. Still, not much research is devoted to Black girls’ experience with the oppressive force of this trope and their methods of resistance. This study seeks to illuminate how Black girls resist and establish autonomy while navigating militarized discipline in educational institutions and oppressive power structures. Adding to previous scholarship that only looks at the rates of discipline, this study analyzes Black girls’ perceptions of their educational and social experience. Interviews and participatory observation shed light on how Black girls imagine new worlds by rejecting attempts to constrain their autonomy. Ultimately, this paper recommends that education institutions empower Black girls’ by embracing their resistance and establishing institutions within the school where students are considered experts of their lived experiences and can effectively practice organizing, advocacy, and leadership.

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Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being.

—Audre Lorde

Introduction

The politics of anger is a persuasive force within the lives of Black womxn and girls. Black girls grow up being heavily disciplined and punished for their anger by both adults and the institutions they traverse. As a result, their emotions are under constant surveillance by both Black and White communities. I use the phrase “politics of anger,” rather than “anger” as a standalone, to signify that there are a set of actions, principles, and assumptions that Black womxn and girls learn and construct as they navigate feeling and displaying anger. The Sapphire caricature, or angry Black woman trope, has roots in the 1950s and dominates popular culture in all age groups right up to the present moment. Still, this limiting stereotype is characterized in youth studies scholarship as exclusive to adulthood. Nevertheless, the pervasive nature of the trope negatively impacts Black girls particularly as it relates to school discipline. I suggest it is just as important to prioritize discourse examining relationships with and constructions of anger in Black girlhood.

Established womxn like Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Serena Williams have all been labeled angry and pigeonholed as dangerous or irrational even in instances where they show little to no anger at all. Society persistently corners tens of millions of people whose identities live at the intersection of being both Black and a womxn into three repressive judgments: ill-mannered, ill-tempered, and irrational. As an example, Beverly Whaling, a West Virginia Mayor described Obama as an “ape in heels” (Prasad 2018). In another instance, Williams was punished for what was deemed as irrational and inappropriate rage during a match with a $17,000 fine for breaking her racquet in response to a referee’s call, a behavior common in her sport (Prasad 2018). Professor Trina Jones responded to William’s punishment, “Black women are not supposed to push back and when they do, they’re deemed to be domineering. Aggressive. Threatening. Loud” (Prasad 2018). Race, gender, and education scholars devote significant time and attention to illuminating the aforementioned subjugation of Black womxn’s experiences as adults. These scholars, however, devote little regard and discourse to analyzing the experience of Black girls. Consequently, this paper seeks to make space for the voices of young Black girls who receive the brunt end of similar persecution but are not afforded nearly as much time, attention, and support.
The examination of the experiences of Black girls with anger gives rise to the following questions: How do Black girls experience and utilize anger as a tool? How do Black girls perceive institutionalized or interpersonal power and attempt to disrupt efforts of domination? By neglecting the lived experiences of Black girls, we’re missing information on how societal behavior that produces the oppression of those both Black and female are duplicated within discrepancies surrounding discipline and control. Descriptive statistics are not sufficient guidelines to where and how to enact changes, nevertheless, Black girls’ voices and actions serve to enlighten our conversations and solutions.

In this paper, I first explain my methods for this research, culminating in my senior honors thesis, of which this article is an excerpt. Next, I discuss the relevant literature on Black girlhood and the methods and principles surrounding Black girls’ use of anger. Finally, excerpts of interviews demonstrate my findings on the uses of anger as resistance within Black girlhood that serve as a foundation for my argument.

**Methods/Methodology**

In order to investigate the questions central to this work, I utilized a mixed-methods approach employing qualitative semi-structured interviews and participatory observation alongside quantitative surveys. This project emerges from a four-month, IRB-approved study rooted in ethnographic fieldwork at a public charter school in St. Louis, Missouri. I investigated the politics of anger and resistance among Black girls ages 11–14. I conducted interviews with 25 girls and utilized participant observation three hours a day for three days a week during this time. In this piece, I use pseudonyms for both the school, which I refer to as Marshall Prep, and participants’ names, to protect their identities. When assessed for test scores, rankings, school and district boundaries, student/teacher ratios, and ethnic makeup, Marshall Prep ranks 534, or in the 8.7th percentile, out of 585 Missouri public middle schools (School Digger 2019). The following sections highlight my findings on anger and resistance from data collected specifically from interviews, observations, and field notes.

**Relevant Literature on Black Girlhood and the Uses of Anger**

**Black Girlhood**

Contemporary sociological and youth studies research has highlighted how schools can perpetuate the subjugation of Black girlhood, particularly through emphasizing how Black girls sound. For example, one of the few youth studies articles centering the classroom experiences of Black girls is “‘Ladies’ or ‘Loudies?’ Perceptions and Experiences of Black Girls in Classrooms,” by Ohio University sociologist Edward Morris (2007). Morris explains how teachers’ efforts to encourage soft soundedness, which is more culturally feminine behavior, limits Black girls’ academic potential. By attending to sound, Morris and other scholars (Fordham 1993, Koonce 2012), push Black girls into two categories of existence: quiet or loud. Although Morris’s examination of treatment based on race, gender, and class expectations is useful in identifying a unique experience, this paper pushes his analysis one step further by investigating how Black girls illuminate and challenge the harmful conditions to which they are subjected. Essentially, the focus of previous literature on the dichotomy of quiet/loud prevents the full understanding, without blinders, of how Black girls vocally and physically defy oppressive forces.

The tendency to emphasize how Black girls are treated according to how they sound implies that the noise level of Black girls’ voices is their most significant identifying factor as well as their main site of oppression. In the place of scholarship that focuses solely on sound, the participants’ uses of anger and their teachers’ subsequent efforts to punish this anger reinforces the work of Connie Wun’s (2015) “Against Captivity.” In this piece, she illuminates that Black girls’ “defiant” behavior is a product of school conditions that violate Black girls and ignore their classroom and life experiences with violence, punishment, and neglect (Wun 2015). The present study builds on Wun (2015) by positing that attention must be given to the insights that Black girls’ anger yields on how educational institutions replicate practices of domination. Through this investigation, we expand the literature that identifies how Black girls face disparate punishment and surveillance to include how they challenge the root cause of this injustice. As a result, scholars advance the capabilities of their fields by not only examining institutional ills but also by reforming policies and practices to rectify these harms.

While I agree with Morris and other sociologists that use intersectionality theory to examine the societal treatment of Black girls, this study’s findings challenge the overall connection in his piece that stifling outspokenness impedes potential academic success (Morris 2007). Morris essentializes this connection between academic achievement and assertiveness. The participants’ narratives suggest that rather than simplifying perceived loudness as merely an obstacle, Black girls are using their voices and anger to radically defy institutionalized oppression—beyond and in addition to pursuing academic achievement. As Morris builds his argument strictly on sound, he disregards the many intricacies of Black girlhood that transcend the politics of sound. Essentially, most extant scholarship remains too concerned with how Black girls sound, disregarding what they are saying.
To avoid this limitation as it relates to Black womanhood, Black feminist thought brilliantly situates and places value on the experiences of Black womxn in evaluating systems of domination along race, gender, and class lines. Kimberlé Crenshaw asserts, “with Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (Crenshaw 1989, 140). Providing a unique evaluation of how Black womxn continue to survive and support their families and communities is central in understanding how people contend and outline persecution. Though Black feminist thought centralizes the nexus of race, gender, and class, it does not extend past womanhood to adolescence or childhood. For their male counterparts, however, literature that features masculinity and manhood chronicles adolescence and childhood to provide context for the experience of Black men (Brooms 2014). Scholars who explore the experience of Black men understand that their experiences as adults are influenced by circumstances and conditions that facilitate their oppression from birth. By emphasizing the value of imparting special theory to the experiences of Black girls, who are left on the margins of Black feminist thought, we garner a more complete understanding of how people contend and outline persecution. Using the participants’ narratives to answer Judd’s question of anger, we find that Black womxn’s use of anger as a tool to check power imbalances and even retrieve power. In “Sapphire as a Praxis: Toward a Methodology of Anger,” Betina Judd interrogates Black womxn’s tireless anger, “Why, under constant surveillance . . . [do] Black women go ahead and be angry anyway and do so in practice of deliberate selfhood?” (Judd 2019, 180). Judd’s question is critical to the paradigm of anger. My findings affirm that we must consider anger not only as an emotion but as an active performance of opposition. Using the participants’ narratives to answer Judd’s question as it relates to Black girls, resistance is at the root of why Black girls are persistently angry even when heavily surveilled and punished for displaying this emotion.

The girls of this study continue to display anger even as they are punished and increasingly surveilled as a result. Rather than anger being merely a display of emotion, the participants explain their use of anger as a tool to check power imbalances and even retrieve power. In “Sapphire as a Praxis: Toward a Methodology of Anger,” Betina Judd interrogates Black womxn’s tireless anger, “Why, under constant surveillance . . . [do] Black women go ahead and be angry anyway and do so in practice of deliberate selfhood?” (Judd 2019, 180). Judd’s question is critical to the paradigm of anger. My findings affirm that we must consider anger not only as an emotion but as an active performance of opposition. Using the participants’ narratives to answer Judd’s question as it relates to Black girls, resistance is at the root of why Black girls are persistently angry even when heavily surveilled and punished for displaying this emotion.

Still, when Black girls use anger to challenge hegemonic practices, school faculty generally deem this effort dangerous. In turn, institutions and individuals make considerable efforts through disciplinary infractions and criminalization to stifle Black girls’ access to resistance and ultimately agency. For this paper, I use Kaspar Maase’s (2017) definition of resistance as “oppositional feelings, thoughts, and actions.” Accordingly, resistance in my study marks a refusal to accept or comply with institutionalized power and practices that the girls perceive to be disrespectful, unfair, or limiting their autonomy. The commonly held notion that resistance exists within movements or organized, collective action makes Maase’s definition essential for enhancing the understanding of Black girls and anger. Using dissenting feelings, thoughts, and actions as a base involves a larger spectrum of Black schoolgirls who might otherwise not receive attention from scholars due to factors such as being quiet or not engaging in “defiant” behavior. Fundamentally, this definition opens the use of anger for resistance within Black girlhood to be inclusive of the experiences of participants who scholars may not code as outwardly or explicitly using anger as resistance.

As Marshall Prep Academy Students, participants use anger as a primary vehicle of the aforementioned opposition. Lyn Mikel Brown’s Raising Their Voices: The Politics of Girls’ Anger (1998) dissects the power of anger as she examines White girls’ use of anger in refusing cultural expressions of femininity. She writes that anger gives back to her participants “the potential for a different outcome that is rightfully theirs” (Brown 1998, 127). Brown’s study of White girls leaves room to interrogate the use of anger among girls who are subjected to negative tropes surrounding rage in addition to compounding systems of control. It is the power of anger being an emotion specifically tied to a response to feelings of wrongdoing and injustice that makes the relationship between anger and Black girlhood so incredibly powerful. Brown explicitly illustrates how the anger of White girls fuels the rejection of normativity related to gender roles and femininity. Similarly, Black girl participants of Marshall Prep are recognizing problems and using anger to create space to confront and deconstruct oppressive race, gender, and class forces. Anger, then, is not merely an emotion or a marker of an intractable, unreasonable Black girl.

Instead, the present interviews and field observations suggest that anger transcends emotional intelligence to give insight on the conditions and understandings to which the Black girls of this study respond. I draw on Audre Lorde’s 1981 explanation that anger, serving one’s vision of liberation, is filled with information that pinpoints the failures of institutions and ushers in solutions to rectify these wrongdoings (Lorde 1981). Lorde’s exploration of the productive use of anger supports this study’s investigation of how the participants’ narratives and displays of anger dissect harmful circumstances that deny Black girls’ right to a safe and equitable education.
Findings on Black Girlhood and the Uses of Anger in Marshall Prep Academy

Tracy Robinson and Janie Victoria Ward (1991) provide an important framework for understanding resistance for liberation in the context of the use of anger in Black girlhood. They maintain that resistance for liberation encompasses Black girls recognizing problems, calling for change, and empowering themselves to dismantle oppressive forces (Robinson & Ward 1991). I adapt their framework in the application of my findings because the core of their argument illuminates the need to trace the organization of dominating forces and the response to these forces throughout one's life course. They find that opposition of these forces is a learned survival mechanism that begins in the educational pipeline and transcends into adulthood (Robinson & Ward 1991, 91). Rianna, an eighth-grade participant, captured Robinson and Ward's sentiments: “Black girls are taught that you shouldn’t let people disrespect you, ‘cause they’re definitely gonna try it” (Rianna, Grade 8). Viewing anger as a form of resistance, it is important to pay attention to how Black girlhood is a site of constant confrontation of power impositions antithetical to the safety, autonomy, and support of Black girls. Discussing the theory surrounding Black girls’ use of anger limits the extent to which we can examine the complexities of Black girlhood. By turning to the girls’ voices, we move past merely scrutinizing the interlocked nature of practices and beliefs that create disparities in Black girlhood. Rather, we empower Black girls by inviting them to be experts of their own experiences and to use their voices to enact change.

During one of my first visits to Marshall Prep, a sixth-grade instructor asked me in passing about my research. When I shared that I was doing a project on Black girls and discipline, this teacher, a young Black woman, replied “you came to the perfect place, the attitudes these girls have are ridiculous” (Fieldnotes 10/11/2019). I was taken aback that she perceived me, also a young Black woman, to be writing an expose on the girls that both of us could have very well been. In a school like Marshall Prep whose foundation rests on rewarding and reprimanding behavior, an instructor that perceives their Black girls to have capricious attitudes, and have that be their defining characteristic, can be detrimental to their education. Each week, students begin with 50 behavior points and have points added or subtracted by faculty depending on subjective assessments of their behavior. Teachers can ignore their students’ requests, send them out of the class, or refuse their participation in events earned by high behavioral scores, such as independent reading time. Kiara explains how instructors dismiss her feelings and educational needs following what Marshall Prep teachers might consider a display of ridiculous attitude: “If they know when you do something and the teachers think that you are acting “black” or, you know, “ghetto” they try to [ignore what you need] and be like ‘Oh, she doesn’t care’” (Kiara, Grade 7). Unsupportive relationships between students and faculty can compromise student success and worsen the impact of negative neighborhood or home environments on the students’ educational achievement and approach to their education.

Conversely, students who feel supported and cared for reach greater academic achievement than those who do not (Hammond & Harvey, 2018). To better student-teacher relationships, the participants suggest that teachers have a set of standards that facilitate their conduct, which would include benchmarks for de-escalation, respect, and honoring the self-determination of their students. Likewise, I suggest that faculty create space for students to voice their curricular and extracurricular desires and needs in addition to the standards for conduct. By treating the participants and their classmates as valued contributors to their education, the students will feel supported and engaged in their educational experiences.

Nevertheless, on two occasions, I’ve observed teachers respond to their Black girl students’ “attitudes” with the sentiment that Kiara explains above. “You’re showing me you don’t care, so I don’t care either,” one seventh grade math teacher remarked and subsequently ended a lesson with 20-minutes remaining. In another instance, Ms. Swanson, an eighth-grade language arts teacher shared with her class that she “could care less” about their attitudes because she “is still going to get her paycheck anyway” (Fieldnote, Swanson Grade 8). Schools significantly shape students’ academic and personal goals and their self-worth as they matriculate into adulthood. Instances such as those aforementioned where instructors make it clear to the participants that they can be dismissed and unsupported at the drop of a hat only perpetuates the larger societal disregard of the plight of Black girls. Because Black girls are more likely to be viewed as disobedient and intentionally harmful by teachers than White girls, faculty disproportionately trivialize Black girls’ educational needs and their innocence as children. Statistically, this dismissive attitude from teachers fuels discrepancies in subjective disciplinary infractions leading Black girls to be more likely to receive more punitive punishments than their Black male and White counterparts (Epstein et. Al 2017, 10).

Many aspects of schools like Marshall Prep effectively suffocate the participants’ ability to access their agency through militarized disciplining and intense monitoring. To make matters worse, teachers and administrators often do not acknowledge or prioritize children’s right to self-determination. Because the girls at the heart of this study live in a society that assumes that adults and institutions “know
best,” authority figures marginalize girls at one of the most important times of their lives when they are attempting to cultivate their identities.

As an illustration of the constraining conditions on participants at Marshall Prep, some girls experienced their work being torn up in front of them as a form of punishment for disrupting a lesson. Recollecting an instance where her social studies instructor ripped up her exit ticket—an assignment that quizzes that day’s lesson and is a requirement for permission to transition into the next class—Altasia of the eighth-grade stated:

I told him, “If you don’t tape my stuff back together, Imaa fuck up your class.” And what he do? He took my paper and rewrote it on another paper and gave me my packet back. I was not playing with him.

Essentially, Black girls display and employ resistant anger to disrupt exchanges of power between themselves and their instructors. Altasia’s classmate, Monique, furthers this claim with the following statement:

These teachers think they won’t get cursed out, like for real, they think just because they’re teachers . . . No you’re not gonna raise your voice at me, ‘cause I got a voice too.

Monique’s declaration illuminates a connection between resistant anger and agency. Resistant anger is a productive means of denying the expected submission that many teachers believe should follow after disciplining their students. This form of anger does not merely function as a tool of disruption. Instead, as Monique demonstrates in her statement this use of anger produces a space within which Black girls have the capacity to exert their power, “cause [they] got a voice too” (Monique, Grade 8). By acknowledging anger as resistance, and therefore a practical tool for Black girlhood, we are empowering and prioritizing the narratives of Black girls in our analysis of oppressive institutions and impetuses.

The girls at the center of this project constantly raise the issue of hierarchy of power. Further, they understand that to challenge this hierarchy, they must not conform to the standards of what a kid should do or stay. Adults expect children in Marshall Prep, and generally in American society, to do and say as adults dictate, regardless of justice or rationality. Eternity mentioned that teachers and administrators disrespect their students and then expect the students to merely fall in line:

When I try to respond in a normal tone, [Mr. Tillman] just get all the way up there with me . . . Like, bro, I just tried to talk to you like a normal kid and treat you like an adult and you just gonna take it all the way up there . . . Like you’re not superior or nothing like that.

Eternity’s interpretation is essential to understanding resistant anger. Resistant anger challenges authority and makes it extremely difficult for them to exercise their power as they might otherwise choose to do so.

Similarly, Denise describes her deliberate disruption of power as a repossession of her own power. She mentioned that she feels good after reclaiming power through forms of resistant anger. She describes the satisfaction: “I feel good when I retrieve power with the teacher, because they be feeling like they could just go off on anybody and everybody, because they got the part, because they are a teacher” (Denise, Grade 8). The anger and agitation explicit in these girls’ actions demonstrate opposition to spatial and verbal constructions of power. Their dissent consistently disallows faculty the ability to completely control the participants. This finding notably illuminates that the participants are learning for the first time how to encumber systems and acts of domination, a skill that will be necessary for survival and liberation as they increasingly continue to challenge the institutionally padlocked nature of oppression.

Conclusion

According to this study, many participants understand that their expressions of anger can be punished and ultimately work against them. Even still, Black girls “go ahead and be angry anyway” in an attempt to disrupt and expose destructive impositions of interpersonal and institutional power (Judd 2019, 180). Sociologists, Black feminists, and school discipline scholars must pay attention to what Black girls are angry about and not just the racial biases that entail characterizing a Black girl as angry. Britney Cooper explains the silencing of Black womxn and their anger in an interview, describing the weaponization of anger against Black womxn as “designed to discredit them and to say that they don’t have a good grasp on reality, that they are overreacting, that they are being hypersensitive, that whatever set of conditions that they are responding to, that their reaction is outsized” (Martin 2019). If we stop short at affirming that this silencing is racist and gendered we fail to exercise due diligence in evaluating and reforming the set of conditions that elicit angry responses from Black girls.

Through this piece, I am encouraging scholars, schools, and communities to embrace the agency exhibited by their Black girls when they expose these harmful exchanges of power. Resistant anger and disruption, I maintain, is a method of advocacy and self-determination rather than improper behavior. Instead of neglecting the anger of Black girls by pushing them out of the classroom and schools, we must listen to what they are saying about the circumstances that they are responding to and the new worlds that they are imagining by resisting normative structures
and practices. I feel strongly that schools should establish organizations, such as student advocacy boards, which allow students to act as experts of their own experiences. Black girls, then, can build leadership skills and effectively practice organizing and troubleshooting solutions. Through this advocacy-based approach to responding to oppositional anger, institutions then empower Black girls to advocate for themselves and collaborate with teachers on how to better improve the institutional and interpersonal circumstances that impact them.

As scholars and as a people, Black womxn are effectively praising and supporting one another as we fight against all odds. The analysis and incorporation of Black girls within our discourse on defying systems of domination must begin earlier as a form of community building and productive examination to any applicable field. This present study, then, holds significance in illuminating and centering a neglected narrative of Black girls who have ever been marginalized by those that they will grow up to be. Encouraging a broader analysis of Black girlhood will bring more resources and attention to how America is failing its Black girls specifically and how to actualize and advance justice in the future.

Endnote

1 The use of woman is to be inclusive of transsexual, transgender, and non-binary people.

Works Cited


Ending Detention: A Radical Policy Recommendation from Immigration Services at the U.S.–Mexico Border in Times of ‘Crisis’

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Kimiko Hirota graduated from Stanford University in 2020 with bachelor’s degrees in Sociology and Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. Her honors thesis examined immigration services at the U.S.–Mexico border under the Trump administration and earned the Sociology Dornbusch Award for Best Undergraduate Thesis and Albert M. Camarillo Senior Paper Prize. Kimiko now works as a John Gardner Public Service Fellow with the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship.

Abstract

This paper examines the ‘migrant crisis’ at the U.S.–Mexico border through the lens of on-the-ground, immigrant-serving volunteers, attorneys, nonprofit employees, and government officials. In my larger thesis project, I find that adversarial bureaucracies, ambiguous and arbitrary regulations, and limited resources under the Trump administration have dramatically affected immigration services’ abilities to help asylum seekers. However, these issues are built upon, and sustained by, a fundamentally dysfunctional immigration system. Ultimately, the immigration industrial complex necessitates the criminalization of unauthorized migration and strengthens a long-standing, carceral system for immigrants. A significant dismantling of immigration detention is warranted due to its unnecessary and illegitimate growth, exploitative profit-based model, and the existence of better alternatives. Drawing on 36 interviews with representatives of 30 border organizations, I find that eliminating immigrant detention is one of the most broadly supported policy recommendations. This paper is a selection from the thesis, “Perpetual Precarity: Immigration Services at the U.S.–Mexico Border in Times of ‘Crisis’.”

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Introduction

The ‘migrant crisis’ is not new to the United States. In fact, the mass detainment of immigrants is a long-expanding carceral system beginning in the 1980s. Though President Trump’s immigration policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric brought this issue to the forefront of mainstream politics, the migration ‘crisis,’ often characterized by large numbers of people crossing into the United States from Mexico, developed over decades. Scholars argue that the political power of ‘crisis’ is mobilized to promote the emergence of restrictive immigration and border enforcement policies (Mountz and Hiemstra 2014; Pallister-Wilkins 2016). For example, the Obama administration (2008–2016) attributed the creation of new detention centers, built and run by private prison corporations, to an increase in families seeking asylum at the U.S.–Mexico border. This system is the most expansive family incarceration system since Japanese American internment during World War II (Williams 2017). Then in June of 2018, under the Trump administration, the Department of Justice introduced the policy of “100% prosecution” for all unauthorized border crossings, including families and unaccompanied children, which violates domestic and international law for refugees and asylum seekers (Edwards 2011; Kandel 2019).

Today, the United States operates the largest immigration detention system in the world (Global Detention Project 2016). In fiscal year 2019, nearly 1 million people were apprehended at the U.S.–Mexico border by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), with an average of 50,000 immigrants held daily in ICE or Customs and Border Patrol custody (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2019). Immigration enforcement justifies detention by arguing that immigrants will not show up for court proceedings, but the vast majority of released immigrants attend all hearings (Eagly 2018). Instead, thousands of people are detained for months, typically experiencing substandard conditions and mistreatment, while corporations profit billions. The vast majority of those detained also lack access to legal counsel and face the court alone. In this article, I argue that a significant dismantling of immigration detention is warranted due to its unnecessary and illegitimate growth, exploitative profit-based model, and the existence of better alternatives. Immigration at the U.S.–Mexico border, regardless of fluctuating ‘crises,’ can be managed without a reliance on detention.

Background

The human costs of our immigration system have been extensively documented: scholars have found that detention centers facilitate increased risks for psychological harm and physical abuse, issues with legal assistance accessibility, and abandonment of legitimate asylum claims (Noferi 2015; Ackerman and Furman 2012). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees advocates that migration policies must protect people’s legal right to seek asylum and discourages the use of detention as a deterrent (Guterres 2015). Research has indicated that recent detention policies violate U.S. responsibilities to international law (Domínguez, Lee, and Leiserson 2016).
Despite these human costs, immigration detention expands through privatization and bureaucratization, as well as the polymorphic nature of border enforcement. Private prison corporations run the vast majority of Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities and massively profit from its operations, in addition to having significant political lobbying influence (Fernandes 2007; Flynn and Cannon 2009). Nancy Hiemstra and Deirdre Conlon (2017) illustrate how immigration detention’s proliferation is also due to bureaucratization, which serves as a “process of obfuscation” that “produces a morass of individuals and organizations at different levels of government and society who play a role in detention.” This obfuscation serves as a mechanism that effectively conceals responsibility and curtails accountability for unethical practices in detention and its expansion itself.

At the macro level, some scholars have conceptualized the actors and relationships sustaining immigration detention as the ‘immigration industrial complex’ in the United States (Doty and Wheatley 2013; Cervantes et. al 2017). The interdependence of state power and private power can contribute to and legitimize detention regimes. Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Ninna Nyberg Sorensen (2012) have proposed the term ‘migration industry’ to refer to the commercialization of immigration and the relationship between immigration enforcement and service providers. This dynamic significantly affects borderland communities, which can become reliant on the migration industry for their local governments and economies.

While analyzing the complex web of immigration enforcement and services at the U.S.-Mexico border, it is crucial to address the extensive racialized history of immigration in the United States that continues today. Predominantly Latino detention can be connected to several other racialized detention contexts, including Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II, Haitian refugees at Guantanamo Bay, and Arabs, South Asians, and Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 (Hernández 2008). For decades, restrictive immigration policies have been fueled by crisis narratives about ‘illegal aliens’ and a Latino threat, perpetuating a constant system of emergency that is now manifested in a militarized border and mass detention across the country. Instead of the comprehensive immigration reform that numerous scholars, experts, and advocates suggest, the federal government’s response is often increased investment for larger detention capacity and the scapegoating and reduction of rights of immigrants in the name of national security. Despite their support for demilitarizing the U.S.-Mexico border and ending detention, immigration service providers have only witnessed the development of a burgeoning detention economy between the public and private sector. This paper examines the immigration industrial complex as it relates to the current ‘migrant crisis,’ and it derives critical insights from on-the-ground immigrant-serving workers.

Methodology

This study examines how immigration organizations adapt their services under changing border practices and federal policies through interviews with 36 people from 30 organizations based in Houston, San Antonio, McAllen, Brownsville, Harlingen, and Austin, Texas—cities and towns both at the U.S.-Mexico border and further north that are impacted by increased numbers of asylum seekers. These confidential and semi-structured hour-long interviews seek to elicit workers’ attitudes and opinions about the immigration system and its changes as well as how, or if, they are able to adapt accordingly. Participants work at advocacy and/or direct service nonprofits, legal services nonprofits, private law firms, Congress, local government, shelters, and churches. I collectively call interview participants “immigration services workers” or “immigration service providers” as a generalized term to encapsulate their many roles and expertise in the field.

My interview protocol consists of about 40 open-ended questions, divided into the following categories: daily work, organization policy, other organizations, treatment/interaction with migrants, migrant rights, and migrant policies. Each organization received a $30 donation if possible; government officials and private immigration attorneys refused or could not receive donations.

As rooted in grounded theory, I analyzed my interview data as it was collected to direct my next interviews, taking cues from the concepts that frequently arose (Corbin and Strauss 1990). I used automatic transcription software to transcribe all recorded interviews. As I reviewed transcripts and listened to audio recordings, I used open coding to compare similarities and differences between pieces of data to create new conceptual labels (Corbin and Strauss 1990). In total, I used 30 codes in Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, re-coding as I re-read throughout the process. I performed iterative coding by going back into the digital recordings for review and direct quotes as necessary.

The On-The-Ground Policy Recommendation: End Detention

Although immigration service providers spend significant time coping with changes in policy and practices as directed by the Trump administration, almost all interviewees recommended changes that fundamentally alter the United States immigration system itself. Along with providing universal representation in immigration court, ending immigration detention was the most frequently proposed
change by participants. Interviewees reason that the use of detention centers is entirely unwarranted due to the detention system’s connection to private prisons, illegitimately expanding size, and concerns with management and living conditions. Furthermore, there are existing, evidence-supported alternatives to detention that researchers and policy experts have deemed more effective than the methods Immigration and Custom Enforcement overwhelmingly uses across the country. For example, Congress has funded an Alternatives To Detention, or ATD, program since 2004. In June of 2019, ATD had 100,000 foreign nationals enrolled out of 3 million in the same category (Singer 2019). Based on United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) evaluation, the program is effective, with up to 90 percent of asylum applicants complying with the conditions upon release, and it complies with the UNHCR’s principles of avoiding the detainment of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, determining that alternatives to detention are less expensive and more humane (Edwards 2011). Accordingly, almost every immigration services worker agreed that the immigration detention system should end or dramatically reduce in size. A pro bono attorney in Houston summarizes:

It doesn’t have to be this way. . . . Not just under this administration but even previously, like just the expansion of immigration detention, it’s a travesty . . . there will be more due process protections, more due process period and more quote, “justice,” whatever that looks like, without immigration detention. . . . I mean the studies show, I think that alternatives to detention work . . . And it’s a drain on money. So not just like the human rights piece, but like if people are coming at this from like an economic perspective.

In the above excerpt, this attorney voices her frustration that there continue to be human rights, economic, and legal grounds for eliminating immigration detention. In her statement, she highlights detention as an outsized, costly, and low payoff system. Additionally, this attorney recognizes immigration detention’s expansion under previous administrations. In her five years working on immigration-related issues, she has learned that justice is fundamentally misaligned with immigration detention, referencing justice as something unimaginable in the current system by describing it as “whatever that looks like.”

Despite the effectiveness of alternative measures, like parole or supervision, as well as the poor conditions of facilities, a statutory backbone reinforces detention. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 authorizes and can require the Department of Homeland Security to detain non-U.S. nationals “arrested for immigration violations that render them removable from the United States” (Smith 2019). In particular, detention is required for those arriving at a port of entry or have entered the United States without inspection who appear subject to removal, according to Section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, affecting the population at the heart of the ‘crisis’ at the U.S.-Mexico border. Since the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, four provisions authorize or mandate detention, dependent upon “whether the alien is seeking admission into the United States or was lawfully admitted within the country; whether the alien has committed certain enumerated criminal or terrorist acts; and whether the alien has been issued a final administrative order of removal” (Smith 2019). Mandatory detention has been raised as unconstitutional, but these challenges have failed in court (Demore v. Kim 2003; Zadvydas v. Davis 2001; Jennings v. Rodriguez 2018). Although ending detention is the lead recommendation for many people who work within immigration services daily, detention is now a ubiquitous part of asylum seekers’ experience in the system.

In addition to discussing the unethical nature of detention, immigration service providers described how detainment has continued to evolve in the last two years. After President Trump’s Executive Order 13768, Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States, was issued during the first week of his presidency, then Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly stated in an implementation memorandum that “prosecutorial discretion shall not be exercised in a manner that exempts or excludes a specified class or category of aliens from enforcement of the immigration laws” (Kelly 2017). Now, an attorney in San Antonio has many clients who do not need to be detained but ICE will not release them, and she shares this as an example:

. . . one of the first things that happened under the Trump administration is that, “we’re not going to exercise prosecutorial discretion favorably.” Right. So it doesn’t matter if you have six children and a wife who all are here and like depend on you for their support. Let’s put them on Medicaid and food stamps and detain you for no reason for like six months. I have that case. Can’t get the guy out.

This attorney’s anecdote shows how unjustifiable detainment is in this situation, considering that this family must rely on the government to survive while the father is detained by the government and he does not present a threat to society. DHS used to prioritize cases that risk national security or public safety, but Secretary Kelly’s memorandum explicitly states that the Department “no longer will exempt classes or categories of removable aliens from potential enforcement” (Kelly 2017). A series of executive orders issued in President Trump’s first few months of office has led to the hiring of thousands more Border Patrol agents and CBP officers and
an increase in detainment (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2018). In November of 2019, nearly 70 percent of detainees had no prior criminal conviction and were being held longer for an average of 60 days (Hauslohner 2019). The expanding detainment system does not reflect an increase in crime among immigrants or a new national security concern; rather, it demonstrates private and public investment in a large, profitable carceral system, motivated by an anti-immigrant agenda at the highest levels of government.

The majority of participants specifically discussed the immorality of the federal government contracting private, for-profit companies to operate detention facilities, creating a multibillion-dollar industry. While private companies are responsible for 9 percent of the prison population in the United States, they detain up to 73 percent of immigrants (Haberman 2018). Companies like GEO Group and CoreCivic spent millions on lobbying efforts in the 2016 and 2018 elections supporting mostly Republican candidates and causes (Alvarado et. al 2019). Since the Trump administration took office, private prisons have benefitted from an increase in the criminalization of immigrants and the Justice Department’s reliance on these companies to house them. Although “immigration’s had its own prison system for a long time,” as a Brownsville attorney stated, the industry’s economic boom, newly built facilities, and newly signed long-term contracts, indicates that ending detention as run by private companies is a challenging task for future administrations.

Similar to the conditions of the private prison industrial complex, the private companies detaining immigrants are using their own detainees as labor to manage facilities, paying them $1 a day (Williams 2019). These voluntary work programs allow detainees to cook, serve food, wax floors, and wash clothing to pay for things like calling a loved one or buying more food and warm clothing. Some people see the conditions of facilities and assume there is not enough funding for healthy food and heating. However, a low bono and pro bono attorney in San Antonio outlines the issue with fighting for increased resources to improve conditions, rather than advocating for the elimination of the facilities altogether:

The problem . . . is that the private prison companies are taking a big chunk out of their funding for profits for their shareholders. So they’re not spending the money on the food, which is what they’re supposed to be doing. And . . . it’s a really, I mean, seemingly corrupt, I don’t want to go so far as to say this, system because then they charge people to buy food from the commissary. So people have to buy food to supplement the fact that they’re not getting enough food provided by their detention. And then to buy food, they have to work to get that money . . . So the detention center kitchen staff has something like 22, you know, people work[ing] at slave labor wages and you know, three supervisors that are actually paid employees. So they’re saving on all their staffing costs by forcing people into those jobs because they need to get the money to pay for the food that they have a right to in the first place. That’s not a problem with congressional funding. That’s a problem with having private prison for profit companies running detention centers.

