



The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal 2025

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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 2025 edition of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) Journal. The goal of the MMUF program is to broaden the range of scholarly perspectives in the U.S. academy, with a focus on the humanities and the humanistic social sciences. Since 1988, the MMUF has supported over 5000 undergraduate students with research support and the opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor, among other activities, 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 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 2025 Journal features contributions by 30 authors from 21 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.

Four themes emerged as prominent in the articles of this journal. Authors gave voice to women who had been silenced or overlooked in history to uncover new knowledge through lived experiences. They employed film, art, photography, and literature to explore concepts of belonging, identity formation, and gender, among other areas. Authors turned to the archive to utilize sources from the past to probe the present and shape the future. Lastly, they examined the creation of places and spaces in past times in order to understand, in a nuanced way, the histories of a place and their impact through to present-day. The imagery that these MMUF Fellows painted through the prose—strengthened by the literal images that accompanied their work—were so vivid and nuanced that the decision was made this year, we believe for the first time, to publish the MMUF Journal in color. We did not want the veracity of their arguments and the courage that these students showed in their work to be lost in literal shades of gray. What was most striking about this year’s MMUF Journal was how many of the authors themselves showed personal growth, development, and self-awareness through the creation of their work.

I urge the readers of this journal to allow the content of these articles to challenge you, change your mind, teach you something that you didn’t know, and encourage you to try to shape the world around you (local and global) to be more positive, welcoming, and inclusive. Let us look to these authors as guides as we each embark on our own journey to leaving our communities in a better place than how we found them.

I am privileged to share the 2025 MMUF Journal with you!

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Who Gets to Tell Their Story? Erasure and Appropriation of Indigenous Textiles

Anana Ardoín, *The University of Texas at Austin*

Anana Ardoín is a rising junior at The University of Texas at Austin majoring in Art History and Conservation with a minor in African and African Diaspora Studies and Elements of Business. She is currently researching the feminist art of Senegalese artists for her thesis through the Mellon Mays program and hopes to continue higher education and gain a doctoral degree in either Art History or African and African Diaspora Studies. Anana has already curated her first exhibit at the LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections and hopes to continue curating after completing her higher education.

Abstract

Textiles woven by indigenous cultures are pieces of wearable art that have been misinterpreted and erased within the Western world, especially woven *huipiles* and blouses. I have had the privilege of acquiring one of these textiles that had been uncatalogued and dismissed from art historical scholarship; in this article, I attempted to find the history behind this piece, with the larger goal of publishing our findings. Woven by the hands of the Atitleco women of Santiago Atitlán, a Tz'utujil Mayan village in the department of Sololá, the brightly colored, multi-patterned *huipil* that I was given is the epitome of a traditional Santiago Atitlán textile. The village is known for its beautifully decorated *huipils*, both daily and ceremonial. Varied in size 34in (length) x 28in (width), the *huipil* is a daily *huipil* woven c. 1980. Although the *huipil* holds deep meaning within its craft, it, along with textiles like it, continues to be erased and misrepresented by large corporations and researchers. I aim not to critique Indigenous textile itself, but the art historical scholarship and interpretive methods that have long represented Indigenous cultures and shaped public comprehension of them. Through a formal analysis of this *huipil*, I show an alternative approach that emphasizes both close visual study and the integration of Indigenous voices, offering a model for more inclusive and respectful scholarship.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my professor, Dr. Astrid Runggaldier, for guiding me through this research project on the erasure of Indigenous textiles. Moreover, thank you to my coordinator, Dr. Tina Thomas, and my mentor, Dr. Rikki Byrd, for also advising me on this article.

When presenting material originating outside the Western hemisphere, scholars must ensure that cultural precision is maintained rather than generalized or presented with decontextualized narratives. When it comes to wearable textiles from indigenous cultures, sometimes the words “indigenous cultures” tend to only sit in the same world as “extinct cultures” as though these communities do not exist in contemporary cultural production. A 2016 *National Geographic* article, “The Super-Ancient Origins of Your Blue Jeans,” highlights this problem. The article describes a 4,500-year-old indigo-dyed textile from Peru’s northern coast and frames it as an unexpected revelation, even though archaeological knowledge of the Moche and other early Andean societies long predates this discovery. Still, with archaeologists stating, “South Americans really did contribute to [the history] of blue jeans,” the article centered the narrative around Western benchmarks of innovation. It failed to contextualize the rarity, sophistication, and cultural importance of the textile within Andean traditions, instead emphasizing its relevance only to the extent that it altered a Western timeline of technological development. This framing exemplifies a broader pattern: Andean textiles, despite their complexity and historical significance, have been marginalized within both public discourse and art historical scholarship for decades.

In this article, I aim to critique the art historical scholarship and interpretive methods that have long represented Indigenous cultures and shaped public comprehension of them. The analysis in this paper is based on research I conducted through The University of Texas at Austin on an extremely rare *huipil* (blouse worn by indigenous women in Mexico and Central America) from a small village called Santiago Atitlán. Although the *huipil* holds deep meaning within its craft, it, along with textiles like it, continues to be erased and misrepresented by large corporations and researchers. Through a formal analysis of this *huipil*, I highlight an approach that combines close visual study with the integration of Indigenous voices, contributing to a more inclusive and historically accurate scholarship. This study builds upon existing scholarship on Maya textiles yet intervenes in the field by foregrounding the perspectives of contemporary Tz'utujil weavers themselves. My analysis addresses this gap by pairing close visual study with the cultural knowledge held by Tz'utujil weavers, proposing a model for art historical interpretation grounded in Indigenous authority rather than Western projection.



Figure 1. Accession Number: 2681-43

Background

Santiago Atitlán is a small municipality within the Sololá department in Guatemala, located right beside the beautiful Lake Atitlán. It is a tropical-like climate with rich vegetation and an abundance of vibrant birds. Predominantly Mayan, this traditional Tz'utujil-speaking town carries culture proudly through its artistic practices since the Spanish conquest of 1523 in Guatemala. During this time of conquest was the destruction of the Tz'utujil and K'iche' kings and the crushed resistance of highland Maya lords (Anderson 2005). For the Maya region, this could be understood as a sign of rebirth; it was a chance to begin anew. This concept of rebirth and renewal is consistent with traditional Mayan beliefs. It is the process of continuous “birth, maturation, dissolution, and rebirth” (Anderson, 2005). These beliefs are shown in ceremonial practices and through textile manufacturing. As mentioned earlier, Santiago Atitlán is a fairly traditional village due to the town not being completely immune to Spanish influence, specifically Christian influences. Atitecos began to integrate Mayan beliefs with the beliefs of Christianity, which could also be symbolized within many of their textile designs. But through my research, that connection became difficult to verify. These belief systems and layered histories shape the materials, visual language, and production methods of Atiteco textiles. By examining the creation of the *huipil*, it will aid in the understanding of the practicality of the culture.

Creation of the *Huipil*

To fully appreciate the significance of this *huipil*, it is important to understand how Santiago Atitlán's textile traditions have evolved and its overall cloth production. Starting around the 1960s, embroidery became more dramatic, and new techniques of embroidery were displayed simultaneously. While the basic composition of *huipils*,

featuring a bi-chromatic warp and grid-like structure, remained consistent, their designs became increasingly intricate, as seen in the featured *huipil*. The unknown weaver begins with a dyeing technique called Ikat (Davis 1988). This is a resistant or tie-dyeing technique that is done before the weaving process. It is done by binding the warps, bunches at a time, and then immersing them in dye.

When the binding is then removed, it results in patterns of yarn not penetrated by the dye. After dyeing the cotton threads purple, on a backstrap loom, the weaver lays out the desired length of the dyed purple thread, vertically, alongside the base white cotton thread on the loom. This is a method included in weaving. Warp threads are the threads that run from top to bottom, and weft threads are the threads that run left to right.

Furthermore, on this *huipil*, there are horizontal lines of blue, magenta, green, and yellow underneath the top half of the *huipil* (the embroidered birds and flowers). All common colors that have held tradition over the past 100 years of textile making in Santiago Atitlán (Chandler, Córdón, and Coca 2015). These lines add weft threads to create more patterns. This is a technique called supplementary weft, or brocading. This brocading allows the *huipil* to form a grid-like design that is specific to Santiago Atitlán. Then, hidden at the top half of the *huipil* is a supplementary weft of white thread hidden behind the embroidery, shown in the close-up image to the right. This is not only to keep consistency within the *huipil*, but also to further conceal the binding of the two panels. A two-paneled *huipil* with one *randa* (the stitching to combine two woven panels) is also a common aspect of the traditional Santiago Atitlán *huipil*. There are variegated rhombuses alongside each other that form rows along the chest, which is also carefully brocaded, which became a specific design technique in Santiago Atitlán. Once the foundational weaving is complete, the weaver transitions to embroidery—a phase that brings both symbolic and aesthetic meaning to the *huipil*, although the patterns and designs hold meaning that is specific to the region of Santiago Atitlán.

Iconography and Imagery

The lake sits at the southern edge of Guatemala and is not only surrounded by villages by volcanoes and other tropical elements. It is a staple within Santiago Atitlán due to the intersection of the cloth production process and the importance that the lake has for the people of this area. It is a lake surrounded by a tropical region, thus bringing birds too. The *huipiles* worn by women can be mothers as well (Christenson 1998), so this puts the women in the center of the lake, a symbol that has already been the pinnacle of this town. It raises the question of whether women are valued at

that level as well. For this specific *huipil*, the dominant colors of the embroidery part are purple and blue. Although due to its fading, it appears white. The blue could symbolize the village surrounding Lake Atitlán. By including the faint blue warp stripes and prominent blue colored birds, it further deepens the relationship between the wearer and Lake Atitlán. While the lake holds deep environmental and spiritual value, it is the presence of birds—both physically and symbolically—that anchors the identity of the *huipil* and the town.

Santiago Atitlan was referred to by its Tz’utujil Mayan name before Christian influence: Tz’ikin Jaay, meaning “house of birds” due to the abundance of diverse birds within the region. Thus, Atitlaco weavers decide to embroider these birds on the front and the back of this *huipil*. The embroidery almost surrounds the wearer with birds, the same way that Santiago Atitlán is surrounded by the birds as well. Birds are often understood to be divine animals associated with moral dualities (Hull and Fergus 2009). So, embroidering the birds with diverse color pallets different than the rest of the *huipil* could emphasize the significance of the animals and how significant it is compared to the rest. For example, on the left side is a daily *huipil* of Santiago Atitlán produced in the early 20th century. The bird motifs have different colored feathers. It is a small embroidery, but the significance is consistent. The use of these multi-colored birds is still apparent within the larger embroidered motifs that you see in the *huipil* that is being featured and only grew as time went on. Both were intentional artistic choices made by the Atitlacos to reflect the use of new techniques of dye and embroidery being used.

Overall, embroidery underscores the thought process and imagination of these weavers. Lola Sapalú, a woman born and raised in Santiago Atitlan, has woven her whole life. She states that “With embroidery, I can use my imagination. I have a lot of designs in my head.” (Chandler 2015). So, it is possibly just that: the artistic choices made on this *huipil* could just be artistic choices and not an expression of clothing that has a “shared worldview” as Mireille Holsbeke, a known Belgian ethnographer and curator, states. This is not a culture that is monolithic but rather one of evolving diversity. From the Western perspective, we can continuously guess the representation of each embroidered design and be wrong, but one thing we do know for certain is that these designs were intentional and held deep meaning to the weaver. Moreover, Lola inspired other women with her designs. This suggests that the sharing of ideas made the embroidery of this region distinct. Embroidery could also be the unknown “weaver” of this *huipil*, with the creator of this piece implementing every modern technique of Santiago Atitlán cloth production to challenge how far they

can go with representing the Mayan town, as well as the relationship between weaver, wearer, and the *huipil* itself. Furthermore, this analysis offers more than the aesthetics of this specific textile. It exposes the interpretation and attention that researchers, museums, and corporations do not give them. When these visual and cultural complexities are filtered through a Western framework, it often results in distortion of historical contextualization, and even erasure. This leads to a broader institutional problem of how indigenous textiles are displayed and understood.

The Problem and the Solution

A 2013 survey conducted in the United States as well as the United Kingdom by the Museums Association found that the public places a high level of trust in museums, almost an absolute trust. Why have museums become the “end-all, be-all” for cultural information? Emma Martin, professor of art history and archeology at the University of Manchester, questions this trust and notes that Western society usually constructs its own cultural narratives, and museums then reinforce them (Martin, “Trusting Museums”). But who are these scholars and researchers behind these museums? What exactly do we trust—the museum or the researchers behind it? And why? Martín Prechtel and Robert S. Carlsen are two scholars known for their work related to the indigenous Mayan community of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. Their article “Weaving and cosmos amongst the Tzutujil Maya of Guatemala” (1988), which was then published by the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, explores the intersection between the textiles of Tzutujil Maya and the cosmos. A main problem with this article was the lack of Indigenous voices. Although Martín Prechtel has lived within Mayan communities, his personal experience does not extend his credibility. He is still a White American man who is speaking from that perspective, one that is non-Tzutujil. Excluding these voices means excluding most of these cultures’ correct history.

What about the artist? Why do they matter? There is usually not a section reserved in museum displays for the identity of the artist, like most museum labels have for other art pieces. For example, the Metropolitan Museum has a few *huipiles* from Guatemala in its collections. One of their *huipiles* titled “*Huipil*” has no image on their website nor does it have a specific artist or location from which it was made. Neither are there any links on this website to find out more information on the significance of *huipils*. A simple marble architectural fragment from ancient Rome has more of a description than the *huipil*. An object’s provenance is routinely examined by a museum’s research staff to represent the material as accurately as possible, yet this textile is excluded from that research. This textile is not alone; other

textiles from Central and South America share the same fate of anonymity. By omitting this key information, these institutions not only contribute to misrepresentation of these textiles but also shape how the public understands these objects.

Large companies like Nike aid in this problem as well. In 2019, Nike had a limited-edition shoe model that was styled based on an indigenous ground in Panama in the Guna Yala region and titled the model “Air Force 1 ‘Puerto Rico’s.” Nike created this product by silencing indigenous voices and had no desire to authenticate these designs. Nike eventually apologized and released a new collection of athletic wear with artistic designs from a Native American designer, Chelysa “Chief” Owens-Cyr, in 2024. But why did it take that long? This raises the question as to why large-scale companies often avoid compensation towards designers like Chelysa and the indigenous culture they are “borrowing” from? Western capitalist societies often prioritize profit rather than the labor required to provide culturally accurate information. I posit that most people simply do not want to spend the energy to learn about the indigenous cultures in question. It is important to note, however, that there are scholars like Astrid Runggaldier and Deborah Chandler who continue to argue for the importance of indigenous textiles. Runggaldier’s course at The University of Texas at Austin titled, “Issues in Exhibitions and Collections of Visual Arts,” was where I was able to conduct my research in this area, which has helped fill a significant gap in the documentation of specific Mayan *huipils*.

Moreover, there are some solutions that could help in bringing indigenous voices to the forefront. A solution brought forth by Dr. Runggaldier is that researchers should be more comfortable with the word “could.” In my formal analysis, I used that word repeatedly because the only affirmation of interpretation should be from the indigenous people themselves. Filtering those interpretations through western narratives continues to generalize indigenous societies.

I would like to take a step further and provide a solution in which researchers actually consider if they should conduct this specific research and to reevaluate the reasoning behind it. These stories need to be presented justly to help the audience further understand these cultures and for a less flattened interpretation of them. Because of this, the reason indigenous textiles are researched need to continuously be evaluated. It is important for authoritative figures such as art historians and archeologists to be questioned to ensure that the right people are telling their stories accurately. This leads to the second solution: access. People would be surprised at how much information is available to the general public, but we must make sure that the

information is correct and accessible. During my research process, The University of Texas at Austin’s Art History Department had an Excel sheet of all the textiles that they have as well as the location and date for some of them. I was given two textiles to research, and one of the two, I had no information except the location (which was a misspelling). Researchers must provide clear and accurate cataloging for these *huipils*. Museums can then take information from these databases and hopefully provide an in-depth description of the textile and a link to those accessible databases. These are solutions that would indeed take time to develop and implement but will be a process that guarantees accuracy and the inclusion of indigenous voices. They are solutions that will start small and hopefully become consistent methods within academic scholarship and museum studies.

Conclusion

This specific *huipil*, although a daily one, is an example of what Santiago Atitlán stands for. It highlights the physical nature of the town through its quintessential embroidered birds that provide the perfect example of modern techniques and a shift in time through textiles. It explores the interconnection between the woman (wearer), the weavers, and the town itself. The complex design and iconography of the *huipil* offer a deeper meaning to what the broader society knows about Santiago Atitlán, unfortunately, which is very surface level. This *huipil* could be understood as a material expression of Santiago Atitlán’s history in the form of a compact and complex piece of cloth. Unfortunately, the people and corporations that we trust and hold in high regard misrepresent and take from these cultures too often. That is why it is important to continuously question who is speaking for indigenous cultures. The Western world easily puts these cultures in a box and keeps them in the past rather than helping them be present for the future.

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Grounds for Development: Coffee, Media, and the Shift from Aid to Agency in Ethiopia (1985–2005)

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Abstract

This paper examines the 1985 Live Aid and 2005 Live 8 concerts as a microcosm for the broader discourse and media narrative around the relationship of coffee and development in Ethiopia. In the early 1980s, Ethiopia suffered a famine of horrific scale. In response, westerners organized the Live Aid concert, which doubled the annual income of Oxfam and Save the Children. In the 2005 Live 8 follow-up concert, Ethiopian leaders advocated for fairer trade regulations, touting coffee as the pathway towards development. This paper is significant because it adds to public understanding by tracking the shift in media narratives around foreign aid, development, and coffee through a focused analysis around Birhan Woldu and the two Live Aid concerts that she participated in. I illustrate that the 1985 Live Aid was built upon charitable donations to solve the Ethiopian crisis. I find that the 2005 Live 8 concert featured more African voices, and many activists focused on sustainable development and economic participation. Tracking Live Aid to Live 8 illustrates a significant shift in the discourse. I argue that by uplifting more Ethiopian voices, Live 8 contains a critique of aid-dependent, pity-driven, neocolonial overtures of Live Aid, while pushing for more equitable participation. Furthermore, I argue that the Ethiopian push to use coffee as the pathway towards sustainable development illustrates the ubiquitous nature of the Ethiopian media coffee narrative.

Introduction

Biblical famine unfurled in Ethiopia in 1983, taking the lives of at least 400,000 people over the subsequent two years.¹ The famine resulted from the Ethiopian government's counter-insurgency military policies. Military offenses bombed marketplaces, destroyed crops, restricted rural trade, and impeded movement, actions which were only exacerbated by drought.² Journalist Micheal Buerk drew attention to the starving masses in the Tigray province in a BBC broadcast.³ Images of starving children and white nurses "playing God" captured the public imagination. The broadcast has been hailed as "one of the most famous television reports of the late 20th century."⁴ The depiction of extreme suffering sparked a record-breaking fundraising campaign.

The following summer, musicians Midge Ure and Bob Geldorf held Live Aid, a global benefit concert that highlighted a young victim of the famine, Birhan Woldu, between performances of prominent musicians. The fundraising success of the event prompted a 20th anniversary concert, Live 8. The famine and its subsequent relief efforts remain infamous, as "no single event affecting the world's poor has captured the public imagination and prompted collective generosity as much as the Ethiopian famine of the early 1980s."⁵

The concerts themselves, notable in their own right for Freddie Mercury's "note heard 'round the world," became the subject of academic scholarship.⁶ In *Famine & Foreigners: Ethiopia Since Live Aid*, journalist Peter Gill argued that although the famine had eased, poverty and hunger remained potent. He found that "people still die of starvation, and no country in the world confronts the threat of famine more painfully and more frequently than Ethiopia."⁷ Alexander De Waal in his report entitled *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, documented the three decades of war and famine that felled Ethiopia from 1961 to 1991, as well as the conflict between Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPFL). The report's analysis showed that the famines were largely "created by government policies, especially counter-insurgency strategies."⁸ Ultimately, violence against civilians was the characteristic feature of the three decades, be that by the hands of the Ethiopian army or through the denial of food and resources.

Scholars have continued to question, rightfully so, if the Live Aid concerts actually generated prosocial impact. In "Live Aid Revisited: Long-Term Impacts of the 1984 Ethiopian Famine on Children," economists Catherine

Porter and Stefan Dercon quantified the consequences by studying longitudinal data of 550 young adults. Children under 36 months at the peak of the crisis are significantly shorter than older cohorts, and that “famine relief in the form of food aid did not appear to have been effective in reducing impacts on the most vulnerable children (who survived the crisis) despite massive aid efforts.”⁹ The famine and persistent food insecurity caused long-term harm for the victims that international aid efforts did not sufficiently address.

In “Band Aid Revisited: Humanitarianism, Consumption, and Philanthropy in the 1980s,” Andrew Jones argued that the Live Aid concerts and the subsequent movement reinforced a shift from state-led welfare solutions towards individualized market-driven forms of charity.¹⁰ Although marketized philanthropy was effective in driving donations, it shunned engagement with the underlying causes of global hunger, and thereby maintained the structures of global economic inequality. Tanja Müller, formed a similar conclusion in “The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism.”¹¹ She argued that celebrity humanitarians perpetuate an anti-political understanding of disaster that obscures the global power structures that underpin famines while perpetuating an image of “Africa” as impoverished.

This paper adds to public understanding of the 1983 famine by tracking the shift in media narratives around foreign aid, development, and coffee through a focused analysis around Birhan Woldu and the Live Aid concerts. I illustrate that although the 1985 Live Aid concert was a herculean international mobilization in response to a human rights crisis, it reiterated an imbalanced relationship between the global North and South. I find that the 2005 Live 8 concert featured more African voices, and many activists focused on sustainable development and economic participation. Tracking Live Aid to Live 8 illustrates a shift in the discourse. I argue that by uplifting more Ethiopian voices, Live 8 pushed for more equitable participation while critiquing the pity-driven, neocolonial overtures of Live Aid. Furthermore, I argue that the Ethiopian push to use coffee as the pathway towards sustainable development illustrates the ubiquitous nature of the Ethiopian media coffee narrative. As such, I present the Live Aid concerts as a case study in the broader discourse around coffee and development.

The 1985 Live Aid Concert

On July 18, 1985, the Live Aid benefit concert was held at the Wembley Stadium in London and the JFK Stadium in New York to raise awareness and funds for the famine in Ethiopia. A staggering 1.5 billion people in 150 nations watched the live broadcast, accomplished through one of the largest satellite link-ups of all time.¹² In Geldorf’s

words, the concert “took an issue that was nowhere on the political agenda and, through the lingua franca of the planet—which is not English but rock ‘n’ roll—[was] able to address the intellectual absurdity and the moral repulsion of people dying of want in a world of surplus.”¹³

The event gained attention for its star-studded cast and global reach. “An expression of musicians’ concern for the starving of Ethiopia, this was the biggest concert ever,” said *The Rolling Stone*, calling the event “superstar heaven.”¹⁴ Artists such as U2, Led Zeppelin, Phil Collins, and Freddie Mercury performed, and footage from more than half a dozen cities around the world was woven into the main satellite broadcast.¹⁵ The concert closed with Geldorf’s hit song, “Do They Know It’s Christmas?”



Figure 1. 1984 television pictures of Birhan Woldu.¹⁶

The concert played documentary footage of a child, Birhan Woldu, on the brink of death. Wrapped in a burial shroud and given 10 minutes to live, the image of her emaciated figure, chapped lips, and rolled back eyes became the defining image of the Live Aid movement. Live Aid used images and videos of her near-death state to encourage attendees to donate. Woldu quickly became the face of the Ethiopian famine.

Woldu’s image and the Live Aid concert galvanized the Western charitable donation scheme, more than doubling the annual income of Oxfam and Save the Children.¹⁷ The effort also increased the international presence in Ethiopia; there were fewer than twenty foreign NGOs in 1984, but that number had tripled by 1985.¹⁸ By 2007, 234 international charities were operating in the nation.¹⁹ While the concert raised millions of dollars for famine relief, its broader impact was broadcasting an image of a poor, desperate Africa to billions of people.

The 2005 Live 8 Concert

The discourse shifted from emergency humanitarian aid in 1984 to long-term economic development schemes in

2005. This is mimicked by the shifting political context, as Ethiopia was led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, rather than the Derg. African leaders became more critical of Western sentiment and started pushing for sustainable development initiatives instead of charitable giving.

When the Live Aid organization threw an anniversary concert in 2005, it invited Woldu to fly to London. The concert was held on an even bigger scale this time, playing sold out shows and hosting a TV audience of 3 billion people. Bob Geldorf introduced her to this crowd in a passionate speech: "Why we should listen to the voices of defeat? I'll tell you why. See this little girl? She had 10 minutes to live 20 years ago. And because we did a concert in this city and in Philadelphia, she's here tonight. This little girl. Birhan!"²⁰ The Live Aid organization used the same self-aggrandizing language, rife with the sentiment that individual charitable donations saved Woldu's life.

Birhan strode on stage in flowing white robes. At the time of the Live 8 concert, she was a college student, studying plant science with the support of the Leicester-based charity African Children's Education Trust.²¹ After her studies, she intended to help her father, Abu, grow coffee in Quiha, a former epicenter of the famine.²² She addressed the London audience through a translator, using her voice to advocate for fairer trade regulations. "The best coffee in the world is from Ethiopia. But it is not being sold in large quantities around the world because of tariffs," she said. "There is no doubt that if debt to countries like Ethiopia is cancelled then it will help our countries develop."²³ Rather than focusing on the famine she grew up in, Woldu spoke about sweeping international economic changes that could contribute to sustainable development in the future.

Woldu used her 15 minutes of fame to push for sustainable economic growth and participation in global trade, rather than more donations. Ethiopian leaders were able to come to the international stage from a position of strength, and push against the unsustainable, pity-driven donations scheme championed by the West. Youssuf N'Dour, who played at the original Live Aid concert, said that "Live 8 is much different, though, as it's much more about a message rather than raising money.... This time we need to see a lot of African leaders fight for modern market laws."²⁴ Ethiopian representatives began advocating for fair economic regulations and sustainable development initiatives.

That a college student specifically focused on sensitive dynamics of coffee production, global trade, and debt cancellation during her speech is curious. She highlighted coffee exportation as the pathway towards development. During this time, the Ethiopian government was mobilizing

its own image and media narratives to bring the issue of economic development through coffee to the forefront. Ultimately, Woldu's speech reflected a broader moment in time through which coffee was seen as a driver of economic change.

Media Narratives around Coffee and Development

The 2005 Live 8 concert occurred precisely when debates over the coffee trademark cases were at the forefront of international exchanges. Tadesse Meskela, the general manager for the Orima Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union and a "key spokesperson for the Ethiopian government," spent the early 2000s trying to increase the economic benefits that Ethiopia can reap from coffee exports.²⁵ He focused on how the "price paid to coffee farmers remains so low that many have been forced to abandon their coffee fields."²⁶ At this point, Ethiopia was a major player in the international coffee market, exporting quality coffee beans that many coffeeshops in 'developed' countries would then sell for a heavily marked up price.²⁷ However, the country was unable to reap the benefits of its exports. Rather than asking for continued humanitarian aid and charitable donations, prominent spokespersons such as Meskela were asking to trademark Ethiopian coffee and participate in the global trade.

Despite the push towards sustainable development through economic participation, the charity sector remained more prominent than Ethiopian production in the years immediately following Live 8. In 2006–7 international NGOs brought in \$537 million in foreign exchange, \$100 million more than coffee, which is Ethiopia's largest export earner.²⁸ In comparison, a 2006 Oxfam report estimated that Starbucks alone was "depriving farmers in Ethiopia of \$90m a year by opposing the Ethiopian government's efforts to trademark three types of local coffee bean."²⁹ The economic muscle of charity continued to outpace Ethiopia's own ability to export goods. The Ethiopian economy was heavily affected by "the asymmetrical character of power in the 'coffee value chain'" of the early 2000s, which "increasingly narrowed the opportunities for vulnerable economies to secure the benefits from coffee trade needed for economic development and poverty reduction."³⁰ Taken in context, the Ethiopian media narrative that pushed for economic development through coffee trade becomes clear. Western corporations such as Starbucks reinforced economic systems that continually disadvantaged Ethiopia and prevented the country from accessing the full value of their exports, let alone create the infrastructure to develop their economy in a sustainable manner. That the idea of coffee as a pathway towards development cropped up at the 2005 Live Aid concert through a college student is remarkable and represents the ubiquitous nature of the narrative.

The Impact of Live Aid

Decades later, Live Aid has continued to define the perception of Ethiopia, a legacy which has been complicated by contemporary reflection. Yared Markos, a businessman who runs Kaffa Coffee in London, reflected on the misguided aid efforts after the 1985 concert, saying, “I remember lots of aeroplanes, biscuits and sweets and cake all over Addis [Ababa, the capital]—we didn’t need cake!”³¹ Author Moky Makura affirmed that “the mainstream media, the most influential ambassador for the Live Aid legacy, still largely perpetuates this dominant narrative about a broken continent plagued by poverty, conflict, corruption, crime, poor leaders and disease...” “Daytime TV in the UK is replete with adverts from international NGOs that continue to use the Live Aid model,”³² Makura continued. Ed Sheeran and Fuse ODG, artists who did not want to participate in the 2014 version of “Do They Know It’s Christmas,” argued that “the song spreads the idea that Africa is a victim of “famine and poverty,” which is “not the truth.”³³ The 2010s saw a growing sentiment that “aid is not a long-term solution... what people want is sustainable growth. If there is political justice, economic justice and social justice, you can maintain peace.”³⁴ Live Aid’s enduring legacy is complicated by continual re-assessments about the programs’ efficacy.

The Live Aid concerts, while a genuine humanitarian response to an overwhelming crisis, solidified the perception of a disadvantaged, destitute Ethiopia and a unidirectional financial model. The concerts solicited mass donations driven by pity, which reinforced the inherent power imbalance between the West and the African continent. This power dynamic is reflected within the coffee supply chain, where the economic success of developed countries such as the United States and Britain far outpaces that of Ethiopia. Ironically, Western countries drove aid-based donations to Ethiopia to counter an economic position that was continually reinforced by Western-based corporations.

Conclusion

The media narrative that pushed the export of coffee and fairer trade conditions at the turn of the century has created a lasting impact. In 2023, *Borgen Magazine* claimed that “Ethiopia’s coffee sector may be the key to sustainable growth,” and predicted that it could weather price and climate related fluctuations to continue driving Ethiopia’s economy. The growth at present is staggering, jumping from \$700 million dollars in 2018 to 1.4 billion in 2023, with aspirations to reach 2 billion in 2024.³⁵ The industry has seen “sustainable growth” in the past few years, but the

asymmetrical international power dynamic that has shaped Ethiopia remains deeply entrenched.

Woldu’s participation in the Live Aid concerts, first passively in 1985 and then actively in 2005, is representative of the increasing agency and advocacy of Ethiopian activists. Live Aid, however noble in its intentions, created a pity-driven media narrative and donations-based economic scheme. Woldu, in her burial shroud, could not consent to the use of her image, and thus was rendered passive. Ethiopia, torn by war and famine, was unable to advocate for itself on the global stage. Live 8 saw a shift in narrative. Woldu actively participated, addressing a crowd of 3 billion people to thank them for their support and advocate for fairer methods for economic participation. Woldu’s story affirms the ever-present Ethiopian narrative of coffee as the tool for growth. Moreover, the shift in language showcases the Ethiopian fight for sustainable development. The cursory shift from aid-based charity towards international trade advocacy seen between the two concerts exposed the economic chasm that characterized the treatment of Ethiopia by economic powers in the global north. Ultimately, the Live Aid concerts, taken in context with the broader economic and political shifts, present a fascinating micro-history of the broader discourse and media narrative around coffee and development.

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A Mexican Homemaker's "Household of Resistance": Composing and Mobilizing a Mexican Working-Class Political Imaginary in WWII-Era Kansas City

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Abstract

This paper examines how Mexican homemakers played an integral role in the mobilization of their households for the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) in Kansas City in the 1940's through the *testimonio* of Josefa Aguilera Parra, a supporter of the UPWA and partner to a Swift & Co. worker. Josefa saw UPWA Local 183 as essential to secure a life of dignity for herself and her family. Thus, she contributed to her husband's union in traditional yet essential ways to fulfill a political imagination rooted in her "household of resistance." This vision would have reverberations in the Midwest during the Civil Rights Movement. This is an excerpt of a longer work, "Mexican Working-Class in Kansas City: Composing Political Imaginations in the Midwest (1920–1953)," that constructs a labor history of the lives and political aspirations of a "constellation" of Mexican workers.

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Introduction



Figure 1. Studio photograph of Josefa Aguilera Parra and her children.

Josefa Aguilera Parra wrangled her children as the camera bathed them in a flash of light. She prepared her family for this photograph at home in Armourdale, Kansas City. She washed her baby and dressed her daughter in a collared dress and a bow. Josefa spent some time on herself too, moving a comb through her hair and putting on a dress from a department store. She could buy it thanks to her husband Adolfo's job at the Swift Co. packinghouse. Her decision to photograph her family showed her desire for dignity. Josefa still imagined more for her and her family's lives.

Born in 1904, Josefa was a homemaker and partner to Adolfo Quiroz Parra, a Swift worker, who was represented by Local 12 of the National Brotherhood of Packinghouse Workers (NBPW) labor union. In this paper, I argue that Josefa's political imaginary was rooted in a "household of resistance."¹ Despite benefiting from stability through Local 12, Mexican women homemakers like Josefa saw aggressive organizing through the competitor union, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) Local 183, as a method to secure their families' dignity through increased returns of their labor. They called upon their experiences of work, their families, and their own desires for dignity. Although women's involvement in unions as workers was restricted and homemakers have only been depicted as supportive actors, Josefa Aguilera Parra's *testimonio* displays Mexican homemakers' role in developing a working-class political imaginary that called upon their homes to organize through their families' union to create fulfilling lives and "sustainable" communities in the Midwest.² I argue this by situating homemakers within a larger union organizing tradition amongst Mexicans in Kansas City and then by presenting Josefa's *testimonio* on her life and contributions to UPWA Local 183. I do so by building on the work of E.P. Thompson on class consciousness when writing the *testimonio*.³ This form attends to how individuals remember their experiences and creates a narrative that reconstructs their politicization.⁴ Finally, I use Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" to capture the "thickness" of Josefa's life when analyzing oral histories, union records, photographs, sociological studies, and newspapers.⁵

Background

Working-class Mexicans joined a diverse proletariat in Kansas City as they fled poverty under dictator Porfirio Díaz, the violence of the Mexican Revolution, and their aspirations for economic opportunity that met industries' need for exploitable labor.⁶ Histories of Mexican laborers in Kansas City describe their working conditions yet obscure how they mobilized in their workspaces or have not included them in accounts in the first half of the 20th century.⁷

However, Mexicans organized with labor unions in the Midwest as New Deal reforms allowed unions to thrive.⁸ Although these unions did not always fight explicitly for the interests of racialized workers, historian Zaragosa Vargas writes that “the union movement for Mexicans became a powerful catalyst to remove the shackles of economic and political as well as racial subjugation.”⁹

Josefa’s husband was represented by Local 12, an independent company union, which joined the NBPW in the late 1930s.¹⁰ Local 12 competed with the CIO’s UPWA and the AFL-affiliated Amalgamated Meat Cutters to bargain for Swift workers. The UPWA represented workers from the major packinghouses in Kansas City, including Armour, Cudahy, Wilson and tried to break the NBPW’s hold over the Swift plant in Kansas City seven times.¹¹ By 1952, the UPWA represented 28 of Swift’s packinghouses nationally but not the one in Kansas City.¹² Historian Roger Horowitz attributed the UPWA’s failures to the company’s white majority of workers who were alienated by the UPWA Local 183’s confrontational labor organizing and interest in racial equity that protected European immigrant and Black workers.¹³ Yet, this account fails to mention Mexican’s involvement at all despite composing 10% of workers of which a strong minority supported Local 183.¹⁴ Informed by Kim Phillip-Kein’s criticism that in Horowitz’s account “none of the workers . . . ever go home,” turning towards workers’ home lives opens possibilities of telling richer stories of Mexican workers at the Swift packinghouse but also how they involved their families, including their partners.¹⁵ In current accounts, Mexican women are not considered to be political agents unless they were explicitly in positions of power in the union. In St. Paul, for example, they are only depicted as dedicated members and the only recognized oral history of a Mexican woman is of Mary Salinas who was the president of her local at the Armour plant in Ft. Worth.¹⁶ I argue that Mexican women outside of the workplace, as homemakers, were necessary actors who not only took on supportive tasks in the movement but also were central to building political imaginations that linked the home and the packinghouse, powering radicalization and praxis.

Josefa Aguilera Parra

Josefa grew up in Tangancicuaro, Michoacán during the Mexican Revolution.¹⁷ Her political imaginary began to take shape when she migrated to the United States to work alongside her uncle and aunt around 1925. She wanted to support her family after her father’s passing. In the 1920’s agricultural businesses in the Southwest sought Mexican migrant workers like Josefa for exploitable labor in their “factories in the fields” of beets, beans, and strawberries in Compton, California and Brighton, Colorado.¹⁸ Harvest work exhausted Josefa, making her accumulate painful

memories in her body. She also never got rest in employee housing.¹⁹ Josefa was disappointed that work decreased the time she had available to herself and to socialize.

So, Josefa found ways to make the most out of her time working in agriculture. Firstly, she realized that she preferred domestic labor over farmwork in her future. While in Mexico, Josefa helped her family by completing housework which was distinct from farmwork. She longed for a similar type of work as she reminisced that “trabajaba ayudando, cuidan-[do] un niño, lavándolo, plancheandolo, . . . tendiendo camas.”²⁰ Josefa also affirmed her bodily agency by fashioning herself with clothes she bought with her wages. She said that “empece a agarrarle [más] cariño a lo que ganaba, porque empecé . . . comprarme [más] ropa.”²¹ For Mexican-American women laborers like Josefa, this consumerism was an expression of agency that showed aspirations for dignity.²²

Josefa arrived to Kansas City in the spring of 1925. Here, she was in community with other Mexicans from Tangancicuaro, Michoacán.²³ Josefa worked at a small Mexican restaurant for two months to continue to support her family but also to attain more freedom by spending time outside of her house.²⁴ Josefa’s uncle quickly realized that her labor exposed her to young men, including her future husband Adolfo Parra.²⁵ Her uncle forced her to quit her job, but this did not damage the care that she already had for Adolfo who was also from Michoacán and a quality inspector at Swift recruited from Fort Worth, Texas.²⁶

Josefa loved him but she also thought of the life she desired as a homemaker. Her body experienced the difficulties of being a farmworker. She said that “yo ya [había] sufrido y [había] visto mucho.”²⁷ In Kansas City, she found a possibility to attain the life she wanted by marrying someone like Adolfo who had a job that paid \$17 a week.²⁸ “[Y]o deseaba una persona que tuviera trabajo . . . para yo depender de él, no que él dependiera de mí,” she affirmed.²⁹ So, Josefa married Adolfo in 1927. She could also take care of her aesthetics and her new family to attain dignity for herself. She remembered that “yo fui libre de agarrar el dinero, gastarlo, vestirme, que era lo que [más] me gustaba en la vida . . . mandarle a mi familia poquito.”³⁰ These were not merely material desires. Josefa was able to attain a level of dignity that many other young Mexican women sought while also continuing to send money back to Michoacán.



Figure 2. "Homes of Workingmen. Front View" from Manuel C. Elmer's *Armourdale: A City Within a City*.

The Parras' home in the Armourdale district was material evidence to her that she was bettering her life. "[L]a vida estaba más cambiada para [mí] . . . miraba . . . que ya todas las casas estaban mejores que donde yo había visto que los ranchos," she reminisced.³¹ Josefa also found joy in laboring from her new home. "Trabaje, estuve contenta, trabajando[,] en mi casa en mi hogar," she said.³² Homemaking was still intense as Josefa stated that "[si]empre yo trabajaba [más] duro en casa."³³ She saw her labor as contributing to the household by raising her eight children but also managed to gain income through babysitting the children of Mexican women who became industrial workers.³⁴ Even though Josefa did not work outside of her home, she was still able to take part in labor politics.

It is likely that when Adolfo came home from work at Swift, he talked to Josefa about the UPWA. Mexicans had mixed feelings about their support for the company and the UPWA. However, Purcell's testimonials demonstrate the conviction of a dissident group of Mexican workers that supported UPWA Local 183.³⁵ One of the workers interviewed, Julio Contreras, stated that "[it]'s a good place to work . . . for people [laughs] other than me! . . . my people don't get a chance. Not just my people, the colored people the same."³⁶ Leaders on the floor also passionately tied their involvement in the UPWA with their families. Purcell wrote about Juanita Mendoza, a Mexican UPWA organizer, who was so critical of the company that she said that she would not want her children to work at Swift. Juanita said that "[t]here's no future for them here . . . Because they will not hire Mexican boys in the office and will not hire Mexican girls in the office. . . . Have you walked through their office? You will see nothing but redheads and blonds!"³⁷ Juanita's critique demonstrates that Mexican women workers saw the direct ties that their workplaces could have to their family. Thus, Mexican workers sympathetic to the UPWA, like Adolfo, organized while keeping their families in mind and brought these concerns to their homes.

Josefa's involvement in labor politics might have reinforced normative ways that workers thought women should get involved in unions: as homemakers through their

male partners. The UPWA perpetuated patriarchal conditions such as wage differentials, gendered division of labor, and limited protections during layoffs inside of the industry when negotiating contracts.³⁸ The union also pushed women into "auxiliary roles" even though the labor organization advocated for equal pay and women served as part of its leadership.³⁹ Perhaps Josefa represented a respectable way for women to get involved in labor politics through their partners from their home.

Despite this, Josefa actively supported the UPWA and took a role in shaping her family's political imagination by linking her home and the packinghouse. Josefa imagined that workers could gain more dignified conditions for themselves and their families through the UPWA. Though Josefa did not explicitly name any union or fighting between the UPWA and the NPBW, the UPWA was the only packinghouse union preoccupied with racial discrimination in the workplace and practiced aggressive organizing which were important for Josefa.⁴⁰ She emphasized that they needed to organize so that "el trabajador gane [más], y esté [más] contento y se le haga el trabajo [más] bueno a esta persona, porque se le esta pagando lo que se le debe."⁴¹ It was clear to her that they had much to win for workers. Josefa also aspired for workers to earn wages that allowed their partners to be homemakers. Her interest in laboring in her home, rather than in industrial work, was intimately tied to her husband's ability to be treated fairly. She only saw this possibility through the UPWA. Thus, her political imagination was also rooted within her "household of resistance."

Josefa encouraged her husband's support of the union's combative methods in the 1940's since she believed they could help them attain lives of dignity. She remembered the events of a strike in the following passage:

algunas personas a veces entraban adentro de las trocas . . . siempre estaban trabajando dentro. . . . Mi esposo nunca lo [hizo], porque [él] no [quería] quebrar la huelga. A [él] le gustaba aunque nos apuráramos por el dinero; . . . a [él] le gustaba cuando se decía una cosa, fuera. Por ejemplo, si [él] quería que le pagaran [más], pues [él] [quería] que estuviera firme la persona. Que no fuera a escondidas al trabajo. . . . Es cuando la persona se decide a una cosa, está segura de misma, . . . de lo que [está] haciendo.⁴²

She understood that workers needed to back their desires with actions to win. Thus, she supported and encouraged her husband to stay committed to strikes despite their financial situation. Considering that a lot of the UPWA's actions took place at other packinghouses, Josefa also displayed Mexican workers' willingness to participate in actions that were not tied to their workplace. Thus, both Josefa and Adolfo practiced solidarity with their neighbors

and community members in Kansas City through the UPWA.

Josefa mobilized these beliefs as she helped with strikes in the 1940's from her "household of resistance." For example, during strikes at other packinghouses, Josefa remembered that she cooked and distributed tacos to workers walking in picket lines. She stated that "todo lo que [hacía] era . . . ayudaba a mi esposo en que me [decía], como tacos, su comida y todo eso y yo [se los] llevaba a las personas resguardando la puerta."⁴³ Josefa completed essential labor during the strike such as nourishing workers that were guarding the doors of the Swift plant. Although she downplayed her own involvement, she understood the necessity of strikes and the labor that supported them. Josefa put into action a political imagination that connected her home and the packinghouse district in Kansas City to achieve a better life.