Resisting the notion that ICE lacks funding to improve detention conditions, this attorney demonstrates how an exploitative system using detained people's labor has already been set up to cut costs. Hiemstra and Conlon (2017) extensively outline the relationships across the public-private lines that participate in immigration detention for daily operational needs. This attorney’s critique reiterates the pervasive and sinister nature of the immigration industrial complex that profits off of the mass detention of asylum seekers and other immigrants. Increased congressional funding for the Department of Homeland Security, under the guise of improved facilities, has proven itself nonsensical and unproductive, when the private companies that DHS partners with take its profits to shareholders instead. Private companies actively seek out federal detention contracts because ICE can pay up to 300 dollars per detainee, with children and families as most profitable (Alvarado et. al 2019). Besides a humanitarian and ethical incentive, there is little incentive for private companies to do anything but detain as many people as possible for as long as possible.

Conclusion

My research examines immigration services workers’ most commonly recommended policy change: an end to immigrant detention. According to these 36 interviewees, one of the most needed changes requires a radical revision to the immigration system itself. Considering how abruptly and extraordinarily immigration has transformed under the Trump administration without changes to immigration law, the possibility for a new and more humane system under new political leadership is worth consideration. Despite the lack of power and resources that local governments have in comparison, cities and states continue to serve as convincing examples of these solutions that the federal government can look to for guidance. Overall, only five states have taken steps to eliminate private detention facilities. The legal grounds for the protection of human rights has already been established. Now, an end to mass immigrant detention must be enacted before we see human rights protected.
Works Cited


How the Women in the *Black Review* Found a Way to Stand in the Sun
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Sinazo Magadlela has recently graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with an Honours in Politics. She has a keen passion for the role that women play in Black Power movements in the 1960s and 1970s. She is currently pursuing a law degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. In the future she looks forward to pursuing a PhD and merging her law and politics degrees.

Abstract

Black Liberation Movements are a critical part of our understanding of resistance by black people to white supremacy and its institutions. However, the articulation of this resistance by these movements has often articulated oppression in terms of race only. This means that black women have had to endure misogyny at their hands of their compatriots together with racism and sexism in the white supremacist state they found themselves in. This paper focuses on the visibility of black women in the *Black Review*, a publication of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa in the 1970s. This paper argues that the first two editions of the *Black Review* did not make visible the work of women activists within BCM. In the last two editions of the *Review* women become more visible, first in the penultimate issue of the *Review* when the apartheid government passed laws that were so draconian, that the *Review* had to report on the activism of women voicing their opposition to the laws. The second reason the activism work of black women was more visible in the final edition of the *Black Review* was due to formation of a women’s organisation within BCM that reiterated the ideology of BCM and therefore made it possible for women to take up more space in the pages of the *Black Review*.

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Introduction

Black Liberation Movements that seek to counter negative narratives about black people and bring about positive imaginations of being black have a long global history. These movements are important because they contribute to restoring the black image and articulate the importance of black people’s self-reliance, especially when a white government is determined to oppress them. These movements deserve praise because they were and are still doing important work. However, we also need to look at the experiences of black people in these movements who were black and women or black and queer or black and working class. By doing this we can celebrate these movements but also highlight blind spots of these movements and provide a nuanced understanding of the work of these movements. This paper will look at the visibility of women in the *Black Review*, a publication of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa in the 1970s, where apartheid was in its heyday. By focusing on this period in South Africa’s history I am hoping to pay particular attention to women who had to navigate being black in a racist country and a movement that did not understand sexism as a system that needed to be overcome.

The *Black Review* was a journal published by one of BCM's activism organisations, the Black Community Programmes (BCP). In publishing the *Review*, the BCP wanted to report on the various activities happening within the black community. Because the report was written by black people for black people, it was supposed to be a credible account of the activities happening within the black community all across South Africa. The *Review* initially had little mention of women and the activism work they were doing, however by time the *Review* stopped being published, two women had been its editors and women and the work they were doing gained more visibility in various sections of the *Review*. This paper argues that the introduction of laws that indefinitely detained those resisting the apartheid government resulting in outrage in black and white communities and the introduction of a women's organisation that reinforced the goals of BC created an opportunity for women to take up greater visibility in the *Black Review*. This paper argues this by looking at the *Black Review* to see where women are mentioned and in what capacity they are mentioned and taking the context of the period into consideration, one can reveal the possible reasoning that could have led to the increasing visibility of women in various issues of the *Review*. The intention is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the activism of women within BCM. Women are an important part of the activism work of BCM and it is therefore necessary to pay particular attention to the visibility of women. In doing so we can avoid an erasure of women and the habit of focusing solely on their race when their gender and race are part of their identities as activists and both of those things must be visible in any movement in which they were involved.

There is a wide variety of scholarship on BCM. Some of the literature, such as Daniel Magaziner’s book *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa*, is concerned with what BCM looked like as an organisation and how it fits into the history of resistance to apartheid South
The Black Consciousness Movement considered racial oppression as the most pressing issue to resist and consequently side-lined other identities, such as gender, which resulted in the marginalisation of women. Some BCM-affiliated women such as Oshadi Mangena did not think it necessary to refer specifically to the marginalisation of women and believed that the success of dismantling racial oppression would lead to the breakdown of gender oppression. Other women like Mamphela Ramphele and Deborah Matshoba were aware that because of their gender they were treated differently and wanted to address those concerns within the movement. This paper will show that despite the apprehension to women being a recognised group within BCM, women were able to gradually gain visibility in the Black Consciousness Movement.

South African Students Organisation (SASO) and BCM

The South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) was formed by Steve Biko in 1968 as a response to a non-racial student organisation National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) that served as a platform to denounce apartheid. Biko argued that NUSAS was unable to respond to the particular way in which racism affected black students differently to their white counterparts. White students who were part of NUSAS could retreat back into their privilege once their show of solidarity was finished, whilst black students continually experienced racism and had no such reprieve. Once the students of SASO graduated from the University of Natal, they formed BCM in the early 1970s. The Black Consciousness Movement would in turn form smaller activist organisations under the BCM umbrella. The Black Consciousness Movement articulated a rejection of an alliance with white liberals in favour of self-reliance by black people.5 The foundation of the BCM ideology was that “Africans had to create for themselves a convincing new identity and a new pride which could liberate them from their subservient attitudes.”6 In their analysis of the apartheid South African society in 1960, SASO saw race as the “primary line of cleavage.”7 For SASO and later BCM, this meant that racial oppression was the main focus and undoing racial oppression was the main goal. Class stratifications were therefore not considered significant and gender was also not recognised as a site of oppression. The South African Students Organisation did not grapple with the racial and class divisions, the articulation of race and class oppression, or how gender and race and class interacted with one another leading to a particular social context in South Africa. The idea that the most important organising principle of South African society was race and colour did not come out of a vacuum but was rather a prevailing norm in the country until the mid-1970s.

Although SASO/BCM’s primary focus on racial oppression was the norm at the time, there were harmful consequences. First, in the movement itself through the misogyny that the women experienced. Second, in South Africa they were black and women at the same time, which meant that BCM women experienced racism from the apartheid state and its various ways of treating black people as second-class citizens.8 At the same time, they would also experience sexism from their peers who invoked cultural traditions that expected subservience from women which included cooking and for the men.

Women in Black Consciousness (BC)

Because BC considered the main site of oppression to be racial, the space for women’s only movements in BC would be limited. Furthermore, attempts to address other sites of oppression in BC, for example, class-based or gendered, were considered divisive. As an example of this was recounted by Deborah Matshoba, an activist within BC. In the late 1960s and the early days of SASO, Deborah Matshoba and the other women students of SASO proposed the formation of the Women Student’s Organisation (WSO) to address issues that were specific to them as women students, but they were outvoted by their male counterparts.9 The men’s rationale was that by forming WSO the women would be part of two organisations, SASO and WSO. This was not the case and Matshoba explained that WSO was intended to form part of SASO and the broader BC movement. Subsequently when women tried to form an women’s organisation, they made it clear that their organisation was a part of BCM and the women in that organisation were committing themselves to upholding the BC ideology.

This organisation was called the Black Women’s Federation (BWF). The Black Women’s Federation was formed in 1975 and was short-lived. The Black Women’s Federation was banned by the apartheid government in 1977 along with numerous other BC-affiliated organisations.10 The conference that formed this organisation would feature prominently in the 1975/6 edition of the Black Review.
Between 1972 and 1976, the Black Review reported on “activity by and against the black community” from what the Black Community Programme (BCP) deemed an authoritative black perspective. The Review consisted of reports on various activities happening in the black community and did not have a strict publication schedule. There were several people such as Aisha Moodley and Thoko Mpumlwana who worked on the Black Review but when the Review was published, it did not have authors listed and instead published the name of the editor. There were editions for the years 1972, 1973, 1974/5, and 1975/6. The BCP was an organisation formed under the BCM umbrella that was meant to provide black communities with the tools to be self-reliant. It was used by BCM to realise its self-reliance ideology. For the employees and activists of the BCP, publications like the Black Review were critical for the type of conscientisation that they were seeking to bring to the fore. Although its exact impact is intangible, its reports and interviews show that the black community was indeed capable of providing healthcare or employment on its own.

In this paper, textual analysis will be used to analyse where women are mentioned in each edition of the Review. I have chosen textual analysis because it allows me to analyse the Black Review as it pertains to women and also identify a change in visibility of the women from minimal to more substantive and account for why this change occurred. I have identified that the change occurs in the 1974/5 edition. Thus, this paper will split analysis of the Black Review into two parts: Part 1 will look at the 1972 and 1973 editions of the Black Review and Part 2 will look at the 1974/5 and 1975/6 editions.

Part 1

In the 1972 edition of the Black Review, the most prominent woman is Winnie Kgware. She was elected as the chair of the Black People’s Convention, another organisation within BCM, at its first conference held between 16 and 17 December 1972 in Hammanskraal. Kgware is mentioned earlier in the Review as supporting a motion by SASO to establish an “all-inclusive black political organisation to be established through which blacks would realise their aspirations.” Her mention at this point in the Review has less to do with her gender but with the position she is taking up in the BPC as well as her support for the establishment of the black political organisation. The idea that race comes before gender within BC is highlighted here once again. This was likely not meant to be a slight. She was elected to chair the BPC and her gender was coincidental.

In the rest of the 1972 Review, women are visible through the reporting on women’s organisations, specifically the establishment or the work of those organisations. There is reference to two organisations: the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the Interdenominational African Minister’s Association (IDAMSA). IDAMSA was the pre-cursor to the Interdenominational African Minister’s Federation (IDAMF). The Review mentions that the work that IDAMSA looks at among other things is “youth work” and the “promotion of activity amongst women.” There is no mention of what these activities entail or which women are involved. Further along in the publication, the Review reports on an IDAMSA conference held in Umtata in 1972 and they recount the “issues” that various branches have been handling: “faction fighting, scholarships, education syllabi, unity, building of centres, nursery schools and experimental farming.” Youth work and women’s activities could very well form part of these issues that IDAMSA was reporting on. The 1972 edition is about 227 pages long and the mention of both Mrs. Kgware and the women’s activities combined takes up around two pages leading to the conclusion that women are not visible in the 1972 edition.

The 1973 edition shifts its reporting on women in women’s organisations to focusing on women in the workplace. On 29 January 1973, women who were employed by S. Pedlar and Co. in New Germany, modern-day KwaZulu-Natal, go on strike causing work at the factory to stop. The factory employed 22 women who did weaving and mending. The women were demanding a pay raise from R4.50 a week to R10 a week. On the same day, in Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal, roughly 300 African and Indian women sorters at the Consolidated Woolwashing and Processing Mill were sent home following collection of their job cards. This was after they refused a pay rise proposed by their employer.

In the first two editions we see that the reporting on women in the 1972 edition moves between mentioning them in a supportive role to the organisation of their husbands then to “women’s activities” but no mention of what these women are doing and how many of them are taking part. There is no effort to comprehensively set out the various ways in which women are involved in the work of BC and the black community at large. The 1973 edition of the Review focuses on women in the workforce and in that section, there is an effort to lay out the grievances of the
women and as well as how many women are involved in the strike action. Although this section is detailed, compared to subsequent editions of the Review, the work that black women are doing does not take up a significant portion of the Review. There is no follow-up of the women’s activities and it is unlikely that these activities would have come to a complete halt. The lack of visibility of women is concerning because if the Review wants to be an authoritative source of activities in the black community, it was not serving its own cause by not including details on the work which black women were performing in the community.

There could be several reasons for the lack of prominence of women in the 1972 and 1973 editions. Going back to the formation of BCM, the language used to develop the philosophy of BC was highly gendered. In his writings Biko states that: “The black man is subjected to two forces in this country . . . ” Biko goes on to say that, “Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around cause of their operation—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.” This gendering is not accidental. Central to BC conceptualisation is an anxiety around the emasculation of black men and their desire to reclaim a “positive” masculine identity to counter that anxiety. Understanding the centrality of black masculinity illuminates why the rhetoric of BC seems to place women in the periphery. Additionally, it makes it easier to understand how women would be expected to take part in BC to the extent that their actions provide “psychological and material supports in male-orientated struggles.”

In the context of the Review, the lack of prominence could be because the work of women particularly as it relates to “women activities” is secondary to the broader work of BC and dedicating a significant part of the Review to their work does not drive the black community forward in ways that other information in the Review would have.

Another reason for the lack of prominence of women in Part 1 is that BC grouped woman as part of the broader black community and the black community’s gains would also be black women’s gains. Oshadi Mangena, a woman BC activist argues that although BC was not organised along gender issues, it “tacitly endorsed” concerns that women might have had. She cites the appointment of Mrs. Kgware as the first president of the BPC as well as the later formation of the Black Women’s Forum which was part of the BCM umbrella. She goes on to say that those in BC were focused primarily on the fight for black people’s liberation regardless of their gender. According to Mangena, this would result in gender struggles being “blurred and dissolved into the larger and deeper struggle for the liberation of the Black people.” In the context of the Review, the idea would have been if the consciousness and pride of black people can be raised, women will also benefit from this and there is no need to pay particular attention to their work because it formed part of the broader BC agenda of self-reliance. I think that Mangena was mistaken in this regard. Racism and sexism are not interchangeable and the abolition of the one cannot guarantee the abolition of the other. Although racism and sexism are both oppressive, they do not have the same goal. Racism seeks to create and maintain the supremacy of white people at the expense of those who are not white. Sexism seeks to uphold the patriarchy and the dominance of men over women. Her argument also ignores that black men benefit from patriarchy in ways that black women do not. White women can also benefit from racism in ways that black women cannot. If specific attention is not paid to the liberation of black women both in terms of their gender and race, they will continue to lose out and that is why it was necessary for BCM to reject an articulation of liberation based on race only.

The first two editors of the Review were two men, Bennie A. Khoapa in 1972 and Mafika Pascal Gwala in 1973. This could also have influenced the direction that the Review would take, considering the close relation for BC between racism and black masculinity and the idea that women formed part of the broader black community and development of the black community would mean progress for black women as well.

Part 2

In the first two editions of the Black Review, the prevailing norm is an acknowledgement that women are involved in either in women’s activities or strike action but there is little in-depth coverage on their activism work. In the 1974/5 edition, this changes and we begin to see greater detail on the coverage of women’s activism work. Significant parts of the Review dedicate significant portions of the publication to the efforts of women in the fight against apartheid. The 1974/5 edition of the Black Review includes a section called “White Reactions.” This section was included after several people, mainly black men and women, had been detained by the Security Police and were subsequently charged under the wide-reaching Terrorism Act. The Act allowed the indefinite detention of those suspected to be terrorists, engaging in terrorism, or hiding information about terrorism. Under this Act, the courts were also unable to order any action taken in terms of the Act invalid or order the release of persons detained in terms of the Act. These actions naturally generated a lot of outcry in both the black and white community in South Africa and the international community. The 1974/5 Review includes a march organised by the Black Sash, a white women’s organisation on Jan Smuts Avenue in Johannesburg. The Review reports that the
women held up placards condemning the detainment and called for those being held to either be charged or released. There were also responses from black women that were included in the Review. Roughly 700 black women signed a petition addressing the Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons, denouncing the detentions and demanding that those detained be released immediately. According to the Review, the petition was also given to the State President.

The increased visibility is carried on in subsequent sections of the 1974/5 issue of the Review. The Review also reports on activities at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre. The Centre ran a programme which instructed local destitute women “in crafts [such] as crocheting, embroidery, pottery, beadwork etc.” The programme also taught the women how to design patterns and how to make dresses. The Review reports that 86 women successfully completed the programme. The second programme is the Makhelwana, meaning neighbourliness, which was established in 1973 and sought to train women to become midwives. Since its start 52 women had completed the programme. The mention of these details in the Review is necessary because it speaks to the beginning of a change on the reporting of women’s activism work from minimal to more substantive. In addition to including the response of women to the Terrorism Act, the Review includes names, numbers, and explanations of other activism work happening in the black community. This is an improvement from the 1972 edition, in which the work that women were doing in their communities was labelled simply as “women’s activities” with no detail on what this worked entailed and how many women were involved in the activities.

In the 1975/6 and final edition of the Black Review, the main focus on women revolves around the BWF and its establishment. BWF was founded at a conference in December 1975 by black women across South Africa.25 210 women on behalf of 41 organisation from all over South Africa were present at the conference. The women through their organisation are articulating in their own words their position in BC and the broader black community. These women see themselves as supporters of the broader liberation struggle. This is evident in one of their aims and objectives which recognises black women as the “custodian of the black family” and their role as the preserver of culture and memory.26 They are also taking up roles in their communities and developing it in the form of empowerment programmes and undertaking the viability of an alternative education system. This reflects back on the aims of the BCP and its desire to provide opportunities for the black community to uplift itself because of the deliberate efforts of the apartheid government to provide them with close to nothing. Mentioning the establishment of the BWF is relevant because it speaks to the change in visibility of women from the first two editions. It is also significant that there are two full pages in this issue of the Review dedicated to the BWF with details in membership and who holds which position as well as what BWF is trying to achieve within BC and how that contributes to the broader liberation struggle against apartheid.

The 1974/5 and 1975/6 editions of the Black Review are edited by women, Thoko Mpumlwana and Aisha Moodley respectively, and this might have impacted the way in which the work of the women was reported in the journal. Their appointment as editors was not based on their gender but because the previous editors had been banned once the Review was published. In addition, the two women also had significant experience having worked as part of the team that compiled the Review in previous years. The 1974/5 edition covers the response of white women and black women to the mass detainment. These responses range from speeches in parliament to demonstrations. The coverage is thorough and includes numbers of women attending these demonstrations. At the Black Sash march, the messages on the placards are also reported in the Review. The fact that another group of women present a petition signed by several hundred women coupled with the attempt to hand the petition over and the subsequent picketing is also covered in a section dealing with the response by black people to the detainment.

The shift towards thorough reporting of women in the black community appears to be driven by the events in the editions. In the 1974/5 edition the outrage to the mass detentions for several days without being charged transcends the black community and the Review includes information, like the marches organised by the Black Sash which was largely an organisation run by white women. The efforts of Black Sash and other white people and organisations would ordinarily not have been included in the Black Review. This indicates a change based on the environment BC finds itself in, in that it chooses to include information on white women and their organisations and as well as efforts by black women who are also marching and engaging in other forms of public resistance. The women were best suited to respond to protest because, unlike the men in BC, they were not in jail. In addition, The Suppression of Communism Act allowed the state to ban organisations and individuals. It would have made it impossible for the Review to publish the names of banned organisations and individuals who were involved in resistance efforts without the Review being banned itself. Publishing the efforts of women would be strategic because it allowed the Review to encourage the black community that there was solidarity from those outside the black community and also record resistance to the apartheid without placing itself at the risk of being banned.
In the 1975/6 edition, the Black Women’s Federation is the main highlight and I think this is because it was central to the work of BC. I posit that the inclusion of BWF in such a big way is deliberate. The women are dedicating themselves through this organisation to preserving the black family by supporting their communities, working together as black women towards “the fulfilment of the Black people’s social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.”27 They were effectively echoing the ideology and ideals of BC but were putting it on themselves as black mothers and women to realise those goals insofar as the black family was concerned. Including this section as a main part of the Review fell right into the intentions of BC and so it makes sense that it was included. It is also re-enforcing the role of women as it pertains to the black family as conceptualised by BC when the ideology was being formulated.

Conclusion

The greater visibility which women enjoy in the last two editions of the Black Review is not deliberate. BCM maintained its insistence of race as the primary line of oppression throughout its lifespan. In addition, the women activists did not insist on greater coverage of their activities in the Review. The change in visibility of women seems to have arisen due to a change in what was happening both in South Africa and the Movement itself. The apartheid government introduced another set of draconian laws that impressed on the black and white community that a civic response was necessary in order make it known to the government that the people considered the government’s actions to be wrong. It would not have served the Review well to leave this information out of its publication. Be that as it may, it is also important to appreciate the efforts of the Review to give detailed and comprehensive information pertaining to the activism work of women, especially when in the first two editions, this information was lacking. The establishment of the BWF and the Review’s inclusion thereof is also important because it reveals an accommodation and implied acceptance that black women have a distinct and significant role to play in the liberation struggle beyond just being black activists. I think that the ability of women to take up space in the BCM as women is a necessary part of women’s history in South Africa. The ability of these women without a direct intention, to make their presence known to the black community through the Review reveals a tenacity and resilience that is important when trying to defeat any system of power that relies on the oppression of a particular group of people for that system to survive.

Endnotes

5 Ibid., 262.
6 Ibid., 271.
7 Ibid.
8 Apartheid was a system of governance between 1948 and 1994 that classified people into four main racial groups, black, white, coloured, and Indian. The classification of a person into one of these groups affected every facet of that person’s life from where they could live, their education and prospects of employment as well as what public areas they could access. The classification was hierarchical and white people sat at the top of the hierarchy. Indian and coloured people were in the middle and black people were at the bottom of the hierarchy. For more information see The Rise and Fall of Apartheid by David Welsh and South Africa: The History and Legacy of the Nation from European Colonization to the End of the Apartheid Era by Charles River Editors. BCM ideology did not follow the apartheid system of classification and considered coloured and Indian people as Black.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 8.
17 Black Review 1974, p. 133.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 260.
23 Black Review 1975, p. 94.
24 Ibid., 127.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 134.
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“Love or Eugenics?”: Marital Bliss in the Eugenic Union

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Ben Maldonado is a recent graduate of Stanford University where he studied History. He focuses on the history of eugenics in the United States and has written extensively about Stanford’s own history with eugenics. He plans to apply to history graduate programs in the near future to continue his studies.

Abstract

Between 1900 and 1940, marriage education was booming, providing advice on how to achieve the most perfect and happiest union. At the same time, eugenics was expanding rapidly throughout the United States, both legally and culturally. Drawing from the writings of marriage educators and researchers, I argue that early twentieth century marriage experts attempted to foster a eugenic conscience—a voluntary adherence to eugenic principles—by framing happy marriages as inherently eugenic and vice versa. This voluntary and cultural approach to eugenics complicates the way we think about the racist and ableist science of human improvement.

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“Love or Eugenics?”: Marital Bliss in the Eugenic Union

In 1930, Paul Popenoe, prominent marriage educator and so-called father of marriage counseling in the United States, opened the Institute of Family Relations, one of America’s first organizations dedicated to promoting successful and happy marriages. The Institute provided couples pamphlets and classes on the basics of family life, providing advice to help solve any potential marriage issue. By the 1960s, the Institute claimed to have saved the marriages of over seventy-five thousand couples and Popenoe had become a minor celebrity, frequenting radio shows and family life magazines to present the newest advice for America’s families. Popenoe even appeared on television, listening to the qualms of unhappy couples before sharing with them the scientifically-backed secrets of a happy married life. Why did Popenoe dedicate his life to fixing marriages and promoting marital bliss? Because Paul Popenoe was an eugenicist, and a radical one at that.1

Like other eugenicists of the early twentieth century, Popenoe valued happy marriages for eugenic reasons. Happy marriages meant more sexual intercourse and thus more children, and if desired populations were not reproducing, then even the most sophisticated eugenic theories were for naught. As Popenoe put it when reflecting on his time with the Institute of Family Relations, “I began to realize that if we were to promote a sound population, we would not only have to get the right people married, but we would have to keep them married.”2 Divorce, sexless marriages, impotence—these all threatened eugenic progress. Ensuring the “right” populations were happily married and happily reproducing was vital to the eugenic conscience. To achieve these happy and productive marriages, eugenicist marriage educators transformed the discourse around happy marriages into explicitly eugenic discourse, applying their framework to pre-existing concerns in an attempt to form a voluntary eugenic framework. Through the analysis of marital education texts, the interplay between marital happiness and racial health, choice and coercion, and love and eugenics becomes clear. By examining how eugenicists portrayed the happy marriage as the eugenic marriage (and vice versa), our understanding of eugenics can expand beyond legal measures and coercive violence to encompass complex questions of choice and desire.

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Stretching back to the late eighteenth century, romance and sentimentality had been an aspect of the white American marriage. However, by the early twentieth century, sexual desire and mate selection took on a new importance. As men and women began interacting more and more as the ideology of separate spheres collapsed, new rituals of courtship appeared. During the late 1910s, these “dates,” as they began to be called, left the home and entered the public sphere: restaurants, movie theaters, long drives to infamous lovers’ lanes. Historians have estimated that at least a third of young woman coming to age in the Roaring Twenties engaged in sexual activities prior to marriage.3 By the dawn of the 1930s, this system of courtship and dating was entrenched within American society as American men and women competed against each other to find the most attractive and popular partners and to, hopefully, find love.4

Many Americans, however, believed that eugenics stood in direct opposition to courtship and dates and selection based on romantic attraction. Those who questioned the new science argued that eugenic policy—from sterilization to eugenic marriage certificates—removed love and emotion from marriage. Many newspaper headlines decried the loss of love: “Cupid Sneers at Eugenics” and “No Sterilized Cupid.”5 Cartoons emphasized the conflict between love and eugenics, such as one in Life that depicted a fit woman lifting weights kicking Cupid from her life with the caption “eugenics.”6 While, unsurprisingly, criticism of forced sterilizations was uncommon in this context of Cupid’s demotion, the fear that individual choice would be sacrificed in the name of eugenic progress was widespread.
Similarly, in 1914, during his time at Princeton University, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote and performed a music-hall ditty for the annual Princeton Triangle Show titled “Love or Eugenics.” Featuring lyrics such as “kisses that set your heart a flame or love from a prophylactic dame,” and with a woman singer proudly admiring her homely and muscular appearance (likely a male student in drag), the short tune lampooned the negative influence of eugenics in marital selection, echoing a wider questioning of eugenic love. 

However, simultaneous with this change in courtship and criticism of eugenics, the marital advice literature genre was booming—and promoting voluntary eugenics. By the 1920s after the First World War, marital advice literature was commonly available to most white households in the United States. Alongside information on courtship, gender roles, and sexual pleasure, marriage manuals and guides also promoted eugenic consideration in marriage. For instance, the 1918 Womanhood and Marriage by notable bodybuilder and health educator Bernarr MacFadden taught that marriage should only occur once the couple could be certain there was no hereditary disability in their bloodline: “the science of eugenics is taking a prominent place in public discussions today, and every young woman should endeavor to learn whether or not there are any constitutionally weak strains in the family which she is thinking of entering.” Popular among proponents and practitioners of physical culture, MacFadden and his teachings on eugenics reached a wide audience eager to think about health and wellbeing.

Similarly, other marriage manuals enforced a strict anti-miscegenation rhetoric, teaching their white audience that the offspring of mixed-race unions were bound to be eugenically unfit: popular physician and birth control activist William J. Robinson’s 1928 Sex, Love and Morality, for example, argued that interracial reproduction ought to be avoided “for it means putting a handicap on the child and we have no right to bring children into the world who are in any ways handicapped—physically, mentally or socially.” Horace J. Bridges’ 1930 The Fine Art of Marriage, too, taught readers that “chances of disaster when any white man or woman mates with one of the black or yellow race are so appallingly great that they should never be taken.”

Eugenic interest in marriage was not conceived in a vacuum: during the twentieth century, a rise in divorce rates terrified many marriage educators. By the 1920s, the chance of marriage ending in divorce was one in six, double the rate from forty years prior. Eugenicists were especially concerned with this increase in divorce because they viewed it as a potential racial threat. For these scientists, divorce was not an inherently dangerous thing: it was better, after all, for an unfit couple to separate than to stay married and reproduce. However, since most eugenicists deeply valued the traditional family structure (despite critics’ claims to the contrary), increased divorce rates threatened to destabilize the family and thus destabilize reproduction. While eugenicists expected unfit populations to divorce at high rates due to bad temperaments and low intelligence, they were dismayed at how many fit marriages also ended in divorce. It soon became clear to that fit couples not only needed to get married, they also needed to stay married. And that required happy marriages.

Lewis A. Terman, a psychology professor at Stanford University, was perhaps the most influential eugenicist fascinated by the question of (un)happy marriages. Today, Terman is best known for the development of the Stanford-Binet IQ test in 1916. A member of the American Eugenic Society and other similar organizations, Terman was drawn to psychometrics as a method to facilitate racial progress. Understanding intelligence as a simple Mendelian inheritable trait, his IQ test intended to locate both the gifted and the feeble-minded, the ideal and the problem. The process of forced sterilization relied on Stanford-Binet IQ test, with its hierarchical ranking of human ability. State laws allowed the sterilization of people with IQ scores under 70.

Terman’s other research, though not as influential, was no less as influenced by eugenics, namely his studies on sexuality and marriage. His first foray into the field of romantic happiness, Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity, co-published in 1936 with Catherine Miles, intended to identify possible homosexual and sexual deviants. The eugenic marriage was, by definition, a heterosexual one; sexual acts and identities other than heterosexual
were unacceptable. Terman developed his M-F test as a method to rank aspects of masculinity and femininity objectively to detect sexual or gender deviancy. Using methods from multiple choice questions to Rorschach inkblots, the M-F test could, according to Terman, locate the “healthy heterosexual” and the “homosexual invert.”

By identifying the pathologized homosexual threats to the heterosexual (and reproductive) family, Terman sought to strengthen the race by stabilizing the family.

Two years later Terman published Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness, in which he outlined the factors necessary for happy heterosexual marriages. Expanding on Sex and Personality, Terman argued that the happiest marriages were ones that adhered to gender roles. Happily married women did “not object to subordinate roles” while aggressive women tended to be unhappy in marriage.

Other factors for happy marriages included childhood background, relationship with parents, and relative sexual pleasure (though Terman, unlike some sexual educators of the period, concluded that the lack of female orgasm was not a “major cause of unhappiness in marriage”). For the most part, the book received praise from sexual educators, who saw it as a way to approach marriage education in the most scientific manner.

Robert Latou Dickinson, for instance, wrote Terman that “nothing whatever has happened to practical marriage studies more important than your book.” Eugenicists also sought to utilize the findings in their project of racial improvement. A review in the Eugenics Review, for instance, noted that Psychological Factors was of “particular value to eugenicists.”

The Journal of Heredity, a eugenics research publication founded by Popenoe, similarly gave the book a glowing review, which claimed that marriage education ought to be divided into “before Terman” or “after Terman.” Sexual educators and eugenicists alike saw Terman’s findings as a way to save marriage and, possibly, save the race.

In 1939, Albert E. Wiggam published an article in Good Housekeeping sharing Terman’s conclusions, titled, fittingly, “Science Blueprints Marital Happiness.” Wiggam was a popular advice writer on various topics of science, religion, psychology, and love. He was also one of the most influential proponents of eugenics for everyday white Americans, writing popular texts espousing racial betterment such as The Fruit of the Family Tree (1924) and The New Decalogue of Science (1923). Wiggam was a firm proponent of the eugenic conscience. In 1934, he published “Wanted: A Eugenic Conscience” in Bernarr MacFadden’s Physical Culture magazine, in which he presented the importance of good mate selection and encouraged readers to find a partner with “happy, healthy, and congenial germ-cells.”

Like Terman, Wiggam obsessed over the psychometric quantification of happy relationships. Later in his life, he became somewhat of a happiness-monger, providing quasi-psychological tips to “scientifically” increase happiness, often drawing from Terman’s findings.

For Wiggam, the happy marriage was a eugenic marriage, a connection he drew even more explicitly than Terman. Wiggam fully believed that eugenic marriages between fit partners tended to be far happier than others, emphasizing emphatically that eugenics was “not a plan for taking romance out of love.” While some eugenicists of the time scoffed at physical attraction and often portrayed attractive people (especially attractive women) as dim-witted and dysgenic, Wiggam saw physical attraction as not only a desirable trait but also one often connected to other traits such as intelligence and morality.

“Beauty is as deep as the human soul,” he argued, “as deep as evolution.” Wiggam feared that American women were becoming less and less beautiful and argued that eugenics could change that trajectory. He encouraged his readership to find attractive partners, to cultivate a culture of beauty admiration, for “every increase of beauty will mean an increase of physical and mental energy.”

Furthermore, Wiggam argued that eugenic marriages were the happiest marriages because of their fit children, arguing that disabled children caused unhappy and failed marriages:

Can anything more completely blast the romance of love than defective, neurotic and uncontrollable children? Does any thing keep the romance in love more permanently than healthy, happy, well-born children? When they see that a marriage into strong, healthy, stock means sound intelligent children, and a marriage into bad stock may mean defective children, it is bound to elevate the dignity, responsibility and beauty of marriage.

The eugenic baby was not just good for the race, it was good for individual couples as a foundation for marital bliss. Wiggam, alongside many other writers, conflated the eugenic marriage with the happy marriage, encouraging readers to chase this ideal relationship.

To reach these eugenic and happy marriages, Wiggam believed, necessitated the development of a eugenic conscience through widespread education. He reasoned that just as public health education about microbes increased voluntary sanitary measures such as handwashing, so too could widespread racial education lead to voluntary mate selection through a lens of racial betterment. Through the teaching of eugenic science, he believed, a new morality could be constructed, a new religion with a creed that called for acting in a manner that benefitted the health of the race.

With these eugenic concerns for happy marriages in mind and the presence of racial rhetoric within the genre,
the marriage manual as a whole comes into focus as a eugenic project with the goal of bettering or, at least, stabilizing the race. The audience of family advice literature was, after all, the exact demographic eugenicists encouraged to breed more: white, middle- to upper-class, respectable families. As one Good Housekeeping article entitled “Who Should Marry?” stated, “the majority of young people who read this article belong to this class,” the class which, for the sake of the race, should be encouraged to reproduce.  

This eugenic happy marriage was not new in any practical way, nor was the marital ideal of Terman, Wiggam, and marriage manual authors no different from the commonly accepted happy marriage of the early twentieth century. And yet, the framing of the happy marriage changed radically. Marriage manuals now provided scientific analyses on how to optimize marital happiness, drawing from researchers such as Terman and Popenoe. No longer was religion the source of marital knowledge. In a Progressive fashion, science now provided those answers. By rebranding the happy marriage as the eugenic marriage, modern marriage manuals presented a eugenic conscience, which could improve not only the race but also improve individual marital bliss. Despite claims that eugenicists idealized a cold and rational approach to reproduction, writers such as Terman, Popenoe and Wiggam, alongside the modern marriage manuals, reveal a belief that love and romantic and sexual happiness were not only compatible with eugenics but, in the eyes of some, required for racial betterment.

Nor was the eugenic conscience simply about shaping choice. It was far more complex: the ideal eugenic conscience would mold desire itself to support agendas of racial betterment. By instructing their white middle-class readers to marry the fittest candidate and to avoid disabled, diseased, or non-white people, marriage manual authors were not merely providing prescriptions. At the very core of their project was an attempt to transform what—and who—white Americans desired, to correct trends of faulty sexual selection. Marriage educators did not simply portray dysgenic people as unfit—authors depicted them as undesirable, unattractive, and the root of unhappy marriages. Through the promotion of a eugenic conscience, the modern marriage manuals sought to align pleasure with racism, desire with ableism, and personal choice with eugenics in their goal of racial betterment.

Perhaps the most useful lens through which to analyze this eugenic framework of desire and choice stems from the Black Feminist tradition: reproductive justice. Defined in 1997 by Loretta Ross and the SisterSong collective, reproductive justice is the “human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” It is not simply the right to make choices about one’s body and reproductive capabilities, but the right to make those choices free of oppressive structures that might limit true choice. In Killing the Black Body (1997), Dorothy Roberts interrogates further this question of choice. She inspects an incident in which an alliance between corporations and the state legally and economically coerced Black women into “voluntarily” receiving Norplant, an experimental contraceptive, and concludes that this choice was hardly a choice at all due to the external pressure: “forms of pressure can make a decision unacceptably involuntary,” she argued.

This same principle applies to the seemingly voluntary eugenicities of happy fit marriages. During this period of marriage education and eugenics, desire itself was shaped for a eugenic end: the happy marriage was—and had to be—fit, heterosexual, reproductive, and white. Any marriage that did not fit into this eugenic mold was by its nature doomed to unhappiness. In the end, no choice is made in a vacuum. These structures, like the eugenic conscience and the blissful eugenic marriage, while often all but invisible to the people they influence, have been consciously built with the intent of racial purity.

Endnotes

1. See Wendy Kline, Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 141–149.


18 Sexual inversion, the theory that homosexual women had the essence of males and vice versa, was the reigning theory regarding homosexuality during this period and the basis for Terman's test identifying both gender and sexual identities. For more on sexual inversion theory, see George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” *Salmagundi* no. 58/59 (Fall 1982–Winter 1983): 119.


20 Quoted in Kline, *Building a Better Race*, p. 141.


22 One notable critic of Terman's findings was Alfred Kinsey, who argued that in his own works that the conclusions of Psychological Factors were questionable at best. Kinsey placed much more emphasis on sexual pleasure than Terman, as well. See Peter Hegarty, *Gentlemen's Disagreement: Alfred Kinsey, Lewis Terman, and the Sexual Politics of Smart Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 49–53.


24 Ibid.


28 Albert E. Wiggam, *The New Decalogue of Science* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1922), p. 283. Wiggam was not alone in the assessment that eugenic marriages were the happiest marriages. Many physical cultureists too echoed this sentiment that fit (both eugenically and physically) marriages were the happiest. See “Never a Divorce for Physical Training Alumni, Say Rodgers,” *New York Tribune*, Dec 10, 1912.


33 Ibid., 296–297.

34 Ibid., 298.


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Shirley Caesar, DJ Suede, “You Name It!”: Evaluating the Challenges of Song Sampling
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Abstract

Song sampling is a popular trend in the American music industry. Although effective in attracting listeners, a common problem with sampling is when the sample contorts the music's original message and limits artists' control in representation. Such adverse effects are seen in DJ Suede’s 2016 remix of the gospel classic, “Hold My Mule” originally recorded by Shirley Caesar. This essay analyzes the sampling of Shirley Caesar's work, Caesar's response, audience reactions, and discusses larger implications of song sampling. This paper indicates the remix and subsequent social media #UNameItChallenge(s) highlight the significance of African American artistic contributions while simultaneously harming Caesar's brand by obscuring the message she shares with her global audience.

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Advanced technology has become the music industry's leading asset and, simultaneously, its leading obstacle. Recording hardware has downsized, allowing for portability, and recording software continues to make user-friendly advances, allowing novices and professionals alike to expedite the production of polished compositions. The Internet alone has increased society's ability to create and share these compositions on a global platform. When technological advances are coupled with musical borrowing, the product is sampling. A sample, as defined by Oxford Music Online, is “sound [that] is taken directly from a recorded medium and transposed onto a new recording.” Although effective in attracting listeners, a common problem with sampling is when the sample contorts the music's original message and limits artists' control in representation.

A prime example of issues in sampling centers around Shirley Caesar’s sermonette-song, “Hold My Mule.” This song experienced a national resurgence in 2016 when it was remixed by popular DJ and social media personality, DJ Suede the Remix God. The remix, which went viral, focused on a single sentence of Caesar's story. Following the remix's release, the “You Name It!” challenge incorporated dance interpretations to the remixed song. Originally, the song was about a man who experiences piercing ridicule for his expression of faith; however, the remix of the tune and the social media response highlight themes that extend beyond Caesar's message and brand as an internationally known gospel singer, Christian pastor, and evangelist.

In the following study, I analyze the sampling of Shirley Caesar's work in 2016 and the larger implications of this sampling. I argue that the remix, and subsequently social media's “You Name It Challenge(s),” harmed Caesar's brand by obscuring the Christian messages she shares with her global audience.

Sampling

In their 2012 book, David and Tim Baskerville discuss the field of music publishing, its subfields, and details for musicians and business owners to consider when entering the industry. According to the authors, sampling has two definitions that further classify “sound” and the processes of reutilization. First, it is the “process by which amplitude and frequency of some sound waves are measured and reproduced.” The second definition is broader and refers to different recordings of existing music being inserted into new music. This technique more succinctly describes the sampling in DJ Suede's remix and is the definition I adopt for the context of this paper. Moreover, The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) further indicates what defines “existing music” into two distinct categories. “The Song Itself” is the actual musical composition and “The Master Recording” is the particular recording (solely featuring instrumentation) the sampler seeks to use. A combination of this is called “The Master Recording and the Song.”

Business lawyer Sam Mollaei explains that because of these separate components, negotiations must be made with both the copyright owner of the song, usually the songwriter and music publisher, and the copyright owner of the master recording, usually the recording company that produces the record. Utilization of either requires negotiation of permissions (including a licensing fee) and other payments, such as
mechanical royalties for every copy sold. This is congruent with the Baskervilles’ work; they emphasize that for a song to be correctly sampled, permission must be granted from both the publisher and recording company of the original song. Without formal permission, the sampler may face charges for the damages, injunctions against their music, and removal of their sampled work.

Sources do not, however, mention receiving permission from the artist. This is due to contractual agreements between the publishers, the label, and the artist. Typically, the recording artist is paid an advance from the publishers and gives them permission to promote and release their music. Therefore, the artists of the original work are not typically involved in negotiations with the sampler because publishers and labels represent them in this matter. Of course, contracts vary from company to company, but generally speaking, this agreement dramatically affects the control artists have on their representation if their voice or work can be heard on platforms without their consultation.

**You Name It! (#UNameItChallenge)**


“Hold My Mule” is a sermonette-song in which Caesar tells the story of “a man called Shouting John.” John, she claims, joined “a dead church.” Caesar describes the church as calm, filled with dignitaries, not welcoming to dancing, shouting, and not believing in the gift of tongues as described in the Christian Bible. John joins this church and performs these acts as thanksgiving to his God.

The church became disgruntled and sent deacons to John’s house to warn him that he would be forced out of the church if he does not keep calm in the services. The deacons find John outside plowing the fields of his farm-home with an old mule. When confronted, John informs them that he is around eighty-seven years old and has many things for which to be thankful. John then says, “If I can’t shout in your church, hold my mule. I’ll shout right here.” Caesar inserts that she also feels like Shouting John and then leads her choir in the gospel classic, “I Feel Like Praising Him.” Over the years, Shirley Caesar has re-recorded and performed the sermonette-song on live television, positioning it as a staple in her repertoire.

In the song, as John explains the reasons he has to be exuberant in church, he mentions all of the crops he is fortunate enough to be able to harvest. He declares, “I got beans, greens, potatoes, tomatoes, lambs, rams, hog, dogs, chicken, rabbit, you name it!” In 2016, DJ Suede The Remix God sampled this line from the 2007 re-recording of “Hold My Mule” on Caesar’s album, *After 40 Years Still Sweeping Through The City* and released the remix titled, “You Name It.” The remix takes John’s list of crops ending in “you name it” and loops it for the duration of the song. The remix is faster than the original and adds an 808 bass, triplet high-hats, drum rolls, and an organ loop.

Instagram user, @_icomplexity superimposed the remix with a video compilation/meme that included the caption “Me: Grandma, what are you cooking for Thanksgiving? Grandma: . . .” followed by the video compilation featuring the “You Name It” remix as a response to the question. In the video and other subsequent variants, @_icomplexity featured several clips of celebrity reactions, acting scenes or dances synced to the rhythms of the remix. The DJ Suede’s remix and @_icomplexity’s video were both released early November and parodied what many homes, specifically African American grandmothers, were cooking for the holiday. Other parody videos included the “You Name It” remix in the background with social media users posting videos of themselves dancing to the beat. Some took the challenge and made rap verses to go along with Caesar’s line, which became the chorus of the remix. Many parodies that were not focused on dance centered around food. There are also video interpretations that display alcohol consumption, party, and dance scenes.

Actress Jada Pinkett-Smith (with the Smith family) and singer Chris Brown were among the celebrities who participated in the trend. They posted videos to their Instagram accounts that featured them in various shots dancing to the remix or syncing previously recorded dancing clips to the music. According to Instagram user, @_icomplexity, Chris Brown is responsible for naming the creative movement the #UNameItChallenge. Sometime after its release on social media, the audio of the remix was also released on music streaming services. The remix’s presence on social media, radio, and television created a viral sensation. For example, students at Claflin University played “You Name It” in the cafeteria, at parties, and in other facets of campus life.

**Reception**

As an indication of the significant and lasting attention the #UNameItChallenge garnered around the country, two key YouTube videos compilations showcase several of the most viewed #UNameItChallenge posts. The first video, entitled, “You Name It Challenge Compilation—Grandma What You Cooking For Thanksgiving,” was posted by hmm on November 15, 2016. It features several styles of dance that incorporate twerking, the milly rock, the hit dem folks, and
other forms of hip-hop dance moves. Some users personified animals, grandmothers, choir directors, or praise dancers. A few users performed dances that included what appeared to be sexually suggestive motions in rhythm with the music. The second video is entitled, “U Name It Challenge Video Compilation 1 Thanksgiving Anthem,” posted by Desroy White on November 22, 2018; this compilation features many of the same dance moves as the former. The latter post also includes clips of American National Basketball Association (NBA) stars dancing at their games with “You Name It” synced over the video. Jada Pinkett-Smith’s video, which included her family, was also included in the compilation video. One user recorded her rendition in a bedroom, wrapped in a towel, and featured twerking and pelvic thrusts to the beat of the remix. The comments on these two videos from viewers are primarily positive. Some of the comments on the first video celebrate African American contributions to popular culture, while others point out their favorite rendition in the compilation.

In the weeks following the #UNameItChallenge’s initial virality, several reports indicated that Caesar filed a lawsuit against DJ Suede the Remix God for improper use of her song. Thero.com and several other news sites falsely claimed that Pastor Caesar was attempting to sue DJ Suede for 5,000,000 dollars. Caesar released a statement via her Facebook account denying the lawsuit. There was, however, legal action that Caesar felt was necessary to protect her property and image. According to the statement, “DJ Suede, Empire Records, and another party” released the remix for profit without the knowledge or consent of Caesar. The statement reported that an accompanying music video, also released by DJ Suede, highlighted alcohol abuse, negative imagery, and misogyny. After multiple failed attempts to rectify the situation, Caesar and her lawyer thought it best to file a temporary injunction to “remove the video as well as cease and desist sales” in order to “protect Pastor [Caesar’s] legacy.” Moreover, Caesar claimed the “illegal release of the song has also prevented her from releasing a Thanksgiving-Christmas holiday album she recently recorded.” The receptions of Shirley Caesar and social media users reveal the lack of control and subsequent unintentional damage sampling can impose on artists.

Aesthetics

In order to fully understand the implications of DJ Suede the Remix God's sample of Caesar's song, one must consider the reasons why the incorporation of Caesar's song into “You Name It” is so successful. In Pearl Williams-Jones’ article, “Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic,” Jones discusses how Afro-American gospel music preserves African culture and simultaneously spearheads the establishment of the Afro-American cultural aesthetic. Instead of establishing a clear definition of aesthetic, Williams-Jones works through the idea of defining the Black aesthetic through reliance on the “black gospel church and the music associated with it." The idea of African American gospel music being “pleasing to the senses” is relevant in understanding the reasons behind the sampling of gospel music as well as why such samples are popular.

Black gospel derives and incorporates features from the African diaspora; these distinct features include “spiritualls, ring shouts, jubilees, chants, and camp meeting[s].” Williams-Jones points out that while these characteristics embody many Africanisms, “the process of syncretism” causes the music to sound Afro-American and not solely derivative of African culture. Additionally, Williams-Jones lists other unique features of Black gospel that highlight its distinct differences outside of Anglo-American gospel tradition. In part, these features include the following:

1. The use of antiphonal response
2. Varying vocal tone
3. Endless variation on the part of the lead singer
4. Religious dancing or “shouting”
5. Percussive-style playing techniques
6. A dramatic concept of the music
7. Repetition
8. Communal participation
9. Oral transmission of the idiom

Williams-Jones showcases these characteristics as evidence of Black gospel’s “self-identity” and asserts that this identity can be maintained while it simultaneously “nourishes” other cultures beyond the United States. Holistically, Williams-Jones asserts that these features are able to embody the Black aesthetic due the genre's unique combination of various Black art forms. Whereas other art forms can be viewed as singular, Black gospel must be viewed as plural as it includes “black oratory, poetry, drama and dance [and therefore] is indeed a culmination of the black aesthetic experience.” Williams-Jones calls for “the acceptability, respectability and universal receptivity of Black gospel music.” She states that it is “imperative that black gospel maintain strong self-identity and continue as the positively crystallizing element in the emerging black aesthetic.”

As Williams-Jones’ article was published in 1975, it is important to compare her agenda with the current reception and disposition of Black gospel music in society. Williams-Jones speaks on the idea of establishing what the Black aesthetic is. Today, forty-three years after publication, the Black aesthetic has been well established, as is evident through the advancements made in African American entertainment,
politics, education, science, fashion, and, of course, the various “Black art forms” Williams-Jones listed. Society’s recognition and reception of the African American contributions to these fields have helped to establish what Black beauty is, thereby creating the “Black aesthetic.” Additionally, African American gospel music today has a larger global audience. This is evident through increased international performances of the African American gospel genre and increased references and samples of African American church culture found in popular media. The certain aesthetic value in the utilization of gospel music is likely due to Williams-Jones’ idea of gospel being the melting pot for many other art forms.

Today, African American gospel music is one of the most targeted art forms infused in popular media. A wide range of branding teams and marketers seek to use this music to appeal to their audience. This is evident in the development of the #UNameItChallenge. Williams-Jones’ aforementioned list of aesthetically pleasing attributes are largely found in Shirley Caesar’s music. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many people familiar with the gospel music repertoire regard her as “The First Lady of Gospel.” According to Williams-Jones’ claim, the title would theoretically confer Caesar as a deposit of African American aesthetic value, which, therefore, made her image and voice particularly marketable for DJ Suede’s platform. This concept is upheld in one of the top-rated comments under the first video noted above that reads in part, “imagine America without African Americans lol . . . . .” Such a comment addresses the value that music and other artistic expressions in the video have as a representation of the African American community. Considering the elements of gospel embodied in these artistic expressions, the user’s comment aligns with Williams-Jones’ conclusion that Black gospel creates and embodies “Black aesthetic value.” However, the holistic nature of this type of representation can be harmful if the party holding the aesthetic value does not agree with the way or reason they are viewed as beautiful. Such disagreement, looking again to Shirley Caesar, complicates the effects of the sample and creates a juxtaposition of two images: one in recognition and appreciation of African American artistic value and another that essentially ostracizes Shirley Caesar from herself.

Conclusion

Once a severely marginalized genre, kept within the confines of the Black Church, African American Gospel or Black Gospel music has evolved into a genre that is heard and loved around the world. The melting pot of Black aesthetic value that rests in the genre of African American gospel has made it highly sought-after in many markets. This is evident in DJ Suede the Remix God’s remix of Shirley Caesar’s “Hold My Mule,” which birthed the #UNameItChallenge. The power of gospel embodying Black aesthetic is revealed in how the sample caused DJ Suede to gain much notoriety, as is evident in the 43,000+ posts with the hashtag #UNameItChallenge on Instagram alone, not including YouTube, Facebook, and other variants of the hashtag.

While social media’s response was mostly positive, the craze of social media opened the door to widely shared misrepresentations of Caesar’s brand, according to Caesar’s own assessment. This is attributed to the fact that the appropriate steps for legal sampling and exchange (according to ASCAP) were not initially taken, and therefore image and video usage agreements were not defined. Caesar and her lawyer released a statement confirming these details and informing the public of the need for injunction against DJ Suede the Remix God. At present, DJ Suede’s music video is still unavailable online; however, several other video compilations that feature DJ Suede’s remix are accessible through social media. This includes the creative work of @icomplexity whose videos also display some of the same imagery contested by Caesar. Moreover, the extent of legal action between Caesar and DJ Suede remains unclear as the remix’s audio is again accessible through streaming platforms. Such a case presents the need for further research that addresses artists’ rights on a broader scale, including artists who are not songwriters. Further research will also be beneficial in gauging the limits on freedom of expression for social media users. Still, this case-study highlights the interwoven complications of music sampling and its implications on represented artists. In spite of the virality, longevity, and acclaim of “You Name It” and the #UNameItChallenge, the contexts of DJ Suede’s remix stifled Caesar’s relationship with its success and stripped Caesar of control over her brand.

Endnotes

4 Ibid., 78.  


14 For the purposes of this paper, I consider aesthetic the “conception of beauty or art: a particular taste for or approach to what is pleasing to the senses and especially sight.” “Definition of Aesthetic.” Accessed February 22, 2019. https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/aesthetic.


16 Ibid., 378.

17 Ibid., 373.

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Instagram Posts

Food Insecurity at a Large, Public University: A Closer Look at Residential Meal Plans and Race
Rachel Medel, University of California, Los Angeles

Rachel Medel is a recent graduate of UCLA with a Bachelor of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies and Political Science. Some of her research interests include race and ethnicity, food justice, and environmental justice. While she is currently exploring fields of study, Rachel plans to pursue a PhD in Sociology or American Studies.

Abstract

This study investigates the following questions: how do different university meal plans correlate with residential students’ experiences of food insecurity (FI) at a large, public university? How, if at all, is this process racialized? How do students respond to this meal plan system? To answer these questions, I conduct a mixed-methods study of 399 undergraduate students who have lived on-campus at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I hypothesize that there will be a stronger correlation between lower meal plans and experiences of FI and that more students of color will have the lowest meal plan than their Non-Hispanic White counterparts. Through an online questionnaire, I have students rank indicators of FI on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree or from Always to Never. Each question represents its own variable which I measure on the IBM SPSS Statistics Software. This study’s qualitative aspect is an analysis of recurring themes in 130 responses to an open-ended, optional portion of the questionnaire. The findings largely correspond with my hypotheses. These results bid us to ponder the nuanced, structural nature of FI on this campus and, consequently, the structural changes necessary to eradicate it.

Acknowledgements

The publication of this study is a testament to the truth that we can go much further when we go together. I have many people to thank. My deepest gratitude to Dr. Charlene Villaseñor Black for her affirming mentorship. Because of her, I know I have a place in the academy. Thank you to Dr. Leisy Abrego and Dr. Patricia Boling for their guidance at various stages of this study. Thank you to my Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship family for sharing their brilliance with me. Finally, thank you to my parents Orlando García and Esther García, my sister Geovanna Medel, and my best friend Elias Sanchez for their unyielding support.

“The idea of freedom is inspiring. But what does it mean? If you are free in a political sense but have no food, what’s that? The freedom to starve?”
—Angela Y. Davis

Introduction

This study investigates the following questions: how do different university meal plans correlate with residential students’ experiences of food insecurity at a large, public university? How, if at all, is this process racialized? How do students respond to this meal plan system? Food insecurity (FI) on college and university campuses has been the focus of a growing but a limited number of studies within the last decade. The existing research informs that FI negatively impacts academic performance, mental and social health, and overall health status (Hughes et al. 29). In addition, students who experience FI have a higher prevalence of obesity, weight loss, anemia, and other cardiovascular complications (Weaver et al. 1). While knowing the effects of FI helps us understand the gravity of the issue, in order to eradicate this issue, it is equally important to identify the root causes of it. The research on food insecurity on college campuses has largely disregarded students with meal plans and the meal plan system structure. The only study to my knowledge that explores the relationship between meal plans and FI on a college campus focuses on students’ usage of their meal swipes (Woerden et al. 1). The meal swipes usage approach highlights meal plan recipients’ behavior, trivializing the structural conditions on campus—such as the meal plan system and racism—that may foster FI.

Many broader population FI studies in the United States utilize the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definition of FI. For the purpose of this study, however, I utilize the Anderson (1990) definition, which defines FI as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (S. Anderson 1576). This definition extends the phenomenon of FI beyond the household-level, allowing us to explore the nature of FI among the residential community at a large, public university campus. I grounded this investigation in the theory of food justice, which is the belief that food security is a fundamental human right of all people (Rodríguez 8). By framing food security as a fundamental human right, we can transform how we view the roots of and solutions to FI (M. Anderson 113). To eradicate FI on campus, we need a clearer understanding of how FI permeates residential students and if students are more susceptible along racial lines.
Background

This study was undertaken at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). UCLA is a large, liberal arts institution in an urban location. The racial makeup of the undergraduate student body on this campus is the following: 28 percent Asian, 27 percent Non-Hispanic White, 22 percent Hispanic or Latinx, 12 percent International, 6 percent two or more races, 3 percent African American, 2 percent unknown domestic, less than 1 percent Pacific Islander, and less than 1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native (“Quick Facts”). The residential meal plan system on this campus relies on “swipes.” Every quarter, on-campus residents pay for a weekly preset number of swipes that grant them access to any dining hall or one entree, side, and beverage at any of the to-go restaurants. The meal plan options this campus offered for the duration of this investigation were the following: 11, 14, 14 Premier (14P), 19, and 19 Premier (19P) (“Meal Plans”). The numbers indicate the baseline amount of preset university-guaranteed swipes per week. The Premier meal plans give students the ability to swipe more than once during a meal period and allow unused swipes to carry over from week to week until the end of the quarter (“Meal Plans”).

A few factors might explain why food insecurity exists among on-campus residents, an otherwise presumed food-secure population, at this institution. One factor is that the lowest number of preset weekly meals on-campus residents can purchase is 11. This number is just above the maximum number of weekly meals (approximately 10.5) students with meal plans can receive to be eligible for CalFresh, the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP (“ECFR—Code of Federal Regulations”). The university states this meal plan exists for students with meal plans can receive to be eligible for CalFresh, the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP (“ECFR—Code of Federal Regulations”). The university states this meal plan exists for students who live off-campus on weekends (“Meal Plans”). Another factor is that, while there are a few on-campus food pantries, there are no accessible kitchens at the on-campus housing. A third factor is that students who live on campus are ineligible for campus meal voucher programs. These programs collect swipes that students donate and redistribute them as single-use meal vouchers to food-insecure students. Students with a meal plan, regardless of which one, are ineligible to receive meal vouchers.

Hypothesis

I hypothesized that there would be a stronger correlation between meal plans with a lower baseline number of meals per week (i.e., 11 and 14 meal plans) and experiences of food insecurity (i.e., utilizing on-campus and off-campus food resources, relying on snacks to fuel through the day, etc.). I also hypothesized more students of color would have the lowest meal plan than their Non-Hispanic White counterparts. In the responses to the open-ended, optional portion of the survey, I expected to find recurring themes of frustration and resourcefulness from food-insecure respondents.

Methods

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a mixed-methods study of 399 undergraduate students who have lived in the university’s on-campus housing. I designed an online questionnaire, basing many of the questions after the USDA survey questions to assess household food security (“Measurement”). I modified them to reflect how FI manifests on a college campus. All questions were asked on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree or from Always to Never. I asked students who lived on campus to select which racial or ethnic categories they identify with and what meal plan they purchased during the most recent school year they lived on campus. Each question represented its own variable. To account for the modified housing and dining operations due to COVID-19, I asked students to base responses on experiences from before the operations changed.

I sent the questionnaire to 51 undergraduate majors and minors departments’ student affairs officers or undergraduate advisors via email to be shared with students. To incentivize student participation, I linked a separate, optional form that respondents could fill out upon completing the questionnaire to be added to a drawing for a $150 US dollar gift card.

To measure the variables, I utilized the IBM SPSS Statistics Software. I cross-tabulated the meal plan variable with different indicators of food insecurity. This cross-tabulation allowed me to compare the racial compositions of each meal plan. It also allowed me to compare how respondents within each meal plan rated food insecurity indicators and experiences. To analyze the 130 free verse responses, I sorted through each response and grouped recurring themes.

Results

The racial makeup of the sample was as follows: 42 percent of respondents were Latino/x, 28 percent of respondents were Non-Hispanic White, 15 percent of respondents were Asian or Asian Indian, 11 percent of respondents were Multiracial, less than 2 percent of respondents were Black or African American, less than 2 percent of respondents were Middle Eastern or North African, less than 2 percent of respondents were American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the 399 students sampled, roughly 51 percent of respondents had the 14 Premier meal plan, roughly 21 percent of respondents had the 19 Premier meal plan, roughly 11 percent of
respondents had the 19 meal plan, roughly 10 percent of respondents had the 14 meal plan, and roughly 7 percent of respondents had the 11 meal plan.

The sample results demonstrate clear racial patterns across different meal plans. As meal plans increased in numbers and upgrades to Premier, Non-Hispanic White meal plan recipients increased in percentages. While only 14 percent of respondents with the 11 meal plan were Non-Hispanic White, that percentage increased to 24 percent for the 14 meal plan, 25 percent for the 14 Premier meal plan, 37 percent for the 19 meal plan, and finally to 39 percent for the 19 Premier meal plan. Compared to being 28 percent of the overall sample, Non-Hispanic White respondents were overrepresented in the 19 and 19 Premier meal plans. In contrast, Asian and Latino/x respondents constituted 83 percent of the 11 meal plan, with Latino/x respondents being roughly 66 percent of the meal plan recipients. In proportion to being 42 percent of the overall sample, Latino/x respondents were overrepresented in the 11 meal plan. As meal plans increased in numbers and upgrades to Premier, Asian or Asian Indian meal plan recipients decreased in percentages. While Asian or Asian Indian respondents were 20 percent of the 14 meal plan recipients, that percentage decreased to 15 percent for the 14 Premier, 13 percent for the 19 meal plan, to 12 percent for 19 Premier.

Responses to instances of FI reveal that FI is more strongly correlated with the lowest meal plans. When asked how frequently they track meal plan swipes, roughly 90 percent of respondents with the 11 meal plan responded that they tracked meal swipes usage often or always. This percentage steadily declined as meal plans increased in numbers and upgrades to Premier. For example, this percentage was roughly 82 percent for respondents with the 14 meal plan, 68 percent for respondents with the 14 Premier meal plan, 55 percent for respondents with the 19 meal plan, and 59 percent for respondents with the 19 Premier. When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “I would have benefitted from CalFresh and other government food programs or services,” respondents with the 11 meal plan agreed or strongly agreed at 45 percent. In comparison, respondents with the 19 Premier plan agreed or strongly agreed at 33 percent. When asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement, “I consistently had enough to eat,” respondents with the highest meal plans agreed or strongly agreed at higher rates. Of the respondents who had the 19 Premier meal plan, roughly 83 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Similarly, 84 percent of those with the 19 meal plan agreed or strongly agreed. In contrast, roughly 35 percent of the 11 meal plan respondents agreed with the statement. 0 percent of the respondents who had the 11 meal plan strongly agreed.

Responses

An analysis of the 130 responses to an open-ended, optional portion of the survey reveals four recurring themes: opinions, narratives, strategies, and suggestions. Some common opinions respondents shared were discontentment with the meal plan system, feeling restricted, and concerns over food waste. One student shared that regular meal plans do not offer students the flexibility they need, so they often find themselves short or having to waste swipes. Some personal narratives respondents shared were about rationing swipes, having more to eat on campus than at home despite being food-insecure, taking out loans to upgrade meal plans, and feeling stigmatized or humiliated for needing food resources. Several students recalled skipping meals due to a lack of swipes. Some strategies for dealing with food insecurity students shared were becoming resident assistants, eating larger quantities in fewer sittings, rationing swipes, asking other students to swipe them into dining halls, and taking food from the dining halls against housing policy. One student disclosed regularly sneaking fruit or snacks out of the dining halls to have for breakfast the next day. Another student revealed “finessing” entire sandwiches from the dining halls. In their words: “You have to do what you have to do.” In an act of solidarity, several food-secure students said they would swipe friends or other students who did not have enough swipes, with one student encouraging others to “spread the wealth.” Some suggestions students had for mitigating the issue of FI among students who live on campus is implementing an automatic swipe donation program so all unused swipes go to food-insecure students instead of to waste, making swipes directly transferable between students, and making FI students who live on campus eligible for CalFresh.

Discussion

The qualitative data helps paint a much fuller picture of FI among the student population who lives on campus. The opinions, personal narratives, strategies, and suggestions of students who have experienced or witnessed this
phenomenon help us better understand the reality of being assumed food-secure at the university and state government levels while not necessarily being food-secure. These insights illustrate that this space of nuance is a space where both frustration and resilience co-exist. It is a space where students fight for their will and right to eat and show up for one another.

These results bid us to ponder the nuanced, structural nature of FI on this campus and, consequently, the structural changes necessary to eradicate it. To combat the issue of FI among the student population who lives on campus, I propose a few solutions. In line with the food justice theory tenet that food security is a fundamental human right, I propose eliminating Premier plans at the university level. Instead, the university should offer students three meal swipes a day to use at their discretion. In addition to this, the university should allow students to pay for this plan in smaller payments. An alternative solution I propose is reducing the lowest meal plan option to 10 meals a week, so students who live on campus are eligible for CalFresh. This solution splits the onus of guaranteeing the human right of food insecurity between the state government and the university. In conjunction with that solution, I propose introducing communal kitchens on campus so students can prepare meals from groceries they purchase with CalFresh. To amplify the student voices who suggested this solution, I also propose making swipes directly transferable between students and automatically donating all excess swipes to food security programs on campus at the end of each quarter. These measures would be a good place to start but cannot substitute structural change to the meal plan system.

Note: For the 2020–2021 academic year, the university has added an 11 Premier meal plan option, a solution many respondents suggested. It should be noted this option was not offered the year this study was conducted. While this is a step in the right direction and may provide students more flexibility around planning the meals they do have, it does not tackle the root of the issue.

Limitations

It is possible that participation in this online study may have been more appealing to food-insecure or at risk of being food-insecure students. While the economic class has a large bearing on FI, this study does not assess how household income played a role in these results. In addition, different departments have different protocols for sharing questionnaires with their students. Only four departments confirmed forwarding the questionnaire to their students. Consequently, Latino/x students were over-represented in the sample, while Asian or Asian Indian students were under-represented. While Black or African American, Native American, and Middle Eastern or North African students were roughly proportionately represented in the sample, the low number of responses may not accurately represent the larger groups’ experiences. Finally, this study’s results may not reflect experiences of FI on campuses with different meal plan systems or different student demographics.

Conclusion

I came to this project through my work with the Office of Residential Life at UCLA. While working closely with the residential Latino/x community, I witnessed food insecurity among students who lived on campus with meal plans, a generally presumed food-secure demographic. I wondered if these experiences were the same for students across different meal plans and varying racial or ethnic groups. I also wondered what the affected students had to say about the experience. While this study’s findings answer much of the initial questions I had, they still give us much to consider. Can the current meal plan system coexist with food security for all students? If it can, why has it not? What changes need to be made? What are we going to do with this information?

This study’s significance lies in its foundational premise that food is a fundamental right of all people and can exist in places where we least expect it. This unequivocally includes students with meal plans. A better understanding of what conditions foster this issue helps us create more effective solutions instead of defaulting to treating the symptoms of FI through meal voucher redistribution programs and food pantries. In light of the recent national conversations about racial justice and inequality, I bid the university to take a more critical approach to eradicating FI on campus. If the university does not reconsider its current meal plan system, I remain hopeful that the student body will demand their fundamental human right to food security on campus.

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"They stole our story": Intersectionally Conscious Feminist Perspectives on Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* as Told Through Twitter

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**Abstract**

Hulu’s streamed series, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, has garnered significant attention as a result of its provocative premise in which the abrogation of women’s reproductive rights is at the center of a dystopian society. *Handmaid’s* has been widely received as an allegory for how women’s reproductive rights are presently threatened in the United States. That said, the series has also been the subject of significant criticism because of its lack of racially conscious nuance, given the U.S.’s legacy of slavery, rape, and forced reproduction. This paper argues that the disparate reactions to the series are a microcosm of the ongoing fissures between white feminisms and the feminisms of women of color. Further, this analysis highlights how viewers of the show have utilized Twitter as a digital platform by which to express their frustration with encoded historical markers of racialized femininity being applied to the imagined experiences of white women. Rather than relegate viewers’ Twitter comments to the margins, this paper intentionally forwards their dialogues on Twitter to demonstrate the significance of social media commentary as a relevant contribution to the field of academia.

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Behind every great black woman is another great black woman. And behind me, have been some of the greatest black women I know. They have supported all my endeavors, including this work. None of this would be remotely possible without the inspiration of my Mère Joyinn, the amazing insights and proofreading of my Tati Melinda, and the endless love of my Grand’mère Marie Erla. This is dedicated to all of my foremothers and the black women freedom fighters, survivors, and thrivers that came before me.

*Mwen rennen nou tout. Mes pou beni’m ak tout souzi yo mwenn te bezou p’oum vole ak klere. Mwen espere ke mwenn fè nou tout fye.*

**Introduction**

On June 8th 2019, reality television star Kylie Jenner threw what has been called a “Handmaid’s Tale Themed Birthday Party” (LeSavage 2019) and posted photos of the celebration on social media. People roundly condemned Jenner’s actions, pointing out that the show she based her party on depicts a post-United States dystopian society in which the present day abrogation of women’s rights has reached its completion resulting in the state sanctioned sexual enslavement of women. More disturbing still, many also acknowledged how Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* series is itself an appropriation of the historically traumatic experiences of sexual exploitation faced by black women during American chattel slavery.

There exists a distinct tension between audience discourses that address Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. On the one hand, there is the discourse that praises the show and its relevant focus on the assaults against women’s rights in the U.S. On the other hand, there is another discourse which has criticized Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* for its lack of racial nuance and its appropriation of black women’s painful history with sexual exploitation under chattel slavery.