Conclusion

Legal repression during the Cold War purged labor organizers and closing packinghouses decreased union membership, destroying a militant tradition of packinghouse workers in the Midwest.⁴⁴ Mexican communities soon faced mass deportations which would also target Josefa who eventually returned to her family in Kansas City after immigration agents coerced her into self-deporting in 1952.⁴⁵ However, Mexicans' involvement in labor organizing gave fruit to their community's involvement in the Civil Rights struggles.⁴⁶ Ricardo, one of Josefa's sons, embodied this. Despite not being interested in his unionist father's stories of his home country's radicalism, Ricardo served as the director of the Midwest Council of La Raza in Indiana and involved himself with the Farmworker Labor Organizing Committee to mobilize Mexican agricultural workers.⁴⁷ Decades after his parents' involvement with the union, he echoed his family's political imagination as he envisioned a project of organizing Latinxs across the Midwest.⁴⁸

This essay describes how union politics took place in the most intimate of spaces as Josefa constructed her ideology, reflecting on her home as she supported the aggressive organizing of Local 183. Although this might have been a normative way for Mexican women to get involved, her testimony allows us to locate the importance of Mexican homemakers and their labor in their homes as central to a tradition of radical Mexican packinghouse workers in the Midwest who believed that unions like the UPWA could transform their lives.

Endnotes

- ¹ I am repurposing Angela Davis' depiction of enslaved Black women in the U.S. as "caretaker[s] of a household of resistance." Similarly to her, I aim to demonstrate that Josefa, a racialized woman, was not complicit in the extractive economic systems that she was a part of. Josefa used her home as a site of labor central to her counterinsurgent political imagination concerning worker's rights. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 4 (1971): 9.
- ² Theresa Delgadillo, Ramon H. Rivera-Servera, Geraldo L. Cadava, and Claire F. Fox, eds. "Introduction" in *Building Sustainable Worlds: Latinx Placemaking in the Midwest* (University of Illinois Press, 2022), 1–2.
- ³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963), 9–10.
- ⁴ Mario T. García, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience* (University of Arizona Press, 2016), 4.
- ⁵ Dana Cuff, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Todd Presner, Maite Zubiaurre, and Jonathan Jae-an Crisman, *Urban Humanities: New Practices for Reimagining the City* (MIT Press, 2020), 21–2; Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 11; Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).
- ⁶ Michael M. Smith, "Beyond the Borderlands: Mexican Labor in the Central Plains, 1900–1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1981): 239–40.
- ⁷ Historian Robert J. Oppenheimer describes the conditions of Mexican workers but does not identify how workers handled or struggled against them even though he was the lead of the "Trabajo y Cultura" project that documented unionization efforts. Additionally, other labor historians like John Herron acknowledge Mexicans workers' presence in the meatpacking industry but does not include Mexicans in his text because government archives do not mention them. However, Valerie M. Mendoza recognizes that Mexicans joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters in the early 20th century. See Robert J. Oppenheimer, "Acculturation or Assimilation: Mexican Immigrants in Kansas, 1900 to World War II," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1985): 39–40; John Herron, "Making Meat: Race, Labor, and the Kansas City Stockyards" in *Wide-Open Town: Kansas City in the Pendergarst*, (University of Kansas Press, 2018), 136; Valerie Marie Mendoza, "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community in Kansas City, 1890–1930" (University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 74–81.
- ⁸ The New Deal's labor reforms allowed unions such as the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) to thrive and increasingly organize a diverse set of workers, including Mexicans, under the model of industrial unions. See Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9; Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.
- ⁹ Vargas, 5.
- ¹⁰ Theodore V. Purcell, *Blue Collar Man: Patterns of Dual Allegiance in Industry* (Harvard University Press, 1960), 19–20.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² "For Better Community," *Call*, October 7, 1952.
- ¹³ Roger Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!": *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930–90* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 101–2.
- ¹⁴ Horowitz' study of Kansas City's UPWA labor organizing is mostly focused on white, Croatian, and Black worker solidarity. He does not mention Mexicans in his chapter on Kansas City but describes their discontent with the NBPW in his footnotes, specifically number 55 in Chapter 4, and mentions page numbers of Purcell's study of where we can find these voices. See Horowitz, 309; Purcell, 10, 42, 127.
- ¹⁵ Reference Phillips-Kein's response to literature on meatpacking labor movements in Eric Arnesen, "Symposium on Halpern and Horowitz: Packinghouse Unionism." *Labor History* 40, no. 2 (1999): 225

- 16 See Mary Salinas, "Mary Salinas (Fort Worth: Armour)" by Rick Halpbern and Roger Horowitz, United Packinghouse Workers of America Oral History Project Interviews, 1985–1986, Mss 698, Tapes No. 85–88, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; Rick Halpbern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (Twayne Publishers, 1996), 104–6, 109, 110, 113; Kate Euckland, "Latina Packinghouse Workers; Story of These Immigrant Women Workers Is a Neglected History in St. Paul." *Union Advocate*, 1997, 5–6.
- 17 In this essay, I will first provide the full note for the oral history interviews and then cite them as "Name of Interviewee" Interview" for brevity. See Valerie Marie Mendoza, "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community in Kansas City, 1890–1930." (University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 5–6; Josefa Aguilera Parra. "Interview with Josefa Aguilera Parra by Laurie Bretz (Spanish), June 23, 1980." By Laurie Bretz, June 23, 1980, transcript, Kansas City, Kansas, Spanish Speaking office interviews and slides. Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
- 18 This information comes from another oral history conducted by Irene Ruiz. In comparison to the one conducted by Laurie Bretz two years later, Ruiz's is more biographical. Thus, I use it to cover more basic facts about Josefa Aguilera Parra's life and will be referred as "Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Irene Ruiz. See Josefa Aguilera Parra, "An Interview with Josefa Aguilera Parra," by Irene Ruiz, January 24, 1978, audio and transcript, Hispanic Oral History Collection, Missouri Valley Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, MO; Kelly Lytle Hernández, "Mexican Immigration to the United States" *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 25; Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Little, Brown and Company, 1939).
- 19 Josefa voiced that "the beds were so hard . . . they were made of a huge piece of wood and then you would just put a thick blanket over it . . . and you slept very badly there . . . sometimes instead of feeling rested, the next day you would wake up tired." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 20 "I worked helping, taking care of children, washing them, ironing, . . . making beds." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 21 "I started to value what I was earning, because I began to spend what I earned . . . buying myself clothes." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 22 Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 17–18; Vicki L. Ruiz, "The Flapper and the Chaperone: Cultural Constructions of Identity and Heterosexual Politics among Adolescent Mexican American Women, 1920–1960" in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, (NYU Press, 1998), 216.
- 23 Mendoza, 48–9.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 25 Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz; Mendoza, 119.
- 26 Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Irene Ruiz.
- 27 "I had already suffered and seen a lot." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 28 U.S. Census Data 1930.
- 29 "I desired a partner that would have a job . . . for me to depend on him and not him on me." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 30 "I was free to use the money, spend it, dress myself, which was the thing that I loved most out of my life . . . send some money home." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 31 "Life had changed for me. . . . I got to see . . . houses that looked a lot better than the ones at the farms." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 32 "I worked, I was happy working in my house, my home." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 33 "I always was the one that worked harder at home." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 34 Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Irene Ruiz.
- 35 Purcell, 135–6.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 38 Dennis A. Deslippe, "We Had an Awful Time with Our Women': Iowa's United Packinghouse Workers of America, 1945–75," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 12–13.
- 39 Horowitz, 100.
- 40 Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 41 "the worker earns more, is more satisfied with their labor, and work would benefit them, because they are compensated for what they are owed." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 42 "some people would enter the company hidden inside of trucks . . . they were always working inside. . . . My husband never did it, because he did not want to break the strike. Although we struggled financially . . . he liked to stick to his word. For example, if someone wanted to be paid more, he expected that person to be firm. Not for them to enter their job in hiding. . . . When the person decides to do something, is sure of themselves, is sure of what they are doing." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 43 "all that I did was . . . help my husband in what he told me to, like cook tacos, his food and all of that and I would bring it to the people guarding the gates." Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz.
- 44 As shown by historian John H. Flores and Zaragoza Vargas, the Immigration and Naturalization Service served as a mechanism to repress CIO Latinx immigrant labor organizers. See Flores, "Deporting Dissidence," 106–7; Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War* (University of Illinois Press, 2018); Zaragoza, 271–3; Horowitz, 255–8.
- 45 Josefa Aguilera Parra Interview with Laurie Bretz; Vargas, 286–7.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 284–9.
- 47 See both interviews, personal papers of Ricardo Parra and his partner Olga Villa Parra, and archives of the Midwest Council of la Raza. See Ricardo Parra, "Oral History, Ricardo Parra," by George Garner and Valeria Chamorro, March 7, 2018, recording and transcript, Civil Rights Heritage Center, Indiana University in South Bend, South Bend, IN; Ricardo Parra, "An Interview with Ricardo Parra." by Irene Ruiz, April 14, 1977, recording and interview notes, Hispanic Oral History Project, Missouri Valley Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, MO; Ricardo Parra and Olga Villa Parra Papers, MS.2009.8., Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN; and Midwest Council of La Raza Records, MCL, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, IN.
- 48 See Ricardo Parra, "Latinos in the Midwest: Civil Rights and Community Organization" in *La Causa: Civil Rights, Social Justice and the Struggle for Equality in the Midwest* (Arte Público Press, 2004), 16.

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Disfruto lo malo, aunque me este matando: 21st Century Transnational Mexican Working-Class Ethos in *Corridos Tumbados*

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Abstract

This paper examines the rise of *corridos tumbados*, a contemporary Mexican musical genre, as a transnational expression of 21st-century working-class Mexican and Mexican-American identity. Bridging sonic traditions of regional Mexican music with hip-hop and trap influences, *corridos tumbados* articulate narratives of resistance, aspiration, and racialized labor under neoliberal capitalism. Drawing on theory focused on Latin American colonialism and theorizations of narcoculture, this study argues that the genre both challenges and reproduces the ethos of exploitation that defines the Mexican working class. Through lyrical analysis and ethnography, I explore how this genre functions as both a counter-narrative and a cultural commodity that negotiates criminalization and state violence. Ultimately, *corridos tumbados* reflect the hybridity of diasporic Mexican identity and assert a sonic space of belonging across borders, especially for youth navigating marginalization in the U.S. and Mexico. This work offers a nuanced reading of music as protest, identity-making, and cultural survival in our contemporary world.

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“Traigo buena clika
Me la rolo con los morros
Yo controlo los negocios, pues mi padre me
enseñó~

“¡Quita esa nacada!”¹

Introduction

Corridos Tumbados in 21st-Century Popular Culture

In April of 2024, Peso Pluma performed his first Coachella set, which he described as a celebration of Mexican American heritage and culture. This inaugural performance of the state of 21st century regional Mexican music didn't simply serve the purpose of a cultural celebration, but symbolized an American cultural shift in popular culture, particularly in music media. The presentation of the *corrido tumbado* at the venue speaks to a broader disruption occurring in mainstream Western culture where the racialized “other” is starting to represent great American masses. As the Mexican *corrido* facilitates transnational discourse on the marginalization of low-income Mexicans both in the United States and in Mexico, a contradiction worth noting occurs when the subaltern music form is championed in American venues. Peso Pluma's Coachella performance marks a shift in American cultural expressions that are beginning to cross national borders during a period where heightened precarity exists around redefining American citizenship through the racialization of the Latino other. This essay aims to showcase *corridos tumbados* as simultaneously challenging and reproducing a working-class ethos shaped by racialized exploitation via a sonic site, where pride in labor, cultural belonging, and neoliberal self-making collide.

Defining the Corrido Tumbados

Corridos tumbados builds upon Mexican *corridista* tradition while incorporating Mexican-American rap, trap, and reggaeton influences. The result is a hybrid sound combining contemporary hip-hop aesthetics with traditional brass instrumentation and the distinctive vocal sounds of Chalino Sánchez and Ariel Camacho. Most significantly, the *corrido*

tumbado remains loyal to its *corrido* lineage by serving as an outlet for narration of life on the margins of a capitalist society. Through my construction of a contemporary folk musical genre that responds to American racial nationalist exclusion of the 2020's, I aim to explore the contemporary moment of the counter-narrative tradition of the *corrido* as it harks on Dr. Mondragon Celis' (2022) definition of *narcocultura* as valuing upward mobility and social justice. I pair this argument with scholar Ruth Gomer-Munoz' (2010) idea of a Mexican working-class ethos that both considers the subaltern state of undocumented/mixed-status Mexicans in the United States and shifts the focus onto workers agency (or lack thereof) where labor and race intersect. I will provide an interpretation of popular lyrics from the *corrido tumbado* genre through a reading of decolonial Latin American racial theory. Additionally, throughout this essay I will offer a first-person reflection based on author subjectivity as a Mexican Chicana scholar.

***Platicando*² sobre: Latino Theory on Race, Language, and Diaspora**

Colonial systems of racial classification did not dissipate with independence movements, but rather evolved and extended beyond Latin America through processes of migration and displacement. As Latinx diasporic communities formed across the United States, they carried with them the racialized legacies of Latin American colonialism. The lived racial experience continues to shape their cultural expressions despite finding friction with confines of the American black-white racial binary. I intentionally approach coloniality as a framework to oppose academic understandings of our current moment as “post-colonial.” Specifically for the Latino, the Spanish Inquisition left devastating foundational beliefs that have led to systemic barriers placed onto the racialized Latino. Maldonado-Torres explains, “[the] sixteenth-century discourse developed around polemics about the very humanity of colonized subjects” (Maldonado-Torres 653). For the Mexican-American existing under the onset of technofascism in 2025 American society, we experience a replication of this colonizer logic, where the citizenship and humanity of Latinos in the United States is being questioned through their rampant criminalization. Understanding diaspora, then, requires us to examine how coloniality travels and transforms in new racial landscapes and how Mexicans can find belonging in the United States as bicultural Americans.

This understanding of the diaspora and the distinct points of encounter that occur is central to Latin American cultural expressions in American ethnic communities. Jossiana Arroyo pairs this phenomenon with Homi K. Bhabha's (1991) terminology of hybridity, which he characterizes as, “. . . focus[ing] on the social construction of

difference and what he calls “liminal,” “interstitial,” and “third spaces” as performative strategies against colonial, national discourses, and the state” (Arroyo 141). For the Mexican in the United States, the mere experience of hybridity is resistance to the white-settler colonial status quo that encourages complete American assimilation for all immigrants. The Mexican diaspora in the United States is thus reframed from a space of exile and alien, but as a space that is equally American as it is Mexican given that its conditions are mediated by American structures of power. This new frame allows us to understand Mexican-American belonging in the United States as an intentional protest to the presidential attempts to whiten the American public and who it recognizes as a dignified citizen.

Narcoculture, State Violence, and Political Economy

*“Tu nomas echale ganas. . .”*³

Corridos tumbados, born at the intersection of Mexican and U.S. working-class experience, reimagine cultural identity through narratives of violence, resistance, and neoliberal aspiration, while simultaneously being policed and co-opted by both states and markets. While this phrase, *échale ganas*, has served as a form of cultural resistance and affirmation, it has also served as an enabler for the over-exploitation of Mexicans in the United States.

Consistency throughout *corridos tumbados* involves a re-imagination of an alternate social economy that offers a representation for urban, poor Mexican youth whose means don't allow for a conventional path towards attaining success. As a successor of the regional Mexican musical tradition of the *corrido*, *corridos tumbados* follow the oral tradition of *corridos* as “. . . a way of documenting the experiences of people who often have no other voice” (Fernández 63). Often, the only space carved out for these communities in Mexico is through illicit trade of commodities; illegal trade of drugs or narco economy. In the genre's musical debut in 2019 with Junior H and Natanale Cano's *Disfruto lo Malo*, the lyrics describe a romanticization of this narco economy and the integration of drugs and its usage as part of the social culture. Because of this association, the Mexican state has championed a move against embracing *corridos tumbados*. There is no coincidence that the only popular sonic form among the poor, Brown urban youth of Mexico is portrayed as vulgar and devalued, as the state has always participated in national whitening projects (See *La Raza Cosmica* by Jose Vasconcelos).

Scholarly Debates on Narcocultura

Some scholars oppose the popularity of *corridos tumbados* due to this perceived romanticization of the ongoing narco economy in Mexico. Agnes Mondragon Celis defines

narcocultura as a political project that associates various identities and practices as valuable, especially ideas relating to capitalist consumption, upward mobility and even social justice. She outlines the role of the Mexican government in contributing to the attractive attributes of drug culture in Mexico, specifically through former president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's populist initiative of *Instituto para Devolver al Pueblo lo Robado*⁴ (c. 2018), which he sometimes refers to as colloquially *Chucho el Roto* institute, referencing a Mexican criminal bandit of the 19th century (Mondragón-Celis 589). On the other hand, Jose Manuel Valenzuela Arce contends that while *corrido tumbados* provide a counter-culture that narrates the real-life circumstances of poor, racialized urban youth in Mexico, it encourages a fetishization of the violence of Mexican cartels and inherent opposition of contemporary stratified state and societal order (Valenzuela Arce 26). Essentially, poverty-struck urban families turn to narco societies in Mexico where jobs are being created and a redistribution of said resources is sustaining the population forgotten by the Mexican political ruling parties. While I recognize the impact of social violence promoted by the *corrido tumbado*, I believe this genre can offer an ethnographic interpretation of an agreed-upon communal understanding of a delegitimization of the state after a shared history of multiple offenses of political state corruption.

Close readings: Working-Class Ethos in the Lyrics

Natanael Cano: "Más Altas Que Bajadas"

In Natanael Cano's 2023 hit, "Mas Altas Que Bajadas," he exemplifies the feelings of reaching success in the neo-liberal capitalist market and how his work ethic encouraged him to overlook the various mistreatments he faced. He sings,

"Aún recuerdo cuando empezaba, la feria no la buscaba
Pero cuando le echas ganas, más te ayuda Dios...
Hoy son más altas que bajadas, ya no me humillan
pa' nada . . ."⁵

As the brown Mexican man (in this case, Natanael Cano, the founder of *Corridos Tumbados*) reflects on his journey towards success, he recounts how at first, he was not motivated by profit incentives. He simply wanted to work because working is dignified in Mexican working-class ethos. When he starts to accumulate capital, he concludes that this is a gift from God that he has earned from his physical labor. Thus, for Natanael Cano, his humanity is derived from arduous labor. He then exclaims his supersession of the forces of oppression, which in this case seems to be poverty, and has finally reached liberation because of all the effort he has put in as a worker. Through

his faith in God and his work ethic (*echandole ganas*) he un-did the curse that being racialized as poor and Mexican has given him. Also, in the final line he notes as of late he does not tend to feel humiliated anymore due to his prior colonial state that he has shed as his labor is being rewarded. Only through consistent faith and working through dangerous conditions can a poor Mexican man earn a narrative of liberation as understood through the *corrido tumbado*.

Peso Pluma and Eslabón Armado: "La Durango"

This mechanism of work ethic is also reflected in Eslabon Armado and Peso Pluma's 2024 "La Durango."

"Después de tanto chingarle, ya me supere
Y no me aguito, gracias a Dios estamos bien
Y si preguntan cómo es que me ha ido tan bien
No se me asusten, con esfuerzo me lo gane"⁶

In their lyrics, these men insist that their work ethic and permissance of their own exploitation will liberate them from the capitalist system that profits from their poverty, while reimagining and centering their desire for leisure and dignity. This is best exemplified with the last phrase of the second song, *con esfuerzo me lo gane*. This particular *corrido tumbado* insists that racialization and the "other'ed" identity Mexicans have been relegated to can be brushed off if one is willing to labor themselves to the bone. Because these men are forced into informal sites of the labor economy, humanity is often conflated to a direct monetary exchange of physical labor. If they are paid (a miniscule amount), they feel dignified in their work. This deliberation, almost like a coping mechanism with one's limited possibilities due to their racial identity, is a working-class ethos at play.

Corridos as Counter-History and Transnational Folklore

The musical genre of corridos is a part of the fabric of Mexican folklore, for Mexicans inside and outside the U.S.-Mexico border. Despite the conclusions of traditional American folklore academics on the conception and history of Mexican corridos (Simmons), the music genre IS unique to Mexico. In a text published in 1965, Merle Simmons concludes that the Mexican *corrido* is simply a part of a long-standing Latin American musical tradition. He particularly argues in favor of the *corrido* simply being a direct descent of the Spanish romance and Argentine decima sound (Simmons 1 & 7). Americo Paredes, counters this argument in the late 90's: the Mexican *corrido* developed in the face of political international conflicts that involved Mexico during the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the Mexican Revolution, the Franco-Mexican War, and the Mexican-American War. Because of the external pressures of a militarization of men, the Mexican *corrido* encouraged nationalistic paternal social values, such as linking

masculinity with valiance, courage and obedience (Paredes). *Corridos tumbados* express a working-class masculinity for Mexican men that is shaped by racialization and economic struggle. They embody a hustle and survival ethos that glorifies labor and upward mobility at the detriment and dehumanization of the poor Mexican in the United States, while also offering a critique of Mexican political systems that have failed to protect their constituents against cartel violence.

The *corrido*, I posit, is a tool used to counter official state histories and a medium of which the subaltern is allowed a non-censored space for social commentary, cultural criticism and a re-configuration of perspective of national narratives. *Corridos tumbados* serve as a powerful cultural site where working-class Mexican and Mexican-American artists articulate both resistance to and complicity with systems of violence, capitalism, and racial marginalization. Their transnational rise showcases how music can operate as both folklore and commodity. Even as state institutions attempt to silence these voices, *corridos tumbados* continue to amplify the lived experiences and aspirations of *plebada* on both sides of the border. In this way, the genre embodies a messy but vital negotiation of identity, memory, and power.

Conclusion

If *corridos tumbados* cultivate models of violent masculinity among Mexican youth while also narrating their lived realities, it is because the enduring legacies of colonialism have shaped the structural violence that poor, working-class Mexicans face across the U.S.-Mexico border. Should these young people not also have the right to see their truths, struggles, and identities reflected in the musical vehicles that speak most directly to them?

Corridos tumbados are the Mexican and American subaltern's form of cultural resistance and documentation of their lived realities, remaining true to their *corridista* traditions. They offer transnational belonging and identity for Mexican-Americans in a tumultuous political landscape that negates their citizenship based on language and racial stratification. The colonial condition of the U.S.-Mexico border mediates the Mexican diaspora and acts as a site of cultural and musical space as it has birthed the original *corrido* during the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century. The hybrid identity of *corrido* artists, like Peso Pluma and Chalino Sánchez as byproducts of Mexican and American cultural upbringing allows us to further complicate the ethnic identity and composition of the *corrido tumbado* as not only a Mexican folk musical genre, but an American folklore as well. This conceptualization begs a deeper analysis of a future study positioning the cultural

productions of *corridos tumbados* as contemporary social moment that responds to what the field of Chicano Studies has theorized as Aztlán (or in the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, *El otro México*) (Anzaldúa 11). These songs are a direct negation of the identity negotiation that the 2025 Trump administration demands from Mexican-Americans, and are an affirmation that Mexicans ARE American and vice-versa.

It is necessary to consider the contradictions of post-coloniality and the nuances of hybrid cultural productions. In future studies of the up-and-coming *corrido tumbado*, I urge scholars to produce a nuanced cultural analysis that does not stop at the perceived romanticization of narco culture in the aesthetics and lyrics of the musical genre, but marvels at the ability of the music to affirm identity and express a criticism of injustice and aspiration amidst systemic violence.

Endnotes

- 1 I have a great clique/ I roll with the boys/ I control the businesses, well my father taught me/ Turn off that vulgarity!"
- 2 "Chatting."
- 3 "Just focus on putting in effort."
- 4 Institute dedicated towards returning items that have robbed from the community to the community.
- 5 "I still remember at first I did not look for profit/ But, when God sees your efforts, he tends to reward you/ Today, there are more highs than lows, no one humiliates me anymore . . ." (Natanael Cano, "Mas altas que bajadas" *Nata Montana*, Rancho Humilde & Warner Music Latina, 2023).
- 6 "After hustling for so long, I have finally overcome my limitations/ And I don't feel down about it, thanks to God we are okay/ And if anyone asks how we have reached so much success/ Don't be frightened, through pure work ethic I reached success." (Peso Pluma, Eslabón Armado & Junior H, "LA DURANGO" *Exodo*, Double P Records, 2024).

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The Forgotten Matriarch

Omar Culbreath Jr., *Morehouse College*

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Abstract

Due to the nature of African Americans' history in the United States, genealogical research within this community has proved to be arduous, hindered by centuries of racism incorporating enslavement and Jim Crow. Several scholars explore the history and conditions that African American women endured over the course of the United States' history as well as their position within society is essential. The common argument of these scholars is that the African American (Black) woman is grounded in an integral position within their families and society, while holding the complex status as being Black and female in a White Patriarchal dominated society. This text explores a personal journey of navigating Black genealogical research and highlighting the story of Rose Dowe, an African American woman born in the early 1800s who enslaved for the majority of her life, and "forgotten" until now.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my MMUF colleagues; my mentor, Dr. Samuel Livingston; Dr. Corrie Claiborne; Dr. Cynthia Neal-Spence; Dr. Alison Ligon; and my family—most notably my Aunt Trudy, who sparked my interest in genealogy and encouraged this publication. Finally, this work is dedicated in memoriam to my great-grandmother, Shelvdine Pack Culbreath (1939–1999); my Nanna, Marie Richardson Lewis (1921–2014); her great-grandmother, Rose Dowe; and all the ancestors who are the reason for my being.

Mrs. Rose Dowe
Clarendon County, SC
December 5, 2022

Dear Rose, my fifth great-grandmother,

In a class this past semester, our studies of the Black Liberation movements throughout history made me think of you and your story. I write this letter in memory of you. Though you were gone long before my time, I am sure you watch over me and have seen my recent matriculation through my first semester at The Historically Black College/University (HBCU), Morehouse College. Within the Black Liberation class, we have learned about the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the various Black organizations such as the Black Panthers, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Republic of New Afrika (RNA), and Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). I was enthusiastic to learn how the Black community centered themselves post-enslavement through aspects of ambition, perseverance, and love, which led to the establishment of organizations previously mentioned. Many of them I had no prior knowledge about, nor did I know the impact they had on the Black community and the world as a whole.

I had the pleasure of researching the RNA organization founded by two brothers, Gaidi and Imari Obadele (née Milton and Richard Henry), as well as Audley Moore, formally known as Queen Mother Moore in 1968. The RNA revolved around the principle of Ujamaa, a Tanzanian concept that focused on cooperative economics to strengthen and build the Black community, while also creating a separate country (consisting of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina). In addition to this, the RNA formed an army solely for the protection of Black people. More importantly, this class was taught by Dr. Michael Simanga, who understood the constraints of the times we were studying and met some of the very people we learned about.

One of our assignments was to attend a conference in memoriam of Asa G. Hilliard III, a man who lived for the liberation of Black people through education of themselves and their history. To be in the presence of people who participated in organizations such as SNCC or contributed to the movement in some way was surreal. This class was an eye-opening experience that will impact generations to come as I am determined to make sure my children and future descendants learn the history of our people and the various aspects of the Black struggle towards liberation. One of the most pivotal aspects we touched on were the disregard for Black women throughout history, which I furthered explored through the works of Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross's *A Black Women's History of the*

United States, both whom explored the lives of enslaved Black women from the colonial to the Civil War era.¹ Berry and Gross use accounts from these women spanning across this period, who weave together a powerful story of the dynamics of their experiences, environments, and perspectives on what it meant to be a Black woman of this time.

Reading LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant's *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women*, Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, and Niara Sudarkasa's "The Status of Women" in *Indigenous African Societies*" in another class, AFR 360, "ADC: The Gullah-Geechee Experience," led me to reflect on how Gullah-Geechee women preserved their culture through spiritual practices such as communicating with the dead, interpreting dreams and visions, as well as the power of prayer.² Through Manigault-Bryant, I reflect on the foundation of this letter to you, as I communicate with one of my deceased female ancestors. Grounded in this woven context of highlighting the pivotal contributions of Black women to societies, families, and history, I was drawn to your uncovering your "hidden" story and how you shaped the legacy of our family.

I have always had a profound interest in who came before me and exactly what their lives were like. At the early age of ten, I became the family genealogist, often sitting at the feet of the elders of the family, trying to gain whatever familial knowledge and wisdom I could. From growing up under your great-granddaughter, my second-great grandmother (affectionally known as Nanna), I could see that I descended from a long line of strong women who endured. In the midst of this thought, though, another aspect made me wonder about my ancestry: the nearly "white" complexion of Nanna. Even at an early age, I knew a female ancestor suffered the atrocities of enslavement, being not only a woman at the time, but a Black woman at that. However, often I would hear conversations of the family not really focused on your identity but that of the White man who contributed to my Nanna and her other relatives' complexions. I even found myself focused more on the identity of this man, and not who you were and what your story was. However, as I did my research, I begin to think of the woman who endured all of this. This sentiment ties into Manigault-Bryant's reflection of "living memory" regarding "talking" to the dead, where descendants pay homage to their ancestors through acts of prayer, singing, cooking, making items, or as I am, uncovering a story (16).³

Your story took several years for me to unveil, with the help of other relatives. No one knew your name, at least not anyone alive at this time. I meticulously combed through records such as census records, death records, family bibles, but the issue was that most of your life was spent enslaved and in Black families, the time period of Slavery proves exceedingly difficult in genealogy. However, I did not give up, and I was able to find your son, Juby Richardson Sr.'s death certificate, my fourth Great-grandfather. Not only was your name listed, Rose Dow, but the informant was bold enough to record who fathered your child, James Burchell Richardson. This was a moment that I will never forget, the excitement, but also the many questions that followed. The search was not over, there were several James Burchell Richardson men that lived in Clarendon County during this time period, all related somehow and any could have had an enslaved woman named Rose. Yet, I never gave up and through brick walls serving as lack of records, I was finally able to find a match, a particular James B. Richardson born in 1806 and died in 1860 who would fit within the period. Luckily, I found his estate papers through the South Carolina Historical Society based in Charleston, South Carolina.⁴ With well over 150 pages, my search for verification began.

The first mention of your name, Rose, was in correspondence between James's brother, Thomas C. (one of the executors) and the lawyer, asking if there were any legal grounds for you to be given an annuity and the option to choose your next "master" or "mistress," along with your children. This sent chills through my body as the puzzle's completion was near, but I also questioned exactly how you felt in the midst of all of this. I continued to read the very old-faded cursive handwriting, searching for any additional clues until I got to page seventy-something, revealing the list of slaves as property, with over one hundred Black people listed. Within the first page, I saw your name and your children's name, Sam, Susan, and Juby with a bracket around your names stating "Legacy." Not only that, but I saw your "monetary" value of you and your children, "Rose-\$1,050, Sam-\$1,100, Susan-\$400, and Juppy (child)-\$250," with the commentary below referenced in Figure 1, being that you and your children as well as several others were regarded as "House Negroes." To actually see you and your children dwindled down to a price really disturbed me, because as human beings, we are invaluable. Yet, with everything I had found so far, I wanted to see the will and exactly what was said.

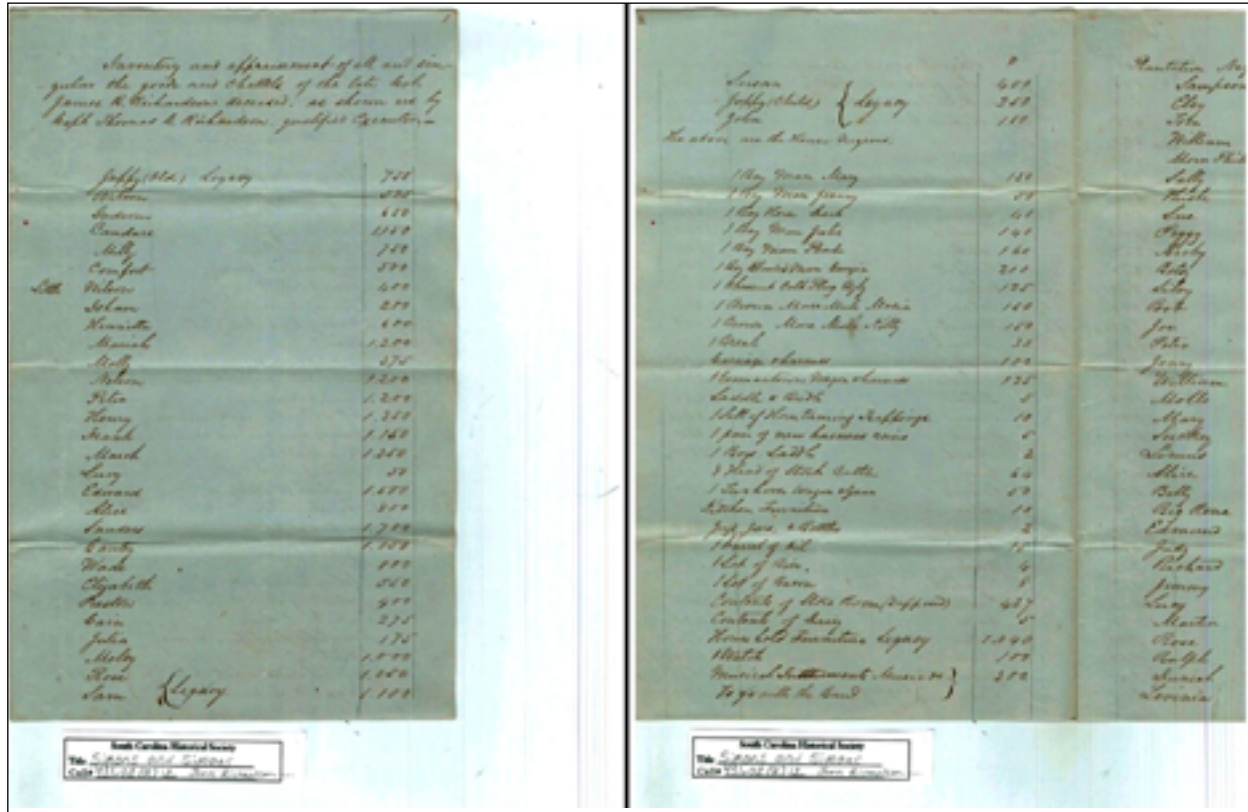


Figure 1. Estate Inventory of James Burchell Richardson (1806–1860) listing Rose and her children. Simons & Simons records, 1714–1879; James B. Richardson legal papers, 1839–1861.

As if saving the best piece of evidence for last, the will and testament of James B. Richardson was found within the last few pages of the estate papers. You and your children were listed in clause five, stating,

It is my will and desire that my female servant, Rose be allowed to choose her master or mistress from among my brothers and sisters who may be Δliving at the time of my death and to him or her whom she may choose I give and bequeath my said servant, Rose and her children Sam, Susan, and Jupy with the future issue and increase of the said Rose and her children and in special confidence that her master or mistress as the case may be will treat the said Rose with kindness and care and consideration of the long and reliable services as a faithful servant and I do hereby will and direct that my executors hereinafter named to annually pay into the hands of her master and mistress so chosen the sum of \$25 as an annuity to be applied or given to the said Rose for her sole and separate benefit use and behalf.

This confirmed everything I was looking for, which was my family and exactly who enslaved them. Yet, I was left wanting to better understand the source of your strength.

In spite of the archives providing the circumstances and context of the situation you and your children were in, which was particularly daunting as your enslaver’s brother tried to sell all the “House Negroes,” threatening the separation of you and your children, there was no mention of your desires or emotions. In cases like these, the archives did not provide a voice for you, a historic commonality that Black enslaved women dealt with.⁵ Like Sudarkasa argues in her essay “The Status of Women,” did you derive your tenacity and fortitude through the bloodline of your ancestors that came before you?⁶

However, I particularly thought of you and your life, having seen that you were born into slavery around the early 1800s, having been enslaved as a “House Negro” first by James’ father, and then himself, bearing three children by the man who enslaved you. I thought of your emotions, the sacrifices you made, the horrors you may have witnessed or suffered, as well as what if any were your actions of liberation during enslavement. I wondered if this relationship that ensued between you and your enslaver was consensual or forced or if was there any love and care present? From my research, his wife as well as his first cousin died around 1849, and your first child which was fathered by him was born around 1840 and I often think about what

that was like for you. To make matters worse, it seemed that James and his wife did not have any children together, which again made me think of what you and/or your children could have suffered at the hands of his wife, if she was jealous, or if she even knew? I wonder what that fear was like once he died if he represented security for you and your children? With *A Black Women's History of the United States* and *Words of Fire* providing context, I know Black women have historically always been vulnerable, both physical and socially, due to their interwoven status of being of African descent and being a female. Particularly during enslavement, Black women faced challenges of sexual assault in addition to bearing the weight of physical labor, all the while trying to protect themselves and their families (Berry and Gross 105; Guy-Sheftall 3).⁷ It can be argued that these conditions persist for Black women until this day.

Nonetheless, I am proud to see your journey through, though the executor (your children's paternal uncle) of the estate tried to sell you and your children, he could not because of the clause in the will! In spite of this, I do not believe you received the annuity. Yet, I followed the paper trail, beyond the Civil war, which showed you were alive in 1880, listed as widowed. You raised progressive children (I am still researching your daughter, Susan), where your eldest son, Samuel "Sam" Richardson would become one of the wealthiest Black men in Clarendon County at the time of his death in 1911, owning over 1500 acres, with an estate valued at \$20,000.⁸ That land, which your youngest child and son, my fourth great-grandfather Juby bought part of, is still in the family today. This experience taught me not only the various aspects of the Black Liberation, but the women behind it as well, and the importance of recognizing female ancestors like you. Furthermore, unveiling your story serves as a reminder to many genealogists, such as I, who struggled with uncovering their ancestors' stories, to continue to push through and to always maintain the goal of bringing our ancestors' voices to the present. Without this research, your descendants would still not know who to pay our homage to, the once unknown female ancestor who endured so that we stand here today, representing the fruit of your labor. Thankfully, your name now lives on and will not be forgotten again.

With immense gratitude and love for your courage and strength,

Omar Culbreath Jr. (Your 5th Great-grandson)

Endnotes

- ¹ Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020).
- ² Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. (The New Press, 1995); LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women*. (Duke University Press, 2014); Naira Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1986), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177985>.
- ³ Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead*, 16.
- ⁴ James B. Richardson legal papers, 1839–1861, Box 38, File 431.02 (R) 12, Simons & Simons records, 1714–1879, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.
- ⁵ Berry and Gross, *A Black Women's History*, 25.
- ⁶ Sudarkasa, "Status of Women."
- ⁷ Berry and Gross, *A Black Women's History*, 105; Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire*, 3.
- ⁸ The Manning Times, March 10, 1909, 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-manning-times/41617259/>.

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Fighting the Frame: How Framing Police Brutality Influences Blame

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Abstract

Framing has been a prevalent subject within contemporary society, and many scholars have explored its effects on news media. Sociologists, in particular, have made great contributions to the concept; however, there is a significant lack of literature regarding the framing of police brutality in the news. This study explores how the framing of police brutality by legacy news sources affects how the audience assigns blame, using automated semantic analysis to analyze a correlation between themes within articles and their comments. Findings methodologically critique previous scholarship and indicate the news's potential for influencing audience opinion.

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Introduction

Sitting at a lunch table with friends, we watched Tyre Nichols, a young Black man from Memphis, Tennessee, be beaten by five Black police officers (Tucker 2023). We watched in horror, witnessing a shocking yet familiar scene. A friend broke the silence, remarking, "Well, the man shouldn't have run." I shook my head in silence. Two months later, the same video resurfaced on an Atlanta news station with additional context informing that the five Black police officers were members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated (Geanous 2023), a historically Black fraternity. That same friend shifted his blame to the police department and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, commenting, "The police department is messed up, man, and that fraternity is wild. How were they allowed to be hired?" This shift in blame sparked this study.

Goffman (1974) characterizes this shift in perspective as framing. Many theorists have extended Goffman's framing theory to discuss its application in politics, media, and social movements (Gamson 1975; Snow et al. 2014; Entman 1993). There is a sociological gap in the study of framing regarding policing and violence. This study examines how the framing of police brutality by legacy news sources influences the audience's assignment of blame and offers a deeper insight into the effects and implications of framing. Furthermore, it explores the subject using Snow's theory of framing and Tilly's theory of blame as a lens to answer the question: How does the framing of police brutality in legacy news articles affect the way commenters assign blame to groups involved? Semantic analysis is used to analyze the correlation between themes within articles and their comments. This study uses articles produced by legacy news sources¹ regarding Sonya Massey, a Black woman in Springfield, Illinois, who was shot in her home by two police officers over a dispute regarding a pot of boiling water.

Theoretical Framework

Framing

This study uses Snow's and Tilly's interpretations of framing and blame processes. Snow defines framing as the alignment of an individual's biography to a collective effort to achieve a specific goal, also known as a social movement (Snow et al. 2014). Snow's definition of framing limits framing to social movements. Gamson's definition of framing is more applicable, defined as "a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning... to events related to an issue" (Pan and Kosicki 2010: 56). Although Snow's framing definition is limited, his analysis of the framing perspective is integral (Gamson 1992). This study applies Gamson's theory of framing to Snow's framing perspective, incorporating Gamson's use of Gramsci and critical theorists (Gamson 1992).

The Framing Process

To understand the effects of framing police brutality, it is essential to understand how Snow analyzes the framing process. Snow's frame perspective demonstrates how objects' meanings are created by previous interactions (Snow et al. 2018). Frame perspective involves three parts: 1) action, 2) interpretation, and 3) judgment (Snow et al. 2018).

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the first scholar to empirically measure framing and its effects (Allen 2021; Wells-Barnett and Collins 2002), can be used to understand the framing process. Her analysis of narrative and lynching exemplifies Snow's frame perspective. The "action" is the abolition of slavery in 1865 (Wells-Barnett and Collins 2002). The narratives "race-riots," "Black man-white woman," and "Negro

Domination” shape the “interpretation” of the act. The “judgment” refers to lynching as a good movement to address the abolition of slavery. The media used these narratives to gather support behind lynching (Wells-Barnett and Collins 2002). Framing gathers the audience’s support for a movement and plays a significant role in the success of movements, especially in a democratic system (Snow et al. 2018).

This study builds on Gamson’s work to examine how the news shapes public perceptions of police brutality, reinforcing ruling-class ideologies. Many framing scholars mention blame (Ricciardelli, Stoddart, and Austin 2024; Roberge 2009; Snow et al. 2014; Snow et al. 2018; Tilly 2010); however, Tilly sociologically demonstrates how framing influences the assignment of blame.

Blame

Tilly demonstrates the role of blame by analyzing how it contributes to reinforcing and extending domination. Tilly identifies the internal process and relevance of

assigning blame (Tilly 2010). This process can be broken into four steps: 1) outcome, 2) value, 3) agent, and 4) judgment. First, there is an outcome analysis, which determines whether it is positive or negative. Next, a value is assigned to the outcome, deciding its impact. Then, an agent is identified as responsible for the outcome. Lastly, the agent is judged based on the outcome (Tilly 2010). This process contributes to creating us-them boundaries and causes the agent to be held responsible for the outcome (Tilly 2010). Blame

The Interaction of Framing and Blame

The blame process heavily depends on the individual’s framing perspective, specifically, how the individual interprets the act and assigns judgment. The individual’s interpretation, highlighted in the frame perspective, influences the value they place on the action, as seen in the blame process. Then, the individual’s judgment, highlighted in the frame perspective, influences how the individual assigns responsibility for the action (Snow et al. 2018; Tilly 2010). This process is highlighted in Figure 1.