I argue in this article that the disparate reactions to Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* on Twitter are a microcosm of the ongoing fissures between white feminisms and the feminisms of women of color. I also assert that this divide and simultaneous marginalization of women of color within mainstream gender justice movements is what has allowed for the continuance of white women’s use of the “slavery metaphor,” such as in Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, to illuminate their experiences with patriarchy (White 15). Finally, I posit here that the existence of social media sites such as Twitter has enabled the intersectional ignorance of this age old issue to be more readily visible on a larger scale than it was in the past. These problems can be pointed out, dissected by audience members, and publicized much more easily via social media as a part of a larger discourse on the issue. These digital social platforms give viewers an access point by which they can point out the problematic handling of racial and gender dynamics in entertainment media on a much larger scale than ever possible before.

I focus on Twitter as a crucial platform that everyday people can use as a space of critique and resistance. I am situating this article within the sphere of digital humanities, as it is a social media specific analysis of written perspectives on *The Handmaid’s Tale* series that have a 280-character limit. Utilizing Twitter as an archive, I identify recurring motifs, vocabulary, and patterns of expression that have circulated in posts in order to track the popular themes and major priorities of the social media conversations surrounding the
show and its handling of gender and race. Thus, what my research contributes is a Twitter driven examination of the intersectional pitfalls within Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* that demonstrates the significance of social media commentary as a relevant contribution to the field of academia.

**A Note on the Original Source Material:**

**Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale***

In terms of the 1985 novel on which the streamed series is based, common ways of analyzing Margaret Atwood’s work are grounded in the understanding of the literature as a mimetic work that foregrounds the “striking similarities that constitute the social problems existing in contemporary society” (Matthews 654). This view of the book falls within general understandings of the speculative fiction genre as a site of subversion. In her article “Gender, Ontology, and the Power of the Patriarchy: A Post-Modern Feminist Analysis of Octavia Butler’s *Wild Seed* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale***,” Aisha Matthews argues that, “the genre’s reality-bending nature lends itself directly to the interpretation of the parallel (real world) struggle to recognize, understand, and empower the ‘other,’ as its tropes encourage us to explore what makes us who we are and to question if we are more different that we are the same” (Matthews 637–638). In the view of many, works like Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* actually bridges gaps between women by recognizing commonalities of experiences with patriarchy.

In her analysis, Matthews does acknowledge that Atwood’s novel, “deals exclusively in presumed whiteness” but believes that in spite of this, the book “examines the purpose of human life, particularly for women in a world devoid of free will” (Matthews 637). Therefore, from this perspective, utilizing enslavement as an ironic metaphor might potentially be seen as appropriate and poignant. That said, through the forwarding of intersectionally conscious audience receptions to the Hulu series via Twitter, this paper demonstrates that a significant portion of the show’s viewers actually see the usage of enslavement in the aforementioned allegorical fashion as unethical and offensive.

**Racialized Bodies and Histories as Sites of Exploration**

In “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” bell hooks explains that for white people interacting with “the Other,” or people of color, is a way for them to leave behind the world of ‘innocence’ and enter the world of ‘experience’ (hooks 23). In this way, people of color are exoticized and their bodies are regarded as sites of exploration for white people to interact with in order to be “changed in some way by the encounter” (hooks 24). I agree with hooks, however, I wish to add that said sites of exploration and interactions with the other are not merely limited to literal exchanges with racialized bodies and can in fact extend to the specific histories of oppression that belong to those bodies. Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a prime example of this, as the series projects the historical experiences of enslaved black women onto modern day white women in order for viewers to have entry into a reality in which white women experience the full consequences of being stripped of bodily and sexual autonomy and freedom. *The Handmaid’s Tale* series in this sense functions as a thought exercise that explores what life would be like for white women if America became a dystopia. The fundamental problem with this experiment is that the fictional dystopian experience surrounding the predominantly white female cast in the show is in fact black women’s historical reality. As such, the show is not simply speculating what life would be like if women lost all of their rights. Rather, *The Handmaid’s Tale* series more pointedly serves as a cautionary narrative and access point for the white female imagination to grasp what it would be like if enslavement was transposed onto them.

While it could be tempting to see the enslavement allegory in both the novel and the subsequent entertainment media as an appropriate and salient tool that illuminates gender oppression faced by *all women*, in doing so, this view ironically takes part in the sidelined of the perspectives of women of color who, for ages, have made the argument that race and gender cannot be treated as separate issues if the conversation is to truly include them. Accepting the “presumed whiteness” of the novel and the marginalization and tokenism of women of color in the show in favor of focusing on the unifying potential of the enslavement allegory is all too similar to the fallacy behind the “All Lives Matter” argument because it completely misses the point. In reality, the multiple layers of oppression that women of color have historically experienced have fundamentally defined the differences in the ways that they and white women experience struggles with patriarchy.

**Twitter Analysis**

In my analysis I identified discourses on Twitter that engage with *The Handmaid’s Tale* series’ handling of race and historical appropriation. In order to do so, I searched on Twitter for threads that contained notable racially conscious terms that have appeared in online periodicals and blog posts focused on the handling of race within the Hulu series specifically rather than all conversations about the show. Each search I conducted contained the phrase “Handmaid’s Tale” in conjunction with a “race conscious” phrase that narrowed down the results to conversations that focus on the topic of race specifically rather than all conversations about Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. 
Reimagining Black Women’s Herstory

The first race conscious phrase that I worked with was “black women.” When I searched for “Handmaid’s Tale black women” nearly all results pointed towards the way the series lacks intersectional nuance. @marinashutup whose Tweet was written in a dialogue format stated, “the handmaid’s tale: what if slavery happened to black women: ok well here’s the thing—handmaid’s tale: what is [sic] slavery happened to WHITE women” —@marinashutup 2018

The author’s use of the dialogue format skillfully allowed for the illumination of both the ahistoricism within the show and the show creators’ decisions to ignore the outcry from those who would choose to point out such a misstep. To demonstrate how much this resonated with other Twitter users, one only needs to look at the 254 retweets and 1,340 likes that this brief post garnered.

Furthermore, the conversation that this Tweet initiated spurred comments predominantly about the unrealistically colorblind and post-racial ideology of the series. Some commenters believed that Margaret Atwood’s original novel, which the show was based on, while problematic, made more sense than the series in this regard, as the latter includes diversity at the surface level but does not meaningfully engage with the real world implications of markers of difference on the characters. In response to the original poster, @in_media_ras makes this point very clear when they replied to @marinashutup’s Tweet with, “It made so much more sense in the book bc they were concerned about the decline of white children. I think the show wanted to add diversity but I don’t think it executes it well” (@in_media_ras 2018).

@in_media_ras’ Tweet hints at the series’ glaring lack of an adequate intersectional race conscious framework within the show. This issue is further exemplified in Tweets by @beckyslayer that evoke black women’s herstory to make the race issue within the show clear. @beckyslayer states, “The handmaid’s tale is hardly ‘dystopian.’ They literally just reimagined institutional slavery and the experiences of enslaved black women to apply to ‘all women’ (mostly white women) hence all of the references to ‘going north’ to Canada to escape totalitarianism” (@beckyslayer 2018). @beckyslayer’s analysis is powerful in that it clearly identifies elements within the show that echo the days of enslavement, which is ironic considering the predominantly white female protagonists of the series. Later in this particular thread, they say that the “reimagining” within the series is really a way of exploring what if all of the above “happened to western white women?” (@beckyslayer 2018).

Further, the very framework of The Handmaid’s Tale series as a vehicle to raise awareness about the past, present, or speculative future is therefore flawed as it is rooted in parallels to American chattel slavery while largely ignoring the fact that modern American reproductive politics are inextricable from historical race politics (Roberts 9). In her book Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty, Dorothy Roberts explains that from the start of African women being enslaved and trafficked to America there was a “brutal denial of autonomy over reproduction” (Roberts 24). To viewers with an intersectional point of view the show’s “reimagining” of enslavement whitewashes and obscures the realities of not only the past, but also the present, and any realistic future by minimizing the role that race plays in the lived experiences of gender based oppression as faced by women of color as opposed to white women.

Despite being a show centered around the issues of gender based violence, it does not make much of an effort to acknowledge how the essentialist mythology of racial inferiority, the legal regulation of enslaved women’s offspring, and the economically profitable nature of enslaved women’s procreation, etc. were all foundational to the way in which modern reproductive politics have been constructed. Thus, without the explicit recognition of the historical abuses of black women’s reproductive and bodily autonomy, any discussion about reproductive politics lacks depth which is why so many viewers take issue with the show’s premise.

A White Harriet Tubman?

In the “Handmaid’s Tale harriet tubman” search there are plenty of threads with Tweets that point out the ways in which many viewers believe that Harriet Tubman was co-opted by the show. One user stated, “Handmaid’s Tale is accurate if Harriet Tubman was blond” (@hypeman 2019). This Tweet references the main character Offred/June played by the blond Elizabeth Moss who, in the final episodes of the second season, tries to flee to Canada on Gilead’s version of the Underground Railroad but at the last minute decides to stay behind after giving her baby to another fleeing handmaid. Instead of escaping bondage, June turns back to join the resistance movement despite knowing that this would likely result in her re-enslavement. In response to the episodes in which Moss’ character returns to join the resistance movement, Twitter user @jatovia expressed frustration at what she saw as an example of the show’s reimagining and theft of an icon black woman’s herstory when she stated that, “the handmaid’s tale is white women’s harriet tubman resistance fantasy complete with the double barrel shottie, only the protagonist lacks the fortitude to actually pull the
trigger, the race politics of the show are TROUBLING to say the least. I guess it’s masterfully shot tho” (@jatovia 2018). @jatovia’s Tweet is particularly impactful in pointing out the uncanny similarities between Harriet Tubman and the show’s main protagonist such as the “double barrel shot-tie” and uses sarcastic wit to identify this particular problem as a symptom of the series’ wider issue with race.

Hulu’s *Handmaid’s Tale* attempts at minimizing the impact of race on experiences of gendered oppression ironically makes race a more pronounced feature of the show rather than erases it completely. The explanation for this is related to what Toni Morrison called the, “Africanist presence” (Morrison 5) in her book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. The Africanist presence is essentially an inescapable phenomenon in American literature in which the spectre of “blackness,” and all that is associated with it, looms over and impacts the reception of a narrative regardless of if a black individual is or is not the focus of a text. Morrison states that, “The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this” (Morrison 17). Although originally in reference to American literature, the concept of the Africanist presence can be applied to American entertainment media as well and Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a perfect example of this. The Hulu series demonstrates the Africanist presence most notably in its use of American enslavement, an issue inexplicably linked to blackness, as an allegory to address the potentially “dystopian” future of America in the event that the ongoing attacks on women’s reproductive rights become extremist. Ironically though, the show’s creation of a fictional system that is both steeped in the Africanist presence and simultaneously colorblind unfortunately results in the allegory being received as sloppy and insensitive to viewers with an intersectional awareness.

**Is Nothing Sacred? The Appropriation of Trauma and Pain**

Moreover, the conversation does not end there. If one examines the searches that do not specifically mention race, but still include phrases that have become racialized, it becomes clear that this conversation can be found under many umbrellas. One such term that has become racially charged is *appropriation*, since in recent years it has largely been used to describe when white people take elements of the cultures of peoples of color without any acknowledgement of their significance and oftentimes without paying homage to their origins. So, for this next search I used the combined phrases of “Handmaid’s Tale appropriation.”

In some Tweets there are many explicit references to appropriation as it relates to enslaved black women’s experiences. For instance, one Tweet by @LizWFab said, “Handmaid’s Tale is Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl. “mic drop” (@LizWFab 2019). This Tweet referenced the autobiography of Harriet Ann Jacobs which laid bare the struggles with sexual exploitation and motherhood that black women widely had to face under enslavement. The visceral pain of this lived experience is evident throughout Jacobs’ book such as when she wrote, “When they told me my newborn babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (Jacobs 119). Having to contend with the ever present threat of rape and the inevitable theft of one’s children were practically inescapable realities for enslaved black women and the echoes of these women’s lives can be heard in the storylines of the fictional handmaids. It is therefore not at all random that @LizWFab referenced Jacobs’ autobiography as the text was clearly foundational to the creation of June’s storyline in both the novel and Hulu adaptation.

That being said, those who see *The Handmaid’s Tale* as merely being “inspired” by Jacobs’ and other black women’s experiences and commend it for using those stories as the foundation of a cautionary allegory about the present attacks on women’s rights are completely missing the point that people like @LizWFab are making. This issue is far from new, however, and can find its roots in white women’s historical use of slavery as a metaphor for their experiences with patriarchy. As Deborah Gray White once stated, “For antebellum black women . . . sexism was but one of three constraints. Most were slaves, and as such were denied the ‘privilege,’ enjoyed by white feminists, of theorizing about bondage, for they were literally owned by someone else” (White 15). Unfortunately, *The Handmaid’s Tale* series, as @LizWFab pointed out, finds itself bringing the legacy of this issue into the 21st century by prolonging the employment of the intersectionality ignorant metaphor.

Another instance in which the word appropriation was used to address the intersectional issues within *The Handmaid’s Tale* universe is a Tweet that says, “Atwood’s ‘Handmaid’s Tale’ in its literary&visual rendering is a direct appropriation of BW’s experiences. Atwood is the literary Kim K” (@josephlboston 2017). In this Tweet @josephlboston puts a spotlight on Margaret Atwood’s original source material which later spawned the creation of the Hulu series. In doing so, the individual puts forth their perspective of the book and the show as examples of black women’s experiences being appropriated. They then sardonically compare Atwood to Kim Kardashian, a white celebrity who has been
widely regarded as a serial appropriator of the black female aesthetic, demonstrating just how vast and multi-faceted this issue truly is.

Conclusion

The one thing that is absolutely clear regarding the Twitter discourse surrounding *The Handmaid’s Tale* series is that many viewers are frustrated with its mishandling of intersectionality. For some, their frustration takes the form of acerbic humor chock filled with references to popular culture and for others it comes across as unfiltered anger. Nonetheless, the one fundamental commonality among all of these individuals is that they use Twitter as a major platform to share their critiques on Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. These social media commentators have brought to platform to push for meaningful inclusive change by raising awareness regarding persistent racial issues that have been routinely ignored in entertainment media.

Coda

On a personal note, I started off as an average viewer of *Handmaid’s*. I had seen advertisements for the show on the NYC subway and heard it was supposed to be “subversive” and “radically feminist” so I dragged my mom through the series with me. I thought she would be interested in its unapologetic pro-women stance, however, I could not have been more wrong as evidenced by her persistent and inexplicably bored reaction to the show. Then one day in our kitchen as I grilled my mother on why she did not like the series, she gave it to a white woman.”

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Labor and Surveillance in 21st Century Persian Gulf Fiction
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Abstract

This paper analyzes Deepak Unnikrishnan’s Temporary People, a collection of short stories about contemporary migrant worker experiences in the Persian Gulf. It argues that in states like the United Arab Emirates, poorer, low-skilled migrant workers are constantly under Gulf surveillance. This surveillance strives to make ‘ideal migrant workers’ by centering migrants’ time and bodies around labor. At the same time, Unnikrishnan’s novel complicates contemporary portrayals of migrant workers, acknowledging that despite the systematic oppressions in their lives, they are agentive actors and have roles and identities in their host countries beyond their occupations. The paper thus opens new conversations about the issues migrant workers face by exploring the complex connections between Gulf power, ambitions for economic growth, and migrants’ personal lives and relationships.

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Introduction

Migrant workers have trickled in and out of the Persian Gulf since the 1950s. Today there are nearly 23 million migrant workers in the region and foreign nationals comprise over 50% of the workforce in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.¹ Most of them originate from Global South countries in Asia (Nepal, India, the Philippines) and East Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda).² As Gulf states continue to invest in mega-projects and gain international capital from big businesses and oil production, the demand for migrant workers increases. Unfortunately, the migrant labor systems in these states are ripe for abuse. Through the exploitative kafala migration system, workers’ employment in private and unmonitored Gulf companies,³ and Gulf states’ refusal to implement United Nations policies for guest workers,⁴ migrant laborers are constantly denied autonomy and rights within their host countries in the Gulf. These practices make it easy for employers to mistreat them without any legal consequences. Although no singular migrant or migrant journey is the same, and there are undoubtedly some who have had positive experiences and employer relationships, the countless instances of abuse of poorer, low-skilled workers cannot be ignored.

In this article, I examine Deepak Unnikrishnan’s Temporary People (Restless Books, 2017), a collection of stories and poems about South Asian migrants in the Gulf. The work received global acclaim especially because it, as reviewer Amit R. Baishya explains, provides “narrative and figurative shape to [migrants’] pasts, bodies, tongues, and homes that conditions of temporariness dismember and render spectral.”⁵ Unnikrishnan’s work is also part of a growing group of Gulf fiction about migrants, adding to the likes of Saud Alsanousi’s The Bamboo Stalk (2013) and Mohamed el-Bisatie’s Drumbeat (2010).

In his work, Unnikrishnan uses metaphorical descriptions of Gulf cities and the migrant body to critique how migrants are dehumanized and objectified within the region. As the author imagines in several narratives, Gulf countries—through intimate configurations of migrants’ time and bodies—strive to produce the ‘ideal migrant worker’ who can work ceaselessly and not require further resources from the state. This dystopic scenario further reveals how migrants are diminished from being complex individuals with needs and identities to only being workers. As is indicated, for Gulf companies and governments, migrant workers are simply tools to achieve urban and economic growth, and should thus only exist or be seen if they are working, or not at all.

Notably, urban scholars and anthropologists such as Ahmed Kanna, Michelle Buckley, and Yasser Al Elshehtawy have explored how migrant workers are excluded from spatial and political rights in Gulf cities. This paper builds upon their works by examining literature to investigate representations and the effects of labor demands on a daily and deeply personal level. Unfortunately, while literary works addressing the migrant experience in the Gulf have recently been growing in number, literary scholarship on these works remains scarce. By examining this fiction, we can see the tangible impacts of expectations for endless economic and urban growth within the Gulf. At the same time, through literature we can also reach more nuanced understandings of the many roles migrant workers play in their host countries, as well as their depth as individuals and as actors affecting social and political change. Finally, examining literary representations of these particular migrant experiences allow
us to imagine and advocate for changes to prevent undue migrant labor exploitation in the Persian Gulf.

Context

Modern Gulf labor migration began in the 1930s, when the British began importing foreign workers from South Asia and the United Kingdom into the region to serve as colonial administrators. Migrants were prevented from integrating within their new communities, so that they could be “used a source of discipline and control” for the colonial apparatus, a model that would re-emerge in the present. After World War II, oil became the most important global commodity at the same time as the discovery of massive reservoirs of oil in the Gulf. The region was forever transformed.

By the early 1970s, colonial independence and immense wealth accumulation allowed Gulf Royal Families to become the political rulers of their respective states. They created modernization plans based on the elite’s global economic ambitions, but that did not heed the capacities or needs of local Arab labor. The regional workforce also had a history of engaging in labor resistance and nationalist movements. It was thus imperative to hire foreign workers who would not become long-term residents, but would instead work as long as needed and not claim political, social, or economic rights. Hiring foreign workers therefore allowed Gulf rulers to consolidate their power over the economy and oil production and exclude citizens from it, thus reinforcing their political and economic authority.

Since then, Gulf employers have deliberately hired migrants from regions with high levels of poverty such as South Asia. In the kafala system, workers can only be employed when sponsored by a citizen or company, but this prevents workers from controlling their employment. In addition, with increasing populations of foreign labor, states offer education, healthcare, and employment benefits only to citizens, ensuring that they remain loyal to the autocratic economic and political structures of the state. Ultimately, the status quo in the Gulf has made foreign labor “an essential element of society” while also ensuring that native populations remain in power. However, as Temporary People reveals, these aims are not only supported by legal and social structures, but also by rendering migrants controllable by authorities.

Body of Work: Labor Demands, the Migrant Worker’s Body, and Resistance

Temporary People begins with a poem about migrant workers’ labor. “There exists this city built by labor, mostly men,” the third-person poetic voice says, “who disappear after their respective buildings are made.” The following lines describe the laborers’ responsibilities, from brick-laying to cleaning glass. Once these tasks are completed, we learn that “the laborers, every single one of them, begin to fade, before disappearing completely,” while some become ghosts “haunting the facades they helped build.” Their disappearance and invisibility ironically contradict the poem’s title, “Limbs,” a synecdoche indicating what about the laborer is considered important. It is only the migrant’s limbs, the functional body part that can build and work, that has permanency by being visible to the readers of the poem. As soon as the building is completed, the migrant loses importance and essentially no longer exists.

Later, in the short story “Birds,” the narrator continues using the trope of the migrant body to explore the violence faced by workers in Gulf States. The protagonist Anna Varghese, a South Indian nurse, works to “tape” migrant workers who fall down while constructing towering edifices in Gulf city centers. Specifically, Anna’s job is to find these fallen men and “put them back together with duct tape or some good glue, or if stitches were required, [patch] them up with a needle and horse hair.” The narrator’s descriptions of these grotesque bodily traumas and their treatments underscore that the migrant is dehumanized, such that his body is treated like a pliable toy or an animal. As the narrator reveals in a stoic tone, even “pedestrians mostly ignored those who fell outside the construction site, walking around them, some pointing or staring,” indicating that this violence is a common, normalized occurrence. In addition, this civilian indifference to migrant suffering indicates that they tacitly support the hierarchical order in which Gulf businesses remain in powerful control of foreign workers.

Anna is good at her job, instinctually finding every remain of the fallen laborers, “including teeth, bits of skin,” so the narrator suggests that she is “part-bloodhound.” The narrator once again weaves the animal with the human, dehumanizing the migrant characters and their bodies. Comparing Anna to a “bloodhound” also suggests that she is ruthless and bloodthirsty. However, the narrator later describes her maternal care for workers, “gently touching” their faces and “stroking their hair or chin” while repairing their bodies. The contradiction between these two aspects of Anna ultimately reveals how, despite her docile nature and being a migrant worker herself, she unwittingly acts as an intermediary between Gulf construction companies and their laborers. She safeguards these companies’ control over the migrant body at work sites, ensuring that it stays effective while working. In doing so, Anna perpetuates Gulf companies’, civilians’, and governments’ cycles of violence against migrant workers.
As the narrator suggests in the earlier story “Limbs,” Gulf cities are fundamentally built by migrant laborers. As such, the immigrant body itself becomes an investment for Gulf governments and companies, a commodity that must be maintained and used well to ensure further capital gain. Thus, bodies in “Birds” are dismembered and taped, stitched, or glued back together countless times to ensure that the migrant can keep working. In this way, even if labor conditions and working time weaken the migrant body, Gulf companies can guarantee the longevity and success of their investment. In “Birds” the narrator resolutely states, “Few workers died at work sites; it was as though labor could not die there.”

It is as if the companies’ policies regulate not only laborers’ work hours and duties, but they permeate into workers’ bodies and determine if and when laborers could be injured or die.

When describing the growth of the city in “Birds,” the narrator remarks, “The city was a board game and labor its pieces, there to make buildings bigger, streets longer, the economy richer. Then to leave. After.” Here, while its pieces, there to make buildings bigger, streets longer, the narrator remarks, “The city was a board game and labor in injured or die.” It is as if the companies’ policies regulate not only laborers’ work hours and duties, but they permeate into workers’ bodies and determine if and when laborers could be injured or die.

In the story, Dubai manufactures laborers that do not have to be imported and could never tire, injure, or die. The narrator adds that this ‘perfect’ workforce also speaks “perfect Arabic and had foreknowledge of Arabic culture—eliminating any problem of cultural assimilation—and had a short life span of twelve years, after which they would die in the desert, seamlessly leaving the state when their service was no longer needed.”

In this eerily retooled time and body, a human’s life is shortened to only when he is young and productive, thus becoming what I call the ‘ideal migrant worker.’ For Gulf employers, this worker does not demand any community, individuality, or resources. Although an exaggerated story, “In Mussafah Grew People” exposes current disregard for migrant autonomy—and the value of their existence—in favor of Gulf economic optimization. In other words, migrant workers should only exist to work, because they are otherwise worthless.

Furthermore, the narrator’s emphasis on the contrast between the natural and the manufactured body underscores that demands on real migrant laborers are wholly unnatural. The manufactured laborer can also be considered the embodiment of Foucault’s “docile body,” one that is susceptible to labor and modes of modern discipline, like surveillance. Foucault writes that this body is “susceptible to specified operations, which have their order, their stages, their internal conditions, their constituent elements . . . It is the body of ‘exercise’ and ‘manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits,’ a body of useful training and not of rational mechanics.”

The migrant labor workforce envisioned in Unnikrishnan’s work is comprised of bodies conducive to meeting the demands of labor and discipline without complaint, and are accordingly predisposed for the discipline systems Foucault discusses.

However, as the story continues, readers learn that the labor project is ultimately suspended. It is not interrupted by ethical concerns (as one would imagine), but because the lab-produced workers “took to the street near what was going to be the tallest structure in the world, and went on strike in a country where dissent is not tolerated.” Despite their unconventional creation, these migrant workers do not remain just workers, but become individuals who actively resist the restrictions of Gulf labor control. This possibility is also discussed in urban scholar Michelle Buckle’s work. In “Locating Neoliberalism in Dubai: Migrant Workers and Class Struggle in the Autocratic City,” she contends that despite the growing limitations of neoliberal and autocratic
cities like Dubai, workers continue to respond to unfair treatment through protests and strikes.\(^\text{26}\) Relatedly, in Unnikrishnan’s story “Le Musée,” these laborers wage violent war against Emirati citizens. They also have established a functioning, advanced community in the middle of the desert, a new space based on their needs.

During the war, the leader of the rebels, the Commander, begins abducting Emiratis.\(^\text{27}\) The Commander forces the abducted into a living exhibition which he calls the Display, where they are given homes, produce, and livestock, but are not afforded privacy and are forbidden from leaving or contacting others.\(^\text{28}\) He compares them to “living war trophies,” conveying that they are just like show pieces or dolls.\(^\text{29}\) Ultimately, the abducted Emiratis are inclined to war trophies, conveying that they are just like show pieces or dolls.\(^\text{29}\) Ultimately, the abducted Emiratis are inclined to the will of the migrant rebels, who manipulate their relationships, bodies, and households, such that even “parents and siblings never saw each other again.”\(^\text{30}\) The narrator indicates that it is as if the abducted are “behind bars” but also in “open court,” a contradiction that shows how the Emiratis are now objectified and lose autonomy, and controlling them becomes entertainment.\(^\text{31}\) In this dystopia, the Commander creates a distinct temporality and space in which migrants invert the control of time, body, and visibility that was previously exercised on them.

Although the migrant rebellion ultimately fails, the aggressive take-over envisioned within the story lays bare the actual hostilities shown to migrant workers in the Persian Gulf. As *Temporary People* shows, Gulf authorities do not see the migrant worker as an individual with agency, but only as a conduit to fulfill ambitious urban and market growth.

**Conclusion**

Although the stories in *Temporary People* follow imagined lives, they are rooted in real issues facing migrant workers in the Persian Gulf. This work shows that the migrant is constantly subject to Gulf authorities’ control of its activities and relationships. The migrant body is an object to be controlled, to contort in countless ways to work without injury or death, and then rendered irrelevant when its tasks are fulfilled. It is as if Unnikrishnan asks: how much more can we expect from the migrant body?

Within the other stories in *Temporary People*, although migrants are intended by Gulf bosses to *only* be workers, they are also depicted as individuals with complex identities, desires, and roles. We see a testament to the importance of this portrayal today, as the global reach of COVID-19 has left many Gulf migrant workers stranded, jobless, and at risk for contracting the disease. In this way, the virus has aggressively shown that Gulf authorities, citizens, and privileged residents must look beyond the “worker” and recognize these migrants as individuals with rights. Migrant workers cannot be hidden away in work sites and expelled once their work is completed; Gulf citizens and governments have social and moral responsibilities to care for them. It is upon us as informed readers to hold these Gulf powers accountable for their actions and ensure migrant workers obtain their rights to live and work in humane conditions.

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Creating India: Exploring Colonized Histories and Mythologized Realities in Megasthenes’s *Indica*

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**Abstract**

The following paper is a critical reading of Megasthenes's *Indica* which is at once India's oldest extant, and most referenced, history, geography, and ethnography, reproduced until the point of its absolute authority and ubiquity. Megasthenes's source text requires further critical engagement to place the work in the tradition of produced knowledge on the Indian Subcontinent, and to assess, using it as one model, the systems by which the West defines the East. In viewing Megasthenes, who first populates the Indian subcontinent for the western gaze, as a "proto-colonial" thinker, this essay will consider the historical text as a space for colonial encounters, that is to say that the settlerism fundamental to colonial power will appear instead in the ways a culture's history is usurped and settled with certain imagined histories. It will also view Dionysus as Megasthenes's primary agent of settlement within the text and explore the ways in which the deity becomes a figure of coloniality. When exploring the larger tradition of the West's discursive historicizing of the East, Megasthenes's *Indica* finds itself relevant to postcolonial discourse in the modern discipline.

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I would like to thank every project of fragments and non-written history that have come before my own. This paper is dedicated to my aji and tata and my ammama and tata taught me the power and joy of imaginations, and my various language teachers who enabled me to turn my imaginations into scholarship.

**Introduction**

The project of Hellenistic history found new import in the post-Alexandrian world. As the Macedonian conqueror traced his way across frontiers of Asia which had been largely untouched by Greek exploration and military campaigns, he engendered revived interest in projects of geography and ethnography across the Hellenistic empires. These historical missions, often part of ambassadorial campaigns in the empires successive of Macedonian rule, became the first productions of knowledge gesturing towards global history. In 302 BC one such text, entitled *Indica*, was written as product of a peace treaty between the warring Seleucid and Mauryan Empires, which resulted in a diplomat, Megasthenes, being sent to the court of Chandragupta Maurya in Pataliputra. This paper will broadly consider the valences and imagery in the historiography of Megasthenes’s *Indica*, specifically those pertaining to Dionysus, and will analyze these features under the lens classical scholarship. Ultimately, the paper aims to (re)negotiate textual encounters between colonized and colonizer, and suggest, through one text, how Greco-Roman historiographical and commentarial traditions are fundamental mechanisms of imperial power.

**Terminology**

Throughout the course of this paper, the term “proto-colonialism” will be formed, utilized, and challenged in the context of Megasthenes's relationship with the Indian subcontinent. Broadly put, proto-colonialism points to a concerted effort by a political entity, and the members within, to occupy and assume control over another state, yet apart from that colonization which bloomed with European expansion in the 15th century. Proto-colonialism allows for the consideration of and engagement with discourse, thought, and activity which exist within some paradigm of colonialism and colonial approach, yet is distanced from the formation of modern statehood, capitalism, and biologically understood race. Specifically, the writing of Megasthenes will be placed in lineage with colonial rather than imperial thought on account of this paper's attempt to examine history as a tool of occupying imagined lands. While imperialism is rooted in expansion into new territories without necessitating settlerism, which is a foundational mode of colonial expansion, this paper will use the imagination of India put forward by Megasthenes as the colonized space, and the ideas, people, religions, and creatures whom he writes into the land as the settlers. In viewing the text as an intermediary space which can be colonized, or aid in the imagined colonization of its examined subject, the term proto-colonialism will serve to categorize the historicizing impulse within *Indica*.

Proto-colonialism should also be distinguished from postcolonialism. While proto-colonialism marks out behaviors, literatures, and epistemes which exist within a spectrum of colonial thought that predates European expansion, postcolonialism is an established and cohesive field of academic study which creates theoretical frames through which the legacy of European expansion can be examined. Further, postcolonial frames which specifically apply to South Asia fall under the umbrella of subaltern studies. The
proto-colonial impulse will be shown manifest in Indica in part through the application of postcolonial methodologies.

Settling Foundation Myths

The foundation myth is one of the most central facets of early history. Usually combining religious and cosmological stories with real geographies, across Indo-European societies foundation myths served as etiological records of a city or nation. The “founding” of India within Indica uses common historic and literary tropes of civilizing and savior narratives in describing how the land came to be settled, yet pushes these tropes in line with a colonial episteme:

Megasthenes speaks the speaker of his claim not as himself, but rather “Ἰνδοῖς οἱ λογιώτατοι,” the most learned Indians, linking his foundation myth to a culture of intellectualism, yet also to forms of ancestral knowledge and heritage. The tale describes the earliest days of India where the habitual practice of living apart was disrupted by the violent entrance of Dionysus. As Dionysus is able to reach with his army every part of India, and entirely resettle it, the land is established as originally weak and powerless, and despite his forceful entry, its people could not put up any form of structured and reliable defense. Indeed, in the following line Megasthenes notes that it is only the disease-inducing heat of India which is able to slow down Dionysus and his campaign, forcing them to take shelter in the mountains. 4

The similarities between both passages are striking, with Thucydides making explicit the danger of conquest that is depicted through Dionysus in Indica. At a later point Thucydides notes that these people did not build large cities nor accomplish anything of greatness, relegating them to the realm of inconsequentiality. 5 The Hellenes are saved by two related introductions to their world, the first, the Trojan War and the second, naval power. By encouraging themselves to take arms in war, and to navigate war by means of sea-faring, the Hellenes are able to save their population from the effect of their past unsteady ways. This is where Thucydides, an author most certainly read by a historian of the likes of Megasthenes, presents the Hellenes as something entirely apart from the Indians of Megasthenes. While the conquerors who unsettled the populace of ancient Hellas are unnamed and seen to be many in form and type, Megasthenes, while establishing the same sort of unstructured and uncivilized society posits a singular external figure who both disrupts and saves the land. 6 While the Hellenes save themselves, albeit by means of reacting to war, the Indians are saved by a foreign conqueror. It is this conqueror who eventually orders the city and coalesces the people into urban centers and structured formations; thus the Hellenes, equally ill-managed in their origins, are the victors of their own foundation myth, while it is Dionysus who is the victor of India’s.

Foundation myths derive their central importance to any culture on account of the past which they establish and the mechanism by which they alter or exemplify this past. The past India given by Megasthenes is a feeble and fallible land, inhabited originally by individuals who did not possess the good character or foresight to arrange themselves in structured cities, proving them easily conquered. The “foundation” of India occurred when Dionysus entered the land, and with all his force and wisdom was able to conquer it, and entirely rearrange it to bring individuals together in systems of structure, so that a conqueror such as him could not again take over. While similarities in the pre-structured state of the land can be drawn between Hellas and India, Thucydides leaves the Hellenes the agents in their own foundation, the populace itself fixing the errors of their past. Thus, while Hellas’s history is constructed upon a personal redemption, India’s foundation is constructed upon colonization. That is to say that only the presence of a foreign savior could aid the land, and in usurping any local foundation myths and settling instead the foundation myth of Dionysus, the land’s own development is intractably linked with colonial power.
Settling Governance Structures

Of equal consequence to the life of Dionysus are the consequences of his death. In a passage relating Dionysus’s death, and the reign of his children, Megasthenes gestures away from archaic India towards his own present:

After Dionysus ruled all of India for 52 years he died as an old man. His sons succeeded to the rule, always leaving the state to their descendants. Eventually, many generations later, the rule was dissolved, and the cities became democracies. (BNJ 715, F I.7)

Megasthenes describes the tenure of the Dionysian kingship, ruling for 52 years before dying, specifically from old age, distancing the figure from the violence during his early encounters in India. Further, upon his death his sons ruled following the same pattern of descent-based empire. Two distinct temporalities are given, the first, the set range of Dionysus’s reign which is one of the few instances of exact time given in Indica; the second, the range of Dionysus’s children’s rule from his death until the onset of democracy which is left undefined.7 In addition, two distinct methods of governance are purported, the first monarchal dynastic rule, by which Dionysus’s children established kingdoms which their lineage would control; the second democratic which arises without mention and results in the dissolution of the system established by Dionysus. By and large, scholars of ancient India note that democracy is unproven in the subcontinent without mention and results in the dissolution of the system established by Dionysus. To use history as mediating space in which settlement occurs, thereby replacing indigenous narratives of India, entering the land by force, installing himself as the king, and bringing to the land a grand civility and order. This is an imagined past, yet one which usurps the narrative of an indigenous India as being extant outside of Hellenic domination altogether, that is to say that Dionysus, in his settlement of India at “the earliest time” bound the entity within the historical, cultural, and traditional grasp of the Greeks. To use history as mediating space in which settlement occurs, thereby replacing indigenous narratives of self-becoming with foreign dominating narratives, comes to reflect the proto-colonial engagement of Megasthenes with the land of India, wherein his own documentation extends an invitation to settle into a legacy, and settle into a land colonized by imagined histories.

Settling a Tradition

The tale of Dionysus found in Megasthenes’s Indica is largely rewritten and reformed in the epic poem Dionysiaká
The epic exhaustively details the life of Dionysus, yet its main action is the travel of the deity to and from India. In Megasthenes, very similar narratives to the Dionysus in *Dionysiaka* are found, including his violent entrance into India, his army's coping with disease, and his anointing of his sons as the rulers of the land, yet there is one critical point of divergence. The *Dionysiaka*’s Dionysus returns back to the West, while *Indica*’s Dionysus dies in India. Throughout this paper, settlement has come to be understood as the foundational program of Megasthenes’ *Indica*. Settle the foundation myths, settle the religious histories, and settle the political narratives until the land is settled; yet if Dionysus left could it have been settled at all? The sort of settlement constructed by Megasthenes is not one of temporary rule or even rule from afar, but rather a settlement from within, internally driven and internally executed. Richard Stoneman in *The Greek Experience of India* has argued that Megasthenes’s project is one which makes India, “a kind of analogue of the Seleucid state, with the kind as the nodal point” (138). Stoneman is in some ways correct. The sorts of comparisons drawn between the Seleucids and the Mauryans gestures towards a sense of familiarity, but where Stoneman sees this gesturing as ambassadorial and diplomatic, this paper posits that the gesturing is colonial. For the project is positioned facing forward; it looks towards the past in specific and critical ways considering the mechanisms of India’s conquest, and considers the present in contrast to the land that Dionysus had occupied. In this turning from a western past towards an eastern present, Megasthenes invites his Hellenistic readers to consider the once-again-western future.

Megasthenes’s created India is far grander than the limited scope of this project as presented in this essay. He details the landscape and art, the people’s facial and bodily features, the animals which trot across the space; Megasthenes’s India is mystical and wonderous, yet with every mention of Dionysus it is fundamentally known. The movements taken by Dionysus during his colonization of India are mirrored in the extant works of the Hellenistic empires and predictable in the arc of the grand civilizing narrative. From his usurpation of its foundation, collecting the disparate people into cities, to his making of sustainable and public religious rituals, to his creation of a longstanding, yet not everlasting, monarchy, Dionysus civilized India. In his civilizing of it, the West civilized India, and if the West had civilized India once, then it was theirs to take again. Thus, Dionysus died in India and never returned to the West. This is the project of Megasthenes, to establish a pattern of settlement, and in this venture, to mark the land as already claimed by the Hellenes, just waiting once more for their return.

**Settling Postcolonialism**

There cannot be a discussion of India’s colonized ancient past, without confrontation with its recently colonized past. In developing the intellectual arc of colonial thought as one whose seedlings are planted by Greco-Roman historiographical traditions, an immediate impulse may be to directly link this coloniality with that presented first, by the Portuguese and French, and second and more notably, with the British, yet this linkage is tenuous at best. Rather than establishing Megasthenes as the creator of a coloniality seized, transformed, and adapted by historian and intellectuals of the British Raj, William Jones and Monier Monier-Williams among them, it is helpful to view both Megasthenes and British colonists as contributors to the same shared tradition, informing a trans-regional rather than diachronic reading of this historicization of India. In this trans-regional approach, one informed by postcolonial and subaltern studies, it is important to interrogate how to locate India within its own histories.

Postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha draws attention to this need through the methodologies of self-narration laid out in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, suggesting, “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.” At one end, this notion might stand in stark opposition to the study of the foundation myth itself as an act of postcolonial scholarship, yet the foundation myths of India mark out not one moment of origination, but an epic constellation of literary and cultural movements which bind the existence of Subcontinent to the existence of the Greco-Roman world. In this, the construction of “Indianness” may only be parsed through extensive reading of “Greekness.” In turn, some essential part of “Greekness” is constructed through its engagement with the peripheral and external, and by means of this, the foundation myths in *Indica* become revelatory facets of Greek identity. As Bhabha continues, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”

The modern notion of the Indian-self was not brought about solely in the current era, but piecemeal through various moments and movements of power and resistance, with its position in a global imagination first emerging through contact with the Greeks. The elaboration of this selfhood, and to the same extent the selfhood of the Greeks, necessitates the exploration of foundation myths as centrally motivating forces in the construction of modern national identity.
The suggestion here is not that the British colonizers of India re-packaged the image of Dionysus charging into India, but rather that the image of India itself was grafted upon by Megasthenes, Ctesias, Josephus, Pliny, Strabo, and Arrian well before the British sought after it. Through these grafts, identities central to “Indianness” and its opposition, “Greekness” and “Romanness,” began to develop.

There is a bewildering passage tucked in Arrian’s own Indica, in which he remarks, likely directly quoting Megasthenes, “Ἡρακλέα δὲ ὃνινα ἐς Ἰνδοὺς ὀδρκέσθαι λόγος κατέχει, περ’ αὐτοῖσιν Ἰνδοῖσι γιγανεκά λέγεσθαι,” which translates into English, Herakles, who, according to the prevailing story, reached the Indians, is said by the Indians themselves to be indigenous. Throughout this paper, I’ve used the word “indigenous,” γιγανεκά, to describe that which Indica lacks, yet perhaps the most generative notion is not to delimit the notion of indigeneity, but rather to expand it. What does it mean for “Indianness” if Herakles is Indian, and likewise what does it do to Greekness? These questions are products of a novel approach to Greco-Roman historiography which prioritizes how texts make meaning rather than the share of truthfulness they may purport. In a postcolonial embrace, those same questions of indigeneity which are germane to subaltern studies (i.e., what becomes of the racially Briton man born and raised only in Bengal?) find reference beyond their own era, back thousands of years to their historiographical instantiation.

Conclusion

India was the last frontier of Alexander the Great, the land he could not conquer. This would hold true for Seleucus I Nicator, who in an effort to build peace rather than long-lasting war sent his chief diplomat to sit alongside the Mauryans in the court of Chandragupta. Indeed, the last westerner who had taken control of India had been Dionysus, and though long past at the moment of Megasthenes’s visit, had been settled by the Seleucid historian into the narrative of India’s becoming. The other alternative to this is of course that Dionysus was not present in the tales told to Megasthenes in Indica, but rather became an agent of India’s imagined conquest, an imagination that was reified, refined, and given back to those who sought to enter the land. Having imagined the history of India as one already conquered by Dionysus, Megasthenes presents the land as colonized, with large facets of its culture including its foundation, its religious system, and its political system defined by Dionysus rather than by any native Indian.

Having colonized the land once before, Megasthenes seems to suggest that the land already belongs to the Greeks, and once the work is read through this lens, Indica becomes a work of colonial discourse, Megasthenes presenting to the Greeks the inhabitants of their colonies and flora and fauna within. The genre of history since its inception has been an embattlement space where the notion of self versus other is tested and defined, yet it is in Megasthenes’s Indica that India is not touched only as a fantastical creation and mythologized land, but is further considered as an established part of Hellenistic history. In using rhetoric mirroring authors such as Thucydides and employing tropes of civilizing that would have been understood as familiar to a Greek audience, Megasthenes writes about an India that is essentially Greek. By this, he is the first colonial thinker to approach the land, a proto-colonist, and settles it by means of his writing on its people, cities, religions, and beliefs, usurping local narrative and settling a foreign history within.

Endnotes

1 Stoneman 2018: 136 for more on Megasthenes as a figure in Alexandrian and post-Alexandrian history.
2 From 305 to 303 BC the Seleucids and Mauryans went to battle over the lands of Arachosia and Sogdia; the war was eventual won by the Mauryans, who sent the Seleucids back to fighting on their western front. The negotiated peace involved the marriage of Chandragupta Maurya to a Seleucid princess, the trade of 500 elephants, and a permanent seat for each empire in the other’s court. See Kosmin, Paul (2014), pp. 124–128.
3 Much scholarship on Megasthenes has been dedicated to his relationship with Brahmans, who would be considered “the most learned Indians.” It has been suggested that the work is written as much for a Brahmanical audience as for a Greek audience. See Stoneman 2018: 133–134.
4 “Ὑπερηφανωμένου δὲ γενεαμίου μαγέων καὶ τῶν τοῦ Διονύσου στρατηγῶν λοιμικῆι νόσωι διαφθειρομένων” (BNF 715, F/W/4).
5 “ό τοίχος ἐπανεσχέτου, καὶ καὶ ἄλλοι μεγάλοι, πολλοὶ ἤφθασαν ούκε τῇ ἀλληγμοροκοιμίᾳ” (Thucydides, I.2.2).
6 Another parallel to Dionysus’s campaign into India is the so-called “Aryan Invasion.” First proposed by Mortimer Wheeler in the mid-20th century, the Aryan Invasion would be the displacement of indigenous, Dravidian communities to the south of India by a tribe coming in from the western world. Wheeler suggested that the ancients, during the time of Megasthenes would have known more about this invasion of which now there is no record, archeological or otherwise. It is possible then that Dionysus is used as a metaphor for a real western campaign into the land. See Stoneman 2018: 148–150 for more details on invasion’s possible importance to Megasthenes.
7 This number of years is clarified to be span 153 kings in Arrian’s Indica, 9.9–12.
8 Doninger 2010: 380–381.
9 Take for example “Εἶναι δὲ οὖσα γῆ τοῦ βασιλείου ἐναντίον τῆς δημοκρατίας, everywhere on earth, Pseudo-Xenophon notes in the Old Oligarch, the best person, or the best element, is opposed to democracy (L.5).
10 Accorinti 2016: 12–18.
11 Subaltern studies describes a disciplinary subfield of postcolonial studies which focalizes the peripheral relationship South Asia holds with the central force of European empire. The field largely coalesces around a definition provided by Bengali historian Ranajit Guha in his 1983 work Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, and is expanded upon by Chaterjee (1993) and Chakrabarty (2000).
12 Bhabha, 2004: 2.
13 Ibid.
14 Arriamus, ed. Müller, 1846: 8, 4–9, 8.
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The Queer and Feminist Myth-Revision of Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”
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Abstract

Scholars tend to read Christina Rossetti’s 1862 poem “Goblin Market” divorced from its female erotic nature, opting to focus on the poem’s themes of merchant economy, eco-criticism, women empowerment, and Christianity instead. Though such scholarship is valid, it misses the opportunity to explore how and why does Rossetti uses female eroticism in “Goblin Market,” as it is the most defining aspect of the poem. Using Adrienne Rich’s 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” I will argue in this paper that by reading “Goblin Market” with Rich’s flexible view of female homosocial and sexual eroticism, the elusive nature of “Goblin Market” is overturned when read as a feminist, queer myth-revision of the Garden of Eden. By close-reading the meaningful similarities and differences between Lizzie and Adam and the goblin men and the serpent, these discussions culminate into a deeper understanding of “Goblin Market’s” central meaning, with Rossetti suggesting that women should form queer, homosocial triad unions with Christ so they can abandon the institution of heterosexual marriage that leaves women feeling unfulfilled and emotionally depleted.

In scholarship discussing the most subversive aspect of Christina Rossetti’s 1862 poem “Goblin Market,” the common adjectives that arise are “erotic” (Campbell 402), “controversial” (Hill 464), “confusing” (Rappoport 580), “odd” (Humphries 402), and “aesthetic excess” (Pionke 908). The poem tells the story of two sisters, Lizzie and Laura, and their encounter with nefarious merchant “goblin men,” who tempt women to buy their exotic fruit in an unknown exchange for the woman’s well-being. Laura succumbs to temptation by eating their fruit and slowly wastes away, pining for more fruit that she cannot seek out anymore; Lizzie tries to aid her sister by purchasing fruits for her sister (but not for Lizzie’s consumption), which upsets the goblin men as they try to force her to eat by smearing the fruit all over her face and body (lines 390–407). The next scene is where scholars are typically unable (or unwilling) to reconcile with the poem’s overall message, as when Lizzie eventually escapes and returns home, she exclaims to Laura in a Eucharistic like offering: “Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices/Squeeze’d from goblin fruits for you,/ Goblin pulp and goblin dew./ Eat me, drink me, love me/ Laura, make much of me” (lines 468–72), where Laura then “clung about her sister/Kiss’d and kiss’d and kiss’d her” (lines 485–6). Although only a handful of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s embraced the incestuous, homoerotic subtext of the poem in their arguments, most scholars agree that any homoerotic subtext is Rossetti’s poetic license in describing the fervor of receiving the holy sacrament. In more recent scholarship, emerging discourses on eco-criticism and the merchant economy concerning “Goblin Market” are entirely divorced from the homoerotic subtext of the poem. However, the homoerotic subtext can be reasonably accounted for in “Goblin Market’s” overall narrative—and in Rossetti’s biographical context as well—when one adopts a more flexible approach in close-reading and discussing female queerness.

Moreover, one could almost see Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” as a precursor to Adrienne Rich’s radical feminist and queer proposals in her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” where she describes the word “lesbian” as limiting the full range of female erotic relationships to “clinical associations in its patriarchal definitions” (Rich 650). Rich proposes that scholars should expand their definition of the lesbian experience for two distinct reasons: 1) Discover lesbian existence in a wide range of texts and, 2) Explore the full spectrum of female eroticism in homosocial and sexual relationships (Rich 650). Alongside quoting Audre Lorde, Rich makes the argument that female eroticism is unrestricted to one body part (or the body in general) and occurs through “the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic” and in cooperation with one another, making women “less willing to accept powerlessness” (Rich 650). In the context of “Goblin Market,” the incestuous eroticism between the two sisters serves the poem’s larger message of sublimating sexual desire from heterosexual relationships and into queer, homosocial triadic unions with Christ as the center of their union. By reading “Goblin Market” with Rich’s feminist and queer theoretical lens, I will examine as a feminist and queer myth-revision of the Garden of Eden in Genesis by close-reading the meaningful similarities and differences between Lizzie and Adam and the goblin men and the serpent. In doing so, these analyses culminate into a deeper understanding of “Goblin Market’s” central meaning, suggesting that women should form queer, homosocial triad unions with Christ so they can abandon the institution of heterosexual marriage that, Rossetti implies, leaves women feeling unfulfilled and emotionally depleted.
The goblin men in “Goblin Market,” much like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, reflects the different cultural anxieties of their period, from the serpent being associated with pagan fertility cults in Canaan (Viviano 19–20) to deceitful merchants in Victorian England who sold products that regularly effected the health of consumers. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, food adulterations by the merchant class posed a significant health crisis to society, regardless of social standing: food poisoning and death from adulterated food were not a rare occurrence and prompted societal outcries and governmental investigations into the matter (Stern 482). For example, in an 1857 book titled “Adulterations Detected; or, Plain Instructions for the Discovery of Frauds in Food and Medicine,” physician Arthur Hill Hassoll wrote about his many findings from investigating food vendors, including the various substances merchants used to change the appearance of their products, such as mercury, copper, and lead (Stern 487). These unethical business practices are reflected in the behavior of the goblin men, whose facial expressions are described as “leering at each other” (line 93) and “Signalling each other./ Brother with sly brother” (lines 95–96), revealing the goblin men as calculating and driven by the “interest of profit and exploitation” (Stern 494). There is a ubiquitous rule—similar to God mandating that Adam and Eve should never eat from the Tree of Knowledge—never to purchase fruit from the goblin men, with Laura initially telling Lizzie that “We must not look at goblin men./ We must not buy their fruits./ Who knows upon what soil they fed/ Their hungry thirsty roots?” (lines 42–5), with Lizzie later exclaiming while Laura becomes entranced by their merchant cries, “Their offers should not charm us./ Their evil gifts would harm us” (lines 65–6). The goblin men sell exotic fruit that “men [do not sell] in any town” (line 101), and much like the serpent who “was the most cunning of all the animals that the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1), the goblin men serve to sway women into disobeying God by luring them in with their innocent, woodland creature appearances and showering them with excessive affection, with the goblin men weaving a crown of “tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown” (line 100) for Laura and Lizzie being initially assaulted with hugs and kisses in their later encounter (lines 348–349).

Despite what Stern wrote in her article, as shown in Laura’s initial encounter with the goblin men, they are not wholly interested in profit, as a clip of Laura’s hair as payment was sufficient (lines 123–6), along with Lizzie trying to pay the goblin men with her coin and their reply being: “‘Nay, take a seat with us,/ Honour and eat with us’“ (lines 368–69). Lizzie initially warns Laura of the dangers of “loiter[jing] in the glen/ In the haunts of goblin men” (lines 145–6), as their friend Jeanie suffered the grave consequences of doing such:

... she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers . . .
But ever in the moonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow.
(Lines 148–50, 153–57)

Thus, the goblin men are revealed to be in the business of destroying women’s well-being—a notion which might relate to Rossetti’s feelings about the coercive nature of heterosexual marriage in general. In her 1885 prose Time Flies, she wrote about her favorite saint Etheldreda, who was a virgin despite being divorced twice, “After twelve successful years of contest, [she] ended strife by separating from her enamored husband. Thus, she fought the battle of life” (D’Amico 116). With Rossetti referring to Etheldreda declining to have sex with her “enamored husband” for twelve years and separating from him as her fighting the “battle of life,” this suggests that Rossetti places tremendous value on placing women’s sexuality in a separate sphere from men, as “succumbing” to heterosexual relationships makes women lose their self-agency. Such agency also extends to women’s relationship with Christ, as Rossetti privileges the virgin woman’s connection to Christ rather than the married woman, as the wife’s devotion is to her husband first then Christ whereas the virgin spouse “enters a marriage” with the Heavenly Spouse directly (Roden 48). With Rossetti rejecting two marriage proposals and remaining a virgin throughout her life, it is not unreasonable to read the goblin men as “agents of the patriarchy” (or, simply, heterosexual men) who seek to lure women into turning away from God—only to have them instead fixate on the goblin men and their produce (or marriage) at the expense of the woman’s well-being.

In “Goblin Market,” Lizzie takes on Adam’s role in the Garden of Eden, where Rossetti “improves” his moral character by making Lizzie completely unwavering in her faithfulness to God. In Rossetti’s 1883 prose Letter and Spirit, she writes that:

Eve made a mistake, ‘being deceived’ she made a transgression: Adam made no mistake: his was an error of will, hers partly of judgment; nevertheless both proved fatal . . . Eve diverted her ‘mind’ and Adam his ‘heart’ from God Almighty. Both cases led to one common ruin (D’Amico 126).
Rossetti stresses that Eve's transgression was due to her innocence and lack of guile, making her a vulnerable victim to the serpent, who is the master of deceit and uses their deception to “cajole” Eve into sin (D'Amico 125), effectively transferring the blame from victim to perpetrator. Rossetti also did not overlook the fact that Adam seems willing to let Eve take all the blame for disobeying God's laws, even though he was a willing participant: “the meanness as well as the heinousness of sin is illustrated in Adam's apparent effort to shelter himself at the expense of Eve” (D'Amico 139). In “Goblin Market,” however, Lizzie neither succumbs to temptation by eating theoblin men's fruit nor allows her “Eve” to be effectively “kicked out of paradise,” as her courage, love for her sister, and obedience towards God helps redeem Laura's life and keeps them both in “paradise.”

Although previous scholars argue that Lizzie is an allusion to Christ, I argue that scholars place too much weight on the “sacrificial” nature of her bracing the goblin men for their fruit. Lizzie did not intend to sacrifice herself to the goblin men, nor does she lose anything in their exchange: Lizzie anticipated buying their fruit with her gold coin (Rossetti 363–67), the goblin men attack her when she asks for her money back (lines 403–407) and then they grudgingly throw her gold coin back after Lizzie successfully resists them (lines 438–39). Therefore, reading Lizzie as an allusion to Adam instead of an allusion to Christ makes more sense in context of the poem. Additionally, in Rossetti's 1892 devotional prose Face of the Deep, she describes the biblical differences between men and women as follows: men, or the “right hand,” “runs the risk, fights the battles,” whereas women, or the “left hand,” “abides in comparative quiet and safety . . . Rules admit of and are proven by exceptions. There are lefthanded people and there may arise a lefthanded society” (D'Amico 139). While Lizzie primarily represents the “right-hand” in the poem, at the same time, she enjoys her “left-hand,” domestic duties with Laura: “Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows/Air'd and set to rights the house,/ Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,/ Cakes for dainty mouths to eat” (lines 203–6)—all duties done with “an open heart” (line 210), “content” (212), and Lizzie “warbling for the mere bright day's delight” (line 213). Lizzie embodies both the left- and right-hand characteristics displayed in Rossetti's prose, a gender fluidity that is exemplified in her writings about Christ and gender in Seek and Find: “in Christ there is neither male nor female, for we are all one” (Roden 48). Thus, it appears that Rossetti is advocating for a more subversive take on gender roles, where gender roles are fluid, and society is dominated by a type of proto-feminism that privileges female relationships.

As previously established, Rossetti appears to be arguing against women entering heterosexual marriages and, instead, advocates for more gender fluidity in women's roles and for a society that honors female relationships. In doing so, I argue that Rossetti seems to be also suggesting that women should form queer, homosocial triad unions with Christ, effectively abandoning the institution of heterosexual marriage that leaves women feeling unfulfilled and emotionally depleted like Laura and Jeanie. This message is especially apparent in the last few stanzas of “Goblin Market,” where conversely, the antidote for Laura's malaise is the goblin men's fruit juice smeared on her sister's body. Germaine Greer in her 1975 article writes that Laura's “salvation is literally that she makes love to her sister,” with Jerome J. McGann concurring in his 1980 article and elaborating that while the Eucharistic scene between the sisters is “patently erotic and sensual,” Laura feasting on the juice smeared on Lizzie's body serves her with a “negative fulfillment,” casting away her fixation on the goblin men's fruit and allowing her to “glimpse, self-consciously, the truth which she pursued in its illusive form” (Tobias 279). The truth, McGann argues, is the love from sisterhood that “fulfills the need for an alternative social order, divorced from the male ‘marketplace’ and exercising the threat implicit in independence—‘the demon of loneliness’” (Tobias 279). My main point of contention with McGann's argument is his last point, as I do not see Rossetti's fear of loneliness as the driving factor of her advocacy of seeking out an “alternative social order” in “Goblin Market,” rather that she sees the patriarchal tradition of marriage as a hindrance to women's spiritual growth and by fostering female relationships, women can have a stronger connection to Christ.

Moreover, one would assume that the poem would end with Laura and Lizzie embracing each other triumphantly; however, the poem ends on a different note. Years have passed since the sisters' interactions with the goblin men, where the sisters now “were wives/ With children of their own,” with Laura ending the poem with a sing-song chant with her children, praising the joy of sisterhood (lines 562–67). Since there is no mention of any other men besides goblin men existing in this poem (despite the insinuation that comes with the sisters being wives), how can their marriage and offspring be accounted for outside of heteronormativity? Notably, the punishment of eating the fruit also has an infertility side effect, represented in the grass and the daisies that Lizzie planted on Jeanie's grave not growing (lines 158–60), in addition to the fruit that Laura planted not growing (lines 281–87). By reading Lizzie and Laura's Eucharistic scene as a Richesque version of erotic, omnipresent sexual intercourse, their union may have helped in subverting the fruit's infertility effects, effectively making the sisters virgin mothers. The ending of “Goblin Market” exemplifies Rossetti's queer and feminist religious utopia: a society where women can rely on each other for complete support while also having a direct connection to Christ outside of a man's opinion. The sisters were able to birth
a new feminist norm into the Garden of Eden, making the last stanza less a call for heteronormativity and sisterhood empowerment and more a message for women seeking an alternative from the institution of heterosexual marriage.

Adrienne Rich’s argument for widening the scope of what scholars consider to be female queerness and eroticism adds another layer of nuance to “Goblin Market,” despite the amount of scholarship that already exists on the poem. The sharing of joy between the two sisters, with Lizzie happily offering her body to her ailing sister and Laura gladly accepting the offer, exemplifies Rich’s and Lorde’s point that female eroticism is omnipresent in female homosocial and sexual relationships. Although discourse on queer and feminist theory in literature accelerated in the 1980s, it also appears to be around the same time discourse on the queerness of “Goblin Market” dissipated. I find this interesting, as a literary critic and one of the pioneers of Women’s and Queer Studies Bonnie Zimmerman writes in her 1981 article “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism” that:

Feminists have not only pointed out the sexism in many canonical works but have also provided creative and influential rereadings of these works; similarly, lesbians might contribute to the rereading of the classics . . . such as Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” [that] might reveal a subtext that could be called lesbian (469).

Though I do not find a scholar’s sexual orientation essential in close-reading texts with a queer theoretical lens, I agree with her sentiment that it has been long overdue for scholars to examine canonical works for a female-centered queer subtext. It is possible that scholars’ aversion to uncovering female, queer subtexts is because of the stigma from the “radical feminist” discourses in the 1970s and 1980s academic sphere or because scholars do not want to claim that any canonical text is queer without direct biographical evidence. However, I have clearly shown in this paper that it is possible to reexamine canonical texts for a queer subtext without making any direct claims about the sexuality of the author—though I will add that scholars already presume authors’ sexual orientation by assigning them as, essentially, “heterosexual until proven otherwise.” Thus, scholars must adopt a less clinical definition of the female, queer experience, as such experience can be easily discovered in the most unlikely of texts.

Endnotes
1 According to the Victorian Poetry journal article, “Guide to the Year’s Work in Victorian Poetry: 1980,” Maureen Duffy, Jonathan Cott, Bonnie Zimmerman, Jerome J. McGann, and Germaine Greer wrote pieces on the lesbian subtext of “Goblin Market,” utilizing psychoanalytical literary criticism as the primary foundation for their arguments. Nonetheless, the scholars all end up settling on a heterosexual interpretation of the poem, establishing that Rossetti either stunted sexuality or a general repulsion of being touched by men (Tobias et al. 279–281).

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Putting the Jailer on Trial: The Iconography of Angela Davis and the Indictment of America

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Abstract

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the rise of what has been called a “world-historical movement,” in which social movements around the world forged global connections and understood their context-specific struggles as part of a broader historical arc. One of the ways in which this network of social groups forged connections was through developing a shared language based on commonly known and revered political icons. One such icon was Angela Davis. Letters, statements, and written speeches sent to the National Committee to Free Angela Davis and to Davis herself show that Davis’s personal narrative and ideology resonated with activists, politicians, intellectuals, and many others around the world. To those following the case, it provided a striking example of the U.S.’s injustices and a point of reference for comparison with other countries. This paper argues that iconography of Angela Davis became part of the basis for a transnational consciousness that was powerfully critical of the United States’ political, economic, and social status quo, and which framed the U.S.’s domestic injustices as part and parcel of other nations’ oppressions.

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I’ve never known Angela Davis, yet I have the feeling that I’ve known her for a long time . . .
—Valentina Nikolayeva-Tereshkova
Pilot-Cosmonaut of the USSR and Chairman of the Soviet Women’s Committee

Introduction

In The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968, George Katsiaficas posits that the global social struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s formed a “world-historical movement,” together posing a cohesive and striking challenge to status quo societal systems across the world. While social groups fought to win demands specific to their locales, they also understood their particular battles within the context of a broader world system. Accordingly, Katsiaficas notes that “the New Left can simultaneously be called one social movement and many social movements.” The glue that held this unity together can be conceptualized as what Jeremy Prestholdt has called a “transnational imagination.” According to Prestholdt, this is “a mode of perception that frames local circumstances within a global historical trajectory and shapes collective desires and actions as a result”—in other words, it is the type of sensibility which allowed the New Left to function simultaneously as one and many social movements.

One of pillars that supported this transnational imagination was a shared set of political icons that people used to understand each other’s distinct histories. This paper focuses specifically on one such icon: Angela Davis. Previous scholarship has examined Davis’s relation to the international left by asking how Davis herself was shaped by thinkers and activists outside of the U.S. Cynthia A. Young, for example, points out that Davis spent much of the years from 1960 to 1967 traveling between Frankfurt, Paris, London, and Havana, and upon her return to the U.S., associated more heavily with the Communist Party than with the Black Panther Party or conventional civil rights circles. Accordingly, Young argues that Davis’s view of domestic politics was impacted by her internationalist orientation, more so than the other way around.

This research builds on Young’s work by instead asking: what did Davis mean in the international left, including activists in the United States? In August of 1970, in an attempt to ultimately negotiate the freedom of three Black prisoners, a man named Jonathan Jackson led a botched kidnapping of a local California judge at the Marin County Hall of Justice. As the men attempted to escape with their hostage, a shootout ensued that left both Jackson and the judge dead. Police soon discovered that the guns used in the kidnapping were registered to Davis, who was promptly targeted by authorities with charges of aggravated assault and murder despite not having been on the scene. Davis’s FBI chase, arrest, and trial thrust her into the international spotlight and provoked an intense campaign to secure her freedom. By examining letters, declarations, and speeches from nearly every continent and from within U.S., sent to the National Committee to Free Angela Davis and to Davis herself, I will discuss how people in both the domestic and international spheres understood Davis’s criminal trial. In short, these documents show that the circumstances surrounding Davis’s trial turned her into an icon of the international left by providing social groups around the world with a reference point to understand domestic injustice in the U.S. and connect it to their local realities. Domestic activists also used her case as a reaffirmation of their critiques of...
the nation’s justice system. Discussing Davis's iconography allows us to better further understand the formation of a transnational consciousness among leftist activists during the 1960s and 1970s, and why this consciousness may have been specifically fostered, in part, by a critique of the criminal justice system.

Angela Davis as Political Icon

The efforts to ensure Angela Davis’s freedom were massive. In January of 1971, the New York Times wrote that the political campaign to free her was the “most broad-based defense effort in the recent history of radical political trials—more potent than that afforded to any of the Panther leaders or the Chicago Seven.” Of those who wrote to Davis and her defense campaign, some related to Davis as Black women, others as anti-imperialists, and yet others as fellow Americans disillusioned with their country. One of the notable features of the support that Davis received was that her supporters did not just wish for her freedom. Through all of the statements she and her campaign received, there ran a common thread: the criticism, whether implicit or explicit, that Davis was the victim of a repressive justice system serving as the spearhead of a morally bankrupt state. To support Davis meant to support not only her but all others who had posed a challenge to this system and its allies, both in the U.S. and abroad.

A sense of distrust towards the U.S. justice system was evident in many, if not all, of the materials sent in support of Davis. The police were no longer the stewards of social order: in the words of one Puerto Rican bishop, they employed “electronic espionage” to uphold a “totalitarian system.” According to the Declaration Concerning the Case of Angela Davis, they would even resort to “simple murder, as is proved by the police raid on the office of the Black Panther Party in Chicago.” Similarly, judges were not seen as reasonable and capable, but were thought to be “wild with racist hate” and committed “to [punishing], through [Angela Davis], the sacred rebellion of blacks in North America who fight for the rights which are birthright in all civilized countries and which in America the law of lynching denies them.” In this type of environment, supporters of Davis did not see any moral nor reasonable outcome as a possibility. One author wrote to Davis, “Everyone who has taken up your cause fully realized that your arrest and the charges brought against you are a logical conclusion to a whole series of arbitrary acts whose aim was to force you to keep silent . . . You are being tried for your convictions.”

The notion that Davis was being “tried for [her] convictions” in order to force her silence, explicitly stated in one letter but implicit in all the others, was a powerful one. It positioned Davis not as a prisoner but as a political prisoner. As Young explains, to see someone as a political prisoner was to see their label of “criminal” not as a neutral legal definition but as a justification for the state’s efforts to uphold its own status quo and thereby its own power. The idea of political prisoners was anathema to the legitimacy of liberal democracy, which was inherently meant to include protections for dissenters. Support for Davis’s case, therefore, did not simply equate to hoping for an outcome in favor of the defendant; it meant repudiating the basis of the entire justice process. Rosario Castellanos, the Mexican Ambassador to Israel, essentially voiced this sentiment when he wrote, “When the verdict is rendered will there be anyone in the world who will believe that an act of justice has been performed and not an act of vengeance?” asked. In the eyes of those commenting from an international perspective, it was not Davis who was on trial, but the U.S.’s legitimacy as a free democracy.

Some who wrote to Davis echoed similar thoughts in their critiques but couched them in explicit comparisons to the battles they had been waging in their own countries. For these groups, the social struggles they fought at home provided them a lens through which to understand Davis’s trial and express solidarity. From South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) wrote, “The oppressed and fighting women of South Africa, who have been, and still are victims of racial oppression perpetrated by a clique of white racialists, have everything in common with you and the just struggle of your people against racism.” Because South Africa’s history of racial apartheid resembled the U.S.’s, the ANC understood that facially neutral notions of justice were often rendered moot in the face of entrenched systemic racism. Similarly, the Korean Democratic Women’s Union in Japan supported Davis because they saw her case as an example of imperialist aggression, which they themselves were combating in Japan. They described themselves as “members of the Korean Democratic Women’s Union in Japan who are struggling for the independent peaceful unification of the divided fatherland and in the defense of the democratic national rights of Koreans in Japan,” and declared an expression of solidarity with “the anti-imperialist forces of the world over.” Indeed, the Union was part of a movement that arose in Japan in the wake of the Vietnam War, which prompted the rise of a transnational critique of Japan’s sub-imperialist role in Asia. In the same vein, the Arab Women’s League of Jordan wrote to Davis, saying, “We understand your case as part of a life-killing in Indochina and the Middle East.” As they saw it, the ties between the U.S. and Israel meant that they shared a common enemy with Davis. They wrote to her, saying, “To us, you represent the fighter against the imperialist state backing Israeli aggression against our people.” To the League, it only made sense that this repression they experienced in the Middle East would function against domestically oppressed
groups as well: in the same letter, they referred to the U.S. as a “suppressed society” and the FBI as a “reactionary body” threatening Davis's “life and liberty.”