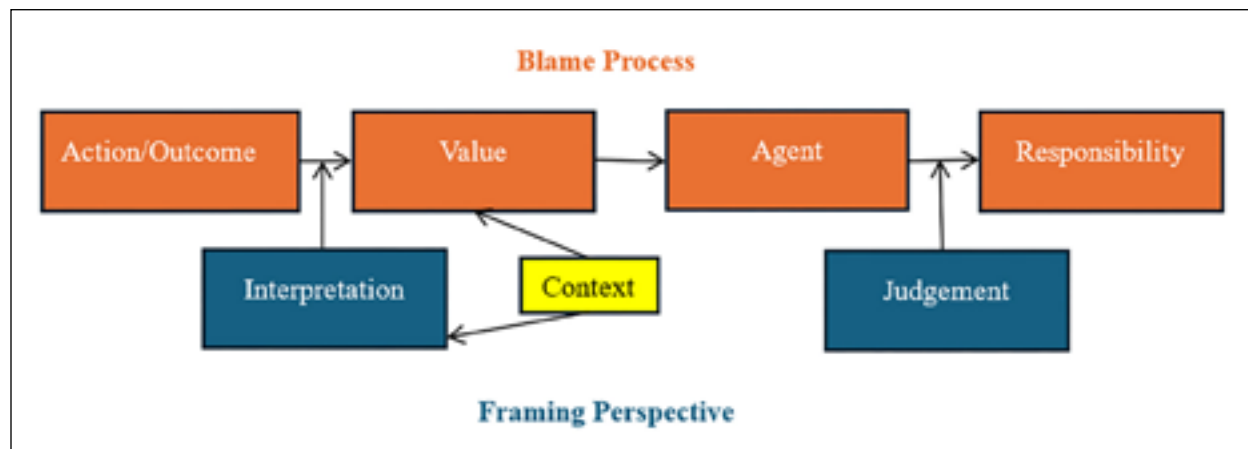


Figure 1. The Framing and Blame Interaction

Because the blame process and frame perspective are interdependent, understanding how external factors influence the frame perspective is integral to comprehending the impact of news media framing.

Methodology

To answer the research question “How does the framing of instances of police brutality by legacy news sources in articles affect how commenters assign blame to the officers and citizens involved?”, this study will quantifiably measure the themes and topics surrounding police brutality and how commenters focus on these themes.

Sample

This study will analyze articles about Sonya Massey from legacy news sources. Legacy news sources have large followings, consistent reliability, experienced editors, and less biased reports than non-legacy sources (Diel 2017). I have chosen to analyze articles about Sonya Massey because she has been one of the most recent and prominent cases of police brutality and has received much coverage on social media. I gathered five articles from legacy news sources, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Fox News*. These sources are the only legacy news sources that publish the audience’s comments on the shooting of Sonya Massey. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are left-leaning news sources, while *Fox News* is a right-leaning news source. I use two articles from *The Washington Post*, and *Fox News*, and one article from *The New York Times*. “Article 1” is the oldest article addressing Sonya Massey, and “Article 2” is

the article directly after. “Article 1” from *The New York Times* did not provide comments, so it was excluded from the study. All the comments from each of the articles are analyzed. I chose these five articles because the first article posted aims to provide a description, while the subsequent article either offers a more opinionated perspective or provides further context.

Design

This study addresses the research question by correlating the themes in the five articles about Sonya Massey to those in the corresponding comments. This approach is inspired by two articles that analyze and interpret text on social media using semantic analysis to understand themes surrounding social issues on Twitter (Qomariyah, Iriawan, and Fithriasari 2019; Xiong, Cho, and Boatwright 2019).

Basic semantic analysis is used to explore themes and topics associated with different framings of police brutality. This analysis explores the interaction between an article’s themes and the comments. R was used to analyze the text with the package “quanteda.”

Hypotheses

H₀: Commenters’ assignment of blame will have no correlation with how articles focus on themes.

H₁: Commenters’ assignment of blame will have a direct correlation with how the articles focus on themes.

Findings

The most common way to capture framing using quantitative analysis is by conducting a thematic analysis to identify correlations between themes in the source and themes the audience focuses on (Fridkin et al. 2017; Altheide 1997; Goidel 2011). Most quantitative researchers prefer survey and experimental methodologies (Fridkin et al. 2017; Goidel 2011; Sacco 1982), while qualitative researchers tend to focus on nuances in the audience’s interpretation (Ricciardelli, Stoddart, and Austin 2024; Hollis 2010; Ghidina 2019). This study’s findings suggest a disconnect between the stories that quantitative and qualitative methods tell, arguing that the two methods must be combined to tell an accurate story.

The method used to measure framing includes a correlational analysis between articles and comments from *Fox News*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*. You can find the articles and their corresponding titles in Table 1.

News Article	Article Titles
<i>Fox News</i> Article 1	“Bodycam video reveals chaotic scene of deputy fatally shooting Sonya Massey, who called 911 for help—If convicted, the IL sheriff’s deputy faces a prison sentence of ‘45 years to life for murder’” (Press 2024).
<i>Fox News</i> Article 2	“Yankees’ Marcus Stroman speaks out following fatal shooting of Sonya Massey: ‘Sad society we’re living in’” (Martin 2024).
<i>Washington Post</i> Article 1	“She called 911. The deputy who responded is charged with murdering her.” (Edwards 2024).
<i>Washington Post</i> Article 2	“Body-cam video shows deputy fatally shoot woman who called 911 for help—Sean Grayson, an ex-sheriff’s deputy in Illinois, is charged with murder in the shooting of Sonya Massey as she held a pot of water in her kitchen during a call for help.” (Edwards 2024).
<i>The New York Times</i> Article 2	“Illinois State Police Release Footage of Deputy Fatally Shooting Woman—The woman, Sonya Massey, 36, called 911 on July 6 because she believed there was an intruder in her home. She was fatally shot by a sheriff’s deputy who has been fired and is charged with murder.” (Jimenez 2024).

Table 1. News Articles and Their Titles

All articles were analyzed using a chi-squared (X^2) goodness-of-fit test to measure the correlation between the most frequent topics in the article and the comments (see Table 2). *Fox 1* and *Fox 2* have statistically significant relationships between the articles and comments for the topic of “Officer.” *Fox 1* has a $X^2 = 0.27$ and *Fox 2* has a $X^2 = 0.24$, which are both less than the critical value of 3.84. This indicates that the article and comments focused on “Officer” to the same extent, but not “Massey.” *New York Times 2*, *Washington Post 1*, and *Washington Post 2* have a significant correlation for the topic of “Massey.” *Washington Post 1* has a $X^2 = 1.35$, *Washington Post 2* has a $X^2 = 0.88$, and *The New York Times 2* has a $X^2 = 3.13$. All articles have a critical value less than 3.84, indicating that they all have a statistically significant relationship with the group “Massey” but not with “Officer.” Because the average chi-squared value for both groups (Massey = 11.01, Officer = 10.72) was not less than 3.84, the H₀ is not rejected. These correlations are visualized in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 for the groups “Officer” and “Massey,” respectively.

		Group Percentage Focus	
		Officer	Massey
<i>Fox 1</i>			
	<i>Fox Article 1</i>	32%	26%
	<i>Fox Comments 1</i>	30%	4%
	Chi-Squared Value	(0.27**)	(32.72)
<i>Fox 2</i>			
	<i>Fox Article 2</i>	8%	36%
	<i>Fox Comments 2</i>	10%	15%
	Chi-Squared Value	(0.24**)	(16.99)
<i>Washington Post 1</i>			
	<i>Washington Post Article 1</i>	31%	17%
	<i>Washington Post Comments 1</i>	48%	20%
	Chi-Squared Value	(35.74)	(1.35**)
<i>Washington Post 2</i>			
	<i>Washington Post Article 2</i>	37%	18%
	<i>Washington Post Comments 2</i>	49%	15%
	Chi-Squared Value	(9.13)	(0.88**)
<i>New York Times 2</i>			
	<i>New York Times Article 2</i>	34%	26%
	<i>New York Times Comments 2</i>	45%	20%
	Chi-Squared Value	(8.21)	(3.13**)

Table 2. Percentages of the Groups Present in the Article and Comments
 Note: Numbers in parentheses are chi-squared (X^2) values that indicate correlation.
 ** $X^2 < 3.84$ indicates a significant finding.

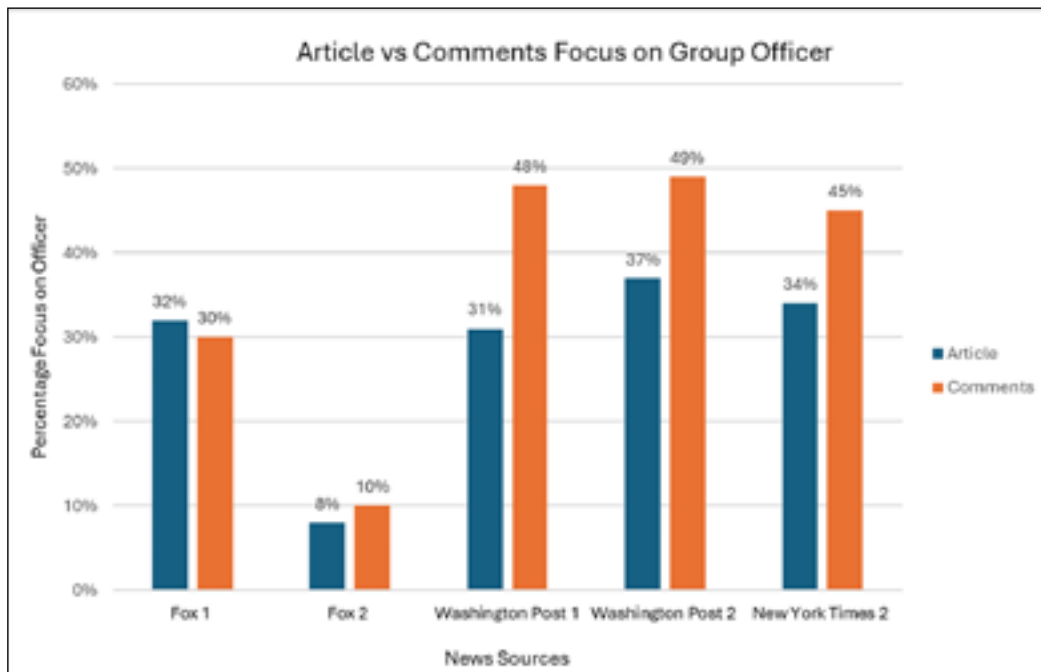


Figure 2.1. Officer Percentage Focus

This graph shows the percentage of words in the comments and articles that focus on the officers.

Note: Percentages were measured by word count of the top ten most frequent words in the article and the top 25 in the comments.

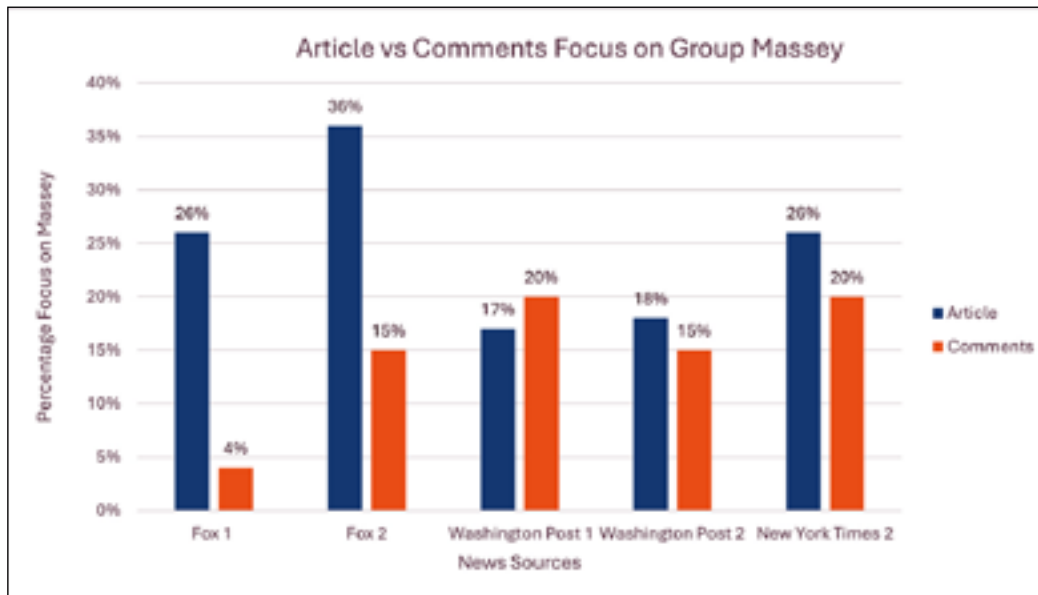


Figure 2.2. Sonya Massey Percentage Focus

This graph shows the percentage of words in the comments and articles that focus on Sonya Masseys.

Note: Percentages were measured by word count of the top ten most frequent words in the article and the top 25 in the comments.

Discussion

Living in an Echo Chamber

The findings imply that sources have more success framing groups that their audience tends to support. This argument can be made as both *Fox News* articles had a significant correlation for the group “Officer.” *Fox News* is labeled as a right-leaning news source (n.a. 2024). Right-leaning sources and audiences have a consistent history of backing the blue (Gerber and Jackson 2016). This pattern is also observed among the audiences of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Both sources are considered left-leaning and successfully framed the group “Massey” as seen in Figure 2.2.

The chi-squared analysis does not explain how commenters assigned blame or what factors contributed to their focus. This is exemplified by a comment from *Fox 1*, stating, “I’m typically sticking up for cops as most of my family is in law enforcement. This dude had zero business being a cop....ZERO. Hope he goes away for life.” This sentiment was shared among many commenters within the *Fox 1* article. However, this is not reflected in the quantitative data.

This thematic correlation is commonly used to measure framing and establish its presence, but it does not adequately connect framing to blame. Quantitative studies often fail to accurately capture the nuances within framing or focus solely on blame (Goidel et al. 2011; Ricciardelli, Stoddart, and Austin 2024).

Addressing Blame

To address blame, I recommend expanding this study to include a generalizable sample and conducting further semantic analysis. Future research should employ a combination of automated text analysis, grounded theory methods, and inferential statistics to investigate the relationship between blame and framing. The influence of framing on blame can be captured by using automated text analysis to identify which words correlate with the groups “Officer” and “Massey.” Grounded theory methods should be used to place these words into the blame and framing theoretical model. Lastly, inferential statistics should be used to examine how the sentiment expressed correlates with the likes and dislikes each comment received, further supporting the model and explaining the outcomes produced. This will provide ample connection between framing and blame by exemplifying how they interact to produce unique outcomes.

Effects

The results of this research call for a greater interrogation of the news’s validity and reliability in providing and creating information. These results should be built upon to exemplify a connection between framing and blame and to better understand the impact of framing police brutality as it is commonly compared to showings of lynchings (Wells-Barnett and Collins 2002). This research highlights the importance of contextualizing events of police brutality in the news media, enabling the public to make informed decisions about the solutions they would like to implement to remedy the problem (Entman 1993; Snow et al. 2018; Tilly 2010; Ricciardelli, Stoddart, and Austin 2024).

Endnote

- ¹ A legacy news source is a news outlet that was not “born on the web” and had its origins in print and paper (Stocking, Barthel, and Grieco 2018: 13).

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About How to Organize a Library: On Walter Benjamin's Book Collection

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Abstract

In his 1931 essay about unpacking his library, Walter Benjamin explains how the processes of ordering a previously disordered tumult of books revolves around curating the particularity of a book's copy, rather than a book in itself as an abstract idea. The present research identifies in his essay an affective dimension along with a conceptual one. The intertwined tone from these two dimensions resonate with concepts that Benjamin developed after 1931. For this reason I claim that in his essay, an early construction illustrating dialectics as suspension can be found in affect's relation to temporality. To circumscribe this essay with a notion of suspension reconfigures how both dialectics and time can be understood. That is why I engage with Nadal Melsió's and Cadava's *Politically Red*. In their reading of Benjamin's essay, the act of attributing order to a crate is a political matter in so far it is an intervention. From this action, the way thought is conformed changes through suspension.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my parents and my dear friend Giuliano for their love and unwavering support.

A book, like a message inside a bottle floating in a body of water, contains and accumulates in a way that can never be static. While the material qualities of the bottle erode through its movement by the currents in water, those who open it transfer their gaze into what is contained in the bottle. By doing so, they become readers but also collectors of the embodied thread that is woven from past to present in what was written. For those who collect, different to only owning the bottle, they might come to understand that each bottle has a fate that is very different to any other. While the number of bottles lost in the deepest and darkest parts of the void remains forever unknown, the threads between past and present in the found ones are not just stories, but the lives of physical copies, each shaped by its making and movement. Therefore, to collect is not a matter of rescuing the bottle from obliteration. Rather, it is a process of curating the articulation of its particular destiny.

Walter Benjamin's reflection on the process of unpacking his personal library revolves around a very similar principle. The ways through which we encounter and relate to the books we collect in our life are always

mediated by a temporal process. Inherent to the message contained inside, just as the bottle's scratches and stains distinguish it from others, the intricacies of a book's marginalia, worn binding, or faded pages set it apart. In so, a thread weaving past and present through its physical presence in shelves or boxes can condition engagements that configure meaning-making. While Benjamin's 1931 essay does not directly describe collecting as a standstill of dialectical movements, I claim that it performs it reflexively. In doing so, two layers begin to be contained within Benjamin's essay, an affective and a reflexive layer.

These layers, intertwined, turn bodies of texts into more than repositories of written information. The absence of a direct mention of Benjamin's notion of dialectics as a suspension, rather than a progression, as often portrayed by German philosophy, does not make this essay alien to said notion of dialectics. To defend this claim, I will examine key passages from "Unpacking My Library" that describe the collector's tension between order and disorder. Instead of addressing abstract theory in his essay on collecting, Benjamin writes in a reflexive manner. He begins describing the scene as not yet touched by the boredom of order. This is where affect becomes decisive.

Affect is not an ornament added to an otherwise structural account for describing book collecting; it is the very vitalization that prevents a collapse into either chaotic dispersion or dead catalogue. To describe order as synonym to boredom is merely a technicality, as it is also what characterizes a relation to suspension. A characteristic example of suspension in Benjamin's understanding of dialectics is his reformulation of Roman author Terentianus Maurus's expression, *Habent sua fata libelli*.

This Latin saying encapsulates the idea that books, once created, embark on journeys shaped by readers, historical circumstances, and chance encounters. Benjamin, however, reinterprets this proverb through the collector's gaze, emphasizing the unique destinies of individual book copies rather than the book in itself. Classically, the phrase implies that books having their own fate in regard to their survival, interpretation, or obscurity, hinges on the readers who engage with them and the thread binding past to present that carry it forward. A book's *fatum* is thus dynamic, shaped by its journey through time and the contingencies of human interaction.

Benjamin writes that "*Habent sua fata libelli*: these words may have been intended as a general statement about books. A collector, however, interprets this Latin saying differently. For him, not only books but also copies of books have their fates." When Benjamin shifts the focus of this Latin term from the book in itself to the material copy we

engage with, affect emerges in collecting. Amidst the emergence of political violence around the third decade of the 20th century, his 1931 essay begins as a meditation on the pleasure of book collecting.

He explicitly states his aim for this publication is to relate the collector's relationship with objects to the binary opposition between a void, emanating from disorder, in hand with determinedness, substantiated by order. The retelling of unpacking his books after year in crates, displaced by travel and other circumstances, is a surface from which, beneath it, lies a deeper concern. The essay subtly gestures to one of Benjamin's most central ideas—the dialectical image and its relation to suspension, an idea which he is known for developing much later than the 1930's in writings such as his *Arcades Project* (written between 1927–1940) or “Thesis on the Concept of History” (1940).

“Dialectics” in this context are not a harmonious synthesis nor a forward-moving progression in the Hegelian sense; it is a constellation from which opposites are held together in a restraint that emanates from suspension. Collecting, in “Unpacking My Library,” precisely performs this standstill. The collection is never complete, never finally ordered; its vitality depends on the permanent suspension between chaos and structure. To collect is to inhabit the flash in which disorder threatens to dissolve ownership and order threatens to kill a book's fate from belonging to his own collection. I claim that while Benjamin does not directly mention the dialectical image in his essay on unpacking, the essay implicitly embodies it through the collector's experience of the dialectical tension between order and disorder that is inherent in collecting.

By opening his essay with a description of the joys and quirks of unpacking, by declaring them antonyms to the boredom of order, Benjamin ensures that these joys and quirks are no innocent flourish. The point of transition away from a state of untouchedness, which engenders what Benjamin refers to as the “boredom of order,” is where the collector merges with a collection's materiality. In identifying this mere description of a day-to-day task, the collector, who is introduced in between order and disorder, delineates an exploration of the collector's mindset—one that thrives on a pull between chaos and structure. This thriving's characteristics, much like the substance for writing the essay on unpacking, is related to the reflexive becoming of affect in collecting. This is why the reflexive tone's relation to an understanding of affect in collecting is an important characteristic of this 1931 essay.

The non-innocent flourish of joys and quirks, in relation to the non-ornamental characteristic of affect substantiate a methodological enactment for the particularity of book collecting. Affect on behalf of the collector is not

an afterthought, but the very medium of the dialectic. The collector does not stand above the collection contemplating order and disorder from a safe distance; he is seized and possessed, at times overwhelmed by the objects collected. Benjamin directly declares that the collector's life is a dialectical tension between the poles of order and disorder. This deeper structure, paired with the playful and intimate tone towards the collector's affect, demonstrates a key characteristic of Benjamin's writing style.

A collector engages with books initially through disorder as books are scattered across the world, subject to being bought, gifted, or collected. For Benjamin, it's not about the method of acquisition only, but what said acquisition means and how meaning and thought are formed in the present moment. Acquisition might be a promise of order but in itself, is not. While a catalogued shelf might be understood as an apparent solution to disorder, the philosophical inquiry that Benjamin implies in his essay reminds us that order is never final.

By collecting, those who collect do not necessarily resolve the tension of order from disorder. The following example demonstrates how a collector is instead thrust into such tension. He asks, “why a collector of older books is closer to the wellsprings of collecting than the acquirer of a luxury edition?” How we respond to what wellspring is in this question is a dependability on the present research's claim regarding collecting in relation to a suspension. As part of my argument relating the 1931 essay to dialectics as standstill, the technical separation between reflection and affect in collecting infers that collecting obtains its meaning in organization. Reflexivity, contrary to reflectivity, marks in a present-tense what unpacking implies. A reader of Benjamin experiences the affect described in collecting as an intervention.

Like a bottle in the sea, the book's journey from a manuscript in the hands of the author, to a printed and reproduced dispositive in the hands of the reader, is not a static journey. Copies of books having their own fates, as Benjamin tells us, illustrate the process of perceiving this journey as a process in constant movement. This movement mirrors Benjamin's instance of the past as a constellation rather than a ray connecting past to present. For this reason, to understand collecting as means of problematizing the now, the present moment, Benjamin's philosophical perspectives prove to be an invaluable source for this enquiry. As such, Benjamin offers a rich philosophical foundation that moves in different directions. Benjamin writes that for a collector, “dates, place names, formats, previous owners, bindings, and the like: all these details must tell him something—not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole.”

Benjamin sees books not as timeless objects but as vessels trapping past instances. Each individual character belonging to the harmonious whole is implied in an unquantifiable tumult. Benjamin states that “every passion borders the chaotic, but a collector’s passions borders the chaos of memories.” The two dimensions contained in the essay, as previously seen, contrasting both disorder from order and boredom to affect, are intertwined with the chaotic character of the infinitude, similar to the amount of bottles lost in the sea, forever unknown.

Unpacking invokes a responsibility on behalf of the collector, in such a way that the question Benjamin posed when he mentions luxury editions as counterpart to older books is attentive of luxury books being pristine, but also ahistorical. To collect is not only to be attentive of what was and its material relation to a book. But how are only two things determined about a book, its time and place of publication, as Benjamin quotes from Antole France, imbedded through the collector into a character of potentiality? This shows the potentiality of influence in the present of what otherwise could be lost to disorder.

The books themselves are not a suspension of the past; a description of them in the present is able to influence and enhance how thought is configured in the present. Collecting is ultimately a temporal intervention as much as a political one. Sara Nadal Melsió and Eduardo Cadava explain in their 2023 book *Politically Red* that the crates that contain Benjamin’s books relate to an expression of a temporal registry of Benjamin’s experienced memories. In rescuing an experience from the chaos of memories, in curating a copy of a copy, a collector, such as Benjamin, discerns between what can be seen and what cannot.

This discernment, to Cadava and Nadal-Melsió, positions boxes as ubiquitous in Benjamin’s corpus. Crates are not mere repositories but enclosures probing the thresholds of visibility and invisibility, revelation, and secrecy. By identifying further instances in which Benjamin’s philosophical inquiry relates to unpacking and boxes, unpacking ruptures linear history, suspending past instances in a standstill, where the collector blasts open the continuum, curating constellations that politicize the now amid fascism’s wreckage on our endemic crises of erasure. Along with many other profound reflections regarding reading and writing, the authors of *Politically Red* fundamentally gravitate toward probing how a text enables us to think about the present.

The tainted margin and the coffee stain of a book, similar to the strange engraving on the bottle in the body of water, participate in attributing meaning to what is observed. Unpacking becomes characteristic of *Politically Red*’s attention to temporality, aesthetics and politics, intertwined. The special characteristic that the collector cherishes from the

book is ultimately a figural element. For the very ink or screen that presents the letters, one next to the other in this paper, participates in this dialectical and visual thread regarding their suspension. The copy of a book having its own destiny through the collector is a process embedded in the figuration of meaning-making.

In this figuration, the collector’s act of discernment transforms the mere possession of copies into a radical curation of historical potential, where the unseen residues of time, unpacked, emerge as constellations that interrupt the seamless flow of the present. Through Benjamin’s lens, as amplified by Cadava and Nadal-Melsió, unpacking becomes the ultimate political gesture, a defiant retrieval from chaos that not only preserves the fates of individual bodies of text but also reconfigures thought against the erasures of our era be they fascist shadows or digital voids.

To unpack, in its relation to the attribution of order, is to enhance why collecting transcends ownership. This transcendence, from which the suspension of affect and reflexivity converge, is inhabited by the collector. This transcendence ensures that each book’s destiny, woven from past tumult to contemporary intervention, illuminates the precarious threads binding memory to resistance. In curating these copies of copies, a crate does not merely archive the visible and figural, but invokes the absent. This absence compels the collector to engage with what remains unseen yet profoundly shapes the now, the present moment.

Endnotes

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- 2 *Ibid.*, 486.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 487.
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- 7 *Ibid.*, 487.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsió. *Politically Red*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2023.

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Reclaiming the Private: Laura Aguilar's Queer Chicana Photography Through the Lens of *Domesticana*

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Abstract

This paper examines the photography of Laura Aguilar through *domesticana*, a feminist framework created by Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains. While Aguilar's work has been explored through queer, feminist, and Chicano perspectives, her portrayal of private spaces as sites of resistance remain unexamined. Through works such as *Self-Portrait* (1984), *In Sandy's Room* (1989), and the *Plush Pony* series (1992), Aguilar transforms traditionally domestic spaces into stages for queer Chicana visibility and self-affirmation. By highlighting the tension between confinement and empowerment within the domestic sphere, Aguilar challenges patriarchal expectations of Chicana identity. Her use of everyday objects, intimate settings, and the queer body repositions domesticity as a dynamic, contested terrain. Ultimately, Aguilar's photographs redefine the value of private life as shaped by the lived experiences of Chicana women.

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Introduction

Laura Aguilar (1959–2018) dedicated her practice to showcasing the diversity of underrepresented communities, refusing to let them fade into the background of Los Angeles' cultural landscape. At the forefront of her career was the desire to explore her identity as a Chicana lesbian artist through nude self-portraiture and the documentation

of subjects who shared her experiences. She often gifted her photographs to those she captured, creating a visual archive that preserved and celebrated the people, lives, and relationships that defined lesbian Chicana culture in late twentieth-century Los Angeles. By eternalizing bodies neglected by mainstream media, she carved out space for powerful representations of queer existence.¹ Her work has drawn interpretation from feminist, queer, and Chicano frameworks.² Until now, however, scholars have yet to examine her work through the lens of *domesticana*.

Domesticana is a concept coined by Chicana writer and visual artist Amalia Mesa-Bains in her 2003 essay "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo," which explores how Chicana women navigate their roles within domestic spaces through art. The traditional nuclear family unit, a structure grounded in Western patriarchal values of privatization and female dependency, is the core of male-defined domesticity. A family unit which consists of a male in the position of authority and a female in the position of subjugation. It is this inherent disclusion of the lesbian from the traditional family unit which severs her from the domestic spaces that her heterosexual sisters work to reclaim. Thus, Aguilar's work, despite challenging the very foundations of domestic space, has evaded the *domesticana* lens as it is seemingly antithetical to conventional domesticity. However, it is the rejection of the male command upon domesticity that motivates Mesa-Bains and the Chicana artists she cites. This endeavor necessitates the interrogation of all forms of male influence on the modern notion of domesticity, including the heteronormative nuclear family unit as its basis. Aguilar's work, therefore, deserves a space within the *domesticana* dialogue.

This paper argues that Laura Aguilar's photography, in the spirit of *domesticana*, functions as a dual act: it rejects domesticity's role as a tool for gendered confinement while simultaneously redefining what home and belonging mean to Chicanas. By bringing visibility to queer experiences that have been ignored, Aguilar challenges the conventional narratives surrounding "private" female life, creating alternative meanings for Chicana identity that resist the limitations imposed by patriarchal Chicano culture.

Rasquachismo and *Domesticana*

Aguilar's photography fundamentally challenges the masculinist foundations of domestic spaces within Chicano culture itself. To fully grasp the significance of this internal intervention, it's essential to first understand *domesticana*'s roots in *rasquachismo*. *Domesticana* builds upon the aesthetics, values, and resistance embedded in *rasquachismo*, extending them into gendered spaces overlooked in traditional narratives of Chicano art and activism.

The term *rasquachismo*, pronounced “rahs-kwah-chee-smo,” was coined in 1989 by Chicano scholar of U.S. Latino and Latin American arts and culture Tomás Ybarra-Frausto in his seminal essay “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility.” In the essay, Ybarra-Frausto proposes that, “To be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness seeking to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down—a witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries.”³ *Rasquachismo* is an attitude, taste, or sensibility that reflects the resilience and ingenuity of the Chicano community. It is about making the most out of what you have and finding meaning out of the things that mainstream culture would otherwise deem as worthless. It is a refusal to be valued according to white standards.

Within this same spirit of cultural defiance, *domesticana* emerges as a feminist extension of *rasquachismo*. Amalia Mesa-Bains conceptualized *domesticana* through an examination of Chicanas’ efforts to survive, thrive, and disrupt prevailing systems of power. While *rasquachismo* confronts the racism Chicanos are subjected to within Anglo-American culture and opposes pressure to assimilate, *domesticana* layers upon this cultural analysis the sexism to which Chicana women are subjected to within their own culture.⁴ Just as *rasquachismo* embraces that of the Chicano stereotype which subverts the Anglo-American standard, *domesticana* embraces that of the Chicana stereotype which subverts the patriarchal standard.

The *domesticana* practice utilizes material from the domestic sphere and repurposes them to expose and resist the inequalities built into it. It explores the relationship between sites of domesticity and Chicana women, both contesting its misogynistic underpinnings and reworking it as a means of reclamation. This manipulation of expectation allows for Chicanas to redefine their identity in rejection of their predetermined selves according to the hegemonic masculinity of Chicano culture. It is a refusal to be defined by patriarchal standards of womanhood.

Mesa-Bains positions *domesticana* as actively reshaping meaning rather than simply representing existing conditions, stating that, “Art production can be seen not as a reflection of ideology but as a vehicle by which ideologies can be constructed.”⁵ Through this framework, Mesa-Bains suggests that because the domestic sphere is so deeply tied to traditional gender roles, it will continue to reflect patriarchal structures *unless* people actively challenge those norms through how they represent it. In doing so, it can become truly transformed.⁶ Laura Aguilar’s art, then, is a powerful example of the transformative nature of *domesticana*, as it reshapes and expands Chicanas’ positionality in relation to domesticity and womanhood.

Laura Aguilar and *Domesticana*



Figure 1. *Self-Portrait* by Laura Aguilar⁷

Aguilar’s *Self-Portrait* from 1984 (Figure 1), contains elements most traditionally associated with *domesticana* art. Here, she is pictured in between two tables with a collection of items on each, reminiscent of the altars used to cultivate a sacred and religious space within Chicano homes. These altars usually hold religious imagery, statues, holy water, and pictures of loved ones, in addition to quotidian objects like calendars, plants, jewelry boxes, or other personal and homely details of ornamentation. In their construction, home altars are some of the most tangible examples of the resourcefulness and creativity embedded within the Chicano community.

The creation and care of altars is a practice traditionally passed down through generations of women, with mothers teaching their daughters. As Art History scholar and professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design Madison Treece writes in her text, “From Domestic Sphere to Public Space: Patssi Valdez’s Bodily Manifestation of the Virgin of Guadalupe,” “In Chicana culture, altars are traditionally a feminine space, built and maintained by women. These altars stand as a mediator that allows women to maintain a relationship with God, Jesus, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and saints.”⁸ Altars are more than a mechanism for keeping women faithful to God, however. They encourage women to practice devotion and caretaking, with the labor required to maintain altars mirroring the care that Chicanas are expected to devote to their husbands, families, and homes.

Aguilar repositions the Chicana through her arrangement of the altars. It is no coincidence that the right altar, adorned with physical manifestations of traditional Chicano values, stands taller than the left. Each object represents a cornerstone of patriarchal Chicano culture: the Pee-Wee Herman figurine embodies male authority over the household, the rosary signifies religious devotion, and the statuette of La Virgen de Guadalupe exemplifies the

feminine ideal of submission and self-sacrifice for family—motherhood was her destiny, it was never a choice. The camera acts as a watchful eye upon the altar, reifying the male gaze under which Chicanas are dissected, controlled, and pressured to embody these values.

The left altar, however, holds a doll, a ceramic woman, and a *calavera* with two braids holding a fruit basket above her head. These figures, which span youth, adulthood, and death, are a deliberate rejection of the patriarchy's limitation of women's value to their childbearing years. As she honors all stages of life equally, Aguilar refuses the narrative that women exist primarily to reproduce and serve family. By angling herself towards the left altar, she affirms Chicana worth across the entirety of her life, independent of her conformity to patriarchal ideals and instead rooted in her authenticity and autonomy.

Furthermore, Aguilar's queer body itself is a disruption to the traditionally heteronormative domestic space. By positioning herself between the two altars, she elevates herself to the status of the sacred. While altars are inherently ephemeral—they can be changed with quick and even unnoticeable actions—the body is something that remains unwavering in its attempts to be seen. Aguilar's body cannot be taken away or deconstructed in the same way an altar can and demands visibility in a realm that has historically excluded queer Chicanas. In this way, Aguilar transforms herself into a living altar, asserting that her worth is intrinsic to her existence. Her presence destabilizes the understanding that domestic space exists to uphold heterosexuality, motherhood, and female self-sacrifice. The queer Chicana body, long rendered incompatible with the home, is here centered within it. As she stares into the camera, her expression challenges the viewer to acknowledge her existence. By redirecting reverence towards herself and away from God, she reframes the domestic altar not as a site of submission, but as a space of self-worship.



Figure 2: *In Sandy's Room* by Laura Aguilar⁹

In Sandy's Room, taken in 1989 (Figure 2), features Aguilar naked and laying upright on a leather chair in front of an open window. Feet up on an ottoman with one hand holding an ice-cold glass of Coca-Cola and the other resting on her thigh, she languidly lounges in front of the viewer, head back feeling the air from the fan on her bare skin. Aguilar's body is the focal point of the domestic scene. Shamelessly showcasing herself, she affirms the existence of queer Chicana bodies and confronts the absence of these identities in Chicana representation.

A defining quality of *domesticana* art is the tension between the Chicana woman's outward presentation and her internal experience. As Mesa-Bains writes in her essay on *domesticana*, "Chicana artists working in domesticana may use hyper feminization juxtaposed with destruction and loss in a persistent reevaluation of the domestic site."¹⁰ This juxtaposition operates on multiple levels. On one hand, it showcases resilience. Chicanas have the capacity to maintain composure even while facing violence from both their own community and Anglo-American society. On the other hand, it exposes the cost of this performance: the hyper-feminine exterior becomes a mask that conceals the internal destruction and loss Chicanas endure. The outside world sees a woman who is feminine, composed, controlled. But this disguises the erasure of true identity required to conform to these demands. This hyperfeminized, polished surface is both evidence of survival and a testament to what has been sacrificed in order to survive. In *In Sandy's Room*, Aguilar rejects this performance. Her photography does not portray a hyper feminized ideal of Chicana womanhood shot against a backdrop of violence. Instead, her depiction is simple and homely.

By placing at the center of her work a scene that would be unexpected in the domestic sphere, Aguilar creates tension between this expected site of labor and her refusal of that labor. Women are obligated to maintain the home by cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and tending to their husbands. But Aguilar lays back, unbothered. She enjoys the space fully as her own and is unconcerned with domestic duties. In this place where women are most compelled to relinquish their peace, Aguilar finds serenity. Her outward presentation is truly representative of her internal experience because she is choosing to prioritize herself. She does not feel shame in the act of claiming space within her own home. Through her authenticity, Aguilar refuses to engage in the exhausting performance that Chicanas must maintain to embody idealized femininity, denying it power over her own behavior within the home. In this denial, she offers Chicanas a vision of life unburdened by masculinist constraints.



Figure 3: *Plush Pony* series by Laura Aguilar¹⁰

This last series created in 1992 and titled *Plush Pony* (Figure 3) was taken at the small Chicana lesbian dive-bar Plush Pony in East Los Angeles where Aguilar photographed working-class Chicanas drinking and relaxing after a long day of work. She used a makeshift set in the back of the bar to take these pictures, attempting to mimic a professional photography setting, akin to those used for family holiday cards or portraits. She offered to photograph the women and sell them the prints for five dollars, creating a form of documentation that mainstream culture has historically denied this demographic.

Photographs serve as material evidence of existence, memorializing communities, identities, and relationships. For queer Chicanas whose relationships held no legal recognition and whose lives were largely invisible in dominant culture, these photographs became crucial acts of historical preservation. Aguilar extended a visual marker of legitimacy typically reserved for heteronormative families to lesbian Chicanas, allowing these women to claim permanence and belonging. Furthermore, the exchange itself was collaborative rather than exploitative: Aguilar offered, the women consented, they paid, and then they owned the images. The subjects had agency over their own representation, taking control over how their lives would be seen and remembered.

Although the bar is not a literal domestic space, Aguilar breaks a barrier between what is often forced to be hidden and what is allowed to be seen in public. The home is where families come together to be with one another and should provide a sense of rest, comfort, and protection. Sustained by chosen family, this bar becomes a home in the truest sense. *Plush Pony* offers these queer Chicanas a space where they can simply exist, be cared for, and belong without the burden of conforming to male-centered expectations. Given that for many Chicanas, traditional domestic settings have become a site of unrecognized labor and sacrifice, this reframing of the home is especially significant.

Lastly, by presenting a diverse range of ages, relationships, body types, and gender expressions, Aguilar reconfigures the Chicana identity. Through her portrayal of these queer bodies, Aguilar affirms that the Chicana encompasses multitudes, revealing that her private life is much more than fulfilling expectations imposed by her community or upholding traditional values. In fact, what she values can span a wide array of things, including her culture and community, all of which expand her world rather than diminish it. *Domesticana* is about the opening of worlds—affirming the powerful and important aspects of private life and womanhood that are meaningful to her, while rejecting those elements that have been forced upon her.

Conclusion

Aguilar's images, echoing the principles of *domesticana*, serve as a profound critique of the conventional representations and expectations of Chicanas within the private sphere. Her artistic approach disrupts the traditional understanding of femininity and domesticity within Chicano culture, asserting that the power of Chicana women lies not in conforming to prescribed roles but in honoring their true selves and defining the spaces they inhabit on their own terms. Through the juxtaposition of queerness and domesticity, Aguilar challenges the rigid gender norms that dominate Chicano culture, creating space for queer Chicana bodies to exist, as they always have, but freely. Moreover, Aguilar's work blends creativity, resilience, and resistance to establish self-expression and personal agency. Ultimately, Aguilar's work not only contributes to the rich canon of Chicana art, but also expands the boundaries of what domestic life and womanhood can entail.

Endnotes

- 1 Gómez-Barris, Macarena. "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives." *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (2017): 319.
- 2 Aguilar's work has been analyzed in pieces such as *Picturing the Barrio: Ten Chicano Photographers* and *On the Nude: Looking Anew at the Naked Body in Art* by David William Foster, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives" by Macarena Gómez-Barris for *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, and "Women Artists of the American West: Lesbian Photography on the U.S. West Coast 1972–1997" by Susan Ressler for *Women Artists of the American West*.
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- 7 Aguilar, Laura. *Self-Portrait*. 1983. Gelatin Silver Print, <https://www.lauraaguilarphotography.com/>.
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Barracks of Love, and Bars of Loss: What War Can Teach Us About Gay Life in California

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Alexa Fronczek-Lewis graduated from Wellesley College in 2025 with a major in Socio-Cultural Anthropology and a minor in East Asian Languages and Cultures. Deeply interested in anthropological research, her work spans from explorations of queer spaces to discussions of hegemonic masculinity in video games. Alexa plans to continue her anthropological research to the doctoral level.

Abstract

My research analyzes the contemporary sexual politics of San Francisco's gay community in connection to World War II's ability to unsettle traditional social attitudes. Focusing specifically on the importance of gay bars, the consumption of queer life, this work hopes to widen our understanding of the cultural importance of physical space within gay communities. Gay bars should be recognized as meeting spaces to fulfill key cultural practices, reminders of the struggle for equal rights, and locations in which racial and class prejudices are practiced. These prejudices manifest in complex and intersecting ways, like social privileges, limited visibility, and the sanitization of gay life. The Audiences will be able to gain a better understanding of the current, and past, social actions adopted by San Francisco's gay community as a result of the many overlapping social narratives within their lives. This research is anthropological by design, but also calls on theories within the disciplines of history and gender and sexuality.

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Introduction

San Francisco, California, is often regarded as one of the great gay capitals in the world due to its richness in community, history, and culture (Howe, 36). Being able to break away from Puritan ideals against homosexuality, the gay community within San Francisco has flourished for many years. This culture was able to develop due to the social and political climate created by the war and has since made a lasting impact on local life (D'Emilio, 31). To fully understand the gay culture within San Francisco, it is

important to decipher the context developed from World War II that allowed certain parts of the gay identity to take root, and why these components of gay life have continued on into the modern age. Under a queer anthropological lens, the greater culture must be critically explored to better understand the subsequent behaviors that define gay culture. Working in response to the contextual ideology around them, queer people were moved to establish a unique relationship with spaces of expression; a relationship that reflected the community's expectation of openly existing. However, physical and intangible spaces can become sanitized and flattened in the wake of movements within the greater culture.

The word "queer" is an umbrella term used to include all people who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. It is important to note that even though the queer community includes gay men, the gay community does not include all queer people (Howe, 36).

Industrial Revolution

Throughout history queer life has been the subject of much hate and abuse. Looking into American history, ideals surrounding sex and sexuality can be traced back to the first settlers in New England. Searching for a new place to practice their much stricter ideology, the Puritans brought to America a set of principles regarding sex and sexuality that still resonate within the general culture today. Ideals were taught to the general population through a religious narrative that preached punishment to those who did not help the community by having children, as not having children placed the continuation of the family unit in danger. As the settlers within America moved westward and life with technology evolved, cracks within this religious narrative began to emerge. The Industrial Revolution was one of the main causes for these fractures. Young people began to move into large, "impersonal" city spaces to be able to participate in the budding marketplace (D'Emilio, 11). As people moved around and came together on other similarities besides proximity and family, they began to understand that community was something they could build, rather than something they had to be constrained by. This shift in what notions are considered important can be identified within California due to the emergence of World War II.

Movement into California

As populations grew and migration took place, the West Coast was among these areas being newly populated. As time moved on, California began to gain a prominent white population. Drastically changing the social landscape of the area, these new settlers in California began to develop attitudes toward homosexuality that were new and distinct

in how they were formed, presented, and digested by the surrounding community. Attitudes toward homosexuality shifted most notably in the years during and after World War II in the major city of San Francisco, California. Many white, able-bodied American men learned to call California their new home in the years surrounding the war. This entirely male group placed within a strange place, coupled with the camaraderie many men felt while fighting a common enemy, meant that a certain “gay ambiance” was created (Bérubé, 89).