One particularly notable dimension about the letters from the ANC, the Korean Democratic Women's Union, and the Arab Women’s League of Jordan was that they identified with Davis as women, specifically women with key roles in social movements. The ANC signed their letter, “Your sisters in the struggle,” and the Arab Women’s League explained their movement by telling Davis, “Arab sisters are fighting and resisting Israeli occupation and aggression backed by U.S. imperialism.” It is clear that notions of womanhood impacted the various authors work, albeit likely in different ways. Despite whatever those differences might have been, this gender-based solidarity would have struck a chord with Davis, who felt that the active and unapologetic work of Black women was necessary for Black liberation. In a 1970 letter to George Jackson, she wrote, “For the Black female, the solution is not to become less aggressive, not to lay down the gun, but to learn how to set the sights correctly, aim accurately, squeeze rather than jerk and not be overcome by the damage.” Davis and her supporters were, at least in part, bound together by a common commitment to demonstrating that women were at the heart of social movements.

Overall, the letters, statements, and speeches in support of Davis lead to two important takeaways. First, they affirm that the left’s transnational imagination of the 1960s and 1970s rested on a shared set of political icons and they prove Davis ought to be counted among them. Prestholdt does indeed identify her as one of these icons, though expounding on this point has been outside the scope of his work. Furthermore, Davis’s own writing and organizing have been heralded by many as central to leftist thought, especially concerning the subject of criminal justice. The novelty of this paper is the outside-looking-in approach, examining not how Davis was shaped by her international influences but how her iconography fostered transnational solidarity by providing a common language for activists around the world. Many saw their own struggles either reflected in Davis’s or directly related to hers, creating, as Katsiaficas identifies, the sensibility that the international left was at once comprised of “one social movement and many social movements.” Davis, in short, became the locus point onto which people projected their collective aspirations, dreams, and pains: “No woman is truly free while Angela Davis is incarcerated,” declared one letter.

Second, because Davis was catapulted to fame by her clash with the criminal justice system, leftist activists used Davis’s iconography as a medium specifically to turn the idea of criminality on its head. Though this idea is implicit in all of the materials sent to Davis and the campaign to free her, Bettina Aptheker arguably put it best: “If Nixon-Agnew are an appropriate executive; if a J. Edgar Hoover is the accredited judge of ‘loyalty’ and ‘patriotism,’ then, indeed, our beautiful Comrade Angela is a terribly dangerous ‘criminal.’” This development is particularly interesting given that just a few years earlier, President Nixon had been elected on a law-and-order platform popular with many Americans. Indeed, Davis’s trial was not only a unifier of the international left, but also of many on the domestic right. Many people took Davis’s presumed guilt for granted and saw her as emblematic of a “small group of warped romantics . . . determined to topple the structure of American society.” One opinion piece in the San Rafael Independent Journal, Marin County’s flagship newspaper, mocked the very kind of rhetoric prevalent in her letters of support: “Miss Davis is not being held to answer to criminal charges, she is being ‘persecuted.’” The accusations made against her are not based on any evidence, but are a ‘fraud and a frame up.’ Her only crime is that she is a ‘black woman.’ The real aim of the authorities who brought charges against her is ‘to terrorize all who fight against racism.’” As is well-established by now, this law-and-order rhetoric won out in the years since the 1970s as manifested in the rise of mass incarceration. However, Davis’s trial created, if not a complete inflection point, a moment of transnational resistance against the mainstream consensus that would soon emerge.

**Conclusion**

On June 4, 1972, an all-white jury found Davis not guilty on all counts after a 13-hour deliberation. She, along with countless others, rejoiced. “This is the happiest day of my life,” she reportedly exclaimed. Clearly, though, freedom had not come easily. Howard Moore Jr., one of the attorneys who had defended Davis, remarked, “It took a worldwide movement of people to acquit Miss Davis. Justice should be the routine of the system.” As Moore suggests, Davis’s trial stands out precisely because it reveals a moment of heightened global consciousness about the United States’ failure to fulfill its own foundational myths. Even as the nation’s court system put Davis on trial and many hoped for a conviction, many others around the world came to believe that American notions of innocence and criminality were warped. In this historical moment, therefore, lie two lessons: first, that iconography has the power to provide historical actors from discrete contexts with a common language to connect their particular social trajectories; and second, that this new shared consciousness can be used to contest long-held myths or narratives, broadening the conditions of political possibility.
Endnotes

1 Valentina Nikolayeva-Tereshkova, “From a Cosmonaut,” Box 4, Folder 14, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.


3 Ibid., 17.


5 Huey Newton, for example, studied the works of anti-colonial leaders and intellectuals, drawing from Frantz Fano’s idea of the “lumpen proletariat” and taking lessons on socialism from Mao Zedong’s “little red book.” Che Guevara was immortalized after his death in the romanticized, iconic image of the Heros Guerilla, which molded him as “a symbol of sociopolitical possibility and as a revolutionary role model.” See Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 87–88; see also, Prestholdt, “Resurrecting Che,” 511.


9 “Declaration Concerning the Case of Angela Davis,” December 10, 1970, Box 4, Folder 14, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

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13 Florence Mophosho to Angela Davis, May 12, 1970, Box 4, Folder 14, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

14 Arab Women’s League of Jordan to Angela Davis, March 8, 1971, Box 4, Folder 14, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.


16 Young, Soul Power, 204. Young also discusses how Davis herself helped formulate the idea of political prisoners in an essay which she wrote while awaiting trial in jail, which she later included in If They Come in the Morning. See Angela Y. Davis, If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance (London; New York: Verso, 2016).

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Shirley Graham Dubois, “Appeal of Mrs. Shirley Graham Dubois,” Box 4, Folder 14, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.


24 “Criminal Charges Ignored in Propaganda for Angola,” San Rafael Independent Journal, December 23, 1970, Box 5, Folder 1, Angela Davis Legal Defense Collection, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

25 Stern, “The Campaign to Free Angela Davis and Ruchell Magee.”

26 Ibid.

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Mestizaje: Iterations of Settler Colonialism
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Abstract

Since it was first published in 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza has become a seminal text for Latino/a/x Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, and Queer Studies undergraduate and graduate curricula. At the core of Borderlands is the theorization of “mestiza consciousness,” informed by Anzaldúa’s own experience as a Chicana lesbian living on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border. To be a mestiza is to negotiate daily the maligned Indigenous mother and the colonizing Spaniard father that make up a Chicana’s identity and her history. In this way, a Chicana can pluralistically engage with her dualism and find agency in her ambivalence rather than her subjugation. Thus, “mestiza consciousness” is considered an epistemology that aims to decolonize, reconside, and resist Anglo imperialism and Anglo settler colonialism. It is my intention herein to challenge this assessment. Specifically, I argue that conflating Chicana identity with indigeneity is in itself a form of settler colonialism. Since the ultimate goal of settler colonialism is to eliminate the Native, Borderlands’ understanding of decolonization ressets Native land in an attempt to rescue mestiza settler sovereignty.

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I would like to acknowledge that the land this essay was written on belongs to the traditional territory of a number of Indigenous peoples—specifically the Apache, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, the Kickapoo Tribe of Texas, the Ysleta del sur Pueblo, the Lipan Apache Tribe, the Texas Band of Yaqui Indians, and the Coahuiltecan. Additionally, Texas is and has been home to the Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa, Wichita, Chickasaw, and Waco nations. I honor and thank the Indigenous peoples connected to this territory and give gratitude to this land on which I write.

Mestizaje: Iterations of Settler Colonialism

As settlers, decolonization is not a process that belongs to us. To decolonize is to return stewardship of lands to whom they belong to—Indigenous people across the globe. Thus, by definition, settlers cannot decolonize that which we retain an empire over, for it is settlers that built and reap the benefits of the conditions requiring a decolonization. This paper focuses on Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza as an example of the aforementioned incommensurability between decolonization and settlers. Instead of being a decolional text, I argue that Borderlands presents to readers a salvaging of settler hegemony through the appropriation of indigeneity and thus maintaining settler control over Indigenous land. Anzaldúa considers the borderlands as both a physical location—the U.S. Southwest—as well as a metaphysical location—a space where Chicanas/os/x exist as a “state of soul” (Anzaldúa 84) that seeks to shatter the U.S.-Mexico border and “disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory” (101). For the purpose of this paper, I make the borderlands as physical location the focus of the first two sections: colonial equivocation and settler nativism, and the metaphysical borderlands the focus of the last two sections: settler adoption fantasies and conscientization. I use Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s paper “Decolonization is not a metaphor” to analyze how Borderlands, with a special attention to its primary epistemology—mestiza consciousness theory—misappropriates decolonization, renders decolonization an empty signifier, and ultimately maintains settler control over Native land. Specifically, “Decolonization is not a metaphor” is germane to my arguments on how mestizaje and mestiza consciousness seek to stand in for decolonization through the theorization of “settler moves to innocence” where setters evade our monopoly over Indigenous land in order to “reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (Tuck, Yang 1).

Colonial Equivocation

A way to retain settler sovereignty is through the avowal that the settler has a sovereign right to control and own land whether that be through a white supremacist belief in that the settler has a divine right to the land, or a misplaced belief that the settler’s relationship to land is akin to the relationship Indigenous peoples removed from their land have. The latter occurs in Borderlands when Chicanas/os/x’s relationship to land places itself in tandem to Indigenous people’s relationship to land and when the mythical location of Aztlán is deployed to physically tie Chicanas/x to the borderlands. In the introductory chapter, “The Homeland, Aztlán: El otro México,” Anzaldúa maps out the Borderlands, putting a thumbtack on Aztlán, the mythical site from which Aztecs migrated (26). Anzaldúa elaborates that the extension of Spanish colonization into the U.S. Southwest constituted “for the Indians, a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanas/os/x originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest” (Anzaldúa 5). Anzaldúa’s analysis uses land to situate Chicanas/os/x within Spanish colonization in a status of colonized subjects. Anzaldúa’s identification
of Aztlán as a “homeland” for Chicanas/os/x signifies a Chicana/o/x birthright to the U.S. Southwest. Further, a “return to the place of origin” also is a call for Chicanas/os/x to claim that birthright. Chicana/o/x attempts to decolonize via land appropriation naturally maintains settler control over the same land; for unless the terms of decolonization do not involve the return of land to the hands from which it was stolen from—i.e., Indigenous peoples—what occurs is a “settler move to innocence” (Tuck, Yang 1) in what Tuck and Yang call colonial equivocation. It is “the homogenizing of various experiences of oppression as colonization” (Tuck, Yang 17). In other words, colonial equivocation is the conflation of several forms of colonization. What this does is make decolonization something needed by all “colonized subjects.” It conflates the Indigenous experience of colonization to the Chicano/a/x experience of colonization and thus decolonization is something that both groups require.

Anzaldúa’s focus, much like that of the Chicano nationalist movement of the 1960’s, was on internal colonialism. I use Tuck and Yang’s definition of the term to guide my analysis. They state that internal colonialism is “the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation” (Tuck, Yang 4). Some examples of internal colonialism are surveillance, labor exploitation, mass incarceration, segregation, criminalization, among others. In the case of Anzaldúa, the internal colonization she experienced took place in the U.S. Southwest, where Chicano/a/x farm workers were exploited for their labor, as was Anzaldúa’s own family. However, her decolonial theorization utilizes settler colonialism as a misnomer for internal colonialism, committing colonial equivocation.

The deployment of Aztlán to justify a claim to decolonization contextualizes this claim within the realm of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism’s decolonization methodology requires the explicit return of Indigenous land and sovereignty: “Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence” (Tuck, Yang 5). Anzaldúa situates the decolonizing methods for settler colonialism and internal colonialism as interchangeable due to Chicana/o/x status as colonized subjects. However, once again this is colonial equivocation. In order for the violence that ensues from settler colonialism to be true of the Chicana/o/x experience, one thing would need to be true: Chicanas/os/x are not settlers. Eve Tuck and K. Waye Yang write, “calling everything by the same name (colonized) . . . is deceptively embracev and vague, its inference: ‘none of us are settlers’” (17). Chicanas/os/x are settlers, regardless of their subalternity in relation to white supremacy.

Chicana/o/x relationship to land and Indigenous relationship to land is irreconcilable. Chicanas/os/x subaltern position in relation to the white settler is not one of oppression but one of settlement in relation to land. Chicana/o/x relationship to land exists in the metaphysical and “ancestral” while exercising dominion over stolen land and stolen resources.

**Settler Nativism**

The vehicle that Anzaldúa uses to push forward her “decolonial” theory is mestiza consciousness. She uses it to connect Chicana/o/x settler sovereignty, land, and indigeneity. She calls mestiza consciousness “a constant state of mental nepantlism,” that is, “meaning torn between ways” (Anzaldúa 78). Anzaldúa identifies the two ways a Chicana/o/x is torn between two cultures—as the maligned raped Indigenous mother and the Spanish colonizer father. This description thematically places Chicanas/os/x in a status of conflict between colonizer and colonized: “policing the Indian in us,” “brutalizing” the indigeneity, Chicanas/os/x inhabit as well as are held captive by an “enemy body” (22). Thus their “ambiguity” becomes a space for contestations. Having “the spirit [that] spurs her to fight for her own skin” (23), the Chicana/o/x “[develops] a tolerance for contradictions” (79) and “undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (78) in order to “fashion [their] own gods out of [their] entrails” (44). Anzaldúa’s suggestively violent language (brutalizing, policing, struggle, war, struggle of flesh, entrails) metaphorically makes the Chicana/o/x an agent in decolonization and links the Chicana/o/x with Indigenous people, who are violently colonized subjects. Anzaldúa’s naming of this “nepantla state” as mestiza consciousness directly links a metaphysical, internal process with a tangible, biological, and phenotypical (albeit essentialist) characteristic of Chicanas/os/x.

This transgressive, transnational nepantlism is the basic foundation of mestiza consciousness and because mestizas “are all cultures at the same time” (Anzaldúa 77), their state of accessing both their colonized Indigenous side and their Spanish colonizer side breaks the transgression, morphing instead into the transformative: mestizaje. Transgression involves breaking binaries and borders, hence the name of the book. Anzaldúa posits that adopting mestiza consciousness in order for a Chicana/o/x to break the binary between colonizer and colonized is a “state of perpetual transition” (78) rather than transgression. For Chicanas/os/x, then, mestiza consciousness is not so much about an Indigenous side or a Spanish side, rather the transition itself between the two. Positioning mestiza consciousness in a transitory state implies that it grants to the mestiza equal access to the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. Anzaldúa confirms this accessibility and coexistence when she writes: “all the voices that speak to me simultaneously” (77). But that
access and coexistence is loaded with irreconcilability that redefines decolonization and melds it into a shape suitable to the settler. This attempt at decolonization is exactly an act of settlement that desires “to reconcile . . . just as relentless[ly] as the desire to disappear the Native” (Tuck, Yang 9). For a Chicana/o/x to access indigeneity, indigeneity would have to be readily available to her. According to mestiza consciousness, Indigenous heritage makes indigeneity available to Chicanas. Tuck and Yang call this locating of an Indigenous ancestor settler nativism. It is a claim “used to mark themselves as blameless in the attempted eradication of Indigenous peoples” with the goal of “deflect[ing] settler privilege and occupying stolen land” (11). Enunciating Indigenous ancestry as a bridge for a Chicana/o/x to reclaim that ancestry and decolonizing their own “enemy bod[ies],” at last making peace with it does settle because the Native is once more eliminated. A claim to Indigenous ancestry implies that there are no Indigenous peoples today, that the only way to access indigeneity is by looking at the past, thus erasing the native, leaving settler colonialism as a historical event. Thus, the mestizaje promoted in Borderlands is one that is committed to proclaiming Indigenous people as dead, living only through the Chicana/o/x and thus reifying a Chicano/a/x settler claim to decolonization.

Settler Adoption Fantasies

Even more problematic, settler nativism as a means to transition between colonizer/colonized (and therefore decolonize the dichotomy) renders decolonization an empty signifier. The original goal of mestizaje as a political device was to eliminate the native via assimilation and absorption in what Tuck and Yang call settler adoption fantasies, placing it at odds with Anzaldúa’s decolonial purposes. Mestiza consciousness derives from mestizaje, the result of Indigenous and Spanish miscegenation. Mestizaje was conceptualized by Mexican writer Jose Vasconcelos in his essay, “La Raza Cósmica.” According to Vasconcelos, with continual miscegenation, a “superior race” would be born. In imagining a race strengthened because of “an ethnic stock in formation . . . destined to prevail over its ancestors” (Vasconcelos 408), I raise the question, if the point of mestizaje is to miscegenate all races indefinitely until the “superior” qualities of that miscegenation becomes tangible, how does one identify whether the miscegenated product is of superior quality to its predecessors? Vasconcelos writes: “Los tipos bajos de la especie serán absorbidos por el tipo superior. De esta suerte podría redimirse, por ejemplo, el negro, y poco a poco, por extinción voluntaria, las estirpes más feas irán cediendo el paso a las más bellosas” (Vasconcelos 42). He extends this “voluntary extinction” to Indigenous people: “The Indian has no other door to the future but the door of modern culture, nor any other road but the road already cleared by Latin civilization” (Vasconcelos 407). Thus, promotions of mestizaje are not intended as “[a] theory of inclusivity” (Anzaldúa 77) as Anzaldúa posits, rather one of exclusivity. Its goal is to eliminate the “inferior” indigeneity and blackness, to obscure both into elimination. Mestiza consciousness theory assures those that practice it will find agency in accessing a maligned indigeneity. However, the origins of mestiza consciousness cannot be overlooked. It’s yet another settler colonial project and to deploy it as a decolonial methodology renders decolonization empty and does so violently. Furthermore, the act of conceiving of mestiza consciousness as “including” indigeneity also erases Natives. It erases Natives because it seeks to assimilate indigeneity into a mestiza identity, that is to “become without becoming [Indian]” (Tuck, Yang 14) in settler adoption fantasies, where the Native “hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safekeeping” (Tuck, Yang 14). Mestizaje is a prolific site for settler adoption fantasies. The success of mestiza consciousness theory as a decolonial struggle rides on the death of Indigenous peoples. To attempt to assimilate indigeneity into a settler god complex is to kill the very indigeneity mestiza consciousness seeks to celebrate. Under a definition of settler colonialism, Indigenous death is required in order for the settler to thrive in Indigenous land. In this way, Borderlands’ mestiza consciousness theory requires the removal of Indigenous people and their displacement into the metaphorical, the imaginary. The imaginary signals an interaction between the metaphorical and the phenotypical. In this next section, I will elaborate on the way mestiza consciousness as a decolonial method subverts the definition of decolonization through conscientization.

Conscientization

Vasconcelos’ statement that “the Indian has no other door to the future but the door of modern culture, nor any other road but the road already cleared by Latin civilization” (407) merits special attention. Vasconcelos fantasizes an elimination of the native via its assimilation and absorption into subaltern subjects. Mestiza consciousness exemplifies this process. First, when mestiza consciousness situates the Indigenous within Chicanas, by assimilating indigeneity within mestizaje as Tuck and Yang suggest, it writes Indigenous peoples as dead: that there are no Indigenous people today, that they are not still violently colonized subjects, and more perniciously, that settler colonialism is an event, not a structure. Second, mestiza consciousness entraps decolonization into the self, into the confines of the mestiza’s “[subconscious] underground” (Anzaldúa 79) in order for the mestiza to “break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner” (80). Mestiza consciousness, then, is a personal labor of “decolonization”: “the struggle has always been inner and is played out in the outer terrains” (87). This settler move to innocence is conscientization. Conscientization is a move to “focus on decolonizing the mind, or the
cultivation of critical consciousness, as if it were the sole activity of decolonization . . . to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land” (Tuck, Yang 19). Mestiza consciousness emphasizes “shifting” through the transitory state of colonizer/colonized to “metamorphose into another world where people fly through the air, heal from mortal wounds” (70). What mestiza consciousness theory that seeks to “metamorphose” the transitory state neglects is not only its derivation but its dynamics with it as well. Its derivation being a Chicana’s relationship to land, the “open wound where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds and before a scab forms it hemorrhages again” (Anzaldúa 3) requiring healing, and its dynamics being decolonization via a metaphysical, internal process of “sustain[ing] contradic- tions . . . turn[ing] the ambivalence into something else” (79). When indigeneity is entrapped in the imaginary, in the conscientization, it “allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolo- nization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation” (Tuck, Yang 7). Borderlands’ mestiza consciousness turns decolonization into an amorphous process, suspending the nature of decolonization—return of land and sovereignty—into a similar amorphousness. Mestiza consciousness creates an elastic decolonization, constructing decolonization as a “one-size-fits-all” where all subjects, colo- nized or not, can take whatever meaning they desire from decolonization while retaining control over Indigenous land. Mestiza consciousness simultaneously deconstructs the conditions of settler colonialism. A decolonization taking place within the individual that expands itself to hold meaning for the decolonization required by settler colonialism is a shal- low and self-serving one. A decolonization that does not span beyond the confines of “decolonizing the mind” specifically erases the notion that settlers retain empire over Indigenous land by having the metaphysical stand in for settler colonialism as well as gaslights actual Indigenous peoples for when conscientization can take the place of decolonization, decolonization would have been completed by now and the so-called United States of America would no longer be a settler state.

Concluding Thoughts

Questions of decolonization will always include ques- tions of landedness; questions of land as a site for settler exploitation, accumulation of resources and ultimately the elimination of the Native in order to replace the Native. Borderlands’ ideological nexus of mestiza consciousness the- ory does not promise decolonization—it promises settler prosperity over Indigenous land. In seeking to go past a dichotomy between colonized and colonizer, the text ignores the fact that the dichotomy itself is myth; that for mestize, the dichotomy is not a concrete wall, but a reflective win- dow in which a mestize settler can see some semblance with the white settler. Mestiza as a means to decoloni- zation is responsible for resettlement of Indigenous land and Borderlands’ theorization of it is a prolific site for this. That mestizaje fascinated Anzludia and that she created her own theorization of the same indicates settlers’ con- fusion between subalternity and indigeneity, blurring and muddling the two. Making mestizaje a misnomer for colo- nized subjects obscures forms of colonization into opacity. When mestizaje makes its subjects all colonized and thus all needing decolonizing, then no one benefits from colo- nization, making the actual decolonization unnecessary. In revealing to its readers mestiza consciousness’ paradoxical quality, Borderlands divulges the error in using mestizaje as a means to access decolonization: settlers cannot decolonize. Additionally, mestiza consciousness as a politic of libera- tion homogenizes Chicanos/as/x which flattens nuances of race and class. If we’re all mestize, then it wouldn’t matter that Black Chicanos/as/x are subject to a higher rate of police brutality than other Chicanos/as/x because mestizaje makes us all colonized. It also wouldn’t matter that a white Chica- nos/as/x benefits from whiteness because via mestizaje, they too are colonized subjects. There is no unity in mestiza consciousness theory in the same way that there is no means to decolonization within it. Understanding our positionality within colonization makes possible the return of land to Indigenous peoples and makes room for actual, tangible steps towards the return of their sovereignty to them.

Endnotes

1 Borderlands/La Frontera acts as partial autobiography where Anzaldúa provides perspective on the agribusiness of the Rio Grande Valley and her father’s experience as a sharecropper, see Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (Aunt Lute Books: 1987) 31.

2 English translation: “The inferior races will be absorbed by the superior races. In this manner, the black person could redeem himself, little by little, by voluntary extinction, the uglier lineages will give way to the more beautiful ones.”

Works Cited


Come, Medea, to be, to pass, to matter: On Latin American Reception
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Abstract

As perhaps the most widely known play of Euripides, his Medea still startles us with the moral shock of its conclusion—probably as much as it surprised the original audience in 431 BCE. No one expected Medea to kill her own children only to fly off into the horizon—terrible and triumphant. Like many ancient texts, Medea is still part of contemporary transgressive dialogues: it does more than evoke the past; it also creates new spaces and registers for the negotiation of identity—moral, social, historical, aesthetic, and even political. Based on the introduction to my senior thesis, this paper outlines the ways in which Latin American authors made use of both Euripides’s play and his character during the 20th century, looking to Agostinho Olavo’s Além do Rio while elucidating the politic nature of the ancient drama.

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It takes a village, so here’s to mine.

The binarism between “self” and “other” is a discursive normative practice that can and should be detonated.1

Euripides’ Medea is a play about many things: the wretched social condition of women, the bonds of oaths, the trappings of heroism, the righteousness of vengeance, and the dangers of discourse.2 It is necessary to keep this in mind when considering the play’s widespread reception in Latin America during the second half of the 20th century. Classicists and Latin Americanists alike have proposed Medea’s alterity—her gender, her foreignness, her magic—as the fundamental reason for her popularity. Fiona Macintosh, for instance, notes that it was precisely in the 20th century that dramatic treatments of the myth began to center around Medea’s otherness.3 Focusing on European performative tradition, she identifies Hans Henny Jahn’s 1926 expressionist Medea as the first of these versions that explored the character’s otherness in ethnic and racial terms. Then it was the rise of Nazism; a few years later, on the other side of the world, Latin American Medeas—othered for their own reasons—would come to be in equally turbulent times.

In this paper, I first offer an overview of the historical context in which Medea helped articulate Latin American narratives before outlining the ways in which Latin American authors made use of both Euripides’s play and his character while also elucidating the politic nature of the ancient drama. Finally, I turn to Agostinho Olavo’s 1961 Além do Rio as an example of Medea’s reception in Latin American literature before concluding with some final thoughts on her particular appeal.

The South Also Exists: Latin America and Classical Reception

First then, it is important to point out that the wave of revolutions that had begun in the 19th century was crashing to an end during the first half of the 20th, birthing many of the Latin American countries that we recognize today.4 Old systems of alliances were breaking down and new ones were taking shape. For example, in 1961, President John F. Kennedy inaugurated the Alliance for Progress in order to establish economic cooperation between the U.S. and Latin America. And yet, the following year he invoked the Monroe Doctrine to quarantine Cuba during the missile crisis—what became just one more instance in the long pattern of justifications for U.S. interventions in Latin America.5 As President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Chronic wrongdoing . . . may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation.”6 In this way, the socio-political landscape of 20th century Latin America was marked by the revolutions of the first half and the subsequent negotiations of the second—not just between the European powers and the Americas but within the continent as a whole. In short, everything was up for grabs.

It was to this tremulous stage that dozens of Latin American Medeas were born— penned and published all over: in Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Cuba, and Brazil, among others.7 Notably, José Tríana’s Medea in the Mirror debuted just one year after the Cuban Revolution; it was then rapidly (and mysteriously) banned.8 A year later, during a democratic interlude in Brazil’s history,9 Agostinho Olavo’s Medea was published in an anthology compiled by Abdias do Nascimento as part of a socio-artistic movement that aimed to vindicate artistic Afro-Brazilian production in the face of the country’s supposed racial democracy. Therefore, individual plays like these should be understood
as particular examples of reception in their own right, embedded as they are within the larger narrative of Latin America.

And yet, what does “Latin America” even mean as a category? The regional term itself was established in the 19th century; but its use as a panethnic catch-all was advanced by U.S. federal agencies in the 20th century so as to effectively lump all southern neighbors into one group. While some now identify the term as a rallying cry for unity in the face of the threatening hegemony of the United States, others argue that it was coined to justify neo-imperialist interventions. It is therefore imperative to recognize both the intricate diversity that the term implies, not least when interrogating the larger frameworks and motivations that led to Latin American reception of Euripides’ Medea. Furthermore, awareness of the contextual complexities of this historical environment nuances the specific allure of Medea’s own alterity.

**Medea: Who, What, Where?**

As Elina Miranda Cancela notes, Medea often appears in Latin American receptions as an all-encompassing symbol of the New World in the face of the old one. Alejo Carpentier’s only play, *La aprendiz de bruja* (*The Witch’s Apprentice*), written in 1956 and published in 1985, makes use of Medea as the mythical referent for Doña Marina, La Malinche. In one of his novels, *El arpa y la sombra* (*The Harp and the Shadow*), Carpentier focuses on Jason instead and casts Christopher Columbus as the Argonaut: a man who, in search of gold for the purposes of a kingdom, sailed to the edges of the world and encountered savages who, because of his intervention as their savior, would now know civilization. In instances such as these, *Medea* (the play) functions as a narrative model for the negotiation of identity and morality by positioning Latin America in opposition to the Old World.

The key to understanding this lies at the heart of the ancient drama: it is the *agón*, the play’s central conflict, spelled out in a pair of opposing speeches delivered by Jason and Medea in turn. Unfazed by his wife’s anger, Jason sanctimoniously reminds her that she has gotten more from their marriage than she has ever given: thanks to him, she no longer lives among barbarians, she understands justice and law, and she herself is known. In just 20 lines, Jason manages to deny Medea agency, credibility, and merit before their meeting. Even now in 2020 this is a familiar narrative, both colonial and colonizing—one from which Euripides’ Medea struggled to free herself back in 431 BCE, thus lighting the way for her Latin American counterparts in the 20th century.

Moreover, some of these receptions make use of the character to articulate the marginalization of peoples within Latin America. For example, José Triana’s Medea is not a foreigner in Cuba like the Colchian princess was in Corinth; now she is a *mulata* named Maria who is abandoned by her white husband in favor of an *hacendado’s daughter*. The character thus serves as a means to critically comment on her own society, much the same way Euripides’ Medea sheds light on the Greeks: she is created by the very people who reject her. As befitting their context of production, these receptions unfurl the constitutive pluralities of Medea’s alterity and, in so doing, lay bare the seams of its socio-political construction. Thus, she is repeatedly (re)invented in order to flesh out Latin America as actively othered—both in the face of its former empires and of itself.

**Medea’s Politic Poetics**

If Euripides’ play explores the limits someone besieged by their own contradictions can reach, then he is playing with tensions that arise between seemingly exclusive identities: Medea is simultaneously cast as a powerful woman and a humiliated wife, as a Greek and a barbarian. Considering that Euripides’ play was presented the year the Peloponnesian War began, scholars have proposed that it could be read as a political allegory of its time. Page DuBois even suggests that gender in *Medea* is a metaphor for the articulation of new and disturbing “differences” among fellow-Greeks at the start of the war. Once a united front against the Persians, the Greek city-states were turning against each other—rebellling against Athens’ hegemony while grasping for some power of their own. We can safely assume that the play’s issues would have had obvious relevance—political, social, and personal—for its then contemporary audience.

In fact, Athenian drama was *inherently* political: it was staged by and for the *polis*, thanks to the power and support of the Athenian state, as part of a fixed celebration in the city’s religious calendar—the City Dionysia, a festival in honor of Dionysus. Thus, as an intrinsic part of the city’s public life, drama was a political phenomenon in its truest sense. Even though the City Dionysia was the civic occasion to glorify the city, the fact that the festival was controlled by the *polis* does not mean that tragedy was merely a part of the government’s machinery; rather, it provided an opportunity (once or twice a year) for political reflection at all participatory levels. All the actors had to be citizens (that is, enfranchised males) since they were considered to be performing a properly civic function—attending was both a citizen’s duty and privilege.
As for the audience, it is difficult to ascertain its exact makeup. We do know, however, that foreigners andmetics (non-citizen resident aliens) were present amid the citizenry majority. As for women and slaves, scholars do not eliminate the possibility of their presence but, as Simon Goldhill points out, neither group is described in any surviving evidence as part of the intended audience. This remains a contentious issue because, as Peter Burian reminds us, the audience was an active accomplice in making the meaning of the plays—plays which enacted narratives that explored and reaffirmed a community, its power structures, practices, and beliefs, as often as they questioned and challenged them. Thus, all these years later, Euripides’ Medea still plays its part; and so do we.

Agostinho Olavo’s Além do Rio: A Case Study

I now turn to Agostinho Olavo’s Além do Rio, the first Brazilian Medea. As far as the scholarship can attest, there has been only one attempt to stage Agostinho Olavo’s Além do Rio professionally: in 1966, five years after it had been published by their founder, the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theater, known as TEN) planned to present the play at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal. Unfortunately, they were forbidden from doing so by Brazil’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Olavo’s Medea fell into oblivion, unstaged and untranslated. Now nearly 60 years later, I propose to look at Além do Rio as a palimpsest—a kind of reception that preserves the distinctness of individual texts while exposing how one bleeds into the other.

From the very beginning, the characters’ names clue us in to how Olavo made use of Euripides’ play—how both the story and the structure have been creolized. Even though the main characters have kept their ancient names, all of them have been translated into Portuguese. The exception is, of course, Medea. The name—the model—has been superimposed on Jinga, the African queen who leads her people into slavery in the New World out of love for Jasão. In this way, Olavo presents Brazil as a stage for the interplay of Greek and African paradigms, a battlefield in which these narratives are constructed, contested, and contested. Consequently, the play itself not only reads like a palimpsest; it functions as one, too: as a record of how different narratives came to be together at a particular moment in time.

All things are but alter’d—nothing dies.

Greek and Latin American, Medea negotiates the fraught space between integration and exclusion. She raises questions of right, agency, and justice with an emphatic focus on how “belonging” is created, ensured, and questioned. Defying either/or paradigms, she reaffirms and reenacts herself as both—not split, but encompassing. I propose that this is at the heart of Medea’s particular appeal to Latin America: her alterity echoes the complexities of Latin American experience and helps to problematize the reductionist binary that generally characterizes North Atlantic modernity. To borrow Margaret Reynolds’ turn of phrase, we remember who she is, much the same way Derek Walcott recognizes Odysseus in the silhouette of a Black fisherman out on the Caribbean Sea. And yet, as I have already noted the problems of generalizing 33 countries, it is necessary for receptionists to first focus on individual case studies—Olavo’s Além do Rio, Carpenterie’s La aprendiz de bruja, Triana’s Medea in the Mirror, to name a few—and so avoid proposing overarching interpretive frames and conclusions. Reading modern works like these within the literary tradition from which they derive—and in connection with the socio-cultural conditions that inform them and to which they respond—will enrich our understanding not only of what is reproduced, modified, or omitted when antiquity is transplanted into modernity—but also how and why. Though traditionally overlooked by classicists, these Medesas do well to remind us that there will be a reckoning in the end.

Endnotes
1 Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medea’s Gaze (University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 79. An overview of the play’s plot: despite her loyal service to her husband Jason, Medea, a foreign princess, is abandoned by him in favor of a Greek bride. Thus bereft, she engineers the death of the new girl and her father, as well as her own children by Jason, leaving him in the dust.
4 For reference, though the Iberian powers lost most of their continental colonies during the first half of the 19th century, Jamaica only declared its independence in 1962.
5 In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan justified the intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua on the same grounds, while his successor George H.W. Bush similarly sanctioned the U.S. invasion of Panama to oust Manuel Noriega. At the dawn of the 21st century, Latin American leaders like Hugo Chavez rose like symbols of the resistance against U.S. imperialism.
6 “Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: 1801–1829,” state.gov (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State, 2019), emphasis mine. Notice the implication that frames Latin Americans as uncivilized wrongdoers in opposition to the civilized U.S.
7 Though their analysis is beyond the scope of this essay, 20th century titles that should be noted are: La selva by Juan Ríos (Perú, 1950); Moqueagua (American Medea) by Jesús Sotelo Inclán (México, 1957); Gota d’agua by Chico Buarque and Paula Pontes (Brazil, 1975); El castillo interior de Medea Camuñas by Pedro Santaliz (Puerto Rico, 1984); Medea de Moqueagua by Luis María Salavaneschi (Argentina, 1992); and Medea by Reinaldo Montero (Cuba, 1997).
8 Though Oxford’s Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) notes the play was banned by the Castro administration, it fails to offer an explanation.

9 Getulio Dornelles Vargas’s dictatorship ran from 1937 to 1945 and the military regime backed by the State Department of the United States began with a coup d’état in 1964. See “Document No. 12. U.S. Support for the Brazilian Military Coup d’État, 1964.”


12 Marina was an interpreter and intermediary for the Spanish Conquistador, Hernán Cortés, and mother to his firstborn child, Martín. Her reputation has been altered over the years according to changing social and political perspectives: She is understood in various and often conflicting aspects as the embodiment of treachery, the quintessential victim, or symbolic mother to the Mexican people. Similarly, Medea was thought to be the mythological mother of the Persians, the great enemy of the Greeks, making this correlation particularly loaded in the colonial context.


15 In the colonies of the Spanish Empire, an hacienda owned an hacienda, an estate (or finca) similar to a Roman latifundium. Some haciendas were plantations, mines, or factories; all ran either partially or completely on the labor of enslaved people.

16 See also Jean Pierre Vernant’s argument that tragedy itself “is an expression of a torn consciousness, an awareness of the contradictions that divide a man against himself” in Myth and Tragedy (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 25.

17 Miranda Cancela, “Medea in Hispanic Antilles,” p. 68.


21 See D. M. Carter, The Politics of Greek Tragedy (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2007), for how modern receptions are political in ways that fifth-century Athenian tragedy was not.


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Redes sin Fronteras: Tracing Son Jarocho’s Transnational Musical Networks
Isaiah Romo, University of New Mexico

Isaiah Romo recently graduated from the University of New Mexico, majoring in Latin American Studies with minors in Linguistics and Economics. His research focuses on transnational music communities in and beyond the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Romo is a recipient of the Summer Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship for which he spent a summer studying the K’iche’ language in Guatemala’s central highlands. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, he is a member of the son jarocho collective Las Brujas Jaranera.

Abstract

This paper examines the growing presence of son jarocho in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Son jarocho, which formed in the coastal Mexican state of Veracruz, has its roots in African, European, and Indigenous musical traditions. It is centered around fandango celebrations that unite people of different backgrounds in a community participatory form of song, dance, and instrumentation. My research focuses on the liminal nature of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and how fronterizo hybridity shapes an increasingly wider transnational community of son jarocho musicians. I use network analysis to trace son jarocho’s contemporary resurgence in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands—in cities such as Albuquerque, Tijuana, Tucson, San Felipe, El Paso, and San Diego—through individual musicians and actors, social media/globalized technologies, and local community fandango celebrations. I argue that network analysis reveals how the structure and maintenance of the son jarocho network follows community organizing dynamics connected to other factors such as migration and grassroots social justice movements. My study contributes to the knowledge of the cultural production of son jarocho in the U.S. and Mexico by examining how multi-ethnic, multi-generational communities of son jarocho practitioners transform border music and politics.

Methodology

My methodology draws upon a combination of participant observation and socio-network analysis. I use these as points of departure from which to think about community networks on both a global and local scale. My own experiences playing son jarocho as part of a collective in Albuquerque have presented me with a valuable insider perspective on the community that I have begun to study. Combining this with socio-network analysis, a particularly useful tool for modeling largescale networks and thinking about how socially connected individuals act in relationship to each other, has allowed me to gain important insights into the structure and maintenance of son jarocho community.

In thinking about the ways in which son jarocho has spread beyond borders, I follow Alejandro Madrid’s notion of transnational musical communities (Madrid, n.d.). Here, “individual and even communal experience takes place within imagined communities that transcend the nation-state as a unit of identification” (p. 8). While recognizing the real and material impacts that nation-state borders have in the world, I highlight the ways in which globally connected actors build community vis-à-vis and in spite of borders, seeking to challenge the dominant logics by which they are constructed.
Background

I begin by offering a very brief background on *son jarocho*. *Son jarocho* is a combination of the words *son*, meaning song, and *jarocho*, a colloquial term used to identify the people and culture of the state of Veracruz. Originating in 19th century colonial New Spain (present-day Mexico), in a coastal region heavily influenced by the transpacific flows of goods, people, and cultures, the music is representative of a syncretic musical form with roots in African, European, and Indigenous, musical practices (Sheehy, 1979). The typical ensemble is primarily composed of stringed instruments, which provide the rhythmic and harmonic foundation as well as the *quijada de burro*, or a donkey jaw bone which is used as a percussive instrument, and the *tarima*, which is a wooden platform that is used by dancers to perform *zapateado*, wherein performers stomp out specific rhythms in a percussive form of dance. Even though *son jarocho* was once exclusively practiced in rural settings within the coastal state of Veracruz, the genre has since migrated to different spaces that include urban centers and institutionalized cultural venues. Today, *son jarocho* practitioners regularly meet in parks, cafes, neighborhood centers, and homes to take part in the community-participatory form of song and dance that is represented by the *fandango*. The *fandango* is the particular name used to identify these community gatherings and is one of *son jarocho*’s central features. It represents a distinctive form of music making where participation is highly encouraged among all members, without regards to level of musicianship or background. A number of traditional practices exist surrounding the *fandango*’s structure and conventions which have developed for many decades and continue to persist despite the new globalized contexts in which it is practiced. These include, for example, when certain songs should be played throughout the night or dances that are meant to accompany specific songs.

In recent decades, *son jarocho* has gained significant attention among ethnomusicologists and historians. The seminal works by both Daniel Sheehy and Steven Loza (1992; 1979) examine the traditional practices of *son jarocho* in Veracruz and in East Los Angeles. More recently Veracruz-based scholars Antonio García de León and Rafael Figueroa Hernández (2007; 2009) have helped to bring attention to the African diasporic elements of *son jarocho* while Chicana/o scholars Martha Gonzales and Alejandro Hernández (2013; 2014) have focused their research on the Chicano experience with *son jarocho* in various cities throughout the U.S. Overall, the growing body of scholarship on *son jarocho* attests to its importance as a musical form and its relevance to many areas of study. But so far, there have been no attempts to use network analysis to analyze the structure of the *son jarocho* community.

Through a combination of active efforts on behalf of *son jarocho maestros*, central cultural ambassadors of the musical practice, as well as a high level of internal and organic growth that is inherent to the grassroots spread of any particular cultural movement, *son jarocho* has gained an internal momentum that has propelled its contemporary resurgence to new heights. It has come to be recognized by many of its member participants as *el movimiento jaranero* (the jaranero player movement). More than just an increase in popular consumption, the *jaranero* movement is deeply connected to traditions of political mobilization and social movement making among the communities that have adopted *son jarocho* and its *fandango*. Alejandro Hernández argues that since its inception in Mexico’s colonial period, *son jarocho* has been used as a tool to voice political discontent and demands for social justice (Hernández, 2014). This tradition, he argues, has become embedded within the music and its practice, even as it has traveled to the United States. He notes that *son jarocho* has become a popular soundtrack at political rallies, marches and other forms of political demonstration, which is something that I have also come to see in my personal experience as a participant in the scene.

Network Analysis

With its theoretical roots in the work of early sociologists like Émile Durkheim and Jacob Moreno, network analysis has found use in a wide variety of disciplines, allowing researchers to understand the spread and diffusion of a particular attribute through linked webs of actors. By creating models of linked individuals based on a set of pre-selected traits, it’s possible to analyze certain large-scale trends and characteristics which might be overlooked at a smaller scale. This tool has been used by healthcare professionals to trace the spread of disease through large urban populations and by political scientists to track the flows of currency through criminal networks. Building a network that attempts to reflect the *son jarocho* community, albeit on a small scale, has allowed me to reach important conclusions about its structure and maintenance insofar as it represents a unified group of practitioners. Perhaps one most significant contributions of this analysis, as I will go on to explain, has been to demonstrate the central role of human connection in facilitating the spread of the musical practice.

For this project a network (Figure 1) was built around nine *fandango* events in 2019, each from a different location and selected based on highest reported Facebook attendance. Facebook proves to be a particularly useful tool for conducting quantitative research due to the vast stores of information that the social media platform collects and publishes about its users. The ubiquity of Facebook and its extensive user base has resulted in it becoming a tool to link individuals and communities across the globe. It is often through Facebook
that *son jarocho fandangos* are promoted and shared on “event pages” that can be distributed easily and widely. By creating an event on Facebook, *fandango* coordinators are able to keep track of who participated in the event. After the fact, Facebook creates a publicly viewable list of people who were in attendance based on one of two measures: either the user voluntary reports that they attended the event after it already occurred, or, depending on a user’s particular privacy settings, Facebook will track a user’s location via their mobile devices to determine whether or not they were present where the event reportedly took place.

To build the network I first identified all of the listed participants who were marked in attendance at each of these Facebook events and created ties between individuals who were together at a *fandango*. Looking at the graph, individual participants are shown as green dots or “nodes” and the grey ties that link them to other members show that they were together at a *fandango*. The nine larger clusters represent the separate *fandangos*, where, as you can see, the majority of the members only played with other people who were at the same of the same *fandango*. They thus remained closely confined within the cluster and primarily linked to other individuals in the same cluster. However, turning our attention to the outlying red dots that seem to be pulling away from the clusters, it is possible to see that there are members who were present at more than one of the *fandango* events and are thus linked to the nodes of the multiple *fandangos* in which they participated. To borrow a term from the sociologist and network analyst Mark Granovetter, these nodes can be considered “bridge actors” since they are, in a sense, the individuals bridging one subgroup to another. By virtue of being physically present and in community with multiple groups of *fandangueros*, they help to establish broad ties throughout the network, linking all the events into one unified network.

So as not to lose sight of the underlying human element that this model ultimately represents, I’d like to bring in the voice of one of the bridge actors that was identified through network analysis in my study.

Figure 1. *Son jarocho* network (Romo, 2019).
Patricio Hidalgo is a prominent figure in the *son jarocho* community and is considered a *maestro* for his extensive musical and cultural knowledge. Originally from the state of Veracruz and the descendent of a long line of musicians, he is the founding member of some of the most prolific *son jarocho* recording groups that include, el Chuchumbe, and Afrojarrocho. For the past thirty years, he has travelled throughout Mexico and the world to promote the growth of *son jarocho*. In an interview conducted with the *maestro* by members of the Seattle Fandango Project, Hidalgo noted that:

Fandangos bring together different individuals, different families and people from different communities... I think that ultimately, the values of the fandango have become transcendent and, by their own weight, and have gone one to break down walls and borders. I think this is why it's started to arrive so many places. Something very important is when people [from Veracruz], cultural exporters come to share their knowledge and be part of the different communities. *Son jarocho* teaches us a way of being in community (convivencia)...[and with it] we can overcome adversities and turn them into dance and celebration. (Seattle Fandango Project, 2011)

Patricio Hidalgo's reflections highlight the *son jarocho*'s power to traverse borders on a personal, community, and global scale.

In further emphasizing the human element that is at the core of *son jarocho*, anthropologist Alex Chavez argues that “flows of music cannot stand in for flows of people” (2017, p. 8). He points out that much of the scholarship that aims to study music in a transnational context has made the mistake of conflating these two notions; they focus on the dissemination of a particular music across geographic area without focusing on the people who themselves transmit the music. The preliminary network analysis I conducted emphasized the important role that people play in the transnational flow of *son jarocho* and how bridge actors help to advance and promote *son jarocho*'s growth. As shown in the map (Figure 1), none of the nine *fandangos* were isolated from the network: the 1,300 members included in the study are, to a certain degree, all connected to each other. *Son jarocho* is thus tethered to individual actors in a way that shows that human connection is still central to the music's spread. This allows us to draw important conclusions about how culture and tradition migrate despite the restrictions on mobility and migration.

**Conclusion**

Network analysis proves to be an especially useful tool for conceptualizing the grassroots spread of a musical practice like *son jarocho*. It offers us a number of valuable insights, like the important role that interconnectivity plays in allowing a community to transcend the divisions imposed by borders and the unifying role that bridge actors play in shaping this broad community. As I expand on this project, I seek to explore questions about how *son jarocho* is practiced along the margins of the network. I, and many scholars engaged with borderlands studies, argue that one can best view patterns and attempt to answer important questions about how movements spread at the fringes. Younger groups like the one that I belong to in Albuquerque represent particularly interesting subjects of study due to our position as newly incorporated and integrated members of the *son jarocho* network. Instead of focusing on what constitute the centers of *son jarocho*'s resurgence, places like Los Angeles and Mexico City, which are also the centers of national cultural production, I look to the peripheries as places where innovation and renewal are vibrant, helping *son jarocho* to flourish and grow through a transformative process that is constantly ongoing.

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Fighting Deportation with Family: The Case of Shirley Tan and the Uniting American Families Act
Laura Veira-Ramirez, Harvard College

Laura Veira-Ramirez recently graduated from Harvard College, where they completed a joint concentration in History & Literature and Studies of Women, Gender, & Sexuality. Veira-Ramirez’ academic interests focus on the intersections of immigration and gender and sexuality. They currently work as a bilingual instructional aide in Norwalk, CT and will be pursuing a master’s degree in education through the Harvard Teacher Fellows program starting in the Spring of 2021.

Abstract

Before 1990, being a queer non-citizen in the U.S. was a deportable offense. Because of this, there was little room to explore the intersection of queerness and immigration. Immigrant rights and LGBTQ+ rights were seen as mutually exclusive. Advocacy across the two communities was kept separate until the creation of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force (LGIRT) in 1993. Out of the organization came a focus on binational same-sex couple advocacy in the early 2000s, which rose as the fight to bring together issues of immigration and sexuality. The challenge became not only to gain support from outside both communities, but also to gain support for immigrants in the LGBTQ+ community and for queer people in immigrant communities. To gain acceptance, binational same-sex couple advocacy was rooted in respectability politics, relying on a messaging of normalcy, humanity, and “American” family values. Stories of binational same-sex couples were used to advocate for permanent immigration solutions for the non-citizen partners. This paper follows the story of one of those couples and the appeal to inclusion in Shirley Tan’s fight against her deportation.

I focus on Tan’s case not because her story is representative of the UndocuQueer experience, but rather because her case is an exception that exposes how undocumented and queer people are forced to perform their narratives in a way that is palatable to lawmakers and potential supporters. Unlike many other people in Tan’s situation, she was able to garner national sympathy for her case by highlighting her “American” family and the harmful effects that her deportation would have on three U.S. citizens. Her performance resulted in a rare private bill that saved her from deportation and put her family in the spotlight of the fight for same-sex

Introduction

In an instant, my family, my American family, was being ripped away from me.
—Shirley Tan

Originally from the Philippines, Shirley Tan applied for U.S. asylum in 1995. Her case, along with its appeal, was denied, resulting in the 2002 deportation order Tan claimed to have never seen before Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents presented it to her seven years later. Tan was arrested on January 28th, 2009 in her home in Pacifica, California. Though her partner, Jay Mercado, was also an immigrant from the Philippines, she [Mercado] was a naturalized U.S. citizen with a stable, high-paying job. Mercado's income made it possible for her to support her partner and the U.S.-born twin sons to whom Tan gave birth 12 years before. Tan was a stay-at-home mom—a job which did not require a Social Security number. The family lived in a quiet suburb in California where the twins attended Catholic school and Tan says they had “a mortgage, a pension, friends, and a community,” with many heterosexual friends who accepted them and viewed them as a model family despite their queerness.

Tan describes her life with her “American” family as “almost perfect” before the ICE agents arrested her. The only thing that seemed to be in their way was Tan’s immigration status. While a heterosexual U.S. citizen or permanent resident could petition a partner for a green card through marriage, Mercado could not petition Tan for a green card as this pathway was denied to same-sex couples. As a result of the U.S.’ divisive immigration system that sorts immigrants into those deserving and undeserving of citizenship, I argue that Tan was forced to leverage her family as a tool to fight her deportation. She had to appeal to traditional “American” values and present herself as palatable enough to gain sympathy and be seen as deserving of protection as a queer, undocumented woman. Tan’s respectability, financial stability, and “model family” set her apart from many queer undocumented people of color who are multiply vulnerable under a heterosexist and xenophobic system of exclusion.

I would like to thank Jungmin Lee and James Mestaz for supporting me through the process of turning this research into a completed final product. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Emily Pope-Obeda for guiding me through so much of the beginning stages of this research and introducing me to this case. Special thank you to Pam Gaddi and the rest of my Mellon Mays cohort for believing in my work. This one goes out to my undocumented and queer communities. May we do ourselves justice.
binational couples—partnerships in which one member is a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident and the other is not.

The Perfect Test Case

Binational same-sex couples and allies started rallying around the Uniting American Families Act (UAFA) in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Originally named the Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA), Representative Jerry Nadler of New York strategically introduced the bill on Valentine’s Day in 2000, setting a framework that focused on tragic love stories of same-sex couples separated by immigration law. Versions of this bill proposed an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 to add “permanent partner” language so that queer U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents could petition non-citizen same-sex partners for a path to citizenship without marriage—a right that was not yet available to them. The change in name of the bill to the UAFA in 2005 shows the increased pressure to appeal to “American” family values. Framed as families, same-sex binational couples could show an intended lifelong commitment, bringing them closer to U.S. nuclear family standards of a husband, wife, and two children. Tan, Mercado, and their twin sons could be seen as a harmless family by the lawmakers who would be deciding Tan’s fate. The problem with strategies like these is that they divide instead of uniting the undocumented and queer communities, filtering out those who cannot meet the high standards of deservingness through legal rights discourse.

Tan’s case fit perfectly into the clean binational same-sex couple fight for inclusion. It was easier to argue that her monogamous, lifelong relationship with Jay Mercado, tied in with their two U.S.-born citizen children, should be included in “American” society. Karma Chavez, one of the few scholars who has written about Tan’s case, has also critiqued binational same-sex couple advocacy by classifying it as a fight for the LGBT mainstream. She defines the LGBT mainstream as a “professionalization of mainstream gay and lesbian organizing” that grew alongside a more radical brand of activism. Chavez recognizes this brand of activism as insufficient as it pushes for inclusion and rights with no tangible transformation or a liberation lens. Tan and Mercado fit under LGBT mainstream efforts to present queer people as no different from anyone else. They also fit under good immigrant advocacy efforts to present as deserving of citizenship for being non-threatening.

One of the main risks when marginalized people appeal to respectability politics in their individual fights for security is that their narratives are easily picked up by the media, which disseminates a harmful expectation for the entire community. Rachel Tiven, then Executive Director of Immigration Equality, described Shirley Tan’s family in an April 20, 2009 People magazine spread saying, “They are exactly the kind of people you want living in this country.” Tiven’s quote came after the author’s assertion that Tan was the “perfect test case” for the UAFA due to Tan and Mercado’s participation in their church as choir members as well as their contribution as fund-raisers at their children’s school. The article sent the message that Tan and Mercado were examples of the kind of non-threatening people you want in the United States, implying that there are indeed kinds of threatening immigrants that you would not want here. At the time the article was written, Tan’s story had already garnered enough media attention to reach California Representative, Jackie Speier, and California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. Representative Speier was able to postpone Tan’s deportation order and Senator Feinstein introduced a private bill for Tan two days after the People magazine spread was published. The private bill put Tan’s deportation order on hold as her case was heard in the Senate. This was a form of relief not offered to most undocumented immigrants that allowed Tan to be present in the U.S. to testify for the 2009 version of the UAFA just two months later.

Because it was still doubtful that Tan’s private bill would pass, the UAFA was the Tan-Mercado family’s best hope for a permanent solution to Tan’s impending deportation. Tan became the perfect poster child for the bill, rarely pictured without her partner and sons by her side. The UAFA was strategically publicized in the original People magazine article under the heading “Same Sex, Different Nationalities” to present Tan and Mercado as just one of 8,500 couples who would benefit from passage of the bill. Still, Tan’s case was very different from those of many other undocumented and queer immigrants who did not find themselves in a long-term partnership with a U.S. citizen. Her legal victories were individual as she was saved from deportation through a series of private acts: Senator Feinstein’s private bill followed by the private act of marriage once the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), stating that marriage was between a man and a woman, was overturned in 2013 with United States v. Windsor. The Tan-Mercado family’s fight, along with the fight for the UAFA, ended once binational same-sex couples were able to get married. However, there were many more undocumented and queer people whose struggles could not be solved through marriage. Instead, an appeal to traditional family values set a higher bar for what a “good” queer immigrant should look like, further marginalizing the most vulnerable members within the undocumented and LGBTQ+ communities.

Appealing to Palatable Queerness

In an April 2014 news story by Balitang America, Tan and Mercado are recorded next to Congresswoman Jackie Speier at their wedding reception in their Pacifica,
California home. Dressed in a black suit, Mercado thanks guests for coming and stands with her arms lightly crossed in front of her. Next to her, Tan also has her arms crossed in front of her and wears a traditional white wedding dress. Throughout the three-minute-long video, the couple only touches briefly when holding the knife together to cut their wedding cake. Their twin sons remain in the frame. Mercado shows more affection toward Congresswoman Speier than she does for Tan, hugging her as a sign of thanks for advocating for the couple and officiating their wedding. Many supporters in the fight for the UAFA are present in their home and guests are seen videotaping Mercado’s speech as it is being recorded for the news story.

This touching video, depicting the end of a long fight for the Tan-Mercado family’s permanent stability, is filled with examples of the cleansing of queer identities. By inviting Congresswoman Speier to officiate the wedding, Tan and Mercado show how grateful they are to U.S. politicians, showing no sign of critique of the government. The lack of physical touch, not just in this video, but also in media coverage that preceded it, serves to desexualize the couple, distancing them from threatening images of lesbian intimacy and sexuality. Tan and Mercado are desexualized in another news story when pictured with their children so that they often appear only as co-parents. The two mothers show affection for their sons, holding them on their laps, but have their backs to each other. Their love is expressed through their children in a way that is safe and reinforces the appeals to traditional family values. The image of the nuclear family is recognizable in this picture with two parents and their two children.

Mercado’s butch presentation, paired with Tan’s femme presentation, also serve to bring them closer to the image of the nuclear family. Yasmin Nair highlights the couple’s “adherence to gender roles,” which she argues were used to legitimize their family: “Where ordinarily her partner’s butch self-presentation might have proved a liability, in this case they were able to use it as an advantage. Mercado emerged as the manly figure who protected Tan, supported her financially, and provided food and shelter for the family.”

Nair highlights another problematic aspect of the couple’s gender dynamics in her notes, acknowledging Mercado’s statement from their earlier People magazine spread: “I have no rights to do something for her,” [Mercado] says. “I feel so helpless.” She even considered getting a surgical sex change. “I don’t want to,” she says. “But I asked the boys if that’s the only way to keep Mommy here, would it be okay? They said, ‘Go ahead so we can stay together.’”

Nair analyzes the intention behind this, saying it was, “presumably with the hope that it would be easier for Mercado to sponsor Tan as a spouse,” but falls short of showing the potential harm and erasure in such a statement. Mercado’s quote sends the message that life would not have been as difficult for the family if Mercado were transgender. It erases the hardships that many trans people face who do not want to physically transition but are unable to for many reasons including financial. The financial aspect would not have been a barrier for Mercado, who had the privilege even to afford to think about it as an option.

I bring up this piece of information to underscore the clear erasure of trans people from this conversation by centering the UAFA around same-sex partnership and marriage and removing any traces of queerness that have historically received more backlash.

Looking at the policing of gender and sexuality alongside the UAFA, it is important to note that sodomy was not decriminalized until 2003 with Lawrence v. Texas. It was illegal when the UAFA was first introduced, and the wound of policed sexuality was still fresh when Tan went up to testify on its behalf in 2009. I turn to the work of Gayle Rubin, who focuses on distinctions between “good” sex and “bad” sex, to further draw attention to the cleanliness of Tan’s case. Rubin argues that queer sex has always been seen outside the confines of “good” sex thanks to its history of policed sexual acts. Rubin shows how policing of homosexuality emerged in the 1950s, centering around the image of the “homosexual menace” and the “sex offender.” She argues that, “sex offender discourse tended to blur distinctions between violent sexual assault and illegal but consensual acts such as sodomy.”

In a chart titled, “Sex Hierarchy,” Rubin shows the most palatable kinds of queer sex fall into an “area of contest.” Tan and Mercado, like other binational same-sex couples, lie perfectly in the middle of this hierarchy. When presented strategically as a cisgender, monogamous couple, Tan and Mercado can get closer and closer to an image of “good” sex. Because sodomy evoked “bad” images of gay male sex, it also helped their case that they were further desexualized as women. Rubin recognizes sex as guilty until proven innocent, stating, “Virtually all erotic behavior is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction, and love.” Tan and Mercado were able to check off love and a desire to get married. Their proximity to reproduction is even highlighted in the People magazine article, which unnecessarily mentions that Tan gave birth to their sons using Mercado’s eggs. Their harmless sexuality made them a model family for their heterosexual friends and positioned Tan perfectly as an ideal candidate for citizenship.
Appealing to Good Citizenship

Faced with the increasing inability to make any individual claim to remain in the United States, undocumented immigrants, their relatives, and supporters have organized around the notion of family as a political subject whose rights are being violated upon deportation.

—Amalia Pallares

For undocumented people to gain access to the rights of citizenship, the U.S. immigration system has to validate them as “good” potential citizens. One effective way to accomplish this is through their relationships with people who are already citizens. In Tan’s case, three U.S. citizens were negatively affected by the threat of her deportation. Mercado was at risk of losing her partner, and their twin sons were at risk of losing one of their mothers. Tan’s proximity to citizenship was seen both metaphorically and physically when she delivered her testimony for the UAFA with her three U.S. citizen family members sitting right behind her. She links her desire for citizenship to close off her testimony: “I humbly ask for your support of the Uniting American Families Act which would allow me to remain with my family and to strive for citizenship in this wonderful country that has been so good to me and my partner and such a blessed home to our children.”

20 Recognizing Tan as a political subject whose rights are being violated upon deportation.

Pallares argues that family-based activism has gained traction because it serves as a response to the systemic policing of immigrants that arbitrarily separates families. Noting the effectiveness of family-based activism, neoliberal politicians, in turn, picked up this family-centered narrative, using it to appeal to U.S. family standards in a similar way that the LGBT mainstream appealed to family standards through the fight for marriage for non-threatening monogamous couples. The harm in relying on this narrative becomes visible when shifting the focus to criminality. “Crimmigration,” the policing of immigrants, gained momentum alongside family-based activism.23 The effects are clearly seen in Obama’s 2014 immigration speech in which he promised to go after “felons, not families.”24 Obama presented the two categories as mutually exclusive and reinforced the good vs. bad immigrant divide with the implication that anyone who is not in a family is a felon and that membership in a family could erase criminality.25

Tan, in collaboration with organizations that helped prepare her testimony, used this assumption to her advantage before the court: “We have followed the law, respected the judicial system and simply want to keep our family together.”26 In this sentence, Tan acknowledges the narratives that tie undocumented people to criminality, shutting it down in her case and distancing herself from a narrative of illegality by drawing attention to her “American family.” A reliance on a family-centered narrative allowed the Obama administration to justify the policing of “bad immigrants,” greatly increasing deportation rates during his terms, by hiding behind the message that they were just going after felons.27 The appeals to family values are harmful for the entire undocumented community when used as a juxtaposition for criminality by shifting the target onto many queer undocumented people and moving the focus away from families to “criminals.”

Conclusion

The U.S. immigration system is designed to divide, forcing immigrants into competition with each other for the love of their oppressor. Shirley Tan was an involuntary actor in this competition, forced to frame herself as one of the immigrants most deserving of acceptance and U.S. citizenship to avoid deportation. In striving for their own safety and security, undocumented and LGBTQ+ people have
fallen victim to U.S. assimilation and exceptionalism under a system that criminalizes and marginalizes them. They have been forced to appeal to U.S. standards of family values and “good” citizenship in attempts to gain allies in their fight to be included within “American” society. Instead of forcing marginalized people to compete for their security, we should really be fighting the systems that keep them oppressed. Under the Trump administration, many of the wins that benefitted parts of the undocumented and queer communities over the past decade were reversed. The vulnerabilities of our communities have been exposed, peeling back the layers that were covered up with appeals to worthiness and deservingness. The power that U.S. politicians hold over the undocumented and LGBTQ+ communities is hard to take down centuries of discrimination. It is going to take more than a fight for inclusion to really be fighting the systems that keep them oppressed.

Endnotes

1 UAFA Senate Hearings (6/3/2009)—Shirley Tan Testimony.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 “Same-sex” is a slightly outdated term that was used at the time of the UAFA and marriage equality. I use it in this paper to recognize their language but also use terms like queer and LGBTQ+ to acknowledge the diversity of the community and push back on the idea of a sex or gender binary.
5 UndocuQueer is a term adopted to acknowledge the existence of people identifying as part of the undocumented and LGBTQ+ communities. This is often an intersection that gets overlooked so the term has been adopted both as an individual experience and as a self-identified political movement.
6 Performance is used in this paper to refer to behaviors that are presented as responses to external expectations. I argue that the United States produces these external expectations. Undocumented and queer people must appeal to them by performing as ideal immigrants and queer people in their fight for safety, security, and rights.
7 Chávez, Queer Migration Politics, 2.
8 Young, “A Gay Mom Faces Deportation.”
9 Ibid. With this phrasing, it is important to note that Tan and Mercado are presented as carrying two different nationalities even though they were both born in the Philippines. This shows the impact of U.S. citizenship in erasing the ethnicity of immigrants once they become naturalized.
10 Lesbian Couple Tie the Knot despite Fear of Deportation.
11 Swift, “Feinstein Intervenes to Help Lesbian Mother Threatened with Deportation.”
13 Young, “A Gay Mom Faces Deportation.”
15 Rubin, 140.
16 Ibid., 149.
17 Ibid., 153.
18 Ibid., 148.
19 Pallares, Family Activism—Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship, 1.
21 Pallares, Family Activism—Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship, 1.
From Grassroots to Global: Memory and Diaspora in Sahra Nguyen’s Deported
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Abstract

Drawing from Sahra Nguyen’s 2017 Deported documentary series, this paper maps the different forms of resistance deployed by the movement against Southeast Asian deportation. In 1996, the U.S. passed the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), a major reform that significantly criminalized immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S. Southeast Asian refugees have been especially impacted by this law with hundreds being deported for past criminal convictions. Far from abject victims, however, the Southeast Asian community has actively mobilized to combat deportations, both in the U.S. and beyond. Using a critical refugee studies framework, I read Nguyen’s Deported as an enactment of diasporic refugee memory that links imperialist state violence and diasporic communities across space and time. In doing so, I reflect upon the uses of memory and diaspora as sites of critical resistance in the ongoing movement against Southeast Asian deportation.

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In 1996, the U.S. government under the Clinton Administration passed the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), a major reform that significantly criminalized immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S. Along with expanding the category of deportable offenses and eliminating statutory relief procedures, IIRIRA especially impacted Southeast Asian refugee populations in its retroactive application to past criminal convictions, resulting in many refugees receiving orders for deportation despite already serving time in prison (IIRIRA, 1996). It was not until March 2002, however, that these orders of removal began to take effect with the signing of a repatriation agreement between Cambodia and the United States. Under diplomatic pressure from the U.S., Cambodia was compelled to accept deported refugees despite many of them having little to no connection with their supposed homeland (Kwon, 2012, 737). With the steady rise of American xenophobia after 9/11, the U.S.-Cambodia repatriation agreement would soon be followed by an agreement between Vietnam and the U.S. (2008), allowing for the deportation of Vietnamese with criminal convictions who arrived to the U.S. after 1995. More recently, U.S. pressure on Laos has forced the country to unofficially commit to a repatriation agreement to begin deporting Lao and Hmong refugees from the U.S. (Mentzer, 2020).

Amidst these assertions of U.S. power over criminalized bodies and geopolitically vulnerable nation-states, Southeast Asian refugees have not taken these injustices without a fight. Rather, we have continued to organize and resist, whether by preventing further deportations or fighting for the return of deportees to the U.S. Joined by these common goals and a shared Southeast Asian identity, activists and organizers have built a robust movement against Southeast Asian deportation that cross the boundaries of the U.S. and Southeast Asia. This transnational struggle for justice is the subject of Sahra V. Nguyen’s (2017) Deported, a five-part documentary series that follows the movement’s advocacy for the end of Southeast Asian deportation. Though originating as a grassroots movement in the U.S. in response to the separation of Cambodian families by deportation, the movement has since expanded into a global effort operating on local, national, and transnational scales.

Drawing from Nguyen’s (2017) Deported, I aim to study the movement against Southeast Asian deportation in relation to two concepts. First, I seek to understand how the movement places deportations in relation to the longer history of U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia through a critical remembering of the Vietnam War and its present-day connections. Second, I think through the ways in which diasporic relations are deployed in the movement in order to facilitate transnational organizing between the U.S. and Southeast Asia. Ultimately, I argue that memory and diaspora serve as crucial sites of resistance in the movement against Southeast Asian deportation by providing the space for critical analyses of U.S. empire with respect to its violent past and exclusionary present.
Critical Approaches to the Movement Against Southeast Asian Deportation

In order to read Nguyen's film, I draw from the field of critical refugee studies as charted in Espiritu's (2014) *Body Counts*. Focusing on the Vietnamese American community, Espiritu (2014) argues for a critical approach to studying refugee populations that does not essentialize them as figures of abject victimhood nor objects of sociological study. Rather, as Espiritu (2014) continues, refugees are “intentionalized beings” who enact their hopes, beliefs, and politics, even when they live militarized lives (14). Such an insight points to the ways that critical refugee studies can serve as the site of profound critiques of empire and nation-state. Building on this work, Espiritu and Duong (2018) then theorize the concept of “feminist refugee epistemology” (FRE), which tends to not only the death and destruction caused by war but also the forms of “social reproduction and innovation” that arise in its aftermath (588). Though focused on the afterlives of war, I contend that FRE can also be applied to read the various modes of relationality represented in *Deported* that shape the movement against Southeast Asian deportation.

To form this analysis, I build on the work of scholars who link the precarity of the Southeast Asian refugee community to past U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia, highlighting the fact that U.S. violence against Southeast Asian refugees has not so much ended as it has adapted to the present moment. In *Nothing Ever Dies*, Nguyen (2016) contemplates the ethics and politics of remembering the Vietnam War and notes the ways that dominant narratives of the war have justified U.S. interventionism while minimizing the violence inflicted upon racialized bodies (96). Um (2012) similarly exposes this elision of U.S. violence in Southeast Asia and notes how such a narrative legitimizes the U.S.’s self-image as a protector of the vulnerable and oppressed. In order to challenge such a perception, Um (2012) discusses the potential of Southeast Asian diasporic memory to reveal the hidden violences of the U.S. nation-state and thereby question the validity of its power (836–838). Such an act of resistance opens the way for further critiques of U.S. authority in the present, especially in relation to issues still faced by Southeast Asian refugees. Thus, by linking the violence of U.S. militarism in Southeast Asia to the precarious position of Southeast Asian refugees in the present, I understand the deportation of Southeast Asian refugees to be a form of “war-based displacement,” opening it to critical analysis through FRE (Espiritu and Duong, 2018, 588).