The war mobilization forced many men to face their attraction to the same sex and simultaneously come together in small communities to strengthen their identities (D’Emilio, 24). This realization of sexuality promoted the notions of community and exploration of sexual identities to become important within the culture of the area. This shift resulted in the creation of like-minded groups of people, active engagement with bars and club life, and homosexual activities. These notions became integrated with the local culture as well and helped create the current positive attitudes towards sexuality that are seen within San Francisco today.

Military Presence and Local Bar Culture

This change in attitudes within the urban culture began to take place within the city as the population, culture, and reach of consumer politics continued to grow. Due to this purchasing power, bars and clubs began to openly cater to the increasing gay population with great results. With time to traverse and influence the culture of San Francisco, military personnel deeply engaged with the gay nightlife that was flourishing during the war (D’Emilio, 24). The original Puritan narrative against homosexual activity was being replaced by a positive narrative on homosexuality that flourished due to the freedom granted by the war. Gay men were free to establish an identity within the city and they then began to adopt notions of sexual liberty and nightlife into their identity due to the importance of self-expression and lifestyle.

Military men were a key clientele for the bars. They used the bars for finding potential partners, paying for sex work, and drinking alcohol, and the bars were able to turn a high profit by catering to this newly dominant, homosexual crowd within the major city. Queer people in general “took advantage of a more tolerant social climate during the war to stake out a new public turf in these bars” (Bérubé, 93). As a result of the war, people within queer communities were able to find better opportunities to meet others, who were also homosexual, more often. Many gay people within California began to see the war as “something of a nationwide coming out experience” (D’Emilio, 24). This

experience further solidified nightlife as a key aspect of the gay life for San Francisco people. Bars became a safe space that encouraged the open display of homosexual activity, the ability to meet people with shared sexuality, and the option to find potential sexual partners.

Bars in the San Francisco area carry a large weight in the established gay community due to their legacy as areas for engaging in sexual activity and companionship. Bars are regarded as a “cultural institution” where gay men historically “were socialized, interpersonal contacts were made, and social isolation was alleviated” (Mattson, 3145). Engaging in this aspect of the culture, gay men have routinely visited gay bars within the area to find potential partners which may have originally looked like finding a male prostitute. Locals regarded bars as a place for social interaction, but for gay men, the setting “provoked diverse sexual possibilities” for them (Mattson, 3150). This continuation of meanings surrounding the nightlife from the post-war era to modern times exemplifies the unique importance of community gatherings and sexual lifestyles for gay culture in San Francisco.

The Objectification of Queer Spaces

Contemporarily, the large number of gay bars within the San Francisco area still cater to the gay crowd to create a profit. Gay bars are often recognized as major attractions for those who want to submerge themselves within the contemporary gay culture. But, this idea of gay bars being a place that people can visit to see and interact with the gay community of the city only works to reinforce queerness as an “object of consumption” (Jackson, 195–196). Creating a sense of otherness, the gay community’s nightlife is stripped of its meaningful context within the culture once positioned as something to visit.

By comparing this objectification of the gay male culture and image to the template of fetish commodification by Karl Marx, we can see this lack of depth more clearly. Thinking that value is intrinsic to the object, rather than coming from the labor that produced it, the commodity has been fetishized. Once this happens, the labor becomes invisible (Hennessey, 53). Replacing the words “labor” with “social progress” and “object/commodity” with “gay visibility,” a new way to see the relationship between gay culture and their usage for capital emerges. In this connection, the social and political history of queer people fighting for inclusion is the labor. This labor has resulted in queer rights and visibility outside of queer spaces. The fight for equal rights is intricately linked to many parts of gay culture as a whole and this understanding is often lost when only the fetishized image of gayness is seen; especially when being positioned as a way to earn capital. This history of

oppression and social mobility is rendered invisible when gay life is commodified, making the gay individual a social object rather than a social person.

The bars in particular have become noted as a place for heterosexual people to engage with the community for a few hours and then return home to their “normal” life once their fun is over. This “heteronormativity” in regards to nightlife often results in the closing of gay bars, and a push towards the “desexualization and sanitization” of gay culture temporarily (Mattson, 3147). This phenomenon can be observed throughout San Francisco. A sign outside one bar reads, “Please respect our neighbors! No public urination. No sexual shenanigans. No noise. Remember: People live here” (Mattson, 3152). The language used communicates a clear message; engaging in these activities is subhuman! Heterosexuals live here!

Limited Visibility at a National Scale

This stripping of culture, history, and personhood can be further seen in the ways that modern companies commodify the queer experience. Companies today will use the allure of “wokeness” and knowledge of minority struggles to gain greater profits. In the past, bars in the community were focused on profit over people, but they allowed for the making of culture within a tangible space. Modern companies are so expansive and impersonal that there is no culture-making to be done on purpose or otherwise. There is no a connection to the community and there is no interest in building one. In terms of visibility, images of queer people can now be seen in movies, advertisements, and art globally. But it is hard to say exactly where the line is drawn between queerness influencing companies and companies influencing queer life. The commodification of queerness more clearly creates a system of exploitation rather than granting social rights and autonomy (Jackson, 195–196). Industrialization and the introduction of capitalism within America originally allowed gay people to leave behind religious ways of thinking, but has contemporarily resulted in the subjectification of gay people as objects to consume. This relationship of changing attitudes exemplifies how feelings towards homosexual men are easily manipulated depending on who is benefiting within each context.

The lives of gay individuals have moved into the public sphere, but liberation is not in the mind of these corporations. This visibility being experienced by the gay community is a “limited victory” as gay people are only welcome to be consumer subjects. Yet, many queer individuals who have helped set the social climate in which the global queer community resides today do not fit the image that companies are willing to project for profit. Companies

are promoting a fetishized image of white, gay men as the face of the queer liberation movement. White, upper-class, gay men are a much easier persona to digest for the dominant white, upper-class heterosexual community, as they can see them as only a slightly lesser equal due to a difference in sexuality. The visibility being achieved by this specific persona is “fetishized” so much that it conceals the work that past queer communities have done in creating the social relations that contemporary queer communities depend on (Hennessey, 36).

Conclusion

Looking at how gay culture and communities operate and develop from a queer anthropological standpoint can help form more awareness around how attitudes towards homosexuality shape queer culture, the importance of gay and queer spaces, and the harm of commodification. Religious ideals caused harm to the lives of gay people, but the freedoms granted by the context of World War II allowed gay life to flourish. In both situations, the lives of gay men are confined by ideals from the larger community. This highlights the importance of understanding the contextual reasons behind attitudes towards gay men and how they affect gay life, as well as the importance of gay communities in general. By having a community, gay men can live by the ideals that they deem necessary and important to their own lives and culture. The gay men in San Francisco developed unique cultural ideals that flourished due to World War II, which have since become integral aspects of the city’s gay life. To fully grasp the significance, meaning, and making of the gay culture within San Francisco, the larger historical, social, and cultural contexts are all needed.

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The Weight of the Water: Self-Hatred Forced Upon *Mestizas* in *Weep, Woman, Weep*

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Ambar Galaviz is a rising senior at Carleton College, majoring in English. Her passion lies in researching the relationship between “trash” fiction and High Literature, and what works outside of the canon might reveal about our society’s values. She is an advocate of education as a tool of empowerment and is in her third year of working at a local high school, where she helps underprivileged students, especially those from ESL backgrounds. After graduating, Ambar hopes to be accepted into a PhD program in English. In case of not being accepted, she will serve AmeriCorps for a year and apply again in the next cycle.

Abstract

Maria DeBlassie’s novella *Weep, Woman, Weep* reimagines the Mexican folktale of La Llorona as an enforcer of whiteness and traditional feminine gender norms in the town of Sueño, New Mexico. The novella thus allows an examination of *mestiza* identity and its painful history through both La Llorona and Mercy, the female protagonist who fights to find happiness when all she has been taught is self-hatred. Using Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* and Jeffrey Cohen’s *Monster Theory*, La Llorona and Mercy can be analyzed as two sides of the same coin: one is driven to cleanse and purify her ancestry, denying her *mestiza* heritage, while the other uses her pain to nourish her life and plant love where there was only sorrow.

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Don’t give me your tenets and your laws. Don’t give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of entrails.
— Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*

Throughout generations, Mexicans have been transfixed with La Llorona, the Wailing Woman, and her tragic backstory. In Mexican folklore, she is a ghost who haunts rivers, wailing for the loss of her children after drowning them. The myth appears reimaged in Maria DeBlassie’s novella *Weep, Woman, Weep* (2021). In the novella, La Llorona was a cruel but beautiful young woman who married a handsome and wealthy vaquero. However, she fails to give him a son, pushing him to cheat and abandon her for his pregnant mistress. Enraged, she drowns her two daughters, an act that dooms her to haunt the river, wailing for her children and threatening any girl who is found near the river after sundown. Applying Jeffrey Cohen’s “monster theory,” which preoccupies itself with analyzing monsters as cultural creations, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories of *mestiza* identity reveals that DeBlassie’s version of La Llorona illustrates the patriarchal and racist systems of control forced on *mestizas*. Although Anzaldúa’s theories are more often applied to sociological questions, they can also be used to understand DeBlassie’s fictional world since the novella is largely preoccupied with exposing the same systems of control that Anzaldúa’s work fights. Using both lenses, I argue that *Weep, Woman, Weep* represents La Llorona as a creation of the *Mestiza*’s self-hatred, her monstrous presence evoking a form of self-flagellation that marks them for generations. Ultimately, the novel serves as a wake-up call for the Chicana community to acknowledge their wounds.

The novella revolves around the life of Mercy, a woman living in Sueño, New Mexico, a town that has been under the control of La Llorona for generations, enforcing traditional gender norms and beauty standards aligned with whiteness. Through the twisted relationship between Mercy and La Llorona, the novella reveals both the devastating consequences of succumbing to the pressure to purify *Mestiza*¹ identity from its non-white components, and also a hopeful path where *mestizas* can find peace and vanquish their internal turmoil. As teenagers, Mercy and her best friend Sherry were dragged into the river by La Llorona. Both girls are then transformed. Mercy, who narrowly escaped La Llorona, is marked by the spirit, damning her to a lifetime of misery and hauntings. Sherry emerges from the river as a hollow shell of her former fiery self: dull and submissive, dressed like the conservative women she always mocked.

Following Cohen’s “monster theory,” La Llorona reflects Mercy’s fear. He argues that monsters have seven key characteristics. Most relevant, that the monster’s body is a cultural body as it reflects a specific time, feeling, and place (Cohen 4). The monster is an enforcer, as it limits and patrols the border of the possible and embodies the consequences of pushing outside the norms. Additionally, Cohen asserts that all monsters are a reflection of their creators. In

this case, I argue that La Llorona is an extreme manifestation of the Sueño people's internalized hatred.

DeBlassie's portrayal of the twinned monstrosity of Mercy and La Llorona explores the tensions inherent in *mestiza* identity as described by Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa. She defines *mestiza* as "a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition" (78). Simply put, *mestizas* are the product of colonization and immigration, a mixture of races and languages. Ripe with tensions as Indigenous, Spanish, Black, and American ancestors are stuffed in her body, all screaming different things. According to Anzaldúa, "The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one... as long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches" (155). To be a woman is to be a monstrous, defective version of a man, which explains their subordinate and degraded role in society. The monstrosity stemming from their sex explains why only women are victimized by La Llorona, as they are the ones who need to be controlled. Mercy's connection to La Llorona runs deeper due to her fated encounter on the riverbank, making Mercy unique in having retained her individuality after facing La Llorona.

Cohen's and Anzaldúa's theories allow us to analyze the presence of La Llorona in the town as an embodiment of the standards that imprison *mestizas*. In Sueño, the standards for *mestiza* women revolve around shame and debasement. Their *mestiza* identity needs to be cleansed, purified from their non-White ancestors. Mercy recalls that despite their heritage, people favored English names, "as if it would erase our bronze skin or at least make it lighter... we were taught to feel shame for those impure bloodlines" (DeBlassie 5). Americanness, equated with whiteness and English, was greatly coveted, while Spanish was muffled to a few phrases, and any Indigenous language was completely erased. Additionally, women were supposed to be submissive to both the authority of the Catholic Church and to men. These women "cried when their husbands beat them and strayed, then defended them to anyone who said 'boo'" (DeBlassie 11). Women were supposed to feel shame for their mere existence, yet all actions of men were justified. In the novella, the town's treatment of Mercy and Sherry reflects these standards; since Mercy refuses to bow to men, she is treated like an outcast. In contrast, post-baptism, Sherry gets married, which the town sees as "a sign of her supposed return to the light" (DeBlassie 42). She had become the ideal woman, in opposition to the monstrous Mercy.

As monstrous doubles, La Llorona and Mercy were both created from the standard imposed on *mestizas*. When

recounting La Llorona's backstory, Mercy reveals that La Llorona never regretted drowning her daughters. Instead, La Llorona only regretted giving up her power to the *vaquero* who ultimately left her, as "he was supposed to help her purify the family line, cleanse her family of tainted blood from unholy mixed unions. They would be reborn through children paler than themselves" (DeBlassie 8). Even before her death, La Llorona believed in the superiority of White people and in her own responsibility to cleanse, *to whiten*, her family lineage. Anzaldúa argues that the biological and cultural creation of new generations rests squarely on women's shoulders, as even though men create culture, they "make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (Anzaldúa 46). La Llorona married the *vaquero* not out of love but rather out of self-hatred of her *mestiza* heritage. Ironically, in death, she acquired the whiteness she longed for in life. After death, La Llorona's "skin was as pale as a grub worm's. Her hands were like white spider legs" (DeBlassie 33). Both ideologically and physically, before and after death, La Llorona exemplifies Cohen's "monster theory" as her body reflects the cultural standards for *mestizas*. She represents everything Mercy tries to run away from, all the degrading White-centric standards that have been imposed on her throughout her life.

La Llorona is not only a monstrous personification of the standards for *mestizas* but also a policer of their behavior. As Cohen states, a monster delimits the possible; "to step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (Cohen 12). La Llorona controls the behavior of the women of Sueño, dragging any woman who steps outside the norms into the river. La Llorona does not drown her victims, as Mercy argues, "It was a baptism" (DeBlassie 10). The ghost uses water, a cleansing agent, to wash away the women's dirty past and initiate them into the life of a "proper" woman. The specter targets girls who defy the standards and baptizes them to cleanse them of their sin: feeling proud of their *mestiza* heritage. Mercy recalls that after baptism, the victims became "Jesus-loving, self-righteous prigs who called themselves Spanish... women who married men who cheated and raised mama's boys and little girls so full of their own virtue, they were hard and sour like lemons" (DeBlassie 11). La Llorona's role in Sueño is to ensure the cycle of *mestiza* self-hatred and trauma continues, drowning the town in misery.

As a double, Mercy fights to defy the cultural standards just as hard as La Llorona fights to keep them. These standards require the people of Sueño to deny any connections to Indigenous people and even to Mexico. Instead of accepting their *mestizaje*, the beauty of their multicultural identity, the women of Sueño suppress it to achieve the impossible whiteness. Mercy recalls, "We were told not to

spend too much time in the sun. Didn't want our skin any darker than it already was" (DeBlassie 5). Even though it results in her isolation, Mercy rebels in ways both small and large, like lounging in the sun to intentionally darken her skin. She also becomes muscular from her farming job, proudly describing herself as sturdy, "even if that's not a word that should be applied to a woman" (DeBlassie 79). Most importantly, she refuses to be submissive to a man, to sacrifice her personhood to become only a mother and a wife. Instead, Mercy focuses on her passion for the land, successfully establishing her own farm and building herself a home despite all the tragedies, earning the nickname from the town "Miracle Mercy." She reflects, "I'd managed to come out the other side not just alive but thriving" (DeBlassie 93). Mercy is a phenomenon, refusing whiteness and feminine norms; she's a miracle not only because of her farm, but because she stood strong and let her personality blossom in a town where women become husks of themselves to fulfill the suffocating standards.

La Llorona's and Mercy's entanglement leaves our heroine with the unintentional gift of supernatural tears. Defined by her sorrow, La Llorona's powers to control water come from her misery and traumatic connection to the river where she drowned her daughters. She is the harbinger of death, misery, and pain. After marking Mercy on that fateful day, she gave the young woman some powers: her tears, when they touch the earth, can wreak havoc. At first, Mercy's tears are fueled by hatred and sorrow, too. Her grief over losing Sherry causes a flood, water is once again used to bring destruction and death. However, unlike La Llorona, who wallows in her hatred and uses her tears to hurt others, Mercy decides to hide this power. She stores her tears in jars for decades, never letting them touch the ground (DeBlassie 40).

Additionally, La Llorona gives Mercy her mark, which is a metaphor for generational trauma since it turns all the Mestizas in Sueño into monstrous versions of themselves with self-hatred that they then force onto others. In Mercy's case, she is violent towards herself. Her acts of self-mutilation come from her half-lived life. She preserves tears in mason jars, representing her refusal to allow herself to feel any emotion whatsoever. This emotional crippling leads her to refuse Santo's advances, her love interest at the end of the novella, who offers Mercy companionate love. She shuts him out and hides her mason jars, because "I was worried that if he knew the kind of monster she'd made me into, he wouldn't come around anymore" (107). The usage of the word monster reveals Mercy's merging with La Llorona. Mercy is hiding herself from her trauma, refusing to heal, and bottling up her tears and her being, all in an effort to hide her monstrosity, her magical tears, which

ironically only brings her closer to La Llorona, whose purpose is to void women of themselves.

After living in misery for years, Mercy slowly heals from the mark of La Llorona. Upon seeing a turnip sprout from where she shed a tear, Mercy wonders, "If all that sorrow could take away life, couldn't it give life, too?" (DeBlassie 103). By exposing her pain to the outside world and letting her tears touch the earth, Mercy starts to heal from her generational trauma. Slowly, she starts enjoying life, saying, "If I didn't start to appreciate the life I'd built, well then, I was just as bad as La Llorona" (110). She reads smutty paperbacks while sipping wine, wears fluffy slippers to feel luxurious, and even starts accepting Santo's company, enjoying the music he plays at night. All these simple pleasures fill Mercy with love instead of sorrow, "All of a sudden, I got this warm full feeling inside my chest, like sunlight" (95). According to Anzaldúa, the transition from reaction to action is key for the *mestiza* to heal from the inner turmoil present in her identity as "counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life" (147). Although Mercy acts as a mirror to La Llorona through much of the text, by the end of the novella, Mercy breaks free, instead choosing to live for herself.

Mercy not only heals herself, but even heals Sherry, even if it is after Sherry's death. After finding Sherry's body in the river, Mercy stops the cycle of pain from continuing by giving her a burial. The body is heavy from the river water, weighed down with suffering. However, Mercy manages to move it with the help of the nature around her, "the wild globe mallow scattered across our path softened things, like they always did, smoothing the road with soft dirt and leaves, while the Russian olive and cottonwood roots pushed Sherry along behind me" (122). The deliberate naming of these three plants symbolizes issues of *mestizaje* in the novella. Globemallow, used by Indigenous people for medicinal purposes and native to New Mexico ("Globemallow"), represents the Indigenous aspect of Mestiza identity. The Russian olive is invasive to the Southwest and originated from Europe and Asia ("Russian olive"), representing the White ancestors. Finally, Cottonwood is famous in New Mexico because it grows along the Rio Grande ("Cottonwood"), an embodiment of the borderlands. All three plants work together in harmony to help Mercy move Sherry and bury her in the earth. Finally, harmony and peace are achieved as Mercy establishes her identity as a *mestiza* and heals her inner turmoil. She uses her mason jars of tears, before only seen as destructive, to nourish her land. If allowed, even water filled with pain can be used to create a better future. The novella ends as Mercy reflects, "We are the seeds we plant, not the histories forced upon us" (DeBlassie 127). For *mestizas*, the cycle

of self-hatred will only end if they are willing to have a reckoning with the history of their identity and use their past pain to create a loving future.

Weep, Woman, Weep explores the self-hatred imposed on *mestiza* identity by the use of mirror characters; La Llorona is a woman who has been monstrously deformed by her desire to achieve racial purity, and Mercy is a woman who heals from the cultural standards imposed on her and makes peace with her multicultural *mestiza* identity. The novella uses water, our most precious resource to show how it can be used to give life or destroy it. However, the true power lies in Mercy as she is the one who decides how to use it. Similarly, it is up to us to choose our own fate, regardless of the stories we inherit. We chose what to nourish and what to let the river wash away.

Endnote

- ¹ Spanish for “mixed” is used to describe the offspring from the intermixing of White Europeans and Indigenous people, resulting in the modern population of Latin America. The feminine version of the adjective is used to specify that our analysis centers around women.

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Latinx-in-Context: Anti-Immigration Rhetoric and Pro-Immigrant Policy Support

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Luis Guaman is a senior at Princeton University, majoring in politics with a concentration in Race and Ethnicity Politics in the American context. His research primarily focuses on Latine politics, with his current project investigating how different contexts of racially-targeted local law enforcement detainment influence Black and Latine support for group-based punitive policies. He is currently in the process of applying for doctoral programs in Political Science.

Abstract

How does executive-level anti-immigration rhetoric shape pro-immigrant policy support? Anti-immigration rhetoric is often tied to decreasing support for pro-immigration policies. In this paper, I test if these trends hold true within different contexts of the Latinx population, focusing on acculturation and Latinx and American identity centrality as potential moderating variables. Using an original pilot survey experiment, I find preliminary evidence suggesting American and Latinx identity centrality moderate exposure effects to anti-immigration rhetoric. Latinx identity centrality is strongly associated with an increase in pro-immigrant policy support, while American identity centrality is strongly associated with a decrease in pro-immigrant policy support. These identity effects persist consistently across acculturation levels, partisan identification, and experimental treatment conditions. This study contributes to the growing literature on the expanding impacts of federal anti-immigration directives and complicates conventional theories on Latinx immigration policy support.

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Introduction

Acculturation is broadly defined as communities' adoption of the dominant norms in which they live. In the Latinx case, acculturation has traditionally been conceptualized as a process through which individuals, often across multiple generations, reject distinctive Latinx values in favor of adopting mainstream American norms. This perspective suggests that by relinquishing their Latinx identification in exchange for an American one, individuals not only distance themselves from their ethnic heritage, such as the Spanish language, but may also internalize anti-immigrant and nativist sentiments that undermine vital community ties. However, this binary framework, while influential, fails to account for the nuanced and context-dependent ways in which identity is navigated and expressed. Drawing on segmented assimilation theory and social identity theory, I argue that acculturation is best understood as a gradient, multifaceted experience, shaped by the diverse social contexts in which individuals negotiate their American and Latinx identities. This reconceptualization, considering intergenerational and language experiences equally, challenges the prevailing paradigm by emphasizing the fluidity and coexistence of multiple identities, rather than viewing them as mutually exclusive or mixed.

To empirically investigate the mechanisms underlying the activation of American and Latinx identities, I designed an original survey experiment in which Latinx respondents were randomly assigned to either a control or treatment condition.¹ Specifically, I create constructs of American and Latinx identity and examine their moderating effect on respondents' support for a range of pro-immigrant policies when confronted with elite-level anti-immigration rhetoric. My findings indicate that, across the experimental condition and levels of acculturation, the centrality of American identity was associated with decreased support for pro-immigrant policies, while Latinx identity centrality was associated with increased support. When exposed to anti-immigration rhetoric, highly acculturated individuals did not exhibit a significant shift toward anti-immigrant preferences, and those with lower levels of acculturation demonstrated a marginally significant increase in support for pro-immigrant policies.

Theoretical Framework

Classic straight-line assimilation theory posits that the attitudes and practices of immigrant group members gradually align with those of the dominant group across generations (Gordon 1964). However, Alba (2003) introduces the concept of “shedding,” viewing acculturation as a selective, pick-and-choose process. Segmented assimilation theory challenges the notion of a single, linear path to assimilation by emphasizing the variability of outcomes based on social context, group resources, and the reception immigrants receive from the host society (Portes and Zhou 1993). Alba’s more recent work (2016) continues to refine these ideas, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of acculturation.

The experience of Latin American immigrants, particularly those labeled as “undocumented,” introduces additional complexity. Unlike earlier waves of European migration, which are often idealized as the archetype of successful assimilation, gradually shifting away from ethnic self-identification toward an “American,” and frequently White, identity (Alba 2009; 2016), Latinx immigrants and their children must navigate the uncertainties and stigmas associated with their legal status. The “illegal” framing of Latin American immigration fundamentally alters both the process and the outcomes of assimilation for this group.

The linkage between whiteness and American identity is deeply entrenched in both academic scholarship and popular discourse. Devos and Banaji (2005) argue that “white” is the cultural default for “American,” a finding echoed by Kim (2000), who shows that Asian Americans and Black Americans are often perceived as less American than their white counterparts. For Latinxs, this racialization as perpetual foreigners (Zou and Cheryan 2017) may prompt a strategic emphasis on American identity as a means of asserting belonging and countering exclusion (Ocampo 2024; Salgado 2023). Yet, as segmented assimilation theory underscores, the success of these efforts is ultimately contingent upon the reception immigrants receive from members of the dominant majority group, highlighting the interactive and relational dimensions of identity negotiation (Alba 2003).

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals navigate group membership and status within the broader system of racial hierarchy in the United States (Omi and Winant 2014). When social norms shift and a

group becomes negatively valued, individuals may attempt to dissociate from that group in pursuit of higher status (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). However, as Padilla and Perez (2003) argue, when such attempts at dissociation are unsuccessful, often due to persistent racialization or visible markers of difference, individuals may instead embrace their ethnic identity and engage in collective efforts to improve their group’s status.

The conscious use of Spanish, a language deeply embedded in the U.S. racial hierarchy, serves as one of the strongest remaining ties to pan ethnic Latinx identity (Bedolla 2003). Portes and Rumbaut (1996) document how language minorities are systematically encouraged by state institutions to adopt English as rapidly as possible. Bedolla’s (2005) study reveals that state-backed English-language dominance exerts a profound influence on family dynamics and identity formation. For first-generation immigrants, speaking Spanish is closely tied to experiences of “othering” and exclusion. The pressure to adopt English creates strong incentives for some first and second-generation Latinx-Americans to refrain from transmitting the language to their children.

Politically, Latinxs’ adoption of anti-immigrant attitudes adjacent to Anglos is often shaped by generational status and English language dominance (Rouse et al. 2010). Later-generation Latinxs may increasingly see themselves as prototypically American rather than as members of an immigrant community, leading to a distancing from recent immigrants who are stigmatized for maintaining ethnic norms such as speaking Spanish (Rouse et al. 2010; Bedolla 2003). However, persistent out-group discrimination can sustain pro-immigrant policy preferences among certain third and fourth-generation Latinx-Americans, especially when these individuals experience rejection from both their ethnic group due to language loss and from the dominant society due to incomplete acceptance (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Pedraza 2014).

Anti-immigrant sentiment is frequently communicated through media coverage, which often emphasizes xenophobic and exclusionary narratives that question the worth of ethnic identity and raise its salience (Perez 2015; Abrajano et al. 2017). Experimental research demonstrates that exposure to threat and security frames in media increases support for restrictive immigration policies, but these effects are conditioned by ideology and identity importance (Lahav and Courtemanche 2011; Avdagic and Savage 2024; Hopkins et al. 2024). Highly identifying

Latinxs may respond to xenophobic rhetoric by expressing greater group pride and support for pro-group policies, while low-identifying individuals may dissociate from their ethnic group and align more closely with dominant attitudes (Perez 2015; Bedolla 2005). This “hunkering” effect is consistent with reactive ethnicity theory, which posits that hostile contexts motivate acculturated co-ethnics to develop politicized group consciousness and resist the dominant group’s political commitments (Rumbaut 2008; Perez 2015).

Prioritizing an American identity over ethnic identity among Latinxs is associated with more conservative positions on immigration and support for Republican candidates (Hickel et al. 2021). Conversely, those whose Latinidad is less central, often later-generation Latinxs who have prioritized American identity, are more likely to respond to anti-immigrant messaging by further dissociating from the pan-ethnic group and aligning with restrictive immigration policies (Rouse et al., 2010; Hickel et al., 2021). This process is shaped by the broader social hierarchy, in which American identity is associated with higher status and greater access to resources (Devos and Banaji 2005; Omi and Winant, 2014).

I argue that the process of intergenerational assimilation is best characterized by the interplay between generational status and the use of the Spanish language. This dual focus moves beyond the limitations of straight-line assimilation models and instead aligns with segmented assimilation theory, which recognizes diverse and context-dependent pathways of adaptation and resistance (Portes and Zhou 1993; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Spanish-language use emerges as a salient marker of both ethnic attachment and resistance to forced assimilation (Bedolla 2003; Bedolla 2005). Therefore, I hypothesize:

H1a: Latinx respondents who have low levels of acculturation, when exposed to anti-immigration messaging by the United States government, will increase their support for pro-immigrant policies.

H1b: Latinx respondents who have high levels of acculturation, when exposed to anti-immigration messaging by the United States government, will decrease in their support for pro-immigrant policies.

Data and Design

I utilized the online survey firm Prolific to generate weighted samples based on Spanish-speaking ability and generational status ($n = 425$). Participation was restricted to respondents who identified as “Latino/Hispanic” in one or more of their race(s)/ethnicity(ies). The sample achieved an even split between third and fourth-generation respondents, with an oversample of first and second-generation respondents. The sample also included 58% Spanish speakers and 42% non-Spanish speakers. To capture being raised in a Spanish-speaking household, I adopted Perez’s (2015) approach, categorizing high acculturation as those raised in English-only households and low acculturation as those raised in Spanish-only households.

To measure pro-immigrant policy support, I created an eight-question additive index including resource-based policies (e.g., pathways to citizenship, DACA expansion, sanctuary city funding, and healthcare access) and immigration-based policies (e.g., border wall funding and deportation priorities). Respondents were randomly assigned to either a neutral statement (“This year, there has been a lot of discussion on immigration policies in the United States”) or a restrictive statement emphasizing illegal immigration and bipartisan concern. The restrictive condition emphasizes the illegality of immigration to induce decreased support for pro-immigrant policies (Merolla et al. 2012).

American and Latinx identity centrality measures were adaptations of Perez (2015) and Masuoka and Junn (2013)’s conceptualizations of pan-ethnic Latinx identity and nationalist identification. I used min-max scaling to create composite scores ranging from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate greater centrality. Cronbach’s alpha tests confirmed internal consistency for all composite measures: American identity centrality ($\alpha = 0.82$), Latinx identity centrality ($\alpha = 0.79$), pro-immigrant policy support ($\alpha = 0.85$), and acculturation level ($\alpha = 0.76$). I created acculturation categories by combining generational status, experiences of being raised in a Spanish household, and Spanish-speaking ability, resulting in the following distribution of the three groups: low acculturation (35%), medium acculturation (29%), and high acculturation (36%).

Results and Analysis

To measure the effects of my variables of interest, I used Ordinary Least Squares linear regression estimates to determine which variables most influence pro-immigrant policy support. I created three separate models for each acculturation category, controlling for treatment condition and Republican identification:

Dependent variable:			
Pro-Immigrant Policy Support (0-1)			
	Low Acculturation	Medium Acculturation	High Acculturation
American Identity Centrality	-0.327*** (0.080)	-0.455*** (0.101)	-0.422*** (0.087)
Restrictive Condition	0.069* (0.041)	-0.054 (0.044)	-0.004 (0.043)
Latinx Identity Centrality	0.447*** (0.085)	0.301*** (0.095)	0.353*** (0.091)
Republican Identification	-0.205*** (0.053)	-0.214*** (0.060)	-0.217*** (0.050)
Constant	0.472*** (0.075)	0.697*** (0.083)	0.597*** (0.079)
Observations	149	124	151
R ²	0.375	0.381	0.383
Adjusted R ²	0.358	0.361	0.366
Residual Standard Error	0.244 (df = 144)	0.245 (df = 119)	0.257 (df = 146)
F Statistic	21.627*** (df = 4; 144)	18.350*** (df = 4; 119)	22.693*** (df = 4; 146)

Table 1. OLS Linear Regression Results: Pro-Immigrant Policy Support by Acculturation Level

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Standard errors in parentheses. Each column reports results for a separate regression by acculturation group.

Across all acculturation groups, American identity centrality is a strong and statistically significant negative predictor of pro-immigrant policy support. The effect is largest for the medium acculturation group (-0.455), followed by high (-0.422) and low (-0.327) acculturation. This pattern is consistent with segmented assimilation theory's expectation that, as Latinx individuals become more acculturated and prioritize American identity, they are more likely to adopt the restrictive policy preferences of the dominant group (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba 2009). This finding supports the argument that American identity, when constructed in opposition to ethnic background, can serve as a mechanism for distancing from group-based solidarity and the interests of co-ethnics (Masuoka and Junn 2013; Devos and Banaji 2005).

The restrictive condition, which primes respondents with anti-immigrant rhetoric, has a statistically significant positive effect only among the low acculturation group (0.069, $p < 0.1$). This suggests that less acculturated Latinx respondents, those with stronger ethnic attachment and Spanish-language ties, respond to exclusionary messaging by increasing their support for pro-immigrant policies. This "reactive ethnicity" effect is well-documented in the literature, where perceived threat or exclusion from the dominant group activates pan-ethnic solidarity and collective resistance (Perez 2015; Bedolla 2005; Tajfel and Turner 1979). For medium and high acculturation groups, the

effect is not significant, indicating that exposure to anti-immigrant rhetoric does not mobilize these groups in the same way.

Latinx identity centrality is a strong positive predictor of pro-immigrant policy support across all groups, with the effect being largest for the low acculturation group (0.447), followed by high (0.353) and medium (0.301) acculturation. This finding supports the theoretical claim that a central sense of Latinx identity motivates support for policies benefiting co-ethnics, especially among those least assimilated (Bedolla 2003; Perez 2015). Importantly, the persistence of Latinx identity centrality as a positive predictor, even among highly acculturated respondents, challenges my original prediction and traditional assimilation models that assume later-generation Latinxs fully converge with dominant group attitudes.

Republican identification is a significant negative predictor of pro-immigrant policy support in all groups, with coefficients around -0.21. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on partisanship and immigration attitudes (Masuoka and Junn 2013) and demonstrates that political identity operates independently of acculturation level to shape policy preferences.

Robustness Check

To extend my findings to a nationally representative sample, I attempted to replicate my results using data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-election Survey (CMPS) (Barreto et al. 2016). I first created a cumulative file comprising all publicly available editions of the CMPS survey (2008–2020). However, 2016 was the only survey year that contained adequate proxies for both American and Latinx identity constructs. American identity centrality was

measured using one question, whereas Latinx identity centrality was a composite measure of two questions. Acculturation remained a composite measure but was composed of survey language and citizenship in addition to generational status. Pro-immigrant policy support could only be captured using two immigration policy questions. Control models include gender, political ideology, religion, income, education, and percentage of Hispanic neighborhood composition:

Dependent variable:						
Pro-Immigrant Policy Support (0–1)						
Acculturation Levels				Acculturation Levels (With Controls)		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
American Identity Centrality	-0.002 (0.012)	-0.024** (0.009)	-0.018* (0.009)	-0.005 (0.015)	-0.024* (0.010)	-0.004 (0.011)
Latinx Identity Centrality	0.082* (0.034)	0.177*** (0.019)	0.121*** (0.018)	0.064 (0.041)	0.121*** (0.021)	0.110*** (0.021)
Republican Identification	-0.087** (0.032)	-0.119*** (0.017)	-0.084*** (0.016)	-0.066 (0.036)	-0.081*** (0.019)	-0.048* (0.020)
Constant	0.606*** (0.034)	0.552*** (0.024)	0.544*** (0.023)	0.668*** (0.070)	0.784*** (0.044)	0.639*** (0.044)
Observations	482	1251	1106	353	977	799
R2	0.029	0.120	0.067	0.047	0.198	0.131
Adjusted R2	0.023	0.118	0.065	0.023	0.190	0.120
Residual Standard. Error	0.216 (df = 482)	0.220 (df = 1251)	0.210 (df = 1106)	0.219 (df = 353)	0.205 (df = 977)	0.204 (df = 799)
F Statistic	4.848** (df = 3; 482)	57.02*** (df = 3; 1251)	26.54*** (df = 3; 1106)	1.946* (df = 9; 353)	24.11*** (df = 10; 977)	12.03*** (df = 10; 799)

Table 2. OLS Linear Regression CMPS Replication: Pro-Immigrant Policy Support by Acculturation Level

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Standard errors in parentheses. The Collaborative Multi-racial Post-election Study (CMPS) is a national post-election online survey of U.S. voters and non-voters on political attitudes, with large oversamples of racial and ethnic groups. Models with controls include gender, ideology, religion, hispanic neighborhood composition, education, and income.

Compared to my study, the CMPS has a notable lack of low-acculturated respondents, which may explain the lack of significance across models for the low acculturation group. However, for medium and highly acculturated individuals, Latinx identity centrality has the most consistent and significant effects on increasing pro-immigrant policy support. These findings provide strong external validation of my experimental results regarding the persistent influence of Latinx identity centrality across acculturation levels.

Republican identification effects are consistent across the replication data as well, whereas American identity centrality loses significance when accounting for fixed effects. This loss of significance may be attributable to American identity centrality being measured with a single

question in the CMPS data, which does not include a group-based measure of American identity comparable to the multi-item scale used in my pilot study. The limited number of policy questions used to construct the pro-immigrant policy support measure may also constrain comparability with my experimental findings.

The most notable difference in operationalization between my pilot study and the CMPS replication concerns the acculturation measure. The CMPS acculturation measure does not capture the intricacies of Spanish-language use within households or across different social contexts but rather relies on an extreme measure of Spanish-language dominance (survey language) combined with citizenship status and generational status. This represents a more

limited conceptualization of acculturation than the composite measure developed in my pilot study, which incorporated household language environment, Spanish-speaking ability, and generational status. Despite these measurement differences, the replication provides meaningful validation of my core theoretical argument. Latinx identity centrality remains a significant positive predictor of pro-immigrant policy support across medium and high acculturation groups in the nationally representative CMPS sample, consistent with the patterns observed in my pilot experiment. This suggests that the relationship between ethnic identity centrality and policy preferences is robust across different measurement approaches and sampling strategies.

Conclusion

The regression analyses reveal that higher levels of acculturation are associated with lower Latinx identity centrality and a modest increase in Republican identification, but that strong ethnic identity and non-Republican partisanship remain prevalent even among the most acculturated. These results confirm the literature's argument that acculturation may encourage adoption of certain mainstream political behaviors but does not erase the enduring influence of group consciousness and the lived experience of racialization (Bedolla, 2003; Masuoka and Junn, 2013). The clear negative relationship between acculturation and Latinx identity centrality, and the evidence that exposure to restrictive rhetoric mobilizes pro-immigrant attitudes primarily among less acculturated, high-identity individuals, underscore the importance of treating identity as a dynamic, context-dependent process (Perez, 2015; Bedolla, 2005).

As recent Latinx political thought emphasizes, Latinidad is a contested and evolving site of political contestation, shaped by diverse histories, experiences, and modes of incorporation. My findings reinforce the need for political science to move beyond deficit-based or homogenizing frameworks and to recognize the agency and heterogeneity within Latinx communities.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. The sample size, while sufficient for initial analyses, limits the ability to explore more granular subgroup variation or to generalize findings to the broader Latinx population. Future research should expand the sample to include greater diversity in national origin, region, and socioeconomic status, and should be powered to test for intersectional effects of skin tone, gender, and ancestral subgroup (Uzogara, 2020). Additionally, the current design focuses on the effects of anti-immigrant rhetoric; subsequent studies should incorporate experimental manipulations that test the effects of both positive and negative immigration rhetoric, as well as the dual activation of

American and Latinx identities in real time (Perez, 2015; Bedolla, 2005). Future experiments should design studies that explicitly test the duality and potential coexistence of American and Latinx identities, providing actionable insights for scholars and practitioners interested in fostering inclusion and civic participation among Latinx communities.

Endnote

¹ This study received IRB approval by my home institution.

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Mālama I Ka Loʻi Kalo: Addressing Sense of Belonging in the Hawaiian Diaspora Within Health Frameworks

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Within the field of Hawaiian Studies, she aims to tackle belonging and identity issues in the Hawaiian Diaspora community and to advocate for cultural education. Her research interests come from her upbringing as a Native Hawaiian in the Diaspora, background in community organizing, and experiences as a cultural practitioner. After college, she plans to apply for PhD programs to further her research and continue working with community initiatives that support the Hawaiian Diaspora.

Abstract

Among Kānaka Hawaiʻi born and raised in the continental United States, many experience isolation and imposter syndrome surrounding their Hawaiian heritage. While these experiences are not unique to Kānaka Hawaiʻi in the diaspora, they are likely linked to migration away from familial, cultural, and educational support networks. The Hawaiian health model The *Abupuaʻa Model* (Daniels et al. 2022) illustrates the direct relationship between these support structures and issues of Hawaiian sovereignty, situating Indigenous health determinants within Hawaiian values of wellbeing. This article explores how applying the ideas of The *Abupuaʻa Model* to present Hawaiian Diasporic cultural education and community spaces—such as *bālau bula* (hula schools)—can illuminate sustainable ways to address Diasporic issues, grounded in both uniquely Diasporic contexts and Hawaiian ways of knowing. By addressing these issues, this research aims to promote the resourcing and creation of wellbeing spaces and support systems for Kānaka Hawaiʻi in the diaspora.

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Mookūʻaubau

My family history is a history of migration. My Kānaka Maoli ancestors come from Oʻahu and Maui, and my ancestors from Korea and the Philippines came to Hawaiʻi to work the sugar plantations. My Grandpa Butchie and Grandma Cathy would then move from Maui to Gardena, California, to raise my mom. My Ojisan Masao and Obaasan Chikako moved to San Francisco, California from Japan to raise my father, and my parents eventually settled in Berkeley, California to raise my sister and me. I am therefore both Sansei and a third generation Diasporic Kānaka Maoli in the United States, identities I treasure deeply alongside my heritage.

As prominent Kānaka Maoli scholars (Chang 2016, Aikau 2012, Kauanui 2007) have argued, Kānaka Maoli have always been mobile, and this mobility is central to the Kānaka Maoli identity. Many Kānaka were labor migrants in the late eighteenth through nineteenth century, working in the fur trade, whaling, and on ranches, with the earliest account of Kānaka Maoli being on the West Coast in 1785 (Chang 2016, Kauanui 2007). In the twentieth century, World War II was the catalyst for the three major waves of migration that shaped the Diaspora as we see it today; post-war resettlement after military discharge during Hawaiʻi’s territorial period, the imposition of statehood in 1959 that made relocating to other states easier for Kānaka Maoli, and the tourism boom in the 1970s, in which the U.S. military, foreign investors, and developers pushed out Kānaka Maoli and appropriated land for the tourist economy (Kauanui 2007, Sissum 2024). There are now over 370,000 Kānaka Maoli living in the Hawaiian Diaspora, with many of us in Los Angeles, San Diego, the Bay Area, Utah, Seattle, Texas, and New York.

However, without access to this history, I grew up ashamed to be from the Diaspora, believing I did not deserve to claim my heritage. I did not grow up in the community, speaking *ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi* (Hawaiian language) or doing hula. I have always struggled with feeling “Hawaiian enough.” However, having had many conversations with Kānaka facing similar struggles, I believe imposter syndrome is among the most prevalent issues currently faced in the Hawaiian Diaspora. Questioning Indigenous “authenticity” is a prevailing colonial weapon, and an extremely prominent one as Indigenous people continue to engage in global contexts.

Yet, personally seeing the many ways Kānaka Maoli from the Diaspora are creating spaces, resources, and communities to help us connect to our cultural heritage has taught me that dedication is not the issue, but resources and support. Therefore, it is important to theorize how Hawaiian values and Diasporic contexts manifest in practices within these spaces, imagining pathways forward that center community organizations, cultural spaces, and educational resources. As *bālau hula* (hula schools) have been crucial spaces of support and cultural connection for myself and many others, in this article, I will demonstrate how *bālau hula* help Diasporic Kānaka cultivate connection to their heritage identity. Furthermore, by framing the lack of sense of belonging as a health issue in The *Ahupua'a* Model of Hawaiian Health, I argue that cultural connection is vital to addressing the struggles over sense of belonging amongst Diasporic Kānaka Maoli.

Pacific health researchers have studied the phenomena of “sense of belonging” for some time now in the health sector. In “The Pacific Identity and Wellbeing Scale,” a tool for surveying health amongst Pacific Islanders in New Zealand, Sam Manuela and Chris Sibley (2003) identify “belonging and connectedness as important markers of wellbeing [in the Pacific], with belonging being a central tenet of ethnic identity.” Manuela and Sibley (2003) define *belonging* as “perception of [one’s self] to be a member and integral part of the wider, general Pacific group, from which a sense of belonging can be attained.” In Māori psychology, Muriwai et al.’s article, “Culture as Cure? The Protective Function of Māori Cultural Efficacy on Psychological Distress,” addresses psychological distress linked to ethnic affiliation, which can be interpreted as negative sense of belonging. Muriwai et al. claim that cultural efficacy, or self-perceived cultural competency to engage with other Māori, is proven to lessen psychological distress attributed to ethnic affiliation (Houkamau & Sibley, 2011). These findings additionally highlight the interconnectedness between culture and one’s sense of belonging and heritage affiliation.

Sense of belonging specifically is not discussed within current Hawaiian health conversations. Yet, because Hawaiian health shares similar foundations to Māori and Pacific health, such as holistic health (spiritual, land, ancestor, mental, cultural, physical wellbeing) and collectivism (viewing health as determined by the larger community), I believe that Hawaiian health is an effective field to assess

sense of belonging in the Hawaiian Diaspora. Furthermore, Hawaiian health models can serve as theoretical guideposts for effective cultural and community intervention, as they have for many Hawaiian cultural, educational, and ecological initiatives.

In general Hawaiian Studies, “sense of belonging” is phrased more commonly as “authenticity” issues and is primarily addressed in social and political contexts. For example, while many Kānaka Maoli currently believe themselves “inauthentic” because their Hawaiian blood quantum is “diluted,” in her book, *Hawaiian Blood*, Kēhaulani Kauanui reveals blood quantum as a colonial construct created to eradicate Indigenous peoples’ claims to their land and rights. In his book, *The World and All the Things Upon it: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration*, David Aiona Chang combats the notion that Diasporic Kānaka Maoli are “abandoning their home,” demonstrating how exploration was common practice amongst Hawaiians in the period after Cook’s arrival to uplift themselves and their people. Additionally, in their article, “A Breath of Ea: Submergent Strategies for Deepening the Hawaiian Diaspora,” Kahala Johnson and Mahealani Ahia normalize Hawaiian diasporaneity by demonstrating how the *kuleana* (responsibility) kinships between land and sea, and the practices of our oceanic pre-human ancestors, can provide deeper understandings of the relationship between diasporaneity and indigeneity. Thus, scholarship on authenticity struggles within the Hawaiian Diaspora have mainly centered on colonial racial logics and Indigenous diasporaneity. Therefore, by placing the Pacific and Māori health definition of sense of belonging into Hawaiian health frameworks, I will be expanding on former Hawaiian socio-political scholarship on authenticity and analyzing culturally-based healing practices for Diasporic issues which are informed by colonial traumas. I will be examining these ideas through the Ahupua’a model’s frameworks of risk and protective factors, and then demonstrating how preexisting spaces in the Diaspora, such as *bālau hula* (hula schools), tackle negative sense of belonging in alignment with protective factors, and therefore values of cultural connection.

When placed in The *Abupua'a* Model as a health issue, struggles with belonging would be represented as the *kalo* (taro). For example, in the *lo'i kalo*, belonging struggles can grow from shame about being distant from your heritage, guilt about leaving, anger about being ostracized, and fear of being rejected as Kānaka Maoli. Yet in actuality, those feelings are shaped by much larger events, including colonization, loss of land, and historical, cultural, racial, and intergenerational trauma. However, what The *Abupua'a* Model importantly shows further is that to acquire spiritual energy, balance, healing, and connection, promoting a strong sense of belonging, we need to engage with cultural connection; the *'āina* (land), *mo'okū'auhau* (genealogy), *'ōhana* (family), culture, etc.

A common misconception about Diasporic Kānaka is that they have “abandoned” and therefore “lost interest in their culture and family.” However, where the Diaspora and Hawai'i differ is not our values of culture and family, but our access to support networks that grow and maintain our relationships to protective factors. As shown in the *Abupua'a* metaphor, the rain (protective and risk factors) falls on the mountain regardless, there for all of us to access.

However, it is *our* job to make sure the rain reaches the *lo'i kalo*, maneuvering the barriers and distance that obstruct connection.

Hālau Hula

I argue that *bālau hula* (hula schools) in the Hawaiian Diaspora are prime examples as to how support structures promote wellbeing by connecting Diasporic Kānaka to protective factors. The structure of *bālau hula* and *bālau hula* teachings connect Diasporic Kānaka to *mo'olelo* (stories, legends, and history), *'āina* (land), *'ōlelo Hawai'i* (Hawaiian language), teach cultural protocols and epistemologies, and develop values in community care and *aloha*. Furthermore, analyzing *bālau hula* demonstrates how applying Diasporic sense of belonging in the *Abupua'a* model translates to current practices in the Hawaiian Diaspora.

One way that *bālau hula* connects Diasporic Kānaka to their heritage is through history, language, and cultural education. Within *bālau hula*, common education includes making costumes and studying the *mo'olelo* (story), oftentimes related to the history of the *akua* (gods) and *ali'i* (chiefs), behind the *oli* (chant). Furthermore, through year-round *bālau* events and gatherings, members are exposed to Hawaiian culture, such as through *Paniolo*-themed (Hawaiian cowboy) activities for children and local foods. Hula students also learn *'ōlelo Hawai'i* (Hawaiian language), practicing reading and pronunciation skills through chanting. Additionally, although physically cultivating a

relationship with the *'āina* (Hawaiian land) is difficult from the Mainland, studying hula helps Diasporic Kānaka create that fundamental relationship. Dancing hula is speaking the language of our *'āina* (Hawaiian land) and chanting connects us to the *la'au* (plantlife) and *akua* (gods) associated with it. Therefore, through the honor and love for the *'āina* (Hawaiian land) expressed in hula, Diasporic Kānaka are able to cultivate their relationship with the *'āina* (Hawaiian land). As such, *bālau hula* provides many foundational learning opportunities for Diasporic Kānaka to connect to their heritage identity.

Importantly, *bālau hula* also upholds the protocols and sacredness around transferring cultural knowledge. In teaching protocols, it is customary to be chosen by *kumu* (master) to be their *haumana* (student). Obtaining knowledge is a process that values deep understanding over memorization and performance and comes with cultural responsibility as a practitioner. Hula follows these protocols, as when a new hula is taught, students also learn history, cultural significance, cultural practices, and community. While learning facts and skills is more easily translatable for the Diaspora, it can be difficult to teach Hawaiian epistemologies and values, equally crucial parts in upholding ancestral knowledge. However, through the *bālau hula* structure of teaching, Diasporic Kānaka encounter Hawaiian values and epistemologies through protocols of learning, connecting them to their heritage.

Additionally, *bālau hula* perpetuate the Hawaiian values of community aloha and care, fostering spaces for intergenerational connection with *'ōhana* (family) and community. Hawaiian communities have always been set up around interdependence and care within the village.

Hālau hula are exemplary of this kinship structure, with whole families being involved in dancing, performances, and cooking. The *bālau hula* also embraces the entire local community, with events such as lei making open to friends and family, and many Kānaka Maoli specifically stopping by to connect with other Kānaka Maoli. Without spaces that emulate these values of community *aloha* and care, Diasporic Kānaka can struggle to connect to their Kānaka Maoli *'ōhana* (family) and community. However, through *bālau* environments and community programming, *bālau hula* connect Diasporic Kānaka to these support networks.

In my personal experience, being a part of a *bālau* not only helps me to learn more about my culture, but it allows me to keep reaffirming and strengthening my connection to my heritage with each class I attend. Those ongoing practices of reconnection have been crucial to me, because my sense of belonging is always changing. As

healing and wellbeing are processes, they require perpetuation and reinforcement of healing practices, which come from engagement with spaces, resources, and community. Therefore, by creating the spaces, resources, and community to foster healing practices, *hālau bula* demonstrate the importance of spaces and resources for executing the wellbeing ideologies defined in The *Abupua'a* Model's protective factors. Moreover, *hālau bula* practices perpetuate Hawaiian culture and form community, alongside promoting healing, combatting colonial traumas, and advancing decolonization efforts.

Conclusion

I have thus far analyzed how *hālau bula* demonstrate the need to resource spaces which strengthen foundational relationships between Diasporic Kānaka and *'āina* (Hawaiian land), community, family, and ancestors. I based these findings in my analysis of Diasporic sense of belonging in the *Abupua'a* model, which depicted the transgenerational effects of settler colonialism, and the holistic and collectivist practices involved in healing. Though the Diasporic community does not frame *hālau bula* explicitly as health spaces, placing *hālau bula* in health frameworks proves how Diasporic structures can be intentional about their role in supporting Diasporic wellbeing. Other Diasporic structures which can be framed similarly include restaurants, families, facebook groups, canoe clubs, and student organizations. Furthermore, situating these organizations in the Hawaiian Diaspora as health spaces recognizes the active engagement of Diasporic Kānaka in connecting to their heritage and perpetuating culture, knowledge, and community. Going forward, I advocate for the creation of resources and spaces that are grounded in and seek to address Diasporic issues. In doing so, we can combat the transgenerational effects of settler colonialism that seek to erase Hawaiian indigeneity and support Diasporic Kānaka in their journeys healing negative sense of belonging, ensuring wellbeing for future generations of Diasporic Kānaka.

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Emancipatory Interiors: Postbellum Citizenship in the American Domestic Genre Scene

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Abstract

This paper investigates depictions of domestic interiors in the genre paintings of late-nineteenth-century artists—namely Edwin White, Thomas Hovenden, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and Harry Roseland—for the interior's role in each artist's unique meditations on Black civic inclusion in the wake of the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction Amendments. I argue that in this moment, the genre-painted interior is regularly constructed as an arena for pondering national questions related to Black citizenship, literacy, and autonomy. While the works and lives of painters like Hovenden and Tanner have been studied extensively, this investigation attends to gaps in research on the works of Edwin White and Harry Roseland, as well as the role of site in evocations of American public discourse and the relationship between the physical and psychological or political "interior."

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The social and cultural ramifications of Black emancipation weighed heavily on the minds of Americans throughout the nineteenth century. Genre painters, in the position to translate national concerns into visual form, took to canvases to participate in the lively discourses surrounding the Emancipation Proclamation and ratifications of the Reconstruction Amendments. Genre images of the domestic interior became crucial sites for such engagement. In producing images of Black Americans in their homes, genre artists of the late nineteenth century were visualizing both the physical and metaphysical Black interior, dimensions of Black life once rendered invisible or nonexistent by the legal and social doctrines that upheld the institution of slavery. Newfound representational access to the emancipated Black body roused attempts to both translate and construct emancipated Black subjects. Yet, relative to the existing scholarship on manifestations of geographic, technological, and gender-related discourses in the genre-painted interior, there is comparatively little scholarship that appreciates the racialization of this site, particularly

as it relates to the social and legal effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction era.



Figure 1. Thomas Hovenden, *Breaking Home Ties*, 1890, oil on canvas, 52 1/8 x 6 1/4 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of Ellen Harrison McMichael in memory of C. Emory McMichael, 1942.

The domestic genre scene's capacity to invoke American racial discourse is perhaps most plainly exemplified in Thomas Hovenden's monumental oil on canvas, *Breaking Home Ties* (1890) (Figure 1). Hovenden does not explicitly invoke racial discourses, but the readings of and reactions to the scene at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition have much to do with them. In the painting, Hovenden pictures a rural white family bidding an adolescent boy, presumably off to make his own living, a last farewell. He, stiff and solemn, is embraced by his mother at the center of the canvas. Other members of the family—even the family dog—look on somberly. Moved and impressed by the poignancy and scale of the scene, organizers of the 1893 Exposition persuaded Hovenden to lend the painting for exhibition in Chicago. In the prevailing narrative maintained by existing scholarship, the tremendous success of Hovenden's work lay in its power to resonate with viewers with regard to industrialization and urbanization's threats to simpler, rustic American life. As Lacey Baradel writes, "commentators' interpretations of *Breaking Home Ties* were informed by the view that the ordinary American (assumed white and male) who left home to seek opportunity elsewhere represented the heart of the nation." Many viewers imagined that this opportunity for the boy would be found in the city specifically, despite there being no visual evidence to suggest so. Yet to be properly dissected in scholarly readings of Hovenden's work, though, are the precise cues that allow for expressly American discourses to be invoked. Whiteness was the basis for the nineteenth-century viewer's identification with this image and its themes. As is evident in a review of the work by a correspondent of the *Philadelphia Telegraph*, the boy is instantly seen as belonging to the American body politic: "The boy who stands on the

threshold of his home in this picture is going out into the world to make his own way ... we know he is going to do well. The American boy always does well.” While invocations of other discourses (on industrialization, urbanization, or geographic and social mobility) may only be read implicitly or imagined, race is readily visible and acts as a direct visual index for ‘Americanness.’

The Black subject-centered domestic interior of the nineteenth century is likewise constructed as a space for meditation on American discourses, but often specifically as a space for a reeling white body politic to ponder the Black subject’s capacity for civic inclusion and personhood. As with the increasingly psychological portrait of the late nineteenth century, scenes of the domestic interior excavate subjects’ inner selves, and, though often more obliquely, their political selves. This was particularly true of Black subject-centered domestic interiors, where visual Blackness flagged relevant, real-life racial discourses. An analysis of the varied constructions of the Black American interior by artists Edwin White (1816–1877), Harry Roseland (1867–1950), and Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), in particular, lays bare the racialization of this historied genre site in relation to discourse on emancipation, in turn revealing the role of the interior in painters’ explorations of the possibilities and limitations for the social inclusion of Black Americans within the national imagination.

Ruminations on Emancipation

While the legal emancipation and incorporation of Black Americans into the citizenry were not yet upon the nation at the outbreak of the Civil War, they were in hazy view. Edwin White’s *Thoughts of the Future (Thoughts of Liberia, Emancipation)* (1861) (Figure 2) captures anxieties about the prospective consequences of emancipation permeating white American discourse in the moment. He pictures a Black middle-aged man slumped pensively, ankles crossed, on a marooned wooden chair in a rustic, rough-hewn interior. Otherwise a plain and restrained interior, a smoking kettle sits atop the blazing fireplace as subtle visual confirmation that something is astir. Although the central figure of the image, the contemplative man is not White’s central subject as White invokes a particularly weighty and contentious American dialogue: displayed on the door behind the man is a blurrily rendered image with the conspicuous caption “Hayti.”



Figure 2. Edwin White, *Thoughts of the Future (Thoughts of Liberia, Emancipation)*, 1861, oil on canvas, 17 x 20 in. Collection of the New York Historical Society.

Lindsey Twa attributes the widespread opposition to Haiti’s political recognition by many white Americans during the period to “whites’ desire to preserve the structures of slavery, their deep-set fears about the consequences of the mingling of the races, and their belief in the inherent and immutable inequality of persons of African descent.” White’s placement of the Haiti poster behind the man—lurking—and above his head—figuratively and literally on the Black American mind—visualizes the fear many white Americans were actively projecting onto Black Americans as the possibility of emancipation loomed. The man holds a newspaper, signaling his literacy and stoking an already ideologically incendiary image. The man possesses what Lindon Barrett calls “a life of the mind,” free from the bind to corporeality imposed by illiteracy. In other terms, literacy, by 1861 a longtime visual and literary symbol of intellectual liberation and civic competency, detaches this man from the expressly object status characteristic of enslavement and much of the antebellum visual representations of Blackness. White figures a man, who, in addition to thinking about the future and Haiti as implied by the title, also apparently *reads* about Haiti, drastically elevating the potency of White’s domestic scene. His subject models a politically conscious, aspirant Black subjectivity that threatens the existing racial order.

Originally titled *Thoughts of the Future*, the work’s later titling *Thoughts of Liberia, Emancipation* by a patron conflates the concerns about an explosive and systemically disruptive emancipation with the issue of Black immigration to Liberia, the African territory colonized by the American Colonization Society. This was not an outlandish connection to make; both discourses were grounded in an image of the Black subject as civically and politically incompetent. On Liberia, Dalila Scruggs writes:

Colonizationists held that blacks were unable to be incorporated into American society and yet could be transformed into capable and industrious citizens by relocating to Africa. Equality (or likeness) of blacks with whites was predicated on the separation of the races and removal of blacks to Africa.

Though White perhaps did not originally intend to invoke these arguments about Liberia, the potential of his domestic scene about Haiti to be read as conversational with contemporaneous discourses about Liberia speaks to the attributes associated with visual Blackness in this moment. In the same way that whiteness indexes Americanness in scenes like Hovenden's *Breaking Home Ties*, Blackness in scenes like White's *Thoughts of the Future* indexes a nebulous opposite. White's Black subject is figured in the context of Haiti and Liberia, two discourses in which the Black subject is decisively inapt for inclusion into the American body politic, even despite literate status.

While White's interior in *Thoughts of the Future* reflects the concerns of a nation under imminent threat of social and political disorder by emancipation, Harry Roseland's mammy-mistress scenes visualize emancipation's immediate aftermath. Roseland, a Brooklyn-born genre painter, made a career out of painting scenes that largely took place in the postbellum South. Scenes depicting young, wealthy, white mistresses in the homes of elderly, poor Black mammy figures are abundant within his oeuvre. Roseland's engagement with such a subject in the twentieth century, well after the end of the age of slavery, manifests a particular kind of white nostalgia also identified by Uri McMillan in spectacular, caricatured mammy performances of the early nineteenth century:

Black performance art . . . was in the service of national memory; as objects, these elderly black women performed as embodied vessels of history, signs of generational shifts. Deploying maternal yet mythic identities, these were not mere roles, but fanciful avatars that rescripted these performers' bodies and perception by others; they became iconic emblems of American identity itself.

Roseland's mammy figures similarly work to appeal to national white memory, though close readings of these subjects and their interactions with white mistresses uncover the mythical veneer of this memory and reveal the political realities of postbellum racial dynamics.

As in White's *Thoughts of the Future*, the theme of literacy figures importantly in Roseland's work. In *Reading Tea Leaves* (1906) (Figure 3), one of Roseland's many scenes of Black women "reading" to white women, a head-scarfed, apron-wearing elderly Black woman is on the right, across from a fancily clad, parasol and hat-wielding young white

woman on the left. The Black woman holds and gestures toward the contents of a teacup, the white woman watching intently. Roseland's interior recreates the dynamics of the plantation household in the immediate years after emancipation, the formerly enslaved woman literally dictating the future of her former mistress. With enslaved Black women no longer under legal obligation to keep up plantation tasks, the plantation household was transformed from a site of slave-powered production into one of consumption as products and labor needed to be outsourced. The fates of mistresses and their households were in many ways bound with those of formerly enslaved Black women, whose newfound autonomy allowed them to choose the extent to which they interacted with the plantation. Roseland's choice to represent this subversion of plantation roles in the mammy's home is not insignificant. As the outcomes for the plantation household were dependent on the mammy, the mistress in Roseland's scene is literally and metaphorically in the mammy's domain.



Figure 3. Harry Roseland, *Reading Tea Leaves*, 1906, oil on canvas, 10 1/8 x 14 1/4 in. New Britain Museum of Art.

Roseland foils such domestic scenes in his oeuvre with images in which the mistress reads for or writes on behalf of the mammy. In *The Letter* (1908) (Figure 4), Roseland inverts the figure placement of *Reading Tea Leaves*; the mammy is on the left, and the mistress is on the right. The mistress reads a creased sheet of paper as the mammy now watches intently, hands clasped with quiet enthusiasm. While these exchanges of literacy between Black and white women are figured as equal in Roseland's deceptively wholesome pseudo-post-emancipation universe, they are far from it. The mammy is textually illiterate; while she can divine the future for her white mistress, she cannot construct her own in accordance with the political and cultural associations of literacy with civic legitimacy.



Figure 4. Harry Roseland, *The Letter*, 1908, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

White and Roseland both transform domestic space into sites of rumination on the Black subject's aptitude for citizenship, postbellum cultural disruptions, and the politics of literacy. Insofar as visual Blackness signaled otherness in the lexicon of the nineteenth-century American genre painting (and even into the twentieth century, as evidenced by Roseland's productions of Blackness), the Black interior worked to anatomize precisely what constituted this otherness.

Henry O. Tanner

A discussion about Black visual representation by white artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as it pertains to American citizenship, is not whole without discussion of the efforts made by Black Americans to figure the Black citizen. In the late 1880s, Black genre painter Henry Ossawa Tanner met Thomas Hovenden while studying under Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Some of Hovenden's tender and sympathetic genre scenes are said to have influenced Tanner's work. At the same time Hovenden was exhibiting *Breaking Home Ties* at the World's Columbian Exposition, Tanner was presenting the speech "The American Negro in Art" for the World's Congress on Africa. This symposium "addressed the quality of African-American and African life thirty years after the Emancipation Proclamation." That these two events happened simultaneously speaks to both Hovenden's and Tanner's very different, personal investments in race, visual representation, and civic inclusion. If we read one of Tanner's Black subject-centered scenes in the same way we read Hovenden's, White's, and Roseland's scenes for the racialization of the interior, we gain a complex reading of some of Tanner's works painted just before his permanent settling in France. While existing scholarship on Tanner's genre scenes rightly and persistently calls out their lack of racial stereotype, a more productive reading of his scenes

involves an investigation of why and how they may be read as such. These scenes, such as *The Thankful Poor* (1894) (Figure 5), are not merely void of popular stereotypes visually, but do not explicitly present the Black interior as an arena for rumination on Black subject-centered discourse.



Figure 5. Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1894, oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 44 1/4 in. Art Bridges.

To return to *Breaking Home Ties*, Hovenden's scene appealed to white audiences in part because they were able to racially identify with its subjects. It too does not explicitly figure the interior as a prompt for engaging in racial discourse, but the conversations about mobility and modernization that it stirred were resultant of viewers' identification with the white genre types presented in the work. Tanner's *The Thankful Poor* pictures an elderly Black man and young boy seated at a table; their heads bowed in prayer over a scant meal. The scene is painterly and muted in color, evocative of a dimly recalled memory. The subjects' Blackness is largely irrelevant to an understanding of the work. This is not to say that Tanner's scene could not invoke relevant racial discourses for viewers in the ways that *Thoughts of the Future*, *Reading Tea Leaves*, and *The Letter* did, but instead that visual Blackness in Tanner's scene does not work to flag such discourses. Tanner thus promoted a visual culture in which the Black subject was not othered, objectified, or presented in explicit relationship to discourses that circumscribed status, subtly subverting contemporaneous representational norms of the genre painting form. Where White and Roseland emphasize the volatility of Black citizenship, Tanner, in his mundane representation of Blackness, puts forth an image in which his subjects are comfortably situated in their person and citizen status.

Reading the racialization of the domestic genre scene exposes this site's potential as a social, cultural, and political stage. As painters, Hovenden, Tanner, White, and Roseland were well aware of the genre scene's relationship to the viewer, that is, its capacity to confirm, propagate, and

subvert existing national ideals and debates. Their negotiations of public discourse, such as that on literacy, with the realities of private Black emancipated life formed scenes that are crucial sites for a contemporary art historical understanding of the visual postbellum Black subject. In particular, their works illustrate that American painters working out the Black interior were simultaneously working out the Black citizen as they offered up their answers to open-ended questions about Black civic inclusion.

Endnotes

- 1 Lacey Baradel and Jochen Wierich, for instance, have read Civil War and Reconstruction era scenes of the genre painted interior for manifestations of geographic and technological discourse and gender-related discourse, respectively. For Baradel's discussion of Thomas Hovenden's *Breaking Home Ties* and its relationship to late nineteenth century concerns about mobility and progress, see "Crossing Thresholds in Thomas Hovenden's *Breaking Home Ties*" In *Mobility and Identity in the U.S. Genre Painting: Painting at the Threshold*. For Wierich's discussion of Lily Martin Spencer's manipulation of the genre form in *War Spirit at Home* (1866) and its reflection of her status as a professional female genre painter, see "War Spirit at Home: Lily Martin Spencer, Domestic Painting, and Artistic Hierarchy." *Winterthur Portfolio* 37, no. 1 (2002): 23–42. I expand this framework—namely, that the genre painted-interior stages national concerns into a highly legible and relatable form for Americans—to include the Black American subject and prominent period racial discourses.
- 2 See Lacey Baradel, "Mobility for the Masses: The Reception of Thomas Hovenden's *Breaking Home Ties*," *Archives of American Art Journal* 56, no. 1 (2017): 4–23; Also see Sarah Burns, "The Country Boy Goes to the City: Thomas Hovenden's 'Breaking Home Ties' in American Popular Culture," *American Art* 20, no. 4 (1988): 59–73.
- 3 Baradel, 8–9.
- 4 Burns, 60.
- 5 See Sarah Blackwood's *The Portrait's Subject: Inventing Inner Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.
- 6 Lindsay J. Twa, "Thoughts of Haiti, Thoughts of Liberia: The Shifting Titles and Interpretations of Edwin White's *Thoughts of the Future*," *American Art* 31, no. 1 (2017): 81.
- 7 Lindon Barrett, "African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority," *American Literary History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 421.
- 8 Twa, 74.
- 9 Dalila Scruggs, "'Photographs to Answer Our Purposes': Representations of the Liberian Landscape in Colonization Print Culture," in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. by Lara Langer Cohen, and Jordan Alexander Stein, 205.
- 10 Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*, 34.
- 11 Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, 168–77.
- 12 Anne Gregory Terhune, *Thomas Hovenden: His Life and Art*, 110–11.
- 13 Jennifer J. Harper, "The Early Religious Paintings of Henry Ossawa Tanner: A Study of the Influences of Church, Family, and Era," *American Art* 6, no. 4 (1992): 74.
- 14 Despite his commercial success at home, Tanner settled in France in the 1890s to escape the racial discrimination he experienced in the United States. He would visit the United States periodically throughout the rest of his life. See Amy Kurtz, "'Look Well to the Ways of the Household, and Eat Not the Bread of Idleness': Individual, Family, and Community in Henry Ossawa Tanner's 'Spinning by Firelight—The Boyhood of George Washington Gray,'" *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1997): 59.

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Echoes of Antiquity: Anna Julia Cooper and the Reimagining of the Classics

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Zaria Kelly is a graduate of Carleton College, where she earned a degree in Classics. While completing the Latin language requirement at Carleton, she was introduced to Classical studies and has continued to explore the breadth of the discipline. As a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, her research interests included the Roman army, the development of culture and identity in the ancient Mediterranean world, and Classical reception, particularly within the African American community.

Abstract

This paper examines Anna Julia Cooper's use of classical education as a lens through which she critiques racial and gender inequality in 19th-century America. Born into slavery, Cooper became a prominent scholar, educator, and activist, using her classical training to both challenge racial dehumanization and advocate for Black women's empowerment. Through a close reading of her 1892 work *A Voice from the South*, this paper explores how Cooper drew on classical texts—specifically referencing Greek and Roman myths, histories, and figures—to build a Black intellectual heritage and advocate for social change. Cooper's engagement with the classics is placed within the broader context of African American classical reception, following scholars such as Eric Hairston, who highlight the significance of classical references in Black activism. By examining Cooper's classical allusions, the paper demonstrates how the ancient world provided Cooper with a framework to envision racial justice and gender equality, marking her contributions as both an intellectual and a transformative political figure.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Anna Julia Cooper was born into slavery in 1858, but would go on to become one of the most influential Black educators and thinkers of her time: a pioneering voice for Black education, women's rights—especially for Black women—and social justice. A lifelong educator, scholar, and activist, Cooper taught Latin, Greek, and other subjects and led educational institutions dedicated to uplifting the Black community (Giles, 2006, pp. 621–622). Cooper's

Classical education began at age 9 at St. Augustine's Normal School, a school for formerly enslaved children in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she studied Latin and Greek. This early exposure sparked a lifelong passion for the Classics, which she carried with her to Oberlin College. There, Cooper deepened her studies, earning both a bachelor's and master's degree. Decades later, at the age of 67, she would break barriers again by becoming the fourth Black woman to ever earn a PhD, receiving her degree from the University of Paris, Sorbonne (Giles, 2006, pp. 623–625). Cooper's life, education, and accomplishments were rare and exceptional for her time, especially since she was not only a woman, but also a Black woman.

The broader significance of Cooper's Classical training is emphasized by a reflection from Alexander Crummell, a 19th century Black minister and intellectual. In an 1897 speech titled "The Attitude of the American Mind Toward the Negro Intellect," Crummell recalled a moment from his youth in which South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun remarked, "if he could find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated as a man" (p. 11). Calhoun's comment reflects racist assumptions used to deny Black intellect and humanity. Cooper's achievements directly refute that logic.

At the core of her intellectual formation lies her Classical education. Beyond challenging racist ideologies, the Classics became a framework through which Cooper interpreted the world. Classics became embedded in how Cooper thought, critiqued, and viewed contemporary society. For Cooper, the ancient world provided models for resistance, reflection, and transformation.

Cooper's engagement with the Classics fits within the field of Classical reception, the study of how the ancient world has been viewed, interpreted and transformed by later cultures. A fairly recent sub-field of Classical reception discusses the ways that African Americans have received and used Classical texts. Margaret Malamud's *African Americans and the Classics: Antiquity, Abolition, and Activism* (2019) explores how abolitionists and civil rights activists used Classical references during the struggle for liberation. Similarly, Patrice Rankine's *Ulysses in Black* (2006) argues that African American authors such as Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison had used their Classical backgrounds to help shape the African American aesthetic and confront violence and racism in their works.

Eric Hairston also released a book in 2013 called *The Ebony Column: Classics, Civilization, and the African American Reclamation of the West*, which provides a thorough analysis of four prominent Black writers and scholars—Phillis

Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, and W.E.B. DuBois—in an effort to address the gap in scholarship concerning the Classical influence on Black writing and thought. In his chapter on Anna Julia Cooper, Hairston emphasizes that understanding her use of Classical thought is essential to interpreting her writing and critiques of Western civilization (p. 128). Building upon Hairston's work, this paper explores how Cooper's Classical education influenced her writings as an activist. I argue that Classics equipped Cooper with the insights that helped her better understand and critique her society in order to enact social change across racial and gender lines. Through a close reading of select essays and speeches from her 1892 work *A Voice from the South* (hereafter referred to as *Voice*), I illustrate how Cooper used Classical references to critique racial and gender inequality and advocate for the education and empowerment of the Black community, especially Black women.

Classical Warnings Against Racial Hierarchy

Throughout *Voice*, Cooper tries to envision a future for her community and country that is more just and progressive than their current conditions. In her essay, "Has America A Race Problem; If So, How Can It Be Solved?," Cooper compares African Americans to Helots in Sparta as a warning of the dangers of having a dominant race/ culture which suppresses all others. By citing ancient civilizations that privileged one group, Cooper illustrates how such exclusion undermined their stability and progress.

Cooper states,

"No more could the Helots among the Greeks have been said to contribute anything to the movement of their times. The dominant race had them effectually under its heel. It was the tyranny and exclusiveness of these nations, therefore which brought about their immobility and resulted finally in the barrenness of their one idea" (p. 155).

The Spartans had conquered and colonized the Helots' native land and subjected them to the harsh conditions of slavery and oppression, exploiting their labor to sustain their society. Cooper draws a parallel to the American enslavement of African Americans, who similarly endured systemic enslavement and marginalization. For Cooper, the Spartan system mirrors the American racial order, where a dominant group preserved its power by enforcing a rigid hierarchy which rendered the oppressed population indispensable yet perpetually excluded.

Recognizing America's diverse ethnic, religious, and racial makeup, Cooper argues that the nation's strength lies in the interplay of multiple perspectives and cultures. She

asserts that true harmony emerges not from repression but from balancing conflicting forces, stating: "...that equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces, is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and of universal freedom" (p. 160). This equilibrium aligns with Cooper's philosophy of dismantling racism, embracing the multiculturalism of America, and fostering reciprocal social participation that benefits everyone mutually.

Cooper uses the Spartan-Helot relationship as a cautionary example, urging America to avoid privileging one race at the expense of others. In addressing the dominant culture of America—white people—Cooper highlights how marginalized groups are excluded from full participation, their voices and cultures overlooked in favor of the majority. By likening the Spartan system to American chattel slavery, she demonstrates that exclusion has deep historical roots and damaging consequences.

Womanhood as a Measure of Social Progress

Cooper's attention to historical patterns of dominance and exclusion continues in her essay "Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race," where she shifts the focus toward gender relations as another measure of social progress. In this essay, Cooper discusses how the treatment of women reflects the health and progress of a society. Addressing a Black clergy and congregation in Washington, D.C., she alludes to Roman historian and politician Tacitus. In Book 7 of his work *Germania*, Tacitus comments on the way that the Germans treated their women protectively with consideration and respect as they went off to war.

"These are the witnesses most precious to them, this is their greatest source of praise: to mothers, to wives they show their wounds, who do not shrink from demanding a sight of them, numbering the blows, and delivering food and encouragement" (*Germania*, 7).

Cooper uses this example to highlight a model of reciprocal care and respect between men and women that she believes is essential for the regeneration and progression of the Black community.

Cooper discusses the ways in which different societies of different time periods have treated their women, providing examples of progressive societies that uplifted their women and stagnant, oppressive societies that did not. She discusses how women in "Oriental countries" have been trapped into lives of "ignorance, infamy, and complete stagnation" by practices such as Chinese foot binding. She also appeals to the religiosity of her Black male audience by pointing out the lack of mention or acknowledgement of

women in the Quran and how this manifested into the “impure homelife” of Ottoman Turks (p. 9–11). By first establishing a historical pattern and relationship between societal progress and the development and veneration of womanhood in those societies, Cooper is bolstering her argument for later when she begins to encourage Black men of the present to be better than the men of past stagnant societies.

Cooper writes,

“Tacitus dwells on the tender regard for woman entertained by these rugged barbarians before they left their northern homes to overrun Europe. Old Norse legends too, and primitive poems, all breathe the same spirit of love of home and veneration for the pure and noble influence there presiding—the wife, the sister, the mother” (p. 13).

Cooper draws attention to one of the ways in which the Germans’ social dynamic fostered mutual support as Tacitus wrote. This dynamic created a moral and social balance of strength and nurture, which Cooper presents as a key factor in the Germans’ societal stability and resilience. By highlighting this, Cooper encourages Black men to recognize the importance of honoring and uplifting Black women, pointing out that the wellbeing of both genders is vital for community progress.

Importantly, Cooper’s choice to reference Tacitus—a Roman historian writing about “barbarian” tribes—serves a layered purpose. She notes that Tacitus emphasizes the Germans’ “tender regard” for women despite their rugged reputation. This suggests that respect for women transcends notions of civilization or cultural superiority. By recasting care for women as a cross-cultural measure of progress, Cooper challenges racist logic that equates Blackness with backwardness and instead situates Black women within a universal narrative of social advancement.

Cooper’s use of this Classical example calls for a reexamination of the contemporary Black community’s gender relations. She argues that progress has been limited in part because Black men have not consistently recognized and honored the central role of Black women to the progression of the Black community. By urging her Black male audience to emulate the Germans’ example of mutual care, Cooper articulates a vision of social regeneration grounded in gender equity and shared responsibility.

Black Womanhood and Everyday Exclusion

Cooper continues to employ Classical sources to critique contemporary social injustices, but here she shifts from exploring the role of women within a community to

examining how Black women are treated in everyday life. In the essay, “Woman Versus the Indian,” Cooper criticizes white-centered political commentary and advocacy that excluded Black women and other women of color, and people of the lower classes, instead promoting white supremacist ideologies under the guise of women’s suffrage and rights. Cooper compares the rage and indignation of Black women to that of the goddess Juno’s in the epic, the *Aeneid* by the Roman poet Vergil.

Leading up to when she makes the reference to Juno in the *Aeneid*, she remarks on the increase in single women traveling alone on trains and how she has noticed that the experience is different for Black women and white women. Cooper notes that Black women were not shown the same courtesy as non-Black women in their travels as she recalled seeing railroad conductors assisting non-Black women off of high train platforms, either by providing them with a stool or holding their belongings as they made the leap, yet deliberately ignoring Black women when it was their turn to disembark (p. 90). Cooper went on to describe the feeling that this treatment evoked:

“The feeling of slighted womanhood is unlike every other emotion of the soul. Happily for the human family, it is unknown to many and indescribable to all. Its poignancy, compared with which even Juno’s *spretae injuria formae* is earthly and vulgar, is holier than that of jealousy, deeper than indignation, tenderer than rage” (pp. 90–91).

Instances like these provoke pain, indignation, jealousy, and rage in Black women so powerful that Cooper likens them to the goddess Juno’s anger when the mortal man, Paris, rejects her beauty. In Juno’s rage she helped the Greeks kill many of Paris’ countrymen, the Trojans, during the Trojan War and tried to prevent the surviving Trojans from their fate of establishing what would become the Roman Empire. In all of her divine fury, she ruined the lives of the Trojans and wasn’t above ruining the lives of innocent bystanders either.

Cooper conveys the deeply disturbing feelings that Black women have when they are ignored and undignified by their fellow Americans. This comparison is effective because while Juno’s fury is affirmed when she is wronged by someone beneath her, Black women’s anger is denied even when they are mistreated by people who are their equals—other human beings. Cooper makes brief mention of other violence committed against Black women in their travels: being forcibly ejected from train cars and thrown out of seats, their garments torn (p. 91). Cooper thereby reveals that their rage is just as equally justified and powerful, though they are compelled to restrain it. Unlike her previous references to historical societies, where the past

was a warning for the future, here Cooper draws from the Classics to illuminate present injustices.

By quoting the Latin directly, she appeals to an educated audience—particularly white women familiar with Classical literature—creating a shared cultural language. This move demonstrates her mastery of the Classical canon and allows her to communicate her argument through a framework her audience recognizes, making her message clearer and more persuasive. This connection invites empathy and understanding across racial lines by framing Black women’s rage in a familiar narrative.

The irony lies in the audience’s willingness to recognize Juno’s wrath and its refusal to acknowledge the comparable indignation of Black women in their own society. Cooper’s use of Classical references thus not only critiques the status quo but also demonstrates the timeless power of the Classics to reveal truths about human experience and social injustice, especially as it pertains to women.

Conclusion

Anna Julia Cooper’s Classical education was not simply a mark of intellect; it was a framework through which she interpreted and critiqued the world around her. In *A Voice from the South*, Cooper uses references to ancient Rome, Greece, and myth not to idealize antiquity, but to draw meaningful comparisons that illuminate the challenges facing African Americans—especially Black women—in her own time. Through these references, Cooper asserts that the Classical past is not the exclusive domain of any one race or class. Instead, it is a shared cultural resource that can be reinterpreted and mobilized in the pursuit of justice and social progress.

Cooper’s use of Classical sources allowed her to craft arguments that appealed to both authority and familiarity while also reframing Classical examples to challenge exclusion and inequality. As she transformed the stories of ancient peoples—whether Germanic tribes, Helots, or goddess—Cooper made the Classics speak to the present as a vehicle for critique, self-understanding, and vision. Tacitus was used to give gendered moral instruction. The Spartans and the Helots offered a political critique of racial hierarchy, and Juno offered an emotional/affective argument for empathy. All of these ancient figures and societies became tools for reimagining a society in which Black women and men could both claim the Classical past and shape the future.

By placing Classical antiquity in dialogue with her contemporary world, Cooper reclaimed a tradition that had often been used to justify racial hierarchy and exclusion. She demonstrated that the Classics could be not just a

symbol of Western civilization, but a means of critique and transformation. In doing so, she anticipates the reclamation Hairston traces in his examination of Black intellectual history. Cooper’s work stands not only as a part of that lineage, but as a foundational moment within it—one that opened the door for future Black thinkers to continue expanding, challenging, and redefining the Classical tradition.

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“Come On In, You Motherf*ckers!”: The Possibilities and Limitations of Afro-Asian Relationality in *Sinners*

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Abstract

This article reads Ryan Coogler’s film *Sinners* (2025) as a speculative meditation on the insurgent yet precarious potential of Afro-Asian relationality. By analyzing the character Grace Chow’s initial inclusion and eventual betrayal of the Black commons she is invited into, this article offers a reparative reading of Grace’s betrayal—neither absolving the harms produced by her actions nor foreclosing the possibilities of Afro-Asian relationality writ large. Rather, this article grapples with the unromanticized and tenuous frictions of interracial solidarity. Drawing on the works of Claire Jean Kim, Grace Kyungwon Hong, Roderick Ferguson, and José Esteban Muñoz, this article understands *Sinners*’ depiction of Black freedom to fundamentally refuse the neoliberal logics of multicultural assimilationism and post-racial futurity. Instead, this article theorizes Afro-Asian relationality not as a perfected solidarity but as an ephemeral and insurgent mode of being-with and being-alongside, locating the film’s affective glimpses of Black freedom as partially enabled by these fleeting moments of minoritarian collectivity.

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Thank you to Professor Kelly Chung for bringing me into the world of the reparative and for showing me new ways of reading the world.

What if we were to understand coalition in relation to its precarity—its ability to flicker, falter, perhaps even fail, and yet still offer a sociopolitical otherwise? In depicting one such provisional commons, Ryan Coogler’s horror film *Sinners* (2025) grapples with the tenuous Afro-Asian community that forms around a locally-run juke joint in Jim Crow Mississippi. While Black and Asian American subjects collectively build this space, the coalition quickly collapses when shop owner Grace Chow invites a swarm of vampires inside the mill, triggering a deadly confrontation that destroys the very community the film’s protagonists labored so hard to cultivate. Even so, *Sinners* presents this moment

not (only) as a site of betrayal, but as an honest homage to the complex frictions of Afro-Asian relationality. While the film’s historical consultant Dolly Li refers to Coogler’s incorporation of the Asian American subject as “camaraderie,”¹ I argue that the film offers a much more complicated and speculative intervention into the fraught terrain of Afro-Asian relationality.

Rather than grounding Afro-Asian camaraderie in the neoliberal flimsiness of representational inclusion, this essay instead analyzes the Chows in relationship to the film’s penultimate theme: Black freedom. In analyzing the presence of the Asian American subject in *Sinners*, I build on Claire Jean Kim’s methodological focus on the non-white, non-Black racial subject as they are recruited into the projects of both white supremacy and anti-Blackness, such that we may ultimately analyze “how the system as a whole operates.”² By staging both the betrayal and the remembrance of the minoritarian commons, *Sinners* grapples with the necessarily precarious possibilities and limitations of Afro-Asian relationality—refusing the comfortable legibility of neoliberal multiculturalism and instead exposing the uneven architectures of racial exclusion. Neither foreclosing nor romanticizing Afro-Asian solidarity, the film locates the possibility of Black freedom not in the assimilatory promises of protected life or the seductive fantasies of post-racial futurity, but in the provisional, precarious, and insurgent moments of being-with that emerge from within the minoritarian commons.

Set in 1932, the film follows Smoke and Stack Moore, twin brothers who return to their hometown in Clarksdale, Mississippi to open a juke joint “for and by” the local Black community. With the help of several friends and family members—Delta Slim, Annie, Cornbread, Grace, Bo, and Sammie—they cultivate a beautiful opening night of dancing, singing, and gathering. However, having attracted the attention of a nearby vampire, Remmick, Club Juke is attacked soon after it opens, with most of its patrons violently recruited into Remmick’s vampiric clan. While most of the remaining survivors reject Remmick’s tricks and promises, Grace—baited by his threats to kill her daughter Lisa—furiously invites the vampires inside the mill, after which a deadly fight ensues. The very end of the film showcases a post-credits scene of Stack—now a vampire—visiting Sammie, sixty years later. As the two reflect on that night, Sammie admits, “Before the sun went down, I think that was the best day of his life,” prompting Stack to similarly confess, “The last time I seen my brother, last time I seen the sun... and just for a few hours, I was free.”

Sinners affectively registers as an intrinsically Black film: the juke joint, after all, was created for and by the local Black community—“a real ring-a-dang-dang, just for us.”

And yet, Grace and Bo are not only allowed into the establishment but are actively recruited to help facilitate its operations. While it appears that the Chows are enthusiastically welcomed into the local Black community, their non-Blackness remains prevalent, as it is their non-Blackness that enables their occupational livelihoods. Directly benefiting from the anti-Black policies of Jim Crow segregation, Grace and Bo own two segregated grocery stores stationed right across from one another, one for whites-only and one for “people of color.” When Smoke enlists the Chows to help supply Club Juke with a hundred servings of catfish, the film visually pans to Bo telling Lisa to get her mother, to Lisa crossing the street and replacing Grace behind the register of the whites-only store, to Grace crossing the street herself, such that she can negotiate with Smoke in the non-white-designated store. While it is Smoke who seeks out the Chows’ labor, he himself cannot cross the street to speak with Grace because of the state’s lethal segregation laws. In *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*, Kim understands that while “Asian Americans... [are] at times... precariously perched in the category of ‘people of color,’”³ not all people of color are racialized evenly under the overlapping but not entirely synonymous forces of white supremacy and Black abjection. Positioning Asian Americans as “dynamically... not-white, *but above all* not-Black,” Kim understands the Chows’ not-Blackness to constitute a vital form of property in an anti-Black world: “But above all’ indicates that anti-Blackness is... the first principle, the core logic that defines the parameters of white supremacy’s operations. Indeed the historical record indicates that whites sometimes compromise the cause of white supremacy to achieve the summum bonum of reinforcing structural anti-Blackness.”⁴ Although the Chows are also “people of color,” their simultaneous possession of not-Blackness secures their social, financial, and physical mobility, such that they may exist, navigate, and most importantly, *profit* from both sides of the street. While the Chows undoubtedly face xenophobic racism as non-white subjects living in a white supremacist world, they also benefit from that very same world’s structural logics of anti-Blackness. Positioned outside of mainstream Black-white racial binaries, the Asian American subject may capitalize on their not-Blackness for their own material benefit.

Indeed, it is Grace herself who invites the vampires in; it is she who betrays the Black commons in pursuit of her own familial self-preservation, at the material expense and deadly endangerment of Black life. While the remaining survivors plead for Grace to wait for sunrise to check on Lisa, Grace becomes increasingly consumed by her maternal desperation, until she finally screams, “Come on in, you motherfuckers!” As articulated by Grace Kyungwon Hong, racial capitalism’s “uneven but connected dispersion of

death and devaluation” effectively renders any pursuit of a self-protective politic to actively subject others to continued racialized violence. If “[a] truly relational vision of community must mean being willing to jeopardize one’s own security for that of others,”⁵ Grace necessarily fails to partake in such coalition-building. Rather, her vengeance, anger, and maternal desperation endanger any possibility of building solidarity with the Black community she is invited into (and also profits from). While the Chows are invited into the Black commons as infrastructural and logistical allies, one might read Grace’s betrayal as evidence of Asian America’s positionality as fundamentally outside the political project of Black liberation.

And yet, Grace’s pursuit of familial self-preservation and her consequent endangerment of the budding Afro-Asian coalition witnessed at Club Juke is further complicated by the material reality of her actions: in a desperate attempt to save her daughter, Grace invites the vampires in, but at what cost? As a vampire, her husband, Bo, is already (un)dead, but in the chaotic fighting, both Grace and Bo burn alive. Grace could not wait until sunrise because she desperately pursues a self-protective politic, but in doing so, not only do Annie, Delta Slim, and Pearline die in her jeopardization of Black life, but the very object she seeks to protect (her daughter Lisa) is now rendered an orphan. Ironically yet fittingly, Grace’s self-protective politic ultimately protects no one.

Perhaps, then, a more reparative reading might understand this moment not as proof of interracial coalition’s inevitable failure, but as a tragic revelation of the deadly frictions racial capitalism poses to Afro-Asian relationality. Conceptualizing “strange affinities” as an alternative coalitional possibility based not in commonality but racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference, Hong and Roderick Ferguson engage with difference not as “a multiculturalist celebration... but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued.”⁶ While the Afro-Asian commons initially witnessed at Club Juke can be read as one such “strange affinity,” Grace’s pursuit of a self-protective politic, her betrayal of the Black commons, and the consequent collapse of this strange affinity reveal the ways in which racial capitalism deliberately structures itself to constrain, limit, and oftentimes, foreclose the political possibilities afforded by Afro-Asian coalition. And yet, without absolving Grace for the harm produced by her actions or foreclosing Afro-Asian relationality writ large, a more reparative reading practice centers these contradictions to encourage “all of us to *continue* to endeavor collectively,” by reckoning with rather than disavowing difference’s “serious, fundamentally deadly consequences.”⁷

To fully grasp what is lost in the destruction of Club Juke, I turn to the film's montage of the juke joint right before its opening night: in its brief flashbacks to the warmth, joy, and intimacy found in the collective's shared preparations, *Simmers* depicts Club Juke as a liminal space where minoritarian subjects can gather together outside of the state's strict delimitations of racial segregation. Instead of absolving Asian America of its anti-Blackness, Kim asks how Asian America may be reimagined as a force that destabilizes an anti-Black world, specifically in its subversion of the U.S. nation-state's attempts to weaponize its structural positionality for the continual preservation of anti-Blackness.⁸ Through the montage's glimpses of the coalitional possibilities of Afro-Asian relationality, *Simmers* offers the Chows as one possible example of how the Asian American subject can potentially subvert their non-white, non-Black racial identity and the economic capital such positionality affords to help foster a minoritarian commons.

While the minoritarian subjects in *Simmers* are racialized as Black and yellow but perhaps not brown, I refer to José Esteban Muñoz's theory of the "brown commons" to illuminate the significance of Club Juke as a minoritarian commons—or what I understand as an insurrectionist site of "being with, being alongside," but most importantly, a being otherwise. For Muñoz, the "brown commons" is an illegible allusion to an insurgent collectivity "that is of and for the multitude": "Brown . . . [is] the potential for the refusal and resistance to that often-systemic harm . . . not only a shared indignation but also a process of thinking and imagining otherwise in the face of shared wounding."⁹ As a space of cultural production rooted not in shared identity but in shared refusal, the juke joint offers a glimpse into the otherwise possibilities enabled by the precarious but also insurgent potential of disrupting the hegemonic racial order through coalitional community.

Having examined the limits and possibilities of the juke joint as a minoritarian commons, I now consider this ephemeral coalition's juxtaposition with Remmick's vampiric promises of a post-racial utopia. While this essay analyzes the presence of the Asian American subject in *Simmers*, it is only interested in the Asian American subject insofar as she exists in relation to the theme of Black freedom—as the film is first and foremost an exploration of Black freedom in the Jim Crow South. I contend that it is through the minoritarian commons facilitated by the material sustenance of Afro-Asian relationality—and not the vampiric pursuit of prolonged and protected life—that we glimpse the affective possibility for Black freedom. While offering vampirism's immortality as a post-racial undead utopia, Remmick and the rest of his vampiric clan warn Smoke of an imminent Ku Klux Klan attack: "You ain't safe here. No matter how many guns or how much

money . . . They was always gonna kill you . . . This is a slaughterhouse. It's a goddamn killing floor. But . . . we gonna start ourselves a new Klan based on love . . . after we kill y'all, we're gonna have Heaven right here on Earth." Vampirism becomes a metaphor for the neoliberal and assimilatory pursuit of minoritized inclusion into what Hong terms "protectable life," but such incorporation does not, in actuality, protect the minoritarian subject from racialized death:

Insofar as our ability to live protected lives depends upon their inability to do so, a politics that registers vulnerability to death simply as something to be eradicated and sees these deathly subjects simply as those we have yet to bring into the protection of life merely advances the validation of life that legislates their deaths. In so doing, we replicate the conditions that create these deathworlds by making life the only site of meaning or political possibility.¹⁰

The neoliberal pursuit of protectable life only exacerbates the conditions of racialized death writ large. A politic of self-preservation only ever exists at the deadly expense of others—if not, in Grace's case, the life of oneself. Further, the post-racial vampiric utopia Remmick offers is purely a delusion: the "new Klan based on love" Remmick markets is literally built in communion with current Klan members and at the expense of Black life. Rather than truly liberating its commons from the oppressive structures of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, this new Klan only reproduces—and even labels itself after—originary Klan logics.

Rather, Stack admits that he only ever felt free that one night, before the sun rose: it is not his access to vampiric immortality that enabled this affective glimpse of Black freedom, but the fleeting commons enabled by Afro-Asian relationality.¹¹ In referencing Hortense Spillers' disinterest in expanding the ranks of gendered femaleness to include Black womanhood,¹² Joshua Chambers-Letson writes, "To stand in the flesh, in this capacity, is to transform (and perform) the ungendering of black (female) flesh into a condition of possibility, thus opening up new ways of doing gender, being a being, being black, being in the body, and being together."¹³ Rather than seeking incorporation into protectable life, Chambers-Letson understands the anti-normative subjectivity of the minoritarian subject to offer an insurgent site of those otherwise possibilities. What one might understand as a condition of racialized injury might actually be transformed into a site of collective being, imagining, and worlding. If it is the opening night of Club Juke and not his vampiric immortality that produced within Stack this feeling of freedom, Black freedom must not be located in the assimilatory expansion of protectable life but

in that which gives life its very feeling of being alive: the “being together” of the minoritarian commons.

Presenting Afro-Asian relationality as neither a perfected solidarity nor an inevitable failure, *Sinners* rehearses a different kind of political imaginary altogether, instead offering the insurgent potential of a minoritarian commons precariously built between and among differently wounded racialized subjects. Grace’s decision to invite the vampires in represents the structural pressures racial capitalism poses to Afro-Asian relationality: to protect one’s own, or preserve the commons? That her self-protective politics results in death—both of others and of herself—testifies to the political impossibility of securing one’s own individualized safety at the expense of another’s. And yet, the film lingers not on Grace’s betrayal, but Stack’s confession: in naming that night as the only time he had ever felt free, Stack presents the ephemeral not as a failed attempt at political liberation, but as one of its most honest conditions of felt possibility. For Stack, Black freedom is found neither in the multiculturalist incorporation into protectable life nor in the false promises of post-racial futurity, but in the fragile mortality of being with and alongside. Coalition, at least within the status quo, need not only be defined in relation to its permanence or lack thereof. And yet, that is not to say that the coalitional may only ever be glimpsable in the ephemeral, as to do so only prematurely forecloses the existence of a world where the felt possibilities of the minoritarian commons are not so impermanent. As such, rather than mourning these “failed” attempts at multiracial coalition, *Sinners* asks us to dwell in the contradictions and to imagine what might still be possible in their wake.

Endnotes

- 1 Alejandra Gualarte, “Sinners Consultant Dolly Li Explains the Inclusion of the Chinese Delta Community,” *Vulture*, April 22, 2025.
- 2 Claire Jean Kim, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 5
- 3 Kim, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*, 3.
- 4 Ibid., 9–11.
- 5 Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 5–6.
- 6 Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Duke University Press, 2011), 11.
- 7 Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*, 11–20.
- 8 Kim, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World*, 16.
- 9 José Esteban Muñoz, “The Brown Commons,” in *The Sense of Brown*, ed. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong’o (Duke University Press, 2020), 2–6.
- 10 Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal*, 16.
- 11 And at the same time, I do not want to overstate the importance that Grace and Bo played in facilitating the Black commons—and also the Black freedom—felt and produced that night. Club Juke’s opening night would have likely also succeeded had the Stack brothers enlisted Black suppliers, but in Coogler’s specific decision to depict Chinese American grocery store owners “when no one would have blinked if the owners

were black or white,” I contend that the film gestures towards a specific social, political, and economic relationality offered by the Chinese American grocery store owner. Gualarte, “Sinners Consultant Dolly Li Explains the Inclusion of the Chinese Delta Community.”

- 12 Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 80.
- 13 Joshua Chambers-Letson, “Nina Simone and the Work of Minoritarian Performance,” in *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (NYU Press, 2018), 71.

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Approaches to Collectivity and Collaboration in the Chicano Mural Movement and Mexican Grupos Collectives

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Abstract

This paper examines the Chicano Mural Movement in the United States and Los Grupos in Mexico, two distinct yet ideologically aligned movements that redefined artistic collaboration and collectivity. While both confronted systemic oppression, rejected individuality, and embraced collaboration as a form of resistance, they differed in how collective practice operated. Chicano muralists such as Judy Baca and collectives like the RCAF and Mujeres Muralistas used collaboration to create community-based public artworks that fostered education and cultural pride. In contrast, Los Grupos, with collectives like Grupo Proceso Pentágono and No-Grupo, treated collaboration not only as a method, but as the art itself. Through performance-based, ephemeral works, they critiqued authoritarianism by dissolving individual identity into collective action. Through highlighting these contrasts, this paper argues that while Chicano muralists made collaborative art, Los Grupos made collaboration into art. This analysis offers us different models of how socially responsive art is made in adversity.

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From the 1960s to the 1980s, artists of Mexican descent on both sides of the United States-Mexico border turned to collective art practices that confronted systemic oppression. In the United States, the Chicano Mural Movement proliferated across cities with large Mexican-American populations, particularly in California. The movement emerged out of the Chicano civil rights struggle, asserting Mexican-American identity and resistance. By

painting large-scale murals on the walls of their neighborhoods, artists created public sites that fostered cultural pride and political awareness. The mural-making process varied across artists and groups, though it remained deeply rooted in local participation and collaboration. Judy Baca's process created a community-based mural-making program, involving neighbors, students, and elders, whereas the Royal Chicano Air Force and Mujeres Muralistas focused on professional artistic collaborations.

At the same time, in Mexico, a different form of collective practice took shape. Mainly active in Mexico City, Los Grupos emerged following the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre and the dirty war. In a country where art had been state-sponsored for decades, these were radical-leaning collectives that sought to reimagine the relationship between artists and institutions. Groups like No-Grupo and Grupo Proceso Pentágono (GPP) turned to conceptual, performative, and anti-aesthetic strategies to critique the authoritarianism of the Mexican government. Collectivity was integral to their practice; they met several times a week to work together. As a result, the individual artistic ego was replaced with true collaboration, creating a blended group vision. Additionally, GPP collaborated with the public, valuing their input and integrating it into many of their works. In an achievement of the movement, the groups joined forces to form the Frente Mexicano de Grupos Trabajadores de la Cultura, known as El Frente, aimed at bridging gaps between art and the public.

This paper examines the distinct approaches to collectivity and collaboration in the artistic practices of the Chicano Mural Movement and the Mexican Los Grupos movement within the context of their shared circumstances. While Chicano muralists used collectivity and collaboration to create art, Los Grupos integrated these into the fiber of their practices; collaboration became the art. Both groups rejected the notion of the individual artist as genius, redefining art as a collective social practice rather than a personal or institutional achievement. They removed hierarchical barriers in artmaking, which engaged the public and blurred the boundaries of art and activism. Reimagining artistic authorship, these movements offer us models for creating socially and culturally responsive art in the face of adversities.

Chicano Mural Movement

In the late 1960s, artists transformed neighborhood walls into canvases, making visible Mexican-American histories, struggles, and aspirations. This outpouring of visual culture reflected a new model for collaboration and collectivity, rooted in community-based art.¹ While the movement was far from monolithic in mode of organization, its many

artists shared the conviction that their art should serve and honor the Chicano community. They focused on translating Chicanos' everyday lives into visual work, emphasizing localized struggles that connected with the community.² In the beginning, Chicano muralists established their work without the support of institutional backing, instead building networks of locally vested collaborators who shared labor. Chicano painters often worked with donated paint, no pay, few trained artists, and mostly support from the community, who fundraised, painted, and protected the murals.³

Judy Baca's practices merged mural-making with youth education. In *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Baca brought together historians, community-storytellers, and over four hundred youth and their families to participate in the planning and execution of the mural.⁴ However, she started her community-based program with humbler resources. Baca began painting murals in East Los Angeles, benefitting from city funding meant to keep public spaces orderly.⁵ She enlisted the help of interested youth, often gang members, some from rival gangs.⁶ She paid them for their labor, and beyond being needed income, this affirmed that their efforts and artwork were valuable.⁷ In facilitating her community-based model, Baca emphasized communication and interaction with a space over a long period, which she believed would lead to active participation. This meant participants shaped *their* program and represented *their* identities.⁸ Rather than asking youth what they wanted to see depicted, she engaged in deeper dialogue, asking questions like "What do you care about? What's happening?" This model was used in some of her first works, like *Mi Abuelita* at Hollenbeck Park and the *Medusa* mural at Wabash Park.⁹ These murals were not just aesthetic projects with community members; they were participatory pedagogical processes that empowered participants to reflect on their identity and taught them how to be artists and thinkers, centering discussion and collaboration.

However, as collaborative as these murals were, Baca remained committed to artistic standards and maintained control over the final execution, which is why authorship is attributed to her. In her model, people contributed ideas that she integrated into *her* final design.¹⁰ As the mural program expanded, the teams became less collaborative due to logistics and higher stakes in the image she curated. Additionally, Baca handed over her model to other artists who were hired to execute more murals, but these artists struggled to continue her efforts. She admits that most artists could not seamlessly work with the community, so she tried different methods to combat this, such as bringing in community organizers.¹¹ Still, the collaborative purity of her original model began to erode.

While Baca's work operated largely due to her efforts and with city funding, many Chicano collectives evolved in more autonomous ways. The Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF) was formed in Sacramento in the early 1970s. The RCAF embraced aesthetic diversity and distinct styles; much of their work consisted of artists taking on independent projects or several artists painting different sections of a mural. However, they always espoused group solidarity over individual notoriety, embodied in how they signed works with the names of the individual artists and the initials of RCAF, acknowledging that every artwork had varying levels of collaboration.¹² Exemplified in their *Southside Park Mural*, the RCAF emphasized the importance of every artist and community participant through designated roles.¹³

At the same time, another collective, *Mujeres Muralistas*, emerged in San Francisco as a feminist response to the exclusion they felt within male-dominated Chicano muralism, employing a slightly different methodology.¹⁴ One member, Consuelo Mendez, was responsible for publishing a manifesto that expressed her ideology, but was credited and interpreted as an expression of the collective's ideology.¹⁵ Similarly, another member, Patricia Rodriguez, became the unofficial spokesperson of the group.¹⁶ These roles gave the impression of a united front, though membership constantly shifted.¹⁷ These self-appointed roles didn't create tension, but rather spoke to the different skills and creative approaches each artist brought; variation in opinion and identity served to further the group's artistic exploration.¹⁸ This ideology followed them into their painting practices; they didn't prioritize formal cohesion and would split murals into sections for different artists to paint.¹⁹ Sections read as stylistically distinct, showing the distinct hands behind each one. In their designing and painting work, they emphasized that there was no leader or director; it was the four lead artists in true collaboration.²⁰ In the end, the practices and knowledge each artist brought to the collective were valued and allowed to manifest organically.

Examples from Baca, the RCAF, and *Mujeres Muralistas* illustrate the variety of Chicano muralist collaboration. Despite differing leadership structures, artistic skills, and aesthetic approaches, the movement remained unified in its prioritization of community. Whether supported by institutional funding, experienced artists, or informal, inexperienced communities, Chicano artists emphasized collaboration as a vehicle for education and empowerment, as well as a tool for executing their projects.

Los Grupos

Los Grupos were deeply shaped by the trauma of state violence and institutional power that controlled cultural production in Mexico. Additionally, they were disillusioned with the art world, which remained exclusive and oblivious to social realities.²¹ They sought to redefine what it meant to create art, favoring collaborative, ephemeral work focused on process and reaction, rather than aesthetic product. Their art actively explored themes of state repression, censorship, poverty, and education.²²

For Los Grupos, collectivity was not merely a method or tool; it was integral to their function. Los Grupos rejected hierarchy and individual authorship in their collectivity in opposition to the structure of institutional politics.²³ Grupo Proceso Pentágono explains their collectivity as a complete involvement from each group member at every stage of the artistic process, from ideation all the way to critique after completion.²⁴ Their process was represented by the theme of the table: a place for discussion, debate, and casual socializing with jokes and drinks shared regularly.²⁵ Members met at least once weekly, but sometimes more, in “exhausting work sessions,” which necessitated participation from everyone.²⁶ One member, Felipe Ehrenberg, likened their work to jazz improvisation—structured yet spontaneous.²⁷ Everyone’s opinion was valued, and in the end, personal egos and styles began to fade away as they arrived at a group style.²⁸ Their model did not suppress ideas, but rather melded several individuals’ ideas together so both the individual and collective benefited.²⁹ No-Grupo had a more avant-garde approach to collectivity, evident in their name, which criticized the idea of Los Grupos as a brand.³⁰ Later in their evolution, No-Grupo would acknowledge the individual contributions of group members.³¹

Los Grupos rejected the aesthetic and self-contained art object; much of their art was performance-based and conceptual. Rather than staging public art to be witnessed, Los Grupos collaborated with the public by eliciting audience reactions and participation. Two such works are *El Secuestro* and *El Hombre Atropellado*, both from GPP, hosted outside the Palacio Bellas Artes in Mexico City. In *El Secuestro*, a GPP member pretended to mingle with the crowd when several other members rushed in and attacked, binding, gagging, and then dragging him away.³² Afterwards, other members of GPP would engage with the crowd, soliciting reactions and creating dialogue, shaking them out of their routine to process the artwork.³³ This engagement was deeply intrinsic to the work, modeled in the other public action, *El Hombre Atropellado*. Members of the group laid out sheets of plastic onto the sidewalk, drew human figures in red paint, and took them into the middle of the road to

be run over by cars, leaving bright red marks on the pavement. They enlisted the participation of onlookers by asking them to describe their reactions in one word, which the artists wrote on cardboard and assembled into a corpse shape.³⁴ Thus, GPP collaborated with the general public as the reactions of the bystanders became an act in the sequence of the work, and a crucial part of the tangible artwork. In creating works that were vehicles for dialogue with the public, “artistic collaboration and the collective social public were, for the first time, conceived as structurally interlinked.”³⁵

In 1978, Los Grupos united to create El Frente, with over 70 members from 14 groups.³⁶ El Frente was formed to exchange information amongst the groups, and by facilitating cross-group collaboration, finding new models to communicate with and involve the public in works, bridging a gap they saw.³⁷ But, seventy people was too great a quantity to facilitate discussions where everyone contributed. Instead, at weekly meetings, proposals were made and then collectively examined. No-Grupo took issue with this, as they did not like the model of presenting ideas and garnering approval, taking the focus away from being artists.³⁸ In 1980, El Frente dropped group identifiers and came under centralized leadership, abandoning Los Grupos’ anti-hierarchical ideal.³⁹ Two years later, the fluctuating nature of El Frente caught up to itself, and it disbanded. Though brief, El Frente marked an effort to broaden Los Grupos’ reach. They were thinking systematically about how to build networks and communities, even if that network fell victim to hierarchy and individualism.

From Grupo Proceso Pentágono to No-Grupo and El Frente, Los Grupos possessed a genuine desire to create a new model of collectivity, one that was authentic to collaborative efforts among group members and valued working with the public. Their collectivity involved disrupting the individual ego to serve the group as a whole and stressed continuous involvement from every member through each step of creation. They rejected individuality and embraced the anonymity of collective authorship. Then, through performative actions, they offered an alternative mode of public collaboration.

Considering Both Movements

The Chicano Mural Movement and Los Grupos both emerged in response to repression and the desire for a new mode of art. However, their approaches to collectivity and collaboration diverged not only in form but also in intention.

For the Chicano Mural Movement, collectivity meant community-based collaboration. Artists like Judy

Baca worked closely with residents of a mural site; participation in planning and painting gave participants stakes in the community. However, as the scale and notoriety of Baca's projects grew, aesthetic control centered on a lead artist. Collaboration was vital to the process of producing a public work ingrained in the community, often serving as logistical and physical support. Though artists did join collectives that espoused unity, like RCAF and Mujeres Muralistas, artists often kept an individual style with no attempt at cohesion. Collaboration was often a necessity; labor had to be divided, as they were not projects that could be executed independently in a timely manner. The Chicano Mural Movement model can then be seen as art made with the tools of collaboration and collectivity.

In contrast, for Los Grupos, collectivity was not only a method, but the substance of the artwork. The process: the act of organizing, discussing, planning, executing, and critiquing was fundamental to the groups and part of the art itself. These collectives were adamantly anti-hierarchical, blurring authorship and blending all members' contributions into one group vision. Further, they collaborated with the public. Their street-based actions didn't just ask for spectators; they actively destabilized the role of passersby, calling on them for responses, ultimately integrating them into the work. Los Grupos inverted the model: instead of art made collaboratively, they created collaboration that made art. The planning, debating, and distribution of physical labor were not just scaffolding for the end goal of creating an aesthetic work; they *were* the work. The collective was a radical alternative to authoritarian state power and the individualistic art world.

In bringing together these movements and models, I seek to contribute to art history. A version of art history that dismantles the Western, white, individualistic, institutional values that have shaped dominant art narratives. In rejecting the figure of the individual artistic genius, these movements destabilized hierarchy in their art-making, engaging with and valuing input from the public, involving them in shaping cultural narratives. The movements were united in their uplifting of community, and their challenge to dominant institutional and individualistic forms of cultural production and authorship. Their work blurred the boundaries of art and activism, grounding collaboration and collectivity as meaningful acts of resistance in the face of adversities. They center collectivity, collaboration, and community in their art-making, thus their work becomes a resource, offering artists, activists, scholars, and the broader public sources of hope and frameworks to learn from.

Endnotes

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- 2 Shifra M. Goldman, "Resistance and Identity: Street Murals of Occupied Aztlan," *Artes Visuales* 16 (1977): 48.
- 3 David R. Maciel, "Mexico in Aztlan and Aztlan in Mexico: The Dialectics of Chicano-Mexicano Art," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985* (1990), 112; Margarita Nieto, "Le Démon des Anges: A Brief History of the Chicano-Latino Artists of Los Angeles," (1989), 219.
- 4 T. V. Reed, "Revolutionary Walls: Chicano/a Murals, Chicano/a Movements," in *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Present* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 124–125.
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- 6 *Ibid.*, 8–11, 22.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 21–22.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 29–30.
- 10 Frances K. Pohl and Judith F. Baca, "The World Wall: A Vision of the Future without Fear," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 11, no. 1 (1990): 41.
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- 16 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 36–37.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 20 Cary Cordova, "Hombres y Mujeres Muralistas on a Mission: Painting Latino Identities in 1970s San Francisco." In *The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Politics in San Francisco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 135.
- 21 Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra. "Ritual and/of Violence." In *Touched Bodies: The Performative Turn in Latin American Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 172.
- 22 Edward J. McCaughan, "Art and Identity in Mexican and Chicano Social Movements," 241.
- 23 Robin Adèle Greeley, "Cold War Conceptualism: Mexico's Grupos Movement," in *A Companion to Modern and Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art*, ed. Alejandro Anreus et al., (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 334.
- 24 Pilar García, "Dossier Grupo Proceso Pentágono," in *Grupo Proceso Pentágono: Politics of the Intervention* (2015), 60.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 62.

- 27 Rubén Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 167.
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Politicizing *Tubabu Jonw* (“Slaves of the White Man”): The *Union Soudanaise* and Syndicalist Activity at the *Office du Niger* in French Sudan, 1946–1960

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Abstract

Using primary source information held at the *Archives nationales d'outre-mer* (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence, France, this paper examines the politicization of the *Office du Niger*, a large-scale colonial irrigation project in French Sudan (present-day Mali), during the postwar wave of labor and partisan activism in French West Africa (AOF). Following the 1946 reforms that granted limited political rights to colonial subjects, the *Union Soudanaise*, the local branch of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (US-RDA), came to revise its ideological underpinnings in order to mobilize technical and agricultural workers in the *Office* to challenge exploitative conditions through the creation of its affiliated syndicate, the *Syndicat des colons et agriculteurs de l'Office du Niger* (SCAON). Gradually, through material politics as well as strategic engagement with colonial institutions, these movements eroded administrative control of the *Office*, culminating in the devolution of authority to Malian actors before independence in 1960. The case underscores the broader role of rural syndicalism in the contested process of decolonization, even when this theme is not immediately apparent in the secondary literature on labor and political activity in AOF on the eve of independence.

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As the French metropole was enjoying the material comforts of the first part of its *trente glorieuses* (“thirty glorious years”) following the Second World War, its African subjects were just beginning to accrue basic political rights.¹

However, perhaps the most important right French Africans gained in 1946 was the “right to claim more rights”—as they gained parliamentary representation and the capacity to unionize, they could become active negotiators with and against a new political order, and could more effectively organize their power to propel demands.² These developments indeed led to the ascendancy of more African voices heard at the highest levels of national politics, as well as the politicization of many more ordinary Africans through labor organizations. In French West Africa (*L'Afrique Occidentale Française*, or AOF), this trend signaled the birth of political parties such as the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA), a big-tent party with national ties to the French Communist Party and the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), the largest trade union organization in France. Importantly, many of its top politicians and syndicalists would lead their countries after the constituent territories of AOF gained independence in 1960. In the case of Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Mali, the RDA's territorial affiliates would go on to become vanguard parties in their countries' post-independence political systems.³ Workers' syndicalization also became a critical means of political struggle: by 1947, tens of thousands of African workers were unionized, and the CGT launched a massive strike among railway workers throughout AOF, which paralyzed the colonial administration into submitting to the workers' demands.⁴ The syndicalist movement in the territory would only widen and deepen throughout the following decade, and led increasingly by local organizational structures.⁵

Perhaps nowhere in postwar AOF were Africans in more need of the “right to claim rights” as in the *Office du Niger*. The *Office* is a large-scale irrigated enterprise located in the inland delta of the Niger River in Mali (then French Sudan). Since its establishment in 1932, it has become famous as one of the largest and oldest irrigation projects undertaken in sub-Saharan Africa, continuing to play an indispensable role in meeting the rice cultivation needs of the Malian people.⁶ The project's first sketches were drawn up in the years following the First World War to develop domestic cotton and rice production, but the scheme's establishment was delayed by economic debates, financial troubles, and technical shortcomings, and the initial fantastical plan of 1,850,000 hectares was eventually winnowed down to 20,200 hectares. The irrigated areas were worked by forced laborers in sordid, impoverished conditions under the direct, militaristic control of European “*moniteurs*.” They were commonly subject to food shortages, corporal punishment, and the whims of the scheme's infrastructural and technological insufficiencies.⁷ Tellingly, tenants became known in Bambara, the predominant regional language of the inland Niger delta, as *tubabu jonw*, or “slaves of the white man.”⁸ When the *Office* was reorganized after the war's conclusion, however, administrators faced an entirely new political situation that

made the previous state of affairs impossible. Facing the reality that cooperation with the new African citizens was a prerequisite for the project's success, the *Office* finally committed itself to modest social reforms.⁹ *Associations agricoles indigènes* (AAI) were also established as cooperative institutions through which settlers could voice issues. These organizations, however, were funded directly by the *Office's* administrators and run by powerful Bambara and Mossi aristocrats, severely limiting tenants' bargaining power and stifling their demands. Moreover, repression and adverse working and living conditions remained serious problems, even past the introduction of this wave of reforms.¹⁰

Therefore, in the fifteen years that passed between the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1946 and Malian independence in 1960, syndical and partisan activity proliferated at the *Office*, led in large part by the *Union Soudanaise*, the territorial affiliate of the RDA (US-RDA)—and its associated syndicalist groups. It is this trend that I focus on in this paper: although these movements are often remembered in their motive force within the AOF's political, intellectual, and urban working classes, the case of the *Office du Niger* suggests that such an interpretation needs to be revised: for example, the keystone study of the roles of labor and discourse in African decolonization is Frederick Cooper's *Decolonizing African Society*, but due to the long-ranging nature of this work, Cooper has left many important cases for further study, including the *Office*.¹¹ The scheme's administration at the Overseas Ministry in Paris, and especially the US-RDA itself, saw it as a key front in the assertion of either party's interest to exert material and political power over the territory and its inhabitants.¹² Based on primary source research using official documents and newspapers held in the *Archives nationales d'outre-mer* (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence, France, I contend that the politicization of cultivators at the *Office du Niger* became crucial to the renegotiation and improvement of its agricultural and technical workers' conditions, as well as to the protracted process of decolonization in French Sudan.¹³

Early Syndicalist Thought and Praxis Following the Second World War

Although the US-RDA came to gain ground in the countryside, its original base lay squarely with the intellectual and proletarian classes. In fact, the first syndicated workers in the *Office* were not farmers, but its African administrative and technical employees. Empowered by the RDA-led railway strikes across AOF in the fall of 1947 and 1948, these workers followed suit and went on strike for more favorable economic and social conditions. While the administration did not cede to all of their demands, the syndicate ended up gaining a seat in the Administrative

Council in Paris, and by 1951 achieved parity of salary and rights with their European colleagues.¹⁴ Although the RDA had relinquished its association with the Communist Party in 1950 after it was outmaneuvered in the formation of a parliamentary majority, this move was not considered to represent the occurrence of a real rupture in party ideology, particularly as the conservative wing of the party was relatively less influential in Sudan.¹⁵ The party maintained its close relationship with the CGT, as well as the *Groupes d'Études Communistes* (GECs) that dotted French Africa and educated partisans in West Africa's territorial capitals on Lenin and Stalin to understand issues of imperialism and nationalism.¹⁶

But despite the earlier date of syndicalist organization among technical workers of the *Office* vis-à-vis the scheme's settlers, as well as orthodox Marxist ambivalence to the revolutionary possibilities of the peasantry, the US-RDA indicated its interest in involving itself with agricultural issues as early as 1947.¹⁷ The party first floated the idea of syndicalizing agricultural workers in a circular document in September of that year. Tactically categorizing cultivators under a section that detailed guiding questions for the exigencies of workers [*travailleurs*], the party asked, "Are cultivators interested in agricultural syndicalization? If so, how do we aid them, how do we facilitate the creation of cooperatives managed by the producers themselves, how do we envisage the betterment of yields [...]?"¹⁸ The association of agricultural workers as workers in the full sense of the term reveals an ostensible willingness to extend syndicalized power beyond its traditional domain in reflection of local conditions. Rather than being described as backward peasants, these agricultural workers who formed the majority of the Sudanese population could coalesce their political will with that of their proletarian counterparts. However, the open questions the document asks reveal a hesitancy and inexperience on agricultural issues that accompanied the party's open attitude in this early stage of partisan activity.

If the US-RDA in 1947 was still finding its footing in agricultural outreach, by 1952 it was ready to convert these questions into practice. Its Third Territorial Congress at Bamako passed a resolution to enumerate the party's immediate goals, which planned for the "formation of technical cadres for the dissemination of modern cultivation methods."¹⁹ By this time, the party had adopted a platform that contested the power of both colonial rule and traditional chieftaincies.²⁰ This line succeeded in assuring the rapid growth and localization of the party, as it handily defeated the Socialist-aligned Sudanese Progressive Party (PPS) in the parliamentary elections of 1956.²¹ But perhaps more importantly, it led to the broadening of the territory's most decisive political movement, right where it was needed most.

The US-RDA, the Syndicalization of Agricultural Workers, and the Sangaré Affair

In 1954, the US-RDA finally assisted in the syndicalization of the *Office's* settlers. Mamadou Gologo, a physician and party official, established the *Syndicat des colons et agriculteurs de l'Office du Niger* (SCAON), connected to the central CGT union of Bamako.²² SCAON would assist farmers in mediating harvest sales and act as a cooperative for the purchase of basic necessities.²³ The syndicate soon formed delegations in each of the *Office's* villages and production zones. A youth wing conducted voluntary work campaigns, and a women's wing fought against domestic abuse and *moniteurs'* disciplinary treatment of settlers with the slogan of "chasing away with pestles the monitors, the European and African supervisors."²⁴ The syndicate challenged administrative authority on the discursive, as well as material, level. In a particularly poignant list of the syndicate's demands in *L'Essor* the US's newspaper organ, SCAON called for "the attention of the elected parliamentarians and responsible unionists to the necessity of working quickly for a total reform of the social system in the heart of the settled villages, and to invite them to immediately combat colonialism, shameful exploitation, and the decadent régime under which the working, colonized masses live[.]"²⁵

A particularly thorny point of contention for the US-RDA and SCAON was the eviction of the *Office's* settlers. In an article from June 1956, after a village AAI recommended the eviction of several dozen settlers because of outstanding debts owed to the *Office*, the newspaper criticized the move, finding it to be improperly rushed through the AAI's approval process. The paper also noted that these debts were in large part caused by persistent infrastructural problems that plagued agricultural production. Particularly, the incursion of invasive wild rice cultivars and improper drainage were cited as impeding the settlers' cotton and rice cultivation yields, causing them to become perpetual debtors to the administration.²⁶

When settlers were evicted because of their political activity, the US-RDA also protested. One such incident occurred when four syndicalists—Soumana Sidiré, Minkoro Koné, Ousmane Drago, and most notably Mamadou Sangaré, a veteran settler of the *Office*—landed in hot water after falsely informing the population of the administrative *cercle* Kokry-Kolongotomo that the local and *Office*-wide administration had been imprisoned in Dakar. Sangaré and his faction then claimed that the local AAI, led by Mossi aristocrats, no longer had any basis of authority.²⁷ Upon their eviction, the syndicate appealed vehemently to the *Office's* Administrative Council and the territorial government of Sudan, supported by the territory-wide affiliate of the CGT, the *Union Régionale des Syndicats du Soudan*.²⁸ The

incident became a serious site of power struggle between the US-RDA and SCAON, the leadership of local AAIs, and the French administration, one that would persist alongside the more everyday demands of the settlers.²⁹

The Politics of Legitimacy and Imperial Devolution at the *Office*

Although harshly critical of conditions at the *Office*, the US-RDA became increasingly willing to reimagine the scheme's existence and its authors' intentions, in an effort to assume a role in its governance. In a *L'Essor* article, the party hailed founder Émile Béline as "one of those great French pioneers," describing the *Office* as "vast and with a unique impact, celebrated with equal interest over all of the African continent." However, *L'Essor* imagined the abuses of the project as a limitation of earlier administration, one that inhibited the full achievement of its objectives: "For twenty years, [Africans] worked under surveillance, paying every year the same series of taxes, without ever seeing the realization of the only promise made to them: the day they would become proprietors of the land."³⁰ Although this endorsement of the French colonial vision may seem surprising given the political program of the US, we can read it as a kind of practically-oriented *doxa*, a framework to legitimize the "parallel administration" that increasingly sought to extend control over the structure.³¹ With clear political visions of greater measures of self-governance, it did not suffice to wage existential critiques of the project. Instead, the US-RDA supported a vague notion of its goals while proposing new standards for the *Office's* state of affairs, for the party's vision of greater power had already been undertaken.³²

When Paris organized the French Community in 1958, lending some sovereignty to its African possessions while retaining a federal structure, and the Mali Federation was established the following year between Senegal and French Sudan which granted the polity self-rule, the colonial administration ceded to the extant party and syndicalist structures to reorganize the *Office* in their own image. Weakened by the proliferation of syndicalist and partisan activity and seeing independence on the horizon, the *Office* eventually dissolved its AAI, replacing them with *Groups ruraux de production et de secours mutuel* (GRPSM) in June 1960, which would devolve responsibility for many of the *Office's* functions to settlers themselves through their organization within SCAON. In effect, the US-RDA and SCAON had succeeded in inheriting administrative sovereignty over the *Office*. When Mali finally gained independence from the French Community later that month, devolving responsibility to Mali's new national government under the vanguard leadership of Modibo Keita and the *Union Soudanaise*, this institutional structure would form the basis of the *Office* in its decolonial, socialist context.³³

Conclusion

The US-RDA and SCAON at the *Office du Niger* illustrates clearly how the interplay of syndicalist and political organizing not only reshaped the *Office* itself, but also played a crucial role in the process of decolonization. As the sources in the Sudanese press and the official records of the *Office* administration testify to, this complex transformation was far from one controlled from the top, although high-level officials consistently highlighted the importance of the *Office* and its social circumstances as part of the broader labor and territorial/national movements defined by the action of the US, SCAON, and its broader syndicalist affiliates. Ultimately, the material and discursive changes produced by this coalition speak for themselves: these organizations managed to transform the *Office* from the site of one of the worst excesses of French colonial exploitation in AOF into a space where settlers struggled for better conditions and self-determination over the structure that had once subjugated them. The agricultural nature of the *Office du Niger* was a defining characteristic in this process, one which allowed the US-RDA to considerably broaden its political base. However, the *Office* is just one case among others, even if an important one; therefore, more thorough analytical work must be completed to better determine the role of other agricultural communities throughout AOF in this complex process.

Endnotes

- 1 A shorter and not as yet well-researched version of this text comprised part of a paper I wrote in Spring 2025, entitled “The ‘Development Episteme’ Reassessed: The *Office du Niger*, Developmentalism, and the Imperial French Left, 1932–1960,” for a research seminar on imperial and global history. I will include the research that underlies this paper as part of my senior history thesis, in which I will compare several development projects in the French colonial empire and their decolonial socialist afterlives; I expect to submit this thesis in May 2026.
- 2 Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa: 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 8. In April 1946, forced labor was abolished throughout the empire, and in May, the native code [*indigénat*] that bound Africans to an inferior legal status was repealed, and limited citizenship rights were extended to inhabitants of Overseas France. These rights were enshrined with the constitutional inauguration of the French Fourth Republic.
- 3 For an in-depth analysis of the political situation in the postwar AOF, see Ruth Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
- 4 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonizing African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 241–248. Well-known writer and filmmaker Sembène Ousmane’s novel *God’s Bits of Wood* highlights this strike’s important role in aiding Africans to ascertain increasing amounts of political power. See also Jean Suret-Canale, “La grève des cheminots africains d’A.O.F. (1947–1948),” *Cahiers d’Histoire* 28 (1978), 82–122; and Frederick Cooper, “‘Our Strike’: Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947–48 Railway Strike in French West Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 37/1 (1996): 81–118.
- 5 Babacar Fall, “Le mouvement syndical en Afrique occidentale francophone: De la tutelle des centrales métropolitaines à celle des partis nationaux uniques, ou la difficile quête d’une personnalité (1900–1968),”

Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps: L’internationalisme en question(s) 84 (2006/4), 49–58. I discuss the localization of these movements in greater detail below.

- 6 Dibril Aw, and Chantel Dejou, *L’Office du Niger: Assurer la sécurité alimentaire pour le Mali* (Washington: World Bank, 1996). Authorized for public disclosure and republished online in 2010.
- 7 Émil Schreyger, *L’Office Du Niger au Mali 1932 à 1982: La problématique d’une grande entreprise agricole dans la zone du Sabel*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984), 75–86. I use the term “settlers” not in reference to any settler-colonial situation; rather, Africans forced to migrate to the inland Niger delta to work on the *Office* were called “settlers” [*colons*] by the French administration. During the Vichy period, the state of affairs was especially dire, when administrators openly discussed the merits of forced labor, and the project’s intensive recruitment measures ballooned to mobilize 8,000 Africans in 1943 alone, all the while producing disappointing results in crop harvests. See Cooper, *Decolonization in African Society*, 152–153. Officials forced traditional monarchies to manhunt the many tenants that fled in response to increased expectations of production and worsening living conditions, see Vittorio Morabito, “L’Office du Niger au Mali, d’hier à aujourd’hui,” *Journal des Africanistes* 47/1 (1977), 53–82.
- 8 Monica Maria van Beusekom, “Colonial Rural Development: French Policy and African Response at the *Office du Niger*, *Soudan Français* (Mali), 1920–1960,” PhD Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1990, 125.
- 9 Monica Maria van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 130–131, 174–175. These reforms were propelled by an influential inspection of the *Office* in 1945, known as the Reste Mission, François Reste, Report from the Reste Mission, ANOM, Fonds ministériels, 11 AFFECO 369/4, box 1. Over the postwar years, officials successfully transitioned to a volunteer recruitment model, made more difficult the eviction of settlers, improved hydraulic infrastructure, and bought modern machinery for cultivators with credits from the newly established public development fund FIDES (*Fonds d’investissement pour le développement économique et social*), as well as with American financial assistance. Even with these new social reforms and funding sources, as Jean Filipovich writes, “funding was never as prompt or as generous as *Office* management would have liked. The belief that a sufficient, though never quantified, influx of capital would solve all its problems had become a sort of leitmotif at the *Office*.” Found in “The Office du Niger Under Colonial Rule: Its Origin, Evolution, and Character, 1920–1960,” PhD Thesis, McGill University, 1985, 415–416.
- 10 Amidu Magasa, *Papa-commandant a jeté un grand filet devant nous: Exploités des rives du niger 1902–1962* (Paris: François Maspero, 1978), chapter 6.
- 11 Ruth Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) has also missed an analysis of politics at the *Office*. Historians of the *Office du Niger* have written on the topics I discuss here with varying degrees. Émil Schreyger in his *L’Office Du Niger au Mali 1932 à 1982: La problématique d’une grande entreprise agricole dans la zone du Sabel* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984) is quite helpful, although the monograph seems to lack conceptual focus. The other main book-length historical work available is Monica Maria van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003). Her thesis that success at the *Office* was predicated on cooperation with Africans in the postwar period is an important intervention, but her analysis of the syndicalist and partisan activities at the *Office* can be expanded and perhaps misses the broader applicability of these political currents to understand the broader process of decolonization in French Sudan. Apart from these works, Amidu Magasa’s oral history/sociology *Papa-commandant a jeté un grand filet devant nous: Exploités des rives du niger 1902–1962* (Paris: François Maspero, 1978) also discusses them and highlights on-the-ground voices among the official administrative and partisan sources I have consulted, but he covers this theme only in somewhat disappointing detail.
- 12 My focus on discourse and ideology, while important to understanding the political situation at-large in postwar French Sudan, is admittedly somewhat distorted. They are indeed informed by the primary sources I consult, which skew towards official documents and mass media, and are

- entirely in French. This comes at the expense of oral and local source research which would further elucidate the profoundly material character of a deep political movement such as the one I discuss in this paper.
- 13 Most documents related to the *Office* held in ANOM are located in the Fonds ministériels holdings in the *Affaires économiques* (AFFECO) series, as the scheme was overseen by an Administrative Council in the Overseas Ministry in Paris rather than the Sudanese territorial government. However, the documentary record is much more complete at the *Archives de l'Office du Niger* in Ségou, Mali. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing Islamic insurgencies in the north and east of the country, I was unable to travel to Mali for this research. The press sources I accessed are held in ANOM's extensive library collections. Generally speaking, I have sought to highlight the *comptes-rendus* in which a syndical representative was present, as from 1955 they were guaranteed a delegate at Administrative Council meetings. Especially before then, the Council's commitment to juridico-scientific standards of fact when discussing their political challengers cannot be verified. It is also important to consider that the party newspapers I cite have political agendas beyond those of the tenants and locally affiliated syndicates themselves. In fact, the "class character" of the *Union Soudanaise*, like in other sections of the RDA, was left intentionally ambiguous as the party sought to attract demographics from various backgrounds from the city into the countryside, so it follows that the party may have been intentionally selective, as well as self-aggrandizing, in its reporting on the *Office* and the labor struggle underway there. See Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa*, 255–276.
 - 14 Schreyger, *L'Office du Niger au Mali 1932 à 1982*, 169–170.
 - 15 Monica Maria van Beusekom, "Individualism, Community, and Cooperatives in the Development Thinking of the Union Soudanaise-RDA, 1946–1960." Cf. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the leader of the Ivorian party affiliate. Infamous for his conservatism, he was responsible for the controversial decision to cut ties with the Communist Party. For more, see Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation*, 176.
 - 16 "Cours Élémentaires des G.E.C.," document 3 in Jean Suret-Canale, *Les groupes d'études communistes (G.E.C.) en Afrique noire* (Paris: Harmattan, 1994), 91–127. Syllabi consistently contained theoretical works such as Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and Stalin's *Marxism in the National Question*, even if members of the GECs were not yet thinking in terms of complete national self-determination. Mamadou Dia, a Senegalese functionary of the RDA, illustrates well the party's thinking of the national question: "It is necessary that the imperialist concept of the nation-state give way definitively to the modern concept of the multinational state." From *La Condition Humaine* (Dakar), August 27, 1955.
 - 17 van Beusekom, "Individualism, Community, and Cooperatives in the Development Thinking of the Union Soudanaise-RDA, 1946–1960."
 - 18 Union Soudanaise, "Circulaire no. 22, Bases d'organisation et de travail sur le territoire d'une section," September 16, 1947. Another circular document, Union Soudanaise, "Rapport d'organisation," November 7, 1947 echoes these questions. Both documents are found in Ruth Morgenthau, ed., *Documents on African Political History* (Waltham: Cooperative Africana Microform Project by Brandeis University, 1977–1978), Reel 2. Thanks to Monica van Beusekom for pointing out this helpful microfilm anthology.
 - 19 Union Soudanaise, "Troisième Congrès Territoriale, 25, 26, et 27 Septembre 1952, Commission Economique et Sociale," Morgenthau, ed., *Documents on African Political History*, Reel 2.
 - 20 Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 173.
 - 21 Joseph-Roger de Benoist, *L'Afrique occidentale française de la Conférence de Brazzaville (1944) à l'indépendance (1960)* (Dakar: Nouvelles éditions africaines, 1982), 531.
 - 22 Amidu Magasa, *Papa-commandant a jeté un grand filet devant nous: Exploités des rives du niger 1902–1962* (Paris: François Maspero, 1978), chapter 6.
 - 23 van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development*, 172.
 - 24 Magasa, *Papa-commandant a jeté un grand filet devant nous*, chapter 6.
 - 25 Syndicat Autonome des Agriculteurs et Colons Nigériens, "Motion," *L'Essor* (Bamako), March 24, 1958.
 - 26 "À propos de l'éviction des colons des terres irriguées du Niger," *L'Essor* (Bamako), June 5, 1956.
 - 27 Zouogo Savodogo, "Intervention de Monsieur Zouogo SAVODOGO représentant les colons de Kokry/Kolongotomo à la réunion du Conseil d'Administration de l'Office du Niger," June 2, 1955, ANOM, Fonds ministériels, 11 AFFECO 362/7.
 - 28 Birama Traoré, "Un événement important pour notre pays: Le Premier Congrès des Paysans du Soudan," *Barakéla* (Bamako), 21–27 February 1955; Letter from the *Union des Syndicats CGT du Soudan* and *Syndicat des Agriculteurs du Soudan* to the General Council of Soudan, February 3, 1955, in *Ibid.*
 - 29 Gologo and SCAON would go on to wage challenges to the AAI and Zouogo Savodogo (who championed the one at Kokry-Kolongotomo) as late as 1958. See Mamadou Gologo, "Syndicat des Colons Nigériens : Motion de Protestation" in "Procès-verbal de la Réunion du Conseil d'Administration," May 28, 1958, ANOM, Fonds ministériels, 11 AFFECO 362/7. By this time, SCAON had become associated with the *Union Générale des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire* (UGTAN), led by the future first president of Guinea, Sékou Touré.
 - 30 "Le delta central nigérien," *L'Essor* (Bamako), November 4, 1957. This assessment seems especially considering Béline's ill reputation from mismanaging the *Office* and his easy and active assimilation into Vichy ideology in the 1930s. Well-known anticolonial activists such as André Gide, Amadou Lamine-Guèye, Félicien Challaye, and Pierre Herbart were all involved in critiquing Béline and the project in the interwar years in both metropolitan and colonial circles. See, e.g., Pierre Herbart, *Le chancere du Niger*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1939); "Le scandale de l'Office du Niger," in *L.A. O. F.* (Dakar), July 2, 1938; Félicien Challaye, "L'Office du Niger: Une menace pour les indigènes d'Afrique," *La Flèche* (Paris), June 22 and July 1, 1938.
 - 31 I borrow this idea from Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical work on practice and categories. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans., Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Another application of this idea in understanding Third World socialist mass politics (in the context of Mao's China) has been undertaken by Peng Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso Books, 2017).
 - 32 See Cooper's discussion of the Loi-Cadre law of 1956 and the emergence of debates about the federalization of the AOF, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation*, chapter 5, 214–276.
 - 33 van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development*, 175. Despite the credence the party gave to the French *mission civilisatrice* prior to independence, after 1960 it would switch to a decolonial African socialist program that hung tightly to the "Bandung spirit." This ideological transformation was more than reflected in the management of the *Office*. See William I. Jones, *Planning and Economic Policy: Socialist Mali and her Neighbors* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1976); and Abakary Touré, *L'idéologie politique de Modibo Keita et Sékou Touré 1945–1984*, vol. 1 (Bamako: Harmattan Mali, 2024).

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“Save Us From These Women”: Market Women, Economic Crisis, and Revolution in *Obaa Sima* (1971–1979)

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Abstract

This is an excerpt of a longer senior thesis which examines the histories and politics of urban markets, development, and revolution(s) in Ghana from the 1950s to the late 1970s. This essay focuses on the country's tumultuous 1970s, when market women became scapegoats for mounting economic and political crises. Drawing on Ghanaian women's magazine *Obaa Sima*, I discuss how elite, professional women joined the military state in representing market women as backwards and deviant. In contrast, these elite women represented themselves as revolutionary agents of development. Such processes complicate common narratives of the 1970s as years of mere decline, and express some of the complex dynamics of gender, class, and revolution that suffused the decade.

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Introduction

Markets and the traders who constituted them were profoundly important to social, political, and economic transformation throughout Ghana's 20th century. Often hailed as key leaders in mass anticolonial struggle, market women especially continue to occupy central roles in histories of gender, politics, and change across West Africa.¹ Yet despite—or because of—their preeminence, market women have also been subject to significant public ire since Ghana's 1957 independence. In this essay, I draw on Ghanaian women's magazine *Obaa Sima* (trans. “The Ideal Woman”) to discuss these dynamics in the tumultuous years of the 1970s, in relation to politics of revolution, history, class, and gender. First, I argue that the magazine reveals how elite, professional women aligned with the military state to scapegoat market women by representing them as barriers to development. I then demonstrate how, in contrast, the women of *Obaa Sima* figured themselves as potentially

revolutionary actors who could bring about transformation. I conclude with a discussion of *Obaa Sima's* relationship to the historiography of Ghana's post-independence life.

Crisis and *Kalabule*

The 1970s were years of global economic strife, with particularly severe effects on Ghana. Yet, this decade remains understudied among historians of Ghana, who often narrate it only as a period of decline.² In this essay, I join recent scholars who have challenged this decline narrative. Yet these were times of profound difficulty for most Ghanaians, who just over a decade after independence found themselves at a structural economic disadvantage in a country whose political instability only exaggerated suffering. Inflation and rising costs of essential goods caused public turmoil, motivating support for military officer Ignatius K. Acheampong's 1972 coup. Self-styled revolutionaries, Acheampong and his National Redemption Council claimed to be leading an “economic war” on behalf of ordinary Ghanaians. This was a war against perceived threats both internal and external.

Over time, many of these threats were condensed into the concept of *kalabule*, which came into daily parlance in the 1970s. Despite *kalabule's* popularity, however, its wide range of meanings have not been thoroughly analyzed by historians—although some like Paul Nugent have made significant contributions. Derived from Hausa, *kalabule* originally meant something like “keep it quiet,” but over time described activities ranging from political corruption to cross-border smuggling. Throughout the 1970s, it came to be associated very strongly with market traders—market women in particular—who were frequently blamed for the crisis facing the country.³ In urban markets especially, traders were accused of defying price controls, which had been instituted by the regime scrambling to control consumer goods crises. Violence against traders by state agents, police, and civilian vigilantes became increasingly common in this period.

As Nugent writes, *kalabule* discourses insinuated that traders “inevitably profited at the expense of ordinary Ghanaians” who could not afford daily needs. He argues that this “represented a fundamental breach in the underlying terms of the social contract” between the state, its citizenry, and traders.⁴ Whereas prior regimes had either assumed that Ghanaian traders and consumers had parallel interests or tended to overlook this relationship altogether, the military regime and many ordinary people alike now used *kalabule* to represent market women—and other suspected commercial deviants—as criminals, traitors, and enemies of the state. *Kalabule* discourse also expressed the gendered dynamics of Ghanaian political economy as crisis

made for a “transitory period for women.” Market women became the most visible symbols of this “upending” of gendered expectations, especially as men’s employment opportunities declined and questions about divorce, domesticity, and childrearing took on new urgency.⁵

It was in this highly gendered context that *Obaa Sima* (*The Ideal Woman*) was founded. First issued in 1971, *Obaa Sima* was edited by notable journalist Kate Abbam and it featured short fiction, reader letters, editorials on culture and politics, and more. The magazine’s explicit commentary on and advocacy for women’s issues makes it useful material from which to assess this “transitory period” in gender relations.⁶ Importantly, however, the category of “women” was not homogenous, and the magazine expressed its contributors’ privileged class and social backgrounds. The women of *Obaa Sima* were largely professionally employed, English-literate, formally educated, middle or upper class, and Christian. Thus, the magazine offers distinct insights into the gendered debates around wealth, accumulation, and corruption that proliferated among certain groups in Acheampong’s Ghana.⁷ Contributors’ commentary on market women makes for particularly rich historical material.

Market Women, Economic Crisis, and *Kalabule* in *Obaa Sima*

In her introduction to the February 1973 edition of *Obaa Sima*, Abbam congratulated the Ghanaian women who had participated in the Lagos All-African Games, writing that in a country “where women are taken for granted,” sportswomen “uplifted the face of your beloved country.”⁸ In contrast, Abbam continued, criminal “MARKET WOMEN” were causing of difficulties for “the ordinary Ghanaian worker in obtaining essential food items.” Citing readers’ complaints, she hoped that “something will be done with speed—to prevent further hardship being caused by [market women].”⁹ Figured as opposed to the “ordinary Ghanaian worker,” market women were characterized not only as sources of economic ills but as direct opposition to the nation’s most productive citizens.

Similar claims were made by others throughout *Obaa Sima*, with some linking market women to the problem of underdevelopment in general. In the same February 1973 edition, one Ewuraba Donsober of Takoradi urged the government to investigate why goods “vanish from shops as soon as they are brought in; where these food items go, and how much they are sold for.”¹⁰ Donsober asked why, in contrast to “advanced countries” where people enjoyed “Super Markets and Department Shops,” Ghana now seemed to be “going *backwards*?”¹¹ Labeling market commerce as “backwards,” Donsober suggested that market traders embodied a distortion in development—which could otherwise be fueled by the morally upright “worker”

to whom Abbam referred in her introduction. *Kalabule* was figured as an anti-development force, while traders’ very existence came to exemplify Ghana’s backwardness. To deal with this, Donsober called upon the military government—signaling the extent to which Acheampong’s “economic war” had garnered favor.

The effects of this embrace of militancy were elaborated in the pages following Donsober’s letter, in an article by Kofi Kakari of Accra titled “SAVE US FROM THESE WOMEN” (Figure 1). Under a large photograph of market women in central Accra’s Makola Market, Kakari narrated his experiences being refused sale by market women who rebuffed “well dressed men and women because they suspected them to be police inspectors.”¹² Exasperated at his market interactions, Kakari admonished, “Ei! What is happening in Ghana these days? Why must these Makola women hold us to ransom?” Referring to a “these days,” Kakari reflected Donsober’s sense that the consumer economy was declining. He defined an “us”—perhaps a construction of those “ordinary Ghanaian worker[s]” whom Abbam had valorized—whose interests were being held “ransom” by market women. And, like Donsober, he called upon government soldiers to “wage war on these *enemies of the REVOLUTION*” to “rescue us from these women petty traders; *for we are dying*.”¹³ Here Kakari elaborated on Donsober’s faith in the military government as a protector of development, further defining market women as internal traitors against Acheampong’s popular “REVOLUTION.” In these wartime conditions, state intelligence and military might became not only desirable but necessary and inevitable.

Market women could, in Kakari’s account, also be found waiting to “pounce on” imported foodstuffs in department stores. Deprived of these essential goods, the “poor worker” could not “give of his best to the nation,” and thus market women were damaging Ghana’s productivity.¹⁴ Kakari, like Abbam and Donsober, argued that market women were depriving the nation’s productive citizens of their capacity to contribute to much-needed development.¹⁵ And this was a matter of life and death. If nothing was done, Kakari and his contemporaries feared, the crisis might well get worse: “they [market women] will *squeeze us to death*.”¹⁶ The enemies of labor, development, and the revolution, market women were therefore enemies of the nation and its future.



Figure 1. Kofi Kakari. "Save Us From These Women," *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, February 1973. University of Ghana Balme Library Africana Collection.

History, Literacy, and Professional Women as Revolutionaries

A key contribution of *Obaa Sima* was to link women's progress to revolutionary progress in general, with elite women positioned as vanguards of positive transformation. In contrast, market women were characterized as anachronistic obstacles to progress. These claims, made by an array of contributors, were supplemented by claims about gender in Ghana's past. For instance, in her September 1975 introduction titled "The Old Order Must Change," Abbam wrote that "This year we have reached the crossroads where we have to choose between remaining stagnant in our attitudes and changing them for the good of society" (Figure 2).¹⁷ She argued that men had long been superior in Ghana and lamented the poor conditions of women in rural areas. In November 1974, Abbam drew on the Biblical story of Adam and Eve to claim that women's position in Ghana has for "several thousand years" been "that of an inferior species created from the mere RIB of a man." By the 1970s, the consequences of this order had been that most women were "essentially illiterates," controlled by their husbands even if some were powerful as queen mothers.¹⁸ Abbam wrote that the "majority of women who would be professional women" were instead "doomed" to pregnancy, illiteracy, and the household.¹⁹ The market itself might have been added to this list, as Abbam and others claimed repeatedly that markets exemplified backwardness and "THE OLD ORDER."



Figure 2. Kate Abbam, "The Old Order Must Change." *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, September 1975. University of Ghana Balme Library Africana Collection.

This "OLD ORDER" was the target for Abbam and her women's movement. Those in *Obaa Sima*'s milieu, she and others claimed, were equipped to lead revolutionary transformation against economic crisis. These elite women viewed themselves as specifically prepared to reform women's ills, often discussed in shorthand through the problem of illiteracy. As Emily Callaci has written of middle-class women in Dar es Salaam, the women of *Obaa Sima* saw an opportunity "to model themselves as reformers and define their position in the city through efforts to improve the lives of poorer women."²⁰ "The government is committed to integrating the women into the national development of our country," Abbam wrote of Acheampong's Supreme Military Council, "but we must not sit down and wait for something to happen." Instead, literate women should start literacy classes "with a BIG BANG!" and educate the illiterate women masses.²¹

The stakes of illiteracy were high. Not only would literacy training allow women to enter the professions, but Abbam claimed that education might stop *kalabule* and therefore the economic crisis broadly. In June 1975, she lamented that women were not only the majority of the population but also the majority of the "ILLITERATE population." "As a result," she continued, "they are very suspicious, they are ignorant and they follow custom blindly, perpetrating the evils in them."²² Illiteracy perpetuated cultural backwardness just as market commerce perpetuated economic backwardness; that many market women were illiterate condensed these problems into a singular symbol of underdevelopment. "Only education" could deal with these problems and lessen *kalabule*, "if not eliminate it altogether":

Only education will help them to shake themselves out of the mantle of APATHY which is preventing the advancement of women in this country.

Let justice be done, let the Government mount a nationwide literacy campaign so that the numbers of literate women will swell, so that the educated women will be in the majority; so that women can speak with a louder voice than the voice they are using at the moment.

This country owes it to the women folk to educate them. Education of the women earns education for the whole nation.

Education for the women will reduce the extent of 'hoarding' of goods if not eliminate it altogether.

Education of the women will reduce smuggling, for when the women refuse to sell smuggled goods the male smugglers will think twice.

Oh! Let justice be done, let it be done quickly.²³

In Abbam's telling, elite women were in ideal positions to bring about this "justice": to rid the market women masses of their problematic elements, protect "ordinary" Ghanaian workers, and bring about transformation. These were claims of enormous scale, and they were made coherent through the assertion that market women were unsuited to a modern world moving toward professionalized, "formal" life. Thus, it was not only the military state who scapegoated market women for the contemporary crisis. It was also a particular movement of elite women who articulated themselves precisely through their differentiation from the majority of market women, figured as criminal, backwards, and anachronistic.

Conclusion: The 1970s in Ghana's Historiography

The pages of *Obaa Sima*, of which only some have been presented here, offer insights into Ghana's 1970s that have often been overlooked. As historians Elisa Prosperetti, Claire Nicolas, and Nana Yaw Boampong Spong have recently written, the compounding crises of these years have led many scholars to narrate them merely as decline after the jubilation of independence. Prosperetti and Nicolas have written that the "long 1970s" are "somewhat of a no-man's land" in Ghana's historiography, officially accessible to historians through weakly organized state archives.²⁴ Similarly, Nana Yaw Boampong Spong has written that students learn of the 1970s as a "lost" decade following the exceptional 1950s and 1960s—often defined through the pathbreaking life of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first leader.²⁵ Yet, as these historians have emphasized, the 1970s cannot be understood simply as the unfortunate afterbirth of independence. By looking beyond official archives to material like *Obaa Sima*, we can instead track what Bianca Murillo describes as the "rich history of social and political engagement with the military state" that pervaded the late 20th century in Ghana.²⁶

Markets and traders, both real and constructed, were central to these dynamics. Yet they, like the decade in which they lived, have often been understood through oversimplified narratives. Caught in contradictory binaries—informality/formality, matriarchy/patriarchy, wealth/

poverty, and political empowerment/disempowerment—they are rarely given the attention that their historical role demands. This essay and the wider thesis to which it belongs ultimately suggests that more dedicated attention to the politics of the market and a more expansive archival approach offer important perspectives from which to interpret local, national, and global change across the 20th century and beyond.

Endnotes

- 1 C.L.R. James, notable author of *The Black Jacobins* and contemporary of Kwame Nkrumah, wrote for instance that "in the struggle for independence one market-woman in Accra, and there were fifteen thousand of them, was worth any dozen Achimota graduates." C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 46.
- 2 Elisa Prosperetti and Claire Nicolas, "Ghana's Long 1970s: Historical Contingency and the Dark Side of Nation Building," *Ghana Studies* 27, no. 1 (2024): 3.
- 3 *Kalabule* was also used to describe politicians' corruption and greed, and was levelled against Acheampong's predecessors and opponents. Later, it was also used to describe Acheampong's successor Jerry John Rawlings. Paul Nugent, "The Remaking of Ghana and Togo at Their Common Border: Alhaji Kalabule Meets Nana Benz," in *Boundaries, Communities and State-Making in West Africa: The Centrality of the Margins* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 455.
- 4 Nugent, 456.
- 5 Shrinking opportunities for public sector employment meant that many women in this period became the primary breadwinners in their homes. Afua Baafi Quarshie, "Bewitching the State: Gender Contestations and Transgressive Citizenship Amid Economic Crisis in Ghana, 1972–1979," *Ghana Studies* 27, no. 1 (2024): 106, 109.
- 6 Abbam was a leader in the strong growth of Ghanaian women's journalism, whose major figures were very involved in domestic and international women's movements of the time. Kate Skinner, Jovia Salifu, and Akosua Adomako Ampofo, "Edited and Approved by Women for Maximum Benefit of All Readers": Newsprint Journalism, the International Women's Year and the Remaking of a Gendered National Public in 1970s Ghana," *Gender & History*, 2023.
- 7 Quarshie argues, for instance, that the common phrase "fa wo to begye golf" ("bring your bottom in exchange for a [VW] Golf"), expressed many male anxieties about the inability to realize full masculinity under the conditions of economic crisis, and the apparent inverse capacity of women to accumulate wealth through trading and, in the case of fa wo to begye golf, through sexual and otherwise intimate relations with powerful men. Quarshie, "Bewitching the State," 105–6.
- 8 Kate Abbam, "We Are Very Proud Of You," *Obaa Sima* (The Ideal Woman), February 1973.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ewuraba Donsober, "Vanishing Provisions," *Obaa Sima* (The Ideal Woman), February 1973.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Kofi Kakari, "Save Us From These Women," *Obaa Sima* (The Ideal Woman), February 1973.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 As historian Jeffrey Ahlman elaborates, gendered ideologies of productivity and hard work had precedent in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, where self-reliance was deeply linked to national and Pan-African freedom. In Acheampong's iteration, however, this moral vocabulary took on an increasingly internal-facing character. Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana*, New African Histories (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017), 115–47.

- 16 Kakari, "Save Us From These Women."
- 17 Kate Abbam, "The Old Order Must Change," *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, September 1975.
- 18 Narratives like Abbam's about precolonial and colonial history have been heavily problematized by historian and theorist Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, who contends that colonial Christianization was key in the invention of patriarchal gender difference in Yoruba society. Awura Ekuwa Badoe (Kate Abbam), "The Concept Of Woman In The Ghanaian Culture," *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, November 1974; Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 136–42.
- 19 Badoe (Abbam).
- 20 Emily Callaci, *Street Archives and City Life: Popular Intellectuals in Postcolonial Tanzania*, Radical Perspectives (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 61.
- 21 Kate Abbam, "Our Most Important Task," *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, September 1975.
- 22 Kate Abbam, "Let Justice Be Done," *Obaa Sima (The Ideal Woman)*, June 1975.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 The most prominent characterization of this decline comes from Deborah Pellow and Naomi Chazan's 1986 *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, which Prosperetti and Nicholas use as important evidence for this historiographical problem. Prosperetti and Nicolas, "Ghana's Long 1970s," 3; Deborah Pellow and Naomi Chazan, *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, Profiles (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986).
- 25 This narrative of exceptionalism begins with the frequently cited fact that Ghana was the first African country to gain its independence in the wave of decolonization throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. Nana Yaw Boampong Spong, "1966 and the Foreshortening of Ghana's History," *Ghana Studies* 27, no. 1 (2024): 24–31.
- 26 Prosperetti and Nicholas write that the era of the "long 1970s" was one in which "the machinery of state record-keeping largely [broke] down." State archival productions and its contingencies are familiar questions for historians of Ghana, including Jean Allman who has long written about the possibilities and limits of official records. Prosperetti and Nicolas, "Ghana's Long 1970s," 2; Jean Allman, "Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (2013): 127–28; Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana*, New African Histories Series (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017), 140.
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“A Delightful Little Show of Its Own”: A Rhetorical Analysis of Early *Sports Illustrated*’s Coverage of Female Olympians

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Abstract

The sports magazine *Sports Illustrated* was created in 1954, a period when international politics rapidly shaped the ways Americans consumed media due to the Cold War. The United States would enter numerous proxy wars, including the Vietnam War, Korean War, and Afghan-Soviet War, in its rivalry with the USSR. This paper places international sports in the realm of proxy conflicts and views *Sports Illustrated* as a major actor in these competitions, using American female athletes and the concept of femininity as weapons against other women and countries. A rhetorical analysis of early *Sports Illustrated* history and coverage reveals a treatment of women reflective of the period’s gender norms and political tensions. By studying Cold War international relations, theories of gender and race, and *Sports Illustrated*’s Olympic coverage from the 1960 Rome Olympics, this paper aims to understand the ways in which American sports contributed to social understandings of womanhood.

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In 1954, *Sports Illustrated* debuted with its first issue on August 16, 1954.¹ While it took until the 1960s for its popularity to skyrocket, *Sports Illustrated* became the nation’s preeminent sports magazine. *Sports Illustrated* produced long-form content on a weekly basis, a publication which “made an art out of in-depth reporting”² and deviated from the more common results-based stories that dominated sports media at the time. This format resulted in more audience engagement with sports and increase in attention for athletes as celebrities brought greater attention to their respective sports.³ *Sports Illustrated* brought a classier appeal to following sports; the prior blue-collar connotations of being a sports fan melted away with this magazine, which

targeted middle class and upper class households.⁴ The high-quality reporting and design helped to prompt *Sports Illustrated*’s place as one of, if not the most, successful sports publications during the span of the Cold War (1947–1991).

At the same time as *Sports Illustrated*’s rise to popularity, technological advances and the United States’ evolving position on the global stage meant that sports itself was taking a larger role in American society—specifically sports *nationalism*. This paper aligns with scholars across numerous fields in claiming that sports and politics are inherently intertwined.⁵ Athletics became an arena for national pride and a stage for international rivalries and national ideologies to play out.⁶ *Sports Illustrated*, from its inception, was a product of its time but also a conduit for cultural norms, including those relating to women, to evolve and disseminate to its general American audience.

Sports Illustrated serves as a common source for multiple studies on women in sports, representations of athletes, and the way that sports have been used in Cold War politics. For example, Susan Cahn studied the development of women in American sports throughout the 20th century in her book, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport*, which contains extensive analysis of the intersections of gender roles, race, class, and sexuality.

Other scholars have touched on the idea of race, class, and Cold War politics in relation to sports. John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard’s *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture* presents case studies in which socioeconomic standing and race are driving forces in athletes’ journeys. The anthology features work studying multiple ethnic and racial groups—though these articles often lack exploration of female athletes of these groups and sports.

In many scholarly discussions about gender roles and sports, the Cold War tends to play a less significant role. It helps to set the stage and implicitly influences the politics of sports, but it often does not take the full focus of the work. It is more common to see the association when it comes to race and sports, yet the Cold War is still often relegated to the background. When the Cold War *does* take a more prominent role, the subsequent project rarely includes women, shifting away from the theme of gender roles. In my work, I retain the focus on the Cold War, race, *and* women’s place in sports as a proxy arena for global affairs.

Past scholarship has encompassed scholars of gender, race, sexuality, class, and politics within the sphere of sports, though their work does not necessarily tackle it all at once and with a specific focus on *Sports Illustrated*. By focusing on a meticulous Olympics-by-Olympics approach and close reading sources, I periodize *Sports Illustrated* in its timeline of progress within a larger national and international

context. This article will focus on the first period, in which *Sports Illustrated* models pre-Second Wave of Feminism American values.

How did *Sports Illustrated* reflect social norms and expectations for women in sports, and in a broader sense, society? How did the magazine contribute to and reinforce stereotypes around female athletes, both American and non-American? This essay analyzes coverage of female athletes from this early period of printed media coverage, focusing on the imposition of gender norms and international affairs onto athletic events and personas. First, it examines the creation of *Sports Illustrated* and to what degree women were considered and included in the staff and pages. Then, it explores a short piece from *SI*'s 1960 Rome Olympics coverage and rhetorically analyzes its claims through the lenses of gender, race, and international politics. By contextualizing the history of the publication and close-reading content from *Sports Illustrated*, this article looks to examine the connections between social and political issues and conversations with the representations of these athletes, which lays the foundation for women's sports media to this day.

Women and Early *Sports Illustrated*

During the planning phase of *Sports Illustrated*, the potential of a female audience was deemed less important to that of a male audience. In the beginning, Ernie Havermann (one of integral members in the creation of the magazine) discussed a report on readership that “will show, [he was] sure, that only males read sports magazines.”⁷ To appeal to women, the magazine's structure was developed to include the fashion column called “Sporting Looks.” Other than this section, the rest of the magazine was targeted specifically towards a male readership. With the exclusion of women in the consideration of the magazine's target audience the role of women in *Sports Illustrated* reflected the position of women in 1954's American society: marginalized, if considered at all.

Women were sometimes featured on front covers, well before Babette Beatty cover of the 1964 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue (the first of the publication's iconic annual edition). A woman was actually featured on the cover of the third issue, her identity revealed in a short blurb in the table of contents as “Pamela Nelson.” The title of the cover photo is “Girl in the surf” and shows Nelson wearing a swimsuit and swim cap, only visible from waist up and looking off into the distance as foamy waves wash around her. The description reads:

Even an inlander can feel the tug of the sea, the tingling chill and the salty exhilaration of surf bathing in this cool, blue picture of pretty Pamela

Nelson, wife of a Navy officer, who was swimming at Jones Beach, Long Island when Photographer Meek came by in his swim trunks and carrying, of all things, an underwater camera. Meek decided to shoot above water at this target of opportunity.⁸

In contrast with the first issue's cover (which features Atlanta Braves third baseman Eddie Matthews) and the second issue's cover (which features a row of golf bags belonging to golfers competing at the Masters tournament), this cover shows sports as recreation—not professionalized. While the intentions of the *Sports Illustrated* cover design team in selecting this image are unknown, regardless, this cover relegates women in sports to an amateur/for-fun environment, especially when in comparison to their male counterparts.

Early *Sports Illustrated* history also includes the women who composed its staff (there were not many). Sports journalism was, and still is, a male-dominated field, and while progress has been made towards inequality in the industry, 1954 was a difficult time to be a woman in sports in any regard. Some female journalists would go down in history for their pioneering activities on assignment. Virginia Kraft, whose first piece on the International Women's Fishing Association ran in 1960, began at *Sports Illustrated* in a supporting role, as other female staff did, and managed to take on the hunting and fishing beat, despite the masculine connotations of the sports.⁹ Both the “boys-club” atmosphere of a sports publication like *SI* and, oftentimes, the actual athletes that reporters like Kraft worked with proved to be challenges, but her persistence paved the way for future female sports journalists who would contribute to a changing landscape that helped to influence the coverage that female athletes would receive.

Until this point in *Sports Illustrated* history, the material presented in this publication was primarily written by men, for men—with the occasional piece about women that made its way into print. This pattern was about to change, however, with the 1960 Olympics.

The 1960 Olympics

Held in Rome, Italy, the 1960 Summer Olympiad had a special issue of *Sports Illustrated*. One recurring section of the publication is “Score Card,” which gives short blurbs, ones which are deemed not important enough to get its own feature. One of these snippets in the magazine's coverage of the Summer Olympics is a piece called “Village Life,” giving a look at the women's section of Olympic Village.

This short piece, only a few paragraphs in length, captures elements of sexism, racism, and anti-communist sentiments that existed at the time of its production, 1960.

The second paragraph begins the description of women, immediately leading by saying the women's section was "naturally called The Harem."¹⁰ A harem can either refer to a group of women all sharing the same partner or a separate location in a household meant for wives, concubines, and female servants. Regardless of which definition is applied in this context, this initial framing creates sexual and strongly gendered associations with female athletes. The piece frames them as present for male use, a sexual service. The wording centers a male reader, almost offering the female athletes as the reader's Harem, given the voyeuristic nature of the reader in relation to the female subjects. The adverb "naturally" implies this association is obvious and inherent to a space entirely filled with women, despite the degrading and non-athletic connotations.

However, the subject of the sentence is not The Harem—it's the U.S. women Olympics athletes, who are referred to as "girls." The women are categorized as "the most ingenious (and the most scatterbrained)" as rated by vague officials. The subsequent description of the American women's shenanigans place sports in the background (if in the picture at all). A focus on bodies, including "tired arms and legs"¹¹ in a makeshift whirlpool, help craft the image of female athletes as unserious—women first and athletes second. The "wearing of a teentsy-weentsy ballerina skirt" combats an alleged ban on shorts. A concluding joke on the ban references "Roman men" who "showed the girls" how the concern of shorts being offensive to Italians was unfounded.¹² The difference between "Roman men" and the "girls" in the same sentence shows the strong difference in regard for each group of people.

It may be interesting to view this same piece as slightly progressive in nature, given its framing of women as sexual agents. America's second wave of feminism began in the 1960s, which included the sexual revolution. Despite presenting the athletes as "girls," they are not given the premise of innocence or lack of sexuality, in need of protection from lusty men. Rather, they are given the opportunity to express their sexuality and femininity, even if presented in this piece through the skewed eyes of a male reporter writing for a male audience. While this alternative reading may also be argued, I align more with the former interpretation in which these women are being described for the benefit of the reader, an assumed male audience. Even the most optimistic interpretation of this piece holds significant limitations to the extent of its potential "progressiveness," including how its inclusion in *Sports Illustrated* detracts from women's sports by not mentioning women's sports at all.

The aforementioned description has an air of comedy about it, but the humor relies on sexist tropes and framing. The implications of sexuality and lack of actual

sports or athleticism reveal the ideas surrounding female athletes at the time. The brief report provides visuals of bodies, revealing outfits, and a false culture clash surrounding bodies and revealing outfits, before moving on to athletes of other countries.

According to the report on the "other girls' teams," Australians are the most dashing "but rank with the Italians at the least tidy," and the French are the most chic. For the first and only time, in this section, the piece references a non-white majority country: Korea. The female Korean athletes are classified as "the shyest, blushing when other girls see them in dressing gowns."¹³

The Korean team's characterization plays on tropes of East Asian hyper modesty. The image of the submissive and demure East Asian woman is the foundation of this sentence's "comedy," bringing to mind the flustered traditional woman whose modesty has been compromised, even if just being in a dressing gown around other women. For audiences, this ranking is a confirmation of the stereotypes around Korean (and other East Asian) women in their behavior and relation to sexuality.¹⁴ Given its time-proximity to the Korean War, certain associations with Korean women, ranging from comfort women (with origins in World War II) to the many "GI Brides" who married American servicemen and moved to the U.S., colored the depiction and perception of Korean female athletes.¹⁵

The ensuing reference to the English women being the least self-conscious contrasts the two groups. While the Korean women are sexualized for their modesty, a hidden sexuality, the English women are characterized by their wearing of "pants and bras and...shortest of shorts outdoors."¹⁶ The focus on English outward sexuality creates a gendered and racial basis for each set of women's sexualization.

The final group of women mentioned in this piece are Russian, who are said to be "perhaps the neatest in their V-neck dresses" but "also, alas the most confined."¹⁷ The use of the word "alas" could easily be read as a desire from the writer (on behalf of the audience) for greater access to these athletes' bodies. The (unlisted) author continues to say the Russian women's coaches "have refused to give them shopping money until the competition is over,"¹⁸ which reinforces the image of the Soviet Union's athletics program being incredibly strict, harsh, and intensive—and that women just want to shop. While not referencing athletics specifically in this piece, the idea of coaches regulating/hyper-managing Russian athletes contributes to the idea of the Soviet machine, in which sports are state-controlled. The final line of the piece, which says "it seems fairly well established all will get the same amount—win or lose"¹⁹

pokes fun at communist ideas. As 1960 was in the earlier half of the Cold War, anti-communist sentiments played out both in sports events and on the pages of media like *Sports Illustrated*.

“Village Life” runs only five paragraphs long and yet is packed with ideologies on women, nationality/ethnicity, and even political and economic systems. Its opening paragraph, which frames the Olympic village as “a delightful little show of its own”²⁰ invites the audience to view the people within the village as entertainers. As spectators, readers can then view these women in a private sphere, in which they are separated from athletics. This imposition is tonally framed as lighthearted, at times comedic, yet the implications of these ideologies could easily factor into the ways the general American readership of *Sports Illustrated* viewed women, especially of different ethnic backgrounds. At a time when the magazine was taking a stronger place in middle-class American culture, such content can be interpreted as a reflection of social attitudes and political narratives that permeated popular media.

From this singular example of *Sports Illustrated*'s coverage of female Olympians, one can see where female athletes stood in American pop culture prior to the second wave of feminism. Women's sports at this time were in an earlier stage of being professionalized and the language surrounding the women competing at the highest international level reveal the limitation of the sports which did exist for women at the time. This paper aimed to illustrate initial *Sports Illustrated* coverage of Olympian women as a foundation to track the evolution of language around the female athlete as social movements and political events shift the American perception of gender, race, and international relations. Future studies may continue this genealogy of rhetoric into the following decades and up to present day conversations about women's sports.

Endnotes

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- 2 Michael MacCambridge, *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 18–19.
- 3 Ibid., 22.
- 4 Ibid., 5.
- 5 For further reading, *Sport, Rhetoric, and Political Struggle* edited by Daniel Grano and Michael Butterworth features a series of essays connecting sports and politics in contemporary American culture, while also tracing the historical precedent of politicization in sports.
- 6 This paper is part of a longer project which looks at the progression of female Olympian coverage in *Sports Illustrated* throughout the Cold War, examining the development of women's sports, the evolution of gender norms, and the weaponization of athletics as a Cold War proxy between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

- 7 MacCambridge, *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine*, 22.
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- 9 Emily Sohn, “Sports Illustrated's Forgotten Pioneer,” Long Lead, 2023, <https://thecatch.longlead.com>.
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Of Whales and Empire

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Abstract

In 1848 an artist duo created *The Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World*, a 1,275-foot-long painting which showed the scenes a whaleman would see from the deck of a ship as they sailed on a whaleship around the world, stopping in port cities as they went. The painting was cinematic: it was rigged behind a proscenium frame and wound onto wooden spools. An operator manually cranked the spool, while a narrator delivered a lecture to accompany the panorama, alongside special effects and props.

The first audiences of *The Grand Panorama* found themselves immersed in the sights of a whaling voyage, which, I argue, meant that they were also immersed in the sights of the Portuguese Empire. The first half of the panorama, after showing the ship's departure from New Bedford, shows only port cities that had a Portuguese colonial connection: the Azores, Cape Verde, and Brazil. In these scenes, the painting is a dynamic portrait of the slackening of the Portuguese Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. Threats to Portuguese control shown in the painting and examined in this paper include regions moving towards independence, colonial mismanagement, and above all, American threats to Portuguese control over territory.

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The first viewers of *The Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World*¹ gathered in front of a stage with a drawn curtain in Fairhaven, Massachusetts in December of 1848 to see a whaling voyage with their own eyes. As they sat together in rows, the audience watched a curtain rise to reveal a sweeping painted landscape (Figure 1). A cranking sound from a gear might have been heard as the background scenery of the stage started to move horizontally. This “scenery” was *The Grand Panorama*, a 1,275-foot roll of cotton sheeting painted with distemper by two artists, Benjamin Russell and Caleb Purrington. While the painting moved, special effects, lighting, music, and a lecturer provided accompaniments to enhance its two-hour run time.² With this massive painted cotton sheeting brought to life with special effects as their guide, the audience could imagine themselves as whalers, watching from the deck of a ship as this voyage around the world passed ports on islands and coasts thousands of miles away.



Figure 1: Modern recreation of the proscenium frame staging of *The Grand Panorama*, constructed by the New Bedford Whaling Museum in 2018.³

The Grand Panorama is a painting and a mass-entertainment spectacle; when it debuted, it was also a vehicle for nineteenth-century Americans to understand just how much the juggernaut industry of American Whaling interfaced with nations far beyond their own. In particular, the Portuguese Empire plays an early and prominent role in the painted scenes of *The Grand Panorama*. Three then-current or former Portuguese Colonies, the Azores, Cape Verde, and Brazil, appear in *The Grand Panorama*. Yet, in comparison to the thriving American cities and trade networks shown in the painting, the Portuguese Empire seems in the painting to be losing its influence across the Atlantic World.

Following the conservation treatment of *The Grand Panorama* completed in 2018, the artwork has attracted new attention from scholars of media studies, the history of art, performance studies, and other disciplines who have used the work to expand our present-day understanding of nineteenth-century American entertainment spectacle. Common also is scholarship that compares *The Grand Panorama* to other whaling media, such as Herman Melville's novel from the same period, *Moby Dick*. Less attention has been devoted to reading the artwork as a document of how closely tied American and Portuguese interests were during the period that the Industrial Whaling was at its height.⁴ After providing necessary background on the nature of this object, I will put forth an analysis of the painted scenes in the first half of the painting, pointing out where the slackening of Portuguese colonial power—most often in comparison to emergent American Imperialism—is shown. With this analysis, it is clear that *The Grand Panorama* replicates for present-day and historic landbound audiences what American Whalers of the nineteenth century bore witness to regularly at sea: the impacts and afterlives of Portuguese Empire on the Atlantic World.

Making a Grand Panorama

The story of the creation of *The Grand Panorama* begins with Benjamin Russell. Not an artist by training, he was descended from a lineage of whaling elites located in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the center of the American whaling industry.⁵ Russell's income—before his entrepreneurial venture into moving panoramas—was derived from family wealth and investments in whaling voyages of the Seth Russell and Sons company. The fortunes of the hitherto prosperous Russell family business changed during the Jacksonian Banking constrictions. Creditors demanded payment from the family firm to stabilize their assets during the sudden economic crisis. Amid lavish spending on mansions and other luxuries, the family could not repay their debts. They lost their property and the Russell firm failed.⁶ The family entered the next decade with little in the way of power or assets; Benjamin Russell hoped that he could regain some semblance of a fortune by shipping out to sea. In 1841, he boarded a whaleship called the *Kutusoff*, which was bound for Australia.⁷ Russell returned to New Bedford safely on March 30, 1845. He had not earned any substantial profit from the voyage.

Russell conceptualized *The Grand Panorama* while in search of a more successful profit-making endeavor. He may have been inspired by other artists' moving panoramas that he could have read about or seen in-person. American moving panoramas, which were variations of European panoramas of the prior century, had become enormously popular by the time Russell returned from his time at sea.

These paintings were comprised of long sheets of substrate, which, after being painted with narrative scenery, were wound onto wooden spools constructed behind a proscenium frame. While operators cranked the wooden spools, the painting rolled past the seated audience over the course of hours, often accompanied by special effects. These paintings were experienced like films, unlike earlier panoramas that were painted on the walls of purpose-built buildings and viewed from a platform in the center.⁸ Many of these portable moving panoramas were met with great popularity and produced great profits on national or international tours. To create a successful moving panorama, one needed a combination of artistic ability, innovation, and often most critically, lived experience pertaining to the painting's subject matter to create a convincing painted simulation for audiences.⁹ After spending three years at sea hunting for whales, Benjamin Russell had plenty of lived experience with which he could thrill audiences willing to pay for a ticket.

No doubt, there was a market for the immersive travelogue that Russell was planning, but materializing his vision required assistance. Russell recruited second artist, Caleb Purrington, to help him with his project. Little is known about Purrington, other than the fact that he was a sign painter also local to New Bedford.¹⁰ However they divided the labor, Russell would have needed both Purrington's experience painting and his extra set of hands to handle the incredible amount of material they worked with. In 1848, after what they would advertise later as "two studious years of labor"¹¹ the artists completed the panorama, which comprised 1,375 feet of cotton sheeting. Russell appears to have led the finished painting's tour across the Northeastern and Midwestern United States.

While *The Grand Panorama* was touring the United States, commercial whaling was at its height in the country. Painters, along with writers, entrepreneurs, showrunners, and other creatives responded, capitalizing on a topical aspect of American culture. *The Grand Panorama* exposed audiences who might have never left the United States to geographies and themes that offered a new perspective into the world through the lens of whaling. Initial viewers agreed that *The Grand Panorama* was a unique phenomenon among even contemporaneous forms of whaling media because it brought the most globally expansive view of whaling yet to enthusiastic audiences in cities with whaling-driven economies. One unnamed New Englander reviewer expressed this sentiment writing for *The Boston Post* on January 11, 1849, after the panorama's showing at the Armory Hall in Boston. The anonymous author, among the first to experience *The Grand Panorama*, gives rhapsodic praise for the showing he experienced:

Of the many panoramas which have from time to time been exhibited in this city, we do not recollect to have seen one so original and diversified in its details, accurate in its delineations, and beautiful in its execution, as Purrington & Russell's panorama of a whaling voyage round the world, now nightly on exhibition at Amory Hall. . . . We would call particular attention to its spirit-stirring whaling scenes. Who has not read, and has wondered as he read, of the matchless daring of our gallant tars in their conflicts with the mighty leviathans of the deep, whose slight touch is destruction and against whose strength the strongest ship is but glass? Here is a panoramic view embodying whaling in all of its phases.¹²

The reviewer takes great excitement in describing the whaling scenes of the painting, which they note as “spirit-stirring,” “accurate,” and “beautiful.” Each adjective is meant to convince prospective viewers that the panorama is entertaining and worth watching, compared even to other media in a saturated landscape of whaling narratives.

A subsequent claim by the reviewer, however, is less easily explained—what exactly is “whaling in all of its phases?” Although the whaling panorama contains some action-packed whale-hunt sequences of the type that the *Boston Post* reviewer relishes, much of the cotton sheeting does not show any whales at all. The painting is organized around the imagined environments which could be seen from the perspective of the deck of an imagined whaleship sailing around the world on a multi-year voyage. Audiences “travel” through the most important ports of the Atlantic and Pacific world for whalers in the 1840s. They depart from New Bedford, Massachusetts, before stopping in the Azores, Cape Verde and Rio de Janeiro. After leaving Rio, the journey progresses into the Pacific Ocean, beginning with Juan Fernandez Island, and followed by Pitcairn Island, the Marquesas, the Society Islands, Hawai'i, and Fiji. A now lost part of the panorama showed New Zealand, Cape Town, and ended in St. Helena. Nearly every scene of *The Grand Panorama* shows a location in the Atlantic or Pacific in one of a many varying stages of colonization by a European nation.

The “phases” of whaling are not only the stages involved in hunting, processing, and transporting whales back to land, but also the varied geographies that whalers pass through in pursuit of their product. As the next section will explain, those geographies are hosts to different political and economic conditions which make clear the impact of colonialism on locales absorbed into seaborne empires. Put simply: empire is one of the phases of whaling that every whaleman, real or imagined, experiences on every nineteenth-century voyage.

Seeing Empire Through the Eyes of a Whaler

The first three destinations the panorama “visits” after departing New Bedford have a Portuguese-Colonial connection. The long block of painting devoted to current and former Portuguese colonies represents just how much of a presence the Portuguese Empire had in the Atlantic and, by extension, its whaling industry. Visually reading the details of these coastlines, with special attention to architecture, national symbols, landscape, and seascape underscores the definitive imperial coherence between the locations in the painting gestured to by their sequence.



Figure 2: Benjamin Russell and Caleb Purrington, *The Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World, 1848*, Distemper on Cotton Sheeting, New Bedford Whaling Museum. Detail from scroll 1 showing New Bedford and the Wamsutta Mills, which were constructed in 1847.

New Bedford is the starting point for the panorama's imagined whaling journey. It serves as a bridge between a depiction of a familiar urban geography and the immersive whaling world Russell and Purrington sought to recreate. The skyline of the city contains such specificity that early local viewers would have recognized many landmarks of their city, with some construction shown in the painting built as recently as 1847—the final of the three years it took to create the panorama (Figure 2). Audiences, many of whom sat within a few miles of the New Bedford port they saw passing by on the painted cotton sheeting in front of them, could have verified the artists' depiction against their own experience of being in the city. If they were impressed by the accuracy of the scenes they saw, it might have been easier for them to suspend disbelief while viewing the rest of the panorama, which contained locales they were much less likely to be familiar with.¹³

These opening scenes of New Bedford also queue up comparisons between a profitable and growing American industrial city and non-industrial, sparsely populated, Portuguese colonies to be fulfilled later in the painting's narrative scenery. Along the coast of the “whaling capital” are many symbols which relate to industries like lumber,

textile, and agricultural production—each of which get more prominent placement than whaling.¹⁴ That these details do have indirect connections to the whaling industry, however, prompts viewers to think about the ways in which whaling, in New Bedford and the international scenes that follow, is implicated in many seemingly unrelated networks. It also serves to distinguish the space of the city as one distinct from where animals and plants are harvested before being processed and sold. That is, a space that is non-agricultural, and by association, more technologically advanced. The painting clearly shows the recent population growth of the burgeoning city, which now has little open land for farming as domestic and international newcomers to New Bedford settle by the harbor in search of work. The New Bedford section of the panorama constructs a modern, industrially productive American city in contrast to the scenes that follow which feature less populated, clearly struggling, Portuguese colonies.



Figure 3: Detail from scroll 1 *The Grand Panorama* showing Pico Island and its abundance of American flags and cropped farmland.

After the shorelines of New Bedford, the imagined whaling journey of *The Grand Panorama* continues to the Azores islands, an archipelago controlled by the Portuguese since at least the fifteenth century. In the panorama, they appear to be islands of weakened imperial sovereignty and contested international influence. Where the preceding scenes of New Bedford recorded an economy that took what it needed from the world outside of its limits and processed it for its large population, the Azores appear here to have an economy which produces for an extractive metropole outside of its limits. A topographical view reveals that the islands are comprised of swaths of pastoral land sectioned into crop squares, sparsely dotted, with dwellings and devoid of factories, mills, or signs of import, at the base of a rocky volcano. It is hard to imagine a sharper contrast to preceding scenes of New Bedford, which pulses with development. While the Portuguese crown administrates the Azores, controlling its exports and governance, Russell and Purrington opt to primarily symbolize American control over the island. The artists pepper the entire coast of the island with American flags, hiding only a paltry few Portuguese merchant flags on ships in the harbor by comparison (Figure 3).



Figure 4: Detail from scroll 2 of *The Grand Panorama* showing Cape Verdeans boarding an American whaling ship and the apparently uninhabited and mountainous land of the island of Brava, Cape Verde.

The subsequent picture of the Cape Verde islands shows an even more advanced phase of Portuguese devastation. After the cotton sheeting shuttles the audience through a brief, non-descript, stretch of sea beyond the group of Azores Islands, the Panorama's viewers are brought face-to-face with yet another Atlantic archipelago colonized by the Portuguese. The Cape Verdean islands' geographic features, having been subject to centuries of colonial extraction, seem to render the land perilous, oscillating between bare cliffs and ill-defined jungle recreated with streaky washes of green paint. Russell and Purrington show residents of the island taking flight from their home island, seeking refuge from famine and poverty as recruits on American whaling ships (Figure 4).¹⁵ If New Bedford buzzes with human activity and commerce, Cape Verde appears barren and unlivable: mountains are cleared, habitable structures are sparse, and there is no sign of food or supplies being grown anywhere on the island to support the population. It's clear that this is a result of the devastating resource extraction, lack of aid from Lisbon, and horrific toll of the slave trade, all carried out by Portuguese colonists on the island.



Figure 5: Detail from scroll 2 of *The Grand Panorama* showing a British naval frigate and an American Warship in Guanabara Bay, Brazil.

To audiences who observed *The Grand Panorama's* rendition of an unsophisticated Azores, followed by a desolate Cape Verde, the Brazilian coastline where they next arrived, glowing with its only decades-old 1822 independence from Portugal stands as an ultimate indictment of

Portuguese weakness in the painting.¹⁶ People and their differences begin to come into focus in Rio, foregrounding the heterogeneous socio-economic and racial makeup of a growing city. Far from a liberated state, the slave trade and export of products that require enslaved labor continued in Brazil well after its independence. The new nation could produce and manufacture for itself using what they found in their own territory and beyond, not unlike the United States at the time, which possessed its own slavery system. Its harbors crammed with foreign vessels mark the new Brazilian Empire shown in *The Grand Panorama* as a powerhouse of economic productivity. Some of the vessels Russell and Purrington paint even imply smugglers, slave patrol, merchant and naval ships, all vying to wrestle control from the nascent Brazilian state in the harbor space (Figure 5).¹⁷ From across the Atlantic the Portuguese crown watched as the massive profits they once gained from the Americas re-routed into the hands of the Brazilian monarchy. Rio de Janeiro, the capital city at the time, had, since colonial times, been the site of significant architecture and cultural institutions put in place by the Portuguese. In 1848, the new city of Rio de Janeiro existed inside of structures that the Portuguese once governed from. *The Grand Panorama* shows audiences the post-colonial aesthetic of a city for which the mark of colonialism will remain in its architecture far after its colonizers are gone (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Detail from scroll 2 of *The Grand Panorama* showing Rio de Janeiro, the Imperial Palace, and a group of enslaved Africans carrying bags of coffee on their heads at left.

In *The Grand Panorama*'s Portuguese Atlantic, viewers saw the "phases of whaling" as they pertained to Portuguese Empire, which flailed in the mid-nineteenth century as it struggled to maintain its overseas territory. The Azores, Cape Verde, and Brazil represent different stages of Portuguese colonization. In each location, Russell and Purrington's picture presents evidence that the Portuguese are unsuccessful colonizers who have been too ambitious in their efforts to maintain distant territories.

The Azores seem more American than Portuguese; The Cape Verde Islands and its people has been devastated by the toll of the slave trade; Brazil seems to be thriving without Portuguese oversight. But make no mistake: the painting makes no argument against all imperialism. In the Portuguese Atlantic, the first act of this narrative painting, colonization is a floundering character struggling to find its footing with the old tricks of one of the globe's earliest empires. The second act of the painting brings audiences to the Pacific, where audiences see views of French, English, and American colonization, many of which seem stable and economically viable. Unconcerned with the question of whether imperialism is ethical, *The Grand Panorama* asks, from the deck of a whaleship, the much more sinister one *Who is the best colonizer, and what is the best way to colonize.*

Endnotes

- 1 A few notes on spelling and abbreviation: In this paper, going forward from this point, I have chosen to shorten the title of the painting from *The Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World* to *The Grand Panorama*. Other authors have chosen different abbreviations, including *The Whaling Panorama* or *Panorama*. I choose the first three words of the title because I mean to be specific as to which whaling panorama I am speaking about (i.e., I am not referencing Thomas Davidson or Charles Sidney Raleigh's whaling panoramas).
- 2 Robert L. Carothers and John L. Marsh, "The Whale and the Panorama," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 26, no. 3 (1971): 319–328.
- 3 All images are taken from the digitized ARC GIS interactive "story map" created by the New Bedford Whaling Museum in 2018 and updated in 2024 to accompany its exhibitions of the restored *Grand Panorama*. The story map comprised two hundred and fifty individual images which were stitched together to make a single digitized, high-resolution panorama. The story map is can be found at the following link online: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=19513a5d13964a48aa9d00973c8a9674> and was created by Michael Lapides and Christina Sewall with assistance from Nathan Silveira.
- 4 For other in-depth object studies focusing solely on *The Grand Panorama* see Kevin J. Avery, "'Whaling Voyage 'Round the World': Russell and Purrington's Moving Panorama and Herman Melville's 'Mighty Book,'" *American Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (1990): 50–78, and the various essays in the more recent exhibition catalogue McMullen, Amanda, et al *A Spectacle in Motion: The Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World* (New Bedford, Massachusetts: New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2018).
- 5 Walter Pease Zephaniah, *History of New Bedford Salem*, (Salem, Massachusetts: Higginson Book Company, 1918): 13.
- 6 Elton Hall, "Panoramic Views of Whaling by Benjamin Russell" from *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Art & Commerce: American Prints of the Nineteenth Century: Proceedings of a Conference Held in Boston, May 8–10, 1975*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 1975): 25–49.
- 7 According to Henry Lindsey, *The Whalers' Shipping List and Merchant's Transcript*. New Bedford, Massachusetts: Henry Lindsey pub., 1843–1914, *The Kutusoff* set sail from New Bedford and spent four years at sea. It took the crew until October 18, 1843, to reach the coast of Australia, where they hunted for whales before going on to French Polynesia, Hawai'i, the Northwestern coast of the United States, and Rio de Janeiro.
- 8 See Tom Gunning, "'The Whole World Within Reach.'" From Jeffrey Ruoff, *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle*, Johns Hopkins University

- Press, 18, no. 2, (April 1996); and Alan Wallach, "The Persistence of the Panoramic: Technologies of Vision in American Culture from the 19th to the 21st Century" *REAL* 26, no. 1 (December 2010): 89–108.
- ⁹ The author's understanding of moving panoramas in the nineteenth century come principally from the Avery, 'Whaling Voyage 'Round the World,' Stephen Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, (New York: Zone Books, 1997), Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*, Leonardo Book Series, (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013), and Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Trefoil in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1988).
- ¹⁰ Keith Kauppila, "Whaling Voyage 'Round the World: American Capitalism in a Work of Art", in McMullen et al., *A Spectacle in Motion*, 67.
- ¹¹ See Printed handbill titled *Purrington and Russell's Original Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World*, preserved in the collection of the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Ink on Paper, 00.131.97. The image is reproduced in color in McMullen et al., *A Spectacle in Motion*, 60.
- ¹² "A Whaling Voyage 'Round the World." *The Boston Post*, January 11, 1849.
- ¹³ Timothy Barringer, "The World for a Shilling" in Katie Trumpener and Timothy Barringer, *On the Viewing Platform: The Panorama Between Canvas and Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), for a discussion of a similar phenomenon Robert Barker's panorama, *London from the Roof of Albion Mills, 1792–1793*, in the collection of The Yale Center for British Art.
- ¹⁴ Kingston William Heath completes a comprehensive study of the development of the city of New Bedford through immigration and industry in Kingston Wm. Heath, *The Patina of Place: The Cultural Weathering of a New England Industrial Landscape*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).
- ¹⁵ Akeia Bernard points out that Cape Verde is deeply impacted by Portuguese colonization, resource extraction, and neglect throughout and after their colonial and slave-trading period, which is clearly shown in the panorama. See Akeia Bernard, "Globalization and Diversity of Maritime Industries from New Bedford" in McMullen et al., *A Spectacle in Motion*, 47–60.
- ¹⁶ For a background in Brazilian history, the author consulted Boris Fausto and Sergio Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- ¹⁷ Michael Dyer points out many details about the specificity of the Maritime vessels off the coast of Rio de Janeiro, and how they indicate a vast range of activities beyond, yet intertwined with, whaling. See Michael Dyer, "An Overview of the Content of the *Panorama*" in McMullen et al., *A Spectacle in Motion*, 101–124.

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An Architecture for Tourism? Urban Design, Segregation, and Informality in the Planning of Cancún

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Abstract

In the late 1960s, the resort city of Cancún—today a world-famous tourist destination—was centrally planned by the Bank of Mexico in an effort to increase the flow of foreign capital into the Mexican economy. The modernist architects Enrique and Agustín Landa played a key role in this development, having designed its urban layout to encourage social cohesion. However, Cancún today is an illustrative example of the severe spatial inequalities commonly associated with modernist city planning. In this paper, I investigate the history of Cancún's spatial design, challenging the oft-repeated claim that the Landa architects overlooked working-class housing in their plan for the city. Instead, I use previously unexamined architectural documents to show that the working class was included in Cancún's initial plan. I argue that the present-day clustering of so-called “informal,” working-class housing north of downtown Cancún was not the result of an omission in the city's design, but rather a self-organized response to the developers' negligence to enforce the city's original plan.

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Introduction

In the 1960s, following a period of rapid industrialization, the Mexican economy experienced growing pains. The Banco de México, Mexico's central bank, began to seek a new development strategy that could capture foreign currencies, develop unproductive regions, and relocate people from the nation's overcrowded center to its coastal peripheries. This coincided with a rise in international tourism caused by postwar prosperity and increased access to

commercial aviation. The Banco de México proposed building new tourist centers, called *Centros Integralmente Planeados* (“Comprehensively Planned Centers,” or CIPs) to attract U.S. travelers. The Banco de México chose eastern Yucatán for its pilot site, as it offered natural beauty, proximity to the eastern seaboard of the U.S., and lacked opportunities for other types of development. This led to the transformation of a remote and scarcely populated island into the present-day tourist metropolis of Cancún. For the Banco de México, the project was a resounding economic success, yet Cancún's meteoric growth has also caused numerous social and environmental issues.

As an architectural site, Cancún is severely understudied. Yet, as local historian Tiziana Roma suggests,¹ Cancún—a city built by Mexicans in the 1970s, rather than by the Spanish in the 16th century—offers an unparalleled case study of 20th-century Mexican urbanism that warrants critical examination. Recent critiques of Cancún's urban planning, both journalistic² and scholarly,³ correctly point out the severity of sociospatial segregation in the city and the dearth of essential services available in the “informal” settlements along Cancún's northern axis. However, they fail to explain why these settlements exist and continue to grow, wrongly assuming that the city's master plan simply did not account for working-class housing. Furthermore, these critiques rely on the uncontested category of the “informal,” a typology of urban space defined only in contrast to the “formal” and thus uncritically conflated with poverty and illegality.

In what follows, I trace the origin of sociospatial segregation in Cancún through an analysis of previously unexamined plans by the city's architects. I argue that segregation in Cancún was planned, not accidental, reframing the settlement of Cancún's northern periphery as a self-organized response to the deliberate deregulation of land designated for popular housing. I do this with three goals: 1) to assert Cancún's place as a site of theoretical importance for studying capitalist urbanization; 2) to contest the definition of urban informality, expanding on Ananya Roy's concept of the “informal city;” and 3) to shed new light on the Indigenous urbanism of Cancún's Franja Ejidal, an urgent prerequisite for imagining a more just city.

The Landa Brothers: Architects of Mexican Modernization

The plan for Cancún was designed by Mexico City architects Enrique and Agustín Landa Verdugo. Both were graduates, and later professors, of the School of Architecture at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and ran a joint practice, Landa Arquitectos y Asociados, until 1986.⁴ The Landa architects worked extensively in public works, particularly in large-scale public housing developments

commissioned by the federal government in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ Despite being among the most prolific 20th-century Mexican architects, having produced more than 600 realized designs,⁶ the Landa brothers' work is seldom included in historical surveys of modernist Mexican architecture. Their work, in the words of Pablo Landa Ruiloba, grandson of Agustín Landa Verdugo, gave “form to the institutions and public programs that sustained the Mexican middle class” in the mid-century period of economic prosperity known as the Mexican Miracle.⁷ The Landa brothers' architecture, with its express use of modernist design principles, materially linked the country's peripheries (whose architectural landscapes hitherto remained colonial in style) to the aggressive push toward modernization emanating from the nation's capital. In so doing, it established and announced the presence of the state throughout the full extent of Mexico's territory, presaging the physical arrival of government technocrats in the peripheral territory of Quintana Roo, where Cancún would soon be built.⁸

Before Cancún was built, Quintana Roo was regarded as the Mexican “frontier of civilization,”⁹ in the words of the military dictator Porfirio Díaz. In the latter half of the 19th century, it had been the epicenter of the Caste War, a protracted conflict between the indigenous Maya population and the mostly white *hacendados* (plantation owners).¹⁰ Throughout the 20th century, Quintana Roo maintained closer commercial ties to British Honduras than to Mexico City, and it garnered the geopolitical interest of the United States, given its strategic proximity to Cuba and shipping routes to the Panama Canal.¹¹ Eager to colonize the territory and stave off foreign influence, the government of Mexico prioritized developing the coast of Quintana Roo and chose it as the pilot CIP site.

In addition to its geopolitical challenges, the site also had unique natural assets: ample shorelines, agreeable weather, and an island with a conveniently linear geography (see Figure 1). The linearity of Cancún was ideal for a beach resort, as it could be fragmented into a series of beachfront plots on the island and a population center on the mainland. For FONATUR, the Banco de México's tourist development arm, this fragmentation was an asset, as its guidelines stipulated that CIP sites should use functional zoning to separate areas for tourism, housing and services, and ecological preserves.¹² Notably, this zoning scheme is characteristic of modernist urban planning, appearing in the influential 1933 Charter of Athens published by the International Congresses of Modern Architecture.¹³ In other words, the separation of land uses—and, by extension, the spatial segregation of tourists and workers—was required by FONATUR and influential in its selection of and intervention into the site. These criteria spawned a system of spatial organization that divided Cancún's mainland

into a city of *supermanzanas* (superblocks), linked to the airport and the Hotel Zone by today's Boulevard Kukulcán.



Figure 1. Map of Cancún island and surrounding physical features. Author's own work.

Supermanzanas and the Spatial Logic of Segregation

Urban space in mainland Cancún is governed by a system of *supermanzanas*, or superblocks.¹⁴ The concept of *supermanzanas* descends from the Mexican Miracle-era designs of modernist urbanists like Mario Pani, Domingo García Ramos, and José Luis Cuevas Pietrasana, who were in turn influenced by American and European architects, notably the Swiss designer Le Corbusier. These architects' plans, which were systematically deployed by public institutions throughout Mexico's midcentury period of economic growth, were characterized by their enclosure, replicability, scalability, and their integration of housing alongside social services and amenities. In Cancún, where the *supermanzana* is the basic unit of spatial ordering, each *supermanzana* is enclosed by a perimeter, around a mile in length, of high-volume arterial roads. A series of U-shaped, one-way internal streets (*retornos*) distribute traffic from arterial roads into the *supermanzana* while disallowing through-traffic, thus encouraging walking within and between *supermanzanas*. *Retornos* are surrounded by medium-density residential buildings, which originally house skilled workers (engineers, surveyors, and architects) during the construction of Cancún. The center of each *supermanzana* is reserved for services and amenities such as schools, hospitals, markets, or parks. This plan intended to foster neighborly ties by giving each *supermanzana* an “inward feeling and a recognizable coherence.”¹⁵

However, this spatial logic is limited to Cancún's middle-class downtown, an area today known as the Zona Fundacional (“Foundational Zone”); a large portion of the city, as it extends north and west into the mainland, did not follow the same growth pattern. In the Franja Ejidal, an

area populated primarily by working-class migrants, this spatial differentiation took hold in the earliest stages of Cancún's development: in 1979, a mere nine years after Cancún was founded, one observer noted that impoverished migrants coming from elsewhere in the Yucatán were settling an area called Colonia Puerto Juárez (from which the Franja Ejidal grew out), as they were unable to afford housing in downtown Cancún.¹⁶ The city's official historian, Fernando Martí, would later claim that the cause of this divergence was the migrant workers' disorderly and informal occupation of land held by FONATUR or the local *ejidos* (a type of agricultural commons owned by the state), going as far as to call it an "invasion."¹⁷ However, as described in the following section, this characterization is problematized by the fact that the Landa architects' original plan to house the working class were never realized, leaving migrant workers in need of housing with scarce alternatives. Furthermore, decades of policing of these so-called "informal" settlements, alongside widespread impunity for illegal developments elsewhere, call into question the category of "informal" itself.

Informality and Class in the Urbanism of the Franja Ejidal

Recently, critics of the Landa plan have argued that it was designed to accommodate only the tourist elite and technocratic middle class while overlooking the working class—today made up of tourist-sector migrant workers—whose labor sustains the economy of the city.¹⁸ However, comparing the original plan with its later iterations shows that this spatialized exclusion was a deliberate design choice; doing so allows us to understand the settlement of the Franja Ejidal not as an invasion, but a creative response to design constraints and development pressures. By regarding the Franja Ejidal's history with greater nuance, what is revealed is that migrant labor was integral not only to the construction of Cancún's resorts, but also to the production of the city itself.

The 1968 Landa plan (see Figure 2), the earliest extant version of Cancún's master plan, included dedicated working-class housing as part of a design that separated residential districts by economic class. In the plan, "popular" housing is distinct and separate from middle-class housing, shown in differently colored blocks. This design was never realized, giving way early on to the migrant workers' settlements that evolved into today's Franja Ejidal, in the area originally designated for formal working-class housing. Today, the Franja Ejidal follows a conventional grid layout, in contrast to the *supermanzanas* of the middle-class downtown. Two decades later, a 1982 plan (see Figure 3) of mainland Cancún showed urbanization in the Franja Ejidal (labeled "Col. Puerto Juarez") beginning to outpace development in downtown Cancún.



Figure 2. The 1968 master plan for Cancún by Enrique and Agustín Landa Verdugo. Reproduced from Landa Ruiloba (2023). Dark brown blocks are designated "middle housing" areas, while taupe blocks are designated "popular housing" areas.



Figure 3. The 1982 plan of mainland Cancún. Reproduced from a 1982 brochure published by FONATUR.

If the area now known as the Franja Ejidal was originally designated for popular housing, then the area's settlement by migrant workers was not the accidental result of a shortcoming in the Landa plan. Rather, the proliferation of working-class housing in today's Franja Ejidal was, indeed, the plan; what is not accounted for in this plan is the developers' unwillingness to enact a design for workers' housing that would integrate it, at least in terms of its spatial logic, with the rest of the city. In other words, working-class residents were—by design—always meant to cluster north of downtown Cancún. Rather than being the result of ungovernable settlement, the forms that urbanization in the Franja Ejidal took emerged as a self-organized response to the developers' negligence to build according to plan. Bianet Castellanos describes the development of the

Franja Ejidal, through grassroots tactics such as squatting and occupation of *ejido* land, as a form of “indigenous urbanism” that continues to reshape the “utopic vision” of the Landa plan.¹⁹

The contested nature of development in Cancún’s Franja Ejidal calls into question the category of “informality” often used to describe it. While urban informality is often conflated with poverty and illegality, Ananya Roy theorizes informality as a broader type of governance that selectively enforces, or fails to enforce, urban planning.²⁰ According to Roy, in informal cities or states where urbanization (in wealthy and impoverished areas alike) routinely violates planning codes, the distinction between “formality” and “informality” is deployed along axes of class and race to maximize the state’s ability to flexibly and profitably govern its land and populace.²¹ For instance, the state can provide corporate investors with “geobribes,” creating zones of exception where development is de facto immune to code enforcement.²²

In Cancún’s Hotel Zone, an illustrative example of a zone of exception, municipal authorities routinely fail to enforce the Federal Maritime Land Zone law, which supposedly shields the 20-meter strip of land adjacent to the seashore from private ownership and development. Meanwhile, construction in impoverished areas like the Franja Ejidal is subject to policing, extortion, or kept as an expendable territorial reserve to be later exploited via eminent domain. Indeed, hotel developers in Cancún’s Hotel Zone frequently flaunt the law, receiving only moderate fines for unauthorized construction and environmental damage that, in the Franja Ejidal, could result in eviction or legal punishment.²³ Furthermore, when the Senate of Mexico approved a constitutional amendment enshrining the universal right to access the beach, Cancún’s Hotel Association declared that they would disobey the law and continue to restrict access through their beach-adjacent properties.²⁴ Meanwhile, decades-old dwellings and businesses in Puerto Juárez (the beachfront portion of the Franja Ejidal) are gentrified or demolished to make space for all-inclusive resorts.

Conclusion

The history of development in Cancún stands not only as a cautionary tale of the social costs of modernist urban planning in Latin America, but as an illustrative example of how capitalist urbanization maps class and racial difference onto the physical landscape. Cancún’s development massively mobilized national and international capital, turning the remote coast of eastern Yucatán into a major node in the global tourist economy. Yet more than 50 years

after it was founded, Cancún’s utopic plan has given way to a city beleaguered by deepening social and spatial inequalities.

As tourism continues to engulf landscapes and populations into its ever-expanding basis of capital accumulation, it is critical to examine how the built environment of tourist cities perpetuates these inequalities. While Cancún’s Landa plan is celebrated for its approach to sustainability and social cohesion, its system of class segregation leaves most neighborhoods in Cancún vulnerable to insecurity, displacement, and environmental degradation. This spatial inequality is compounded by the informal city’s selective enforcement of its planning code, which allows hotels to operate with relative impunity while threatening working-class residents with policing, extortion, and eviction.

Critically examining the built environment, then, becomes not only a scholarly exercise but an urgent prerequisite for imagining better, more just cities. Future scholarship on Cancún should continue to excavate the Landa architects’ archive, which will soon open to the public, to continue examining how inequality is embedded into their plans; at the same time, we must attend to the voices of local residents and indigenous and migrant workers who already engage in resistance through a continuous process of reimagining and remaking the city.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Cancún (también) es México*. | Tiziana Roma | TEDx Cancún.
- ² Hernández Ruiz, “El otro Cancún.”
- ³ Castellanos, *Indigenous Dispossession*, 15.
- ⁴ Landa Ruiloba, “El fondo Enrique y Agustín Landa Verdugo en el Acervo de Arquitectura Mexicana de la Facultad de Arquitectura de la UNAM,” 57.
- ⁵ _____, “Enrique y Agustín Landa Verdugo, Arquitectos Del Desarrollo Estabilizador En México,” 9.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁷ Landa Ruiloba, “El fondo Enrique y Agustín Landa Verdugo en el Acervo de Arquitectura Mexicana de la Facultad de Arquitectura de la UNAM,” 58.
- ⁸ _____, “Enrique y Agustín Landa Verdugo, Arquitectos Del Desarrollo Estabilizador En México,” 2; Landa Ruiloba, “El fondo Enrique y Agustín Landa Verdugo en el Acervo de Arquitectura Mexicana de la Facultad de Arquitectura de la UNAM,” 64.
- ⁹ Careaga Viliesid, “Forjadores de identidad,” 46.
- ¹⁰ Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatán*.
- ¹¹ Arnáiz Burne and César Dachary, *Geopolítica, recursos naturales y turismo*, 14, 245.
- ¹² Schjetnan G., “The Cancun Strip,” 493–95.
- ¹³ Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, “La Charte d’Athenes.”
- ¹⁴ A comic illustrating the concept of *supermanzanas* can be found at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211202193630/https://landasuberville.com/comic8/>.
- ¹⁵ Schjetnan G., “The Cancun Strip,” 496.
- ¹⁶ García de Fuentes, *Cancún, Turismo y Subdesarrollo Regional*, 105.
- ¹⁷ Martí, *Cancún fantasía de banqueros*, 202.

- 18 Hernández Ruiz, “El otro Cancún.”
- 19 Castellanos, *Indigenous Dispossession*, 17.
- 20 Roy, “Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities,” 76–77.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 80–81.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 79.
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Music on the Margins: The Preservation of Musical Heritage in Working-Class Communities Through Class-Conscious Community Archiving

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Abstract

This article proposes a class-conscious framework for preserving musical heritage in working-class communities, emphasizing the economic and structural barriers that determine whose cultural memory is preserved. It argues that the ephemerality of music in these communities reflects not a lack of value but a lack of access to preservation tools and institutional support. Through a comparative analysis of three archival models—a university-backed initiative in Urbana-Champaign, a community-led digital archive in Manchester, and informal Facebook memory groups—the paper explores how legitimacy, labor, and material conditions shape practices of remembrance. Drawing on archival theory and a class critique, it advocates for a low-cost, decentralized, and emotionally responsive approach to archiving. By validating informal and affective forms of memory, such as flyers, oral histories, and recollections, the essay challenges traditional archival standards and calls for more inclusive, sustainable methods of cultural preservation grounded in material realities and communal care.

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Introduction

Growing up in a working-class immigrant household, I went to countless local music shows that left no trace. Sometimes, a band would announce, “We’re going to play an original tonight! It’s not out anywhere.” Though this was exciting to hear, I was likewise mournful knowing I might never hear that song again. In a hypercommodified world, without recordings, the music often disappeared. And over time, so did my memory of it.

Most music is ephemeral—but in working-class communities, that ephemerality becomes systemic loss. What gets remembered is shaped not just by cultural value, but by who has the means to preserve it. The musical lives of working-class communities often go undocumented not because they lack significance, but because preservation requires resources that are often out of reach.

This paper encourages a class-conscious approach to community music archiving. Drawing on archival theory and class critique, I examine three models of memory work: the Urbana-Champaign Local Music Preservation Initiative (an institutional project), the Manchester Digital Music Archive (a community-led, semi-formal initiative), and Facebook groups that preserve South Florida’s music history through informal, affective storytelling. I adopt Paul Long’s understanding of Les Roberts and Sara Cohen’s typology of “authorized,” “self-authorized,” and “unauthorized” practices devoted to popular music to explore how legitimacy, labor, and material access shape what musical memory survives.¹

I argue that musical heritage must be preserved through more than just recordings. Performances, oral histories, show flyers, affective attachments—all of these are equally valid forms of preservation, though vulnerable to loss when economic precarity limits the means of preservation. I propose a low-cost, decentralized framework for archiving musical culture that values informal and emotionally driven memory work. This essay does not claim that class-conscious community music archives already exist in full—but that they must. In proposing their possibility, I offer a critique of existing archival frameworks and a vision for a more equitable and inclusive preservation of musical heritage—one rooted in love, memory, and material conditions.

Today's Community Music Archives, in Theory and Practice

Community archives emerged as a critical response to the exclusionary practices of traditional archives, offering a grassroots approach to archiving that archival scholars such as Andrew Flinn, Anne Gilliland, Michelle Caswell, and Marika Cifor have emphasized not only democratize access to preservation, but challenge dominant forms of archival authority by centering affective labor, autonomy, and collective ownership.² While scholars still debate the meaning of the word “community,” I choose to keep the definition intentionally broad to emphasize diversity and variety within community-led archives rather than be prescriptive and dogmatic, and to resist institutional frameworks that define who qualifies as a community.

Much of the scholarship on the significance of community archives has focused on identity-based marginalization, often underexamining how economic inequality shapes what memory gets preserved. Drawing on Marxist cultural theory and scholars such as Achille Mbembe, this essay positions capitalism not as a backdrop but as a structuring force: the economic precarity of working-class communities directly limits their capacity to preserve cultural memory.³ Archival gaps, in this view, are not accidental—they are embedded in systems of exclusion, shaped by who has the time, resources, or access to engage in preservation work. Music is especially vulnerable, as its ephemerality and emotional resonance is difficult to preserve without recording equipment, technical infrastructure, or institutional support. Further, as Cuk and Long et al. have argued, the emotional labor that sustains music archives is often unsustainable, masking structural vulnerabilities such as burnout or lack of funding.⁴ Still, the impulse to preserve persists, especially in communities for whom cultural memory acts as both resistance and survival.

To explore how economic precarity and class shape musical memory work, I examine three community archiving models through Paul Long et al.'s typology of “authorized,” “self-authorized,” and “unauthorized” heritage practices. These case studies—the Urbana-Champaign Local Music Preservation Initiative, the Manchester Digital Music Archive, and informal Facebook groups—showcase the varying degrees of access, sustainability, and power embedded in different forms of preservation.

Urbana-Champaign Local Music Preservation Initiative

Launched in 2013 by the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois, the Urbana-Champaign Local Music Preservation Initiative (UCLMPI) was designed to document and preserve the region's music scene through oral histories, local documentation, and community engagement.⁵ Its foundation in

institutional resources gave it access to archival expertise, digitization tools, and formal infrastructure. As an “authorized” heritage project, UCLMPI benefited from legitimacy and stability—at least initially.

The initiative has since stagnated. Its Facebook presence hasn't been updated since 2018, and dead links litter its web presence. This decline reveals the fragility of archives tethered to institutional priorities. When university funding or attention wanes, the archive falters. It also raises questions about inclusion: how accessible is a university-based archive to local working-class musicians who may lack formal affiliations? While the initiative sought to center community voices, its institutional roots may have unintentionally skewed participation toward those already closer to academic or cultural capital.

The Manchester Digital Music Archive

The Manchester Digital Music Archive (MDMA), founded in 2003, is a contrasting model. A digital project and registered charity, MDMA invites global users to upload memories, flyers, photos, and reflections on Manchester's music scenes. It explicitly rejects hierarchies of value, encouraging anyone, from fans to musicians, to define what counts as heritage.⁶ Projects have included exhibitions on queer club culture, immigrant musicians, and anti-gentrification struggles.

Its transparency fosters a sense of ownership and has generated a robust digital community. However, the archive also reveals important limitations, particularly when viewed through a class-conscious lens. Although anyone can contribute, doing so assumes a level of digital literacy, Internet access, and free time not afforded to all. These requirements, while invisible, function as barriers that disproportionately (though maybe unintentionally) exclude those in economically precarious positions. Within Long et al.'s typology, MDMA represents a “self-authorized heritage model”: a grassroots, volunteer-driven project that has carved out institutional recognition while maintaining autonomy from state authority. Its success demonstrates the power of participatory archiving but also exposes the structural inequalities that limit who can fully participate.

Moreover, the MDMA's success may be shaped in part by Manchester's status as a culturally rich, historically significant urban center. Though not an explicit fault of the city nor the archive, Manchester's long-standing infrastructure of venues, record shops, and music press has generated a surplus of collectible materials, resources unavailable in smaller cities or working-class suburbs. What would a similar archive look like in a place with fewer tech-savvy volunteers and less cultural capital or digital infrastructure? Would the same crowd-sourced model thrive? The MDMA offers a radical

model of participatory archiving, but its class dynamics remain complex. Questions arise about who gets to participate in digital memory-making and who gets left out.

Facebook Groups

Facebook groups dedicated to preserving music memories celebrate and share memories about a musical genre, heritage, and an artist. By “music memories,” I refer to the recollections, emotions, and community attachments associated with musical experiences, whether or not they were formally documented. The existence of these Facebook groups challenges the notion that musical heritage is ephemeral, thus unimportant and trivial as culture.⁷ Members of that community desire to participate in the creation of their own histories and they demand respect and recognition by creating a space to do so.

Scholars have rightfully critiqued attempts to preserve history and create a personal digital archive on social media platforms.⁸ As they make clear, Facebook groups are not the ideal community archive since they exist on a platform that is heavily regulated by a larger corporation. Posts may be deleted, accounts removed, and platform structures changed without notice. There are often no formal organizational or retrieval methods for research. While social media enables everyday users to record their memories, it also holds those memories under terms that users do not control, limiting long-term access and archival durability.

Facebook groups are thus “unauthorized” practices. But they can also be understood as a form of unintentional and everyday archiving—those practicing memory-sharing and preserving musical heritage do not view themselves as being involved with history, heritage, or the archive. This phenomenon is a form of archival desire, where people instinctively feel the need to preserve despite lacking formal archival tools or training.⁹ These groups may not adopt archival language, but they operate archivally, especially in working-class communities where no formal music archive exists. Individuals are not passively waiting to be remembered, they are doing the work of remembering themselves. While they may never be “archives” in the institutional sense, they challenge the idea that preservation must be formal to be meaningful.

Toward a Class-Conscious Archival Framework

A class-conscious framework for preserving musical heritage does not place more value on recordings, but on the histories of love, struggle, and solidarity that music carries within a community. Rather than attempting to determine a universal standard of what “should” be preserved, this framework begins with the understanding that recording every performance or producing exhaustive

documentation is neither feasible nor desirable for working-class communities. It instead insists that preservation should center the forms of memory that people already create, forms historically dismissed by traditional musicological and archival methods—oral histories, flyers, setlists, recollections, and the emotional narratives attached to musical experiences. These forms reflect the material realities of communities with limited access to recording technologies and institutional support.

If musical memory can be preserved through methods that do not demand wealth or institutional access, it sets a precedent for how other forms of cultural heritage can be preserved more equitably. There is value in articulating principles that can guide more just and inclusive preservation efforts, especially when it comes to the fleeting, communal nature of music. The following is not a fixed model but a set of guiding considerations—particularly for those attempting to preserve musical heritage in working-class communities. It aims to offer strategies that recognize music’s ephemeral nature, center material realities, and support sustainable, accessible memory work.

1. *Validate Ephemeral Forms*

When documenting music, archives should welcome memory forms beyond recordings: oral histories, concert flyers, handwritten lyrics, ticket stubs, setlists, playlists, recollections of performances, and emotional impressions. Performance itself can also be a record.

2. *Prioritize Low-Cost Preservation*

Preservation should not depend on expensive recording equipment or professional-grade archives. Affordable, DIY methods—zines, phone recordings, community exhibits—must be legitimized as serious archival practices.

3. *Expand Access Beyond the Digitally Literate*

Assume that not all contributors have access to high-speed internet, professional software, or academic platforms. Class-conscious archives should accept analog contributions, verbal storytelling, and low-tech documentation.

4. *Acknowledge Emotional Labor and Consent*

Archivists must recognize that sharing musical memories, especially those tied to working-class struggle or loss, can involve emotional labor. Contributors must have the ability to redact, refuse, or limit their participation without penalty.

5. *Foster a Decentralized, Multiplicity-Driven Approach to Preservation*

Rather than centralizing materials into a single site, encourage multiple small-scale archives: personal

collections, social media pages, and neighborhood zines. Multiplicity increases resilience and disperses custodianship across the community.

6. *Respect Existing Grassroots Archives*

Institutions and professionals should recognize that many informal projects are already doing vital archival work. Rather than imposing professional standards or institutional models, archivists should offer support that respects the autonomy, informality, and cultural specificity of these grassroots archives.

7. *Contextualize Within Local and Cultural Norms*

Not all communities value permanence. Archivists must respect local norms around memory, loss, and what deserves to be kept.

If preservation frameworks are built with economic realities, emotional attachments, and cultural self-determination at their core, they can begin to redress the historic exclusions of traditional archives. Class-conscious musical archiving is about honoring the right to remember, the right to document joy and resistance, and the right to define history on one's own terms.

Conclusion

The preservation of local musical heritage is more than an archival task. It is a labor of love, an act of care, and an emotional investment. In working-class communities, where formal records are often scarce and musical memories are preserved in fragments of memory, flyers, and oral stories, the work of remembering demands intention. Without equitable preservation methods, the cultural contributions of these communities risk being systematically erased—not because they lack value, but because they lack institutional power. As this essay has shown, the challenges of documenting working-class musical culture are not simply logistical—they are rooted in structural inequalities that determine whose histories are worth saving.

Through a comparative analysis of the Urbana-Champaign