Focused on the social relations of Southeast Asian refugees separated by deportation, I find Hall's (1998) discussion of diasporic imagining to be particularly useful in situating the movement against Southeast Asian deportation within the greater Southeast Asian Diaspora. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall (1998) reflects on the ways in which diasporas are formed through a shared imagining of cultural identity rooted in a common history and homeland (235), similar to Anderson's (1983) concept of the “imagined community” (15). Such an imaginary is facilitated through technologies such as transnational communication networks and cultural works such as film (Hall, 1998, 217). Bridging Hall's (1998) understanding of diaspora with Espiritu and Duong's (2018) concept of FRE, I aim to read Nguyen's (2017) *Deported* documentary series as a diasporic cultural production that represents and reinforces a sense of community upon members of the movement against Southeast Asian deportation. However, this imagining complicates Hall's (1998) understanding of diaspora by displacing the idea of home from an originary location to a sense of belonging among personal relations such as family and friends. This is why, despite being returned to their supposed homeland by birth, deportees in Southeast Asia fight to return to the U.S. where their immediate personal connections reside.

Piecing Past and Present: Remembering as Resistance

The story of Southeast Asian deportation is a story of fragmentation. This is reflected in the way that the *Deported* series is broken into five short episodes rather than being shown as one long film (Nguyen, 2017). Such a structural feature calls to mind the ruptures that deportation inherently brings in not only separating families and communities (discussed in next section) but also erasing the connections between past and present, particularly in relation to the precarious position of Southeast Asian refugees. *Deported* works against these ruptures by providing critical perspectives from members of the Cambodian refugee community who have been impacted by deportation.

The first divide the documentary series aims to bridge is that which is drawn between the history of Cambodian refugee migration and the current issue of deportation. Though seemingly separate processes, the first episode of the series titled “A Grassroots Movement” highlights the ways in which Southeast Asian deportation is necessarily tied to U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia as well as its domestic criminalization of communities of color. The episode accomplishes this through a combination of historical information and interview footage with activists. For example, early in the episode, details are shared regarding “the seven million tons of bombs” that were dropped by the U.S. in Southeast Asia from 1957–1975 (Nguyen, 2017). Such extreme force is outlined as a major cause of the instability that prompted the post-1975 migration of over a million refugees to the U.S. The question remains, however, as to how this mass refugee migration ties into deportations occurring nearly five decades later.
To elaborate on this connection, the film draws from the insights of different community organizers and the ways that they understand refugee migration and deportation as closely linked. Speaking with an exasperated voice at an anti-deportation rally, Sarath Suong clearly connects the precarity of Southeast Asian refugees both in the past and present:

From the very beginning, Southeast Asians always had to struggle and live under state violence. It was U.S. imperialism in our home countries . . . that actually caused us to come here in the first place. And then growing up in impoverished and poor and violent communities, it was a straight shot from schools to prison, right? And then once we got to the prisons and got convicted, then we were served orders to then go back to the countries where we fled from in the first place! (Nguyen, 2017)

By tracing Southeast Asian deportation back to U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia, Suong highlights the ways in which the U.S. is deeply implicated in the ongoing deportation crisis. In just a few sentences, Suong exposes U.S. state violence against Southeast Asians in the context of not only war but also domestic criminalization. Such culpability is rendered especially visible through the connection Suong makes between U.S. imperialism abroad and at home. Ultimately, through a careful pairing of historical facts and interviews, _Deported_ engages in a critical remembering of the U.S.’s war in Southeast Asia, a conflict with effects still apparent today in the thousands of Southeast Asian refugees who either have already been deported or are currently at risk of removal.

**From America to Cambodia and Beyond:**
**Transnational Refugee Resistance**

Given that _Deported_ links ongoing deportations to historical processes of U.S. war and imperialism, I argue that it is possible to understand the movement against Southeast Asian deportation through the lens of FRE. In doing so, the interactions present in the film can be read as forms of “social reproduction and innovation” that are simultaneously “radical acts of social struggle and freedom” (Espiritu and Duong, 2018, 588). These acts take place in the context of the Southeast Asian diaspora, a social formation that itself is unsettled by the ongoing deportation crisis. By looking at the movement’s transnational organizing, I seek to further understand the forms of resistance deployed against Southeast Asian deportation and the ways that they challenge conventional understandings of home and belonging.

Although the _Deported_ series is broken up into five episodes, each segment builds upon the last as shown by the ordering of their titles: “A Grassroots Movement,” “Forced Family Separation,” “An Urgent Appeal,” “Beyond the United States,” and “A Global Movement” (Nguyen, 2017). The episodes flow naturally into one another as the series illustrates the connections between local and global organizing on the issue of Southeast Asian deportation. Though separated by thousands of miles, Southeast Asian organizers and activists are nonetheless able to cooperate in their efforts between Southeast Asia and the U.S. I argue that this unity produces a diasporic space of resistance where activists are able to operate beyond the general purview of the nation-states in which they are located.

Such is evident in the many examples of activism and advocacy shown in the film. In “An Urgent Appeal,” 1Love Movement organizers joined forces with the U.S. Human Rights Network to file an appeal to the United Nations regarding the issue of Southeast Asian deportation (Nguyen, 2017). Through emotional sharings from impacted community members, organizers argued that the deportation crisis was no less than a human rights violation, and thus the U.N. must hold the U.S. and Cambodia accountable (Nguyen, 2017). The following episode follows Chally Dang, Sophea Phan, and Kalvin Hang, three deported refugees who begin organizing a network of deportees and allies in Cambodia to advocate for the Cambodian government to stop accepting deportations from the U.S. (Nguyen, 2017). Finally, “A Global Movement” shows U.S.-based advocates traveling to Cambodia to join with deportees in a meeting with Cambodian government officials (Nguyen, 2017). Together, they discover that the Cambodian government had already put in a formal request to the U.S. to cease deporting refugees, a small but significant step toward permanently halting refugee deportations (Nguyen, 2017). In each of these events, _Deported_ showcases anti-deportation organizing that goes beyond advocacy solely based in the U.S.

While originating in response to U.S. deportation policies, the movement against Southeast Asian deportation, requires solutions that incorporate a truly global perspective. Such a movement is situated in the larger Southeast Asian diaspora but is unique in that it locates home and belonging not in Southeast Asia but rather in the U.S., where refugee families and communities have long been established. For anti-deportation activists, deporting Southeast Asian refugees is not so much a return of individuals to their supposed homeland as it is another displacement from families and communities in the U.S. In this sense, deportation becomes an act of violence perpetrated by the U.S. against Southeast Asian refugee communities along with other refugee and immigrant communities of color. Ultimately, reading Nguyen’s (2017) _Deported_ through the lens of FRE underlines the social formations that facilitate transnational anti-deportation organizing and challenges us to look beyond the U.S. in order to think through solutions
to ending Southeast Asian deportation and facilitating the return of deportees.

The Fight Goes On

Sahra Nguyen’s (2017) Deported documentary series thinks through memory and diaspora as crucial sites for Southeast Asian refugee resistance by reflecting upon the connections between past and present struggles against U.S. imperialism as well as the unity still found among forcibly separated refugee communities. The persistence of the movement speaks to the community’s strength and resilience even in the face of militarized intervention and unjust deportation. However, it is important to note that the movement’s work is not yet finished. Nguyen’s (2017) film was released only a few years ago, and as mentioned earlier, deportations of Southeast Asian refugees have continued to increase under the Trump administration (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, 2018). The film showcases some of the successes accomplished after a long period of active organizing, but these efforts must persist if we are to see the end of deportations and reunification of families. As much as the series serves as an informative documentary on Southeast Asian deportation organizing, it is also a call to action for viewers to ally themselves with the movement and join in the work for justice wherever they may be.

Works Cited


“Link Deeply Through Their Wounds”: Haruki Murakami, Intercultural References, and World Literature

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Abstract

Due to Haruki Murakami’s stylistically un-Japanese approach to literature, many scholars have deemed his fiction as a promotion of westernization or concession to commercialism. Taking Murakami’s controversial reception as its starting point, this paper reexamines Murakami’s idiosyncratic employment of a key Western musical reference in Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage. By analyzing the significance of the musical references, I argue that the protagonist is not the stereotypical Murakami-esque hero who is merely alienated. The overarching goal of this paper is to reconceptualize Murakami’s use of intercultural references within the framework of world literature. It demonstrates that Murakami’s reference-laden literary style propels his works into the global literary network and functions as a means for him to navigate global authorship. It concludes by propounding that Murakami’s works should be conceptualized more as world literature.

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Beyond Mukokuseki

Haruki Murakami1 is a widely celebrated contemporary Japanese author whose imaginative books are bestsellers around the world. He is notable for employing an untraditional Japanese writing style, inventing wildly creative narratives, and exploring taboo topics and universal themes that appeal to both readers in his native land and foreign countries. However, even today, Murakami remains a controversial literary figure. His unconventional writing style has prompted many Japanese scholars and critics to deem his works mukokuseki, which translates as “something or someone lacking any nationality” (Iwabuchi 28), and to suggest that his writings are a promotion of westernization or rejection of Japanese literary conventions.2 Murakami’s popularity prompts many scholars to argue that his novels are produced for the sake of widespread consumption. Murakami’s works are, in other words, seen as replicating a sheen of commodity—and as thriving because they are a concession to commercialism.3

Taking Murakami’s controversial reception as its starting point, this paper re-examines Murakami’s idiosyncratic employment of intercultural references in his narratives. In particular, it explores a key Western musical reference in the novel Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage. By explicating the significance the musical references carry in the novel, I argue that Murakami’s employment of intercultural references does not merely reduce his work to mukokuseki or commercialism. I contend, instead, that musical references function as a means for the protagonist, Tsukuru, to establish a connection with other individuals. Scholars have often considered Tsukuru as a quintessential Murakami-esque protagonist, deeply imbued with an aura of melancholic alienation.4 However, Tsukuru’s relation to the musical reference has suggested otherwise.

From my analysis, I proceed to further reconceptualize Murakami’s use of intercultural references within the framework of contemporary world literature and argue that Murakami’s reference-laden literary style helps to propel his works into the global literary network and functions as a means for him to navigate global authorship. Murakami’s strategic use of cross-cultural references helps to create a distinctive global voice capable of creating resonances and connection with readers around the world. This paper concludes by maintaining that Murakami’s works should be conceptualized less as Japanese writing infiltrated by Western influences, and more as “world literature” intended for the contemporary global literary stage.

Liszt’s “Le Mal du Pays” in Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage

Many of Murakami’s novels incorporate a dynamic range of Western musical references, including the classical, jazz, and pop genres. In Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, Murakami deploys a particular piece of classical music, “Le Mal du Pays,” as a weaving motif throughout the novel. Composed by Hungarian pianist and composer Franz Liszt during the 1830s, “Le Mal du Pays” (“Homesickness”) is the eighth of the nine compositions featured in the first piano cycle of his three-volume Années de Pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage).5 The second half of the novel’s title, “Years of Pilgrimage,” is likewise a direct musical reference to Liszt’s set of classical piano compositions. It is worth noting that Years of Pilgrimage, which was written during Liszt’s travels in Italy, has been considered...
as his quest to discover a new artistic identity (Celenza 4). In this regard, Liszt’s composition has a direct parallel to Murakami’s protagonist in Colorless: a middle-aged Japanese man who embarks on a journey of discovery.

Colorless centers around Tsukuru Tazaki—a lonely man who travels around the world, hoping to uncover the truths of a past traumatic event after many years of sulking in reticence. It is easy to conclude that Tsukuru is another quintessential Murakami-esque character who is deeply isolated and alienated. Such an argument is true to the extent that Tsukuru has isolated himself after experiencing banishment from his group of close friends. However, the symbolic function of Liszt’s “Le Mal” throughout Tsukuru’s journey of discovery has suggested otherwise: the musical piece has functioned as a vehicle for him to access the nostalgic past and reclaim the deep connection he used to have with a group of close friends. More specifically, Tsukuru’s desire to reconnect with his lost community is fleshed out in his relationships with Haida, Shiro, and Eri—who all likewise have a deep connection with the musical piece.

The traumatic past that relentlessly haunts Tsukuru is caused by his sudden banishment from his group of close friends. In the past, Tsukuru used to belong to a unique little community consisting of three boys (Tsukuru, Aka, and Ao) and two girls (Shiro and Kuro). To Tsukuru, the group was essentially an “orderly, harmonious community” in which all five of them are a “centripetal unit” that always does things together (Murakami 24). Tsukuru was thus extremely pained by his friends when they suddenly banished him from the group without giving him any reason. The banishment has wounded the young Tsukuru so deeply that it has left him broken and deeply pessimistic about the future. Several years after the ostracism, Tsukuru re-encounters the familiar “Le Mal” that his old friend Shiro used to play on the piano through Tsukuru’s new friend, Haida. Upon hearing the sorrowful melody, Tsukuru cannot help but feel “his chest tighten with disconsolate, stifling feeling,” recalling a “vivid and three-dimensional” mental image of Shiro performing the piece (Murakami 70–1). On the one hand, it is Haida who reintroduces the warmth of friendship into Tsukuru’s loneliness; however, it is simultaneously he who evokes the painful memories hidden deep within Tsukuru.

Tsukuru’s unspoken desire for connection is explicitly illustrated in a surreal erotic dream he has after listening to Haida’s story about a dying pianist. Tsukuru has had a number of sexual dreams involving Shiro and Kuro together before. However, in a “different sphere of reality”—particularly one imbued with dreamlike qualities—Tsukuru realizes that Haida is likewise present in his dream (Murakami 124). One crucial piece of minutiae is that the melody of “Le Mal” is swirling around Tsukuru’s head the whole time that he experiences the surreal sexual encounter with Haida. Whether Tsukuru is aware or not, Haida holds a special connection to him and the music—as it is Haida who brings “Le Mal” back into Tsukuru’s life, once again reminding him of the loss of connection to a unique community. Moreover, Haida likewise stimulates and uncages Tsukuru’s repressed sexual interest and sexuality, reifying the latter’s craving for human connection, precisely one of extreme intimacy.

As indicated by Tsukuru’s dream, the two female friends in his utopian closed circle hold a distinctive connection to him and to the piano piece. Because Shiro is a skilled pianist whose favorite song to play is Liszt’s “Le Mal,” she has always reminded Tsukuru of music. She is, in other words, a representation of music to both Tsukuru and the rest of the group. When Tsukuru travels around the world searching for his old friends in hope to uncover the truths of his traumatic past, the last question he always asks them is: “Do you remember the piano piece that Shiro used to play?” Tsukuru’s question reveals that he is still seeking the lingering traces of any connection possibly existing between him and his old friends. He finds out, out of everyone in the group, Eri is the only one who remembers. Eri reveals that, similar to Tsukuru, she often listens to “Le Mal” and feels that a vibrant and luminous part of Shiro still lives on in the musical piece (Murakami 321). As the two quietly listen to “Le Mal” together, Tsukuru suddenly has an epiphany: “One heart is not connected to another through harmony alone. They are, instead, linked deeply through their wounds” (Murakami 322). Because both Tsukuru and Eri continue to listen to Shiro’s favorite musical piece even after she is gone, they are able to reach a deep emotional understanding and connection many years later.

Colorless at one point reveals that Tsukuru has loved Liszt’s “Le Mal” because it is a “fragile, thin vein” that connects him to Haida and Shiro; whenever he listens to the piano piece, vivid memories of his friends would sweep over him as if they are quietly breathing right beside him (Murakami 258). In Liszt’s musical piece, the melody of “Le Mal” powerfully evokes the homesickness of a traveler, tinged with yearning and sorrow, and brings no relief with a melancholic ending in the lower register (Wright). Similarly, Tsukuru’s journey in Colorless conveys the emotional tolls of a person helplessly yearning for what he or she has lost. Tsukuru’s longing and yearning for the nostalgic past are manifested and sustained in the motif of Liszt’s musical piece throughout the novel. There is likewise no relief at the end of the novel, as many questions remain unanswered. However, at the very least, Tsukuru has achieved finding a discreet connection—one he has been longing and seeking for—with Eri, whose understanding of Liszt’s “Le Mal” has linked her deeply with him.
Toward World Literature

The analysis of the key musical reference in *Colorless* demonstrates that Murakami’s use of intercultural references, otherwise regarded as merely commercial by many scholars, has a more profound significance. Murakami’s incorporation of Liszt’s musical piece suggests that Tsukuru is not the typical Murakami-esque hero who is deeply alienated. On the contrary, Tsukuru yearns for a sense of belonging, and he seems to cannot forget the one musical piece that serves as his memory of his colorful friends. Beyond the way it forces us to recharacterize Tsukuru, the reference to “Le Mal” in *Colorless* serves as a case study that illustrates the contention that Murakami’s strategic use of intercultural references contributes to creating a distinctive voice that globalizes his novel. The globality of Murakami’s narrative not only stems from his employment of cross-cultural references but also the fact that those references are simultaneously global and local. The use of musical reference in *Colorless* is global in that it presents to the reader two disparate cultures at once: Liszt’s musical piece is western, whereas the context of Murakami’s narrative is Japanese. While the musical reference is specifically Western, it is presented from a narrative that speaks from the local perspective of a Japanese character. In other words, Murakami demonstrates how a seemingly exclusively-Western reference can travel and create different meanings and resonances in another context beyond its point of national origin. The fact that Tsukuru achieves reconnecting with Eri—the only character who lives in a foreign land—through a Western musical piece further suggests the cross-border mobility of individuals in today’s globalized society.

Many scholars have criticized Murakami’s un-Japanese narrative style and common use of cross-cultural references as a perpetuation of Western cultural hegemony. Such a claim, however, overlooks the Japanese social and cultural milieu underpinning most of Murakami’s works. It is important to highlight that Murakami is a post-war Japanese writer who belongs to a society where tradition coexists with modernity and Western influences. One cannot simply forget that Murakami, born in 1949, had come of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s in a country that “had been assiduously importing American culture for more than two decades” (Walley 41). Murakami’s novels are thus highly reflective of the characteristics Japan manifests in the late twentieth century, as Rebecca Suter puts it—“non-Western but modernized, hybrid, and ambiguous” (21). In other words, Murakami’s novels cannot be exclusively-Japanese if they seek to reflect the sociohistorical context and trajectory of Japan as a post-war country.

According to David Damrosch, a work becomes world literature by dint of being read as literature and by circulating beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin (6). Murakami’s novels and short stories, in this sense, are already part of the global literary network as they have been translated into many different languages and circulated around the world. Nevertheless, what is particular about Murakami’s works is their ability to create and sustain communities around its circulation and consumption. As Tsukuru who reaches connection with his friends through “Le Mal,” Murakami’s readers, who all read in different languages, are likewise able to experience such a similar connection. Murakami’s novels have given rise to forms of community and shared cultural performances in which his fans have created playlists on music streaming sites, such as YouTube and Spotify, for every musical reference found in his novels. He has allegorized forms of connection, in works like *Colorless*, that the same novels enact in their circulation around the world.

Despite the contention of scholars that Murakami’s works are a compromise of commercialism, I maintain that Murakami’s works carry a deeper significance and should not be easily dismissed as vacuous and shallow. If anything, Murakami has ruptured the stereotypical representation of Japanese culture in literature through his idiosyncratic narrative style. He has presented to the world—or if not to the world, at least to the Anglophone readers—a different kind of Japan that is already global and not subjected to forms of Orientalist fabrication. In particular, Murakami’s use of intercultural references further contributes to creating a voice emblematic of a global identity forged by modern experiences, contemporary cultures, and the forces of globalization. From this, I build to this idea that Murakami’s works are closer to representing world literature intended for the contemporary literary stage. Murakami’s novels are not a passive product that glorifies Western cultural hegemony but a product of hybrid languages and culture that has the mobility to transcend national borders while drawing together a global literary community—an idea that even a critic of the global novel like Tim Parks cannot dismiss, as he remarks: “Buying a book, a reader becomes part of an international community.” What Murakami’s works suggest is that the motivation of finding a literary connection—one that is simultaneously local and global—is slowly expanding the horizon of the world literature canon, as globalization continues to bring changes to the world in ways unimaginable to previous generations.

Endnotes

1 Japanese names are written in Western order of given name followed by family name.
3 In *Off Center*, literary critic Masao Miyoshi describes Murakami’s tales as a “smooth, popular item of consumption” (234).
Murakami's literary approach, which includes his un-Japanese writing style and trademark themes of alienation and critique of urban life, has been described as “Murakami-esque.” See Muhamad Rafy Adityana on "Tsukuru's experience of social and self-alienation, and Alona U. Guevarra on “Murakami-esque” and alienation as one of Murakami's “trademark themes.”

"Years of Pilgrimage" consists of twenty-six piano compositions published in three volumes (in 1855, 1858, and 1883 respectively): *Première Année, Suisse* (First Year, Switzerland), *Deuxième Année, Italie* (Second Year, Italy), and *Troisième Année* (Third Year). See the booklet of Sinae Lee's album and Dolores Pesce 398–410.

Eri's full name is Eri Kurono Haatainen. She refuses to be called by “Kuro” after the small group disbanded. See Murakami 300.

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The Black Frontier: African Americans, Slavery, and Freedom in Mexico, 1820–1840
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Abstract

This paper covers a portion of a larger research project about free black Americans’ idealized notion of Mexico as a place in which they could create the multiracial democracy that the United States only promised. Using newspaper articles and personal correspondence from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, this paper argues that popular notions of the Mexican frontier circulated across northern free black communities during the 1820s and 1830s as part of the general discourse on Manifest Destiny. In 1832, a woman who used the pseudonym “A Colored Female of Philadelphia” (C.F.P.) penned an article in William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator, outlining the reasons why Mexico would allow her people to manifest their destiny of establishing a multiracial democracy. This paper draws upon Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” and the ideas associated with U.S. Manifest Destiny while also addressing the sentiments of Mexican citizens who faced encroachment on their land from both pro and antislavery forces during this period.

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In January 1832, a woman of color proposed a black version of Manifest Destiny over a decade before white newspaper editor John O’Sullivan coined the term. While Afro-descended enslaved people struggled for freedom in the Caribbean and the New England Anti-Slavery Society mobilized in Boston, a woman of color who used the pseudonym “A Colored Female of Philadelphia” (C.F.P.) published an article in William Lloyd Garrison’s Bostonian newspaper, The Liberator.1 Entitled “Emigration to Mexico,” this author presented herself not just as a female abolitionist of color, but also as an antislavery leader interested in the future of Afro-descended people. This woman of color was more than just an abolitionist. She was also an imperialist who advocated for black emigration to the “sister republic” of Mexico.2

To C.F.P., Mexico not only offered a place to realize the promises of democracy, but it also offered the opportunity in which black Americans could expand and “civilize” the American frontier. C.F.P. saw Mexico as the black people’s version of Manifest Destiny, a haven from the onslaught of the expansion of proslavery Americans and their principles throughout the western hemisphere. This paper draws upon Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” and the ideas associated with U.S. Manifest Destiny to reflect on the ways in which Americans understood Mexico in relation to slavery, abolitionism, and freedom. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a seminal address at the American Historical Association’s meeting in Chicago. Entitled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” this essay outlined a vision of the western frontier, which he described as “the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” In Turner’s view, U.S. democracy and identity were not found along the eastern North American seaboard but “it is in the great West.”3 By focusing on the decades leading up to the U.S.-Mexico War (1846–1848), this paper sheds light on how some African American abolitionists viewed expansionism, Manifest Destiny (domestic and overseas), and the annexation of Texas.

This paper argues that popular notions of the Mexican frontier circulated across northern free black communities during the 1820s and 1830s as part of the general discourse on Manifest Destiny. Furthermore, black Americans at the time visualized Mexico as the land of opportunity in which they could enjoy the multiracial democratic system of government that the United States only promised. By the late 1820s, Mexico had already declared its independence from Spain and several Afro-descended individuals served in prominent political and military positions. But the most notable reason why Mexico seemed like such a promising country for black Americans centered on the fact that it had abolished the legal institution of slavery within its national borders. This paper proves that Mexico functioned as an improved version of the United States for black Americans in which white Americans and their European influences did not control the government. Black Americans envisioned residing in Mexico because they believed that in this nation, they would have a voice.

The issue of proslavery and antislavery expansionism extended into Mexico and affected those beyond the borders.
of the United States. By analyzing the reaction of Mexican citizens and not just focusing on the views of black and white Americans, this paper also historicizes how people on the receiving end of expansionism also had agency in the extension of the U.S. frontier. In the end, black Americans fell short in establishing a colony of interracial democracy in Mexico because Mexicans fundamentally opposed the idea of people from the United States (whether they were black or white) encroaching on their land and commandeering it as their frontier. While British Canada embraced a white savior complex in allowing black refugees from the United States into its borders, Mexico did not encourage emigration from its northern neighbor, especially after the conflict that proslavery expansionists caused in the struggle with Texas.

* * *

In her article about Mexican colonization, C.F.P. laid out a variety of rights that black Americans would be able to have full access to in Mexico that they did not have in the United States. She expressed:

By leaving the land of oppression, and emigrating where we may be received and treated as brothers; where our worth will be felt and acknowledged; and where we may acquire education, wealth and respectability, together with a knowledge of the arts and sciences; all of which may be in our power—of the enjoyment of which the government of the separate states in the union is adopting means to deprive us.4

Straying from Garrison’s early opinion, C.F.P. referred to the United States not as the cradle of “freedom and independence,” but as “the land of oppression.”5 She believed that as a nation composed of people of color, black Americans could easily integrate into Mexican society and begin to participate in the government. C.F.P. also recognized the fact that Mexico had abolished slavery in 1829, which gave everyone in the country the right for the government to treat them as human beings, unlike in the United States where the practice of slavery was still legal and expanding in 1832. While Garrison claimed that in South America “cultivating the arts and sciences with avidity” were “expectations” that were “blighted and destroyed in the bud,” C.F.P. asserted that Mexico would allow black Americans to “acquire education, wealth and respectability, together with a knowledge of the arts and sciences.”6 Conversely, she explained that in the United States, many states were adopting laws that deprived black Americans of their rights. Contextualizing C.F.P.’s article also identifies the fact that she published it in The Liberator the year after Nat Turner’s Rebellion, when lawmakers throughout the state of Virginia and the entire slaveholding South were attempting to cut down on the rights of black people in order to limit the possibility of another revolt.

She also played on Jefferson’s words in the Declaration of Independence when she explained, “There is an independent nation, where indeed ‘all men are born free and equal,’ possessing those inalienable rights which our constitution guarantees.”7 Although she recognized that her opinion was not popular at the time, her views were worth noting because she proposed that living in Mexico would be the fulfillment of the principles of the American Revolution. C.F.P. suggested that Mexico was the ideal place for black people from the United States to move to because Mexico was the place in which they found a true democracy. Thus, the new “American Dream” for black Americans awaited them in Mexico, making this nation their new frontier.

Mexico’s appeal was extensive because it allowed people of color to have political, economic, and social freedom in an ideal location. If she lived in Mexico, C.F.P. believed that she could acquire full citizenship.8 Conversely, the United States did not adopt the 14th Amendment until 1868, which gave all people born in the U.S. citizenship, regardless of their race.9 In line with the notion of a frontier not only being available to expand democracy, C.F.P. also discussed the favorably warm and agreeable climate that black Americans could find in Mexico. She explained, “The climate [in Mexico] is healthy and warm, and of course adapted to our nature; the soil is rich and fertile, which will contribute to our wealth,” a practical argument that appealed to black Americans.10 Not only would Mexico provide her people with political opportunities through citizenship, but it would also allow them to be more successful in agriculture and raising livestock, since they were activities that were possible year-round. In addition to the climate, C.F.P. was “of the opinion that Mexico would afford us a large field for speculation, were we to remove thither,” and this promise of land was enough to indicate that she foresaw Mexico as a promising frontier.11

C.F.P. explained to her audience that she was “informed that the population of Mexico is eight millions of colored, and one million of whites.”12 Therefore, she believed that these demographics would attract black Americans who were looking to be included in the majority rather than in the minority. Since white Americans considered their black counterparts as “others,” and often excluded them from reaping the benefits of living in the United States, black Americans desired to become members of the majority.13 To achieve this aim, black Americans looked toward Mexico as the frontier that would afford them this opportunity. C.F.P. wanted to show other black Americans who were reading her article in The Liberator that emigrating to Mexico was their opportunity to be part of the racial
majority that could make political decisions and have a higher socioeconomic status. For example, even though it was not allowed for black men to enlist in the U.S. military as soldiers at the time, Mexico's promise led C.F.P. to believe that young black men would "feel proud to enlist under the Mexican banner, and support her [Mexico's] government," when faced by an outside threat. Because she claimed that black Americans would gladly take up arms against Mexico's enemies, she believed that the generations after her could become merchants and soldiers in Mexico despite the inferior status that they held in the United States.

But beyond merely integrating into Mexican society, she also fostered an idea of black Manifest Destiny, one that would lead her people to Mexico where they could experience a truly interracial democracy. Besides her idealistic motives, she also wanted to spread Protestantism, much like white pioneers moving to the Western territories of the United States did at the time. Her one objection to the emigration of black Americans to Mexico was the simple fact of "the religion of that nation being Papist [Catholic]." Nonetheless, she had a solution that could have changed the course of Mexican history if it had come to fruition. C.F.P. believed that "we can take with us the Holy Bible, which is able to make us wise unto salvation," and she wanted black people from the United States to "be made the honored instruments in the hands of an all-wise God, in establishing the holy religion of the Protestant Church in that country." Clearly, she not only believed that Mexico was the black frontier, but she also desired to carry out a black version of Manifest Destiny in that country as well.

Though C.F.P. envisioned Mexico as her ideal frontier, in the eyes of enslaved and formerly enslaved people, Mexico did not manifest the same destiny for them that Canada did. The Monroe Doctrine claimed the entire western hemisphere as an entity that the United States controlled. The only part of the hemisphere into which the United States could not extend its dominion was British Canada. As part of an empire that abolished slavery, the British Canadian colonies appealed to enslaved communities throughout the United States, principally because there was not a threat of American slavery's expansion into this region.

William Wells Brown, a former fugitive slave, recognized how slavery in the United States and its proposed expansion into the Mexican province of Texas was the cause of the Mexican American War. Brown explained how the abolition of slavery in Mexico directly challenged the institution of slavery throughout the American continent. This situation prompted the armed conflict that ensued for the annexation of Texas and the demarcation of the border between Mexico and the United States. Black abolitionists were aware of the debate and the issues that arose when attempting to flee to Mexico. Published in the same month as C.F.P.'s editorial, an article from Freedom's Journal indicated how black antislavery communities understood what was at stake if they took up the cause of the black Manifest Destiny in Mexico. If the colony failed, they had everything to lose, including their freedom, but if it succeeded, they could expand antislavery principles and true multiracial democracy throughout the American continent. Although C.F.P. trusted that Mexico would pave a new way forward for black Americans, her view was only limited to free black Americans in the northern United States who may not have been as familiar with the institution of slavery as those who were still in bondage.

Mexican newspapers at the time vocalized their views about the United States and the state of slavery in the country. Particularly, El Sol and El Mosquito Mexicano unabashedly expressed the sentiment that the United States was incredibly hypocritical since it espoused the notions of equality and democracy when, in reality, it did not adhere to these practices. In a reprinting in El Sol of the proceedings in the Camara de Senadores (Chamber of Senators) from January 1827, Mexican senators discussed their lack of understanding of U.S. chattel slavery. Though the Mexican government did not abolish slavery until two years after the publication of this newspaper in 1829, they had already questioned the notion of a nation that claimed that all people were equal but treated Afro-descended people as property. Notably, these debates over slavery occurred in Mexico before they did in the United States.

In an article in El Mosquito Mexicano from January 1836, the author used extensive footnotes to comment on the hypocrisy of the United States. At the time, Mexico was in the midst of the second French intervention, and the Texas Revolution was coming to an end in favor of the proslavery expansionist colonists from the United States. The writer of the article entitled "Francia" poked fun at both France and the United States since they respectively claimed to be nations that valued freedom and independence but were imposing their ideas on Mexico. That same year, the paper also reprinted a piece from the New York American about the conflict for Texan independence at the time. The editor inserted sarcastic commentary in footnotes throughout the article, saying that he included the reprinting of "this article for the honor and glory of the philanthropic liberty of the North American village," in diminutive reference to Texas and the United States. In addition, the editor wrote, "Oh yes! That is a very good thing, that the African race will not be free in the territory of the republic of Texas. Only the
diabolical race, like the race of that congress of theirs, will be forever free.”25 In the same issue of El Mosquito Mexicano, a letter to the editor asked if the United States would dare “recognize a colony as independent that does not have the elements nor any other reason to be one,” referring to Texas.26 Mexico viewed the United States as hypocritical in its practice—or lack thereof—of the tenets that it preached. During the 1830s, Mexican people clearly opposed the institution of slavery in the United States, but they did not appreciate the encroachment of their borders, whether those who attempted to establish colonies were pro or antislavery. This perspective from Mexican newspapers highlights the disconnect between C.F.P.’s hopes for expanding into Mexico and the reality of how Mexican people refused to accept U.S. colonies within their borders.

When C.F.P. penned her article in The Liberator about emigration to Mexico, she reshaped the ideologies surrounding colonization and expansionism. Writing the article was her way of propagating the concept of a black frontier thesis. Not only did she desire to extend American democracy into a place that would accept it, but she also wanted to broaden its definition to include a multiracial dimension that it could not achieve in the United States. This interracial democracy was only possible in Mexico, a nation that, although it had its own governmental structure, C.F.P. also believed could learn from the U.S. Protestant work ethic. She promoted both the vision of a black frontier and a black Manifest Destiny that could teach people in Mexico the beneficial values that the United States offered. Though white abolitionists were skeptical of her black Manifest Destiny and black Americans were afraid that proslavery expansionists would re-enslave them if they took over a black colony in Mexico, C.F.P.’s thesis still stands. Mexico was her frontier, and it was the place where she could manifest her destiny of genuine freedom and democracy at a time when the United States denied her people of those rights.

Endnotes

1 A Colored Female of Philadelphia, “Emigration to Mexico,” The Liberator, January 28, 1832: p. 14. Unfortunately, I have not been able to identify the author of this letter with complete certainty. As a result, I have decided to use the abbreviation “C.F.P.” (A Colored Female of Philadelphia) hereinafter, which I base on the moniker that this black female antislavery writer elected to use in her article published in The Liberator.

2 For more on Mexico as one of the “sister republics,” see Caitlin Fitz, Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017).


6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.

9 U.S. Const. Amend. XIV.


12 Ibid.


15 Ibid.


18 Ibid.


22 Ibid.


24 “Batalla de los libres en Tejas,” El Mosquito Mexicano, September 6, 1836, p. 1; my translation.

25 “Batalla de los libres en Tejas,” El Mosquito Mexicano, September 6, 1836, p. 2; my translation.

26 “Comunicados,” El Mosquito Mexicano, September 6, 1836, p. 3; my translation.

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U.S. Const. Amend. XIV.

*Secondary*


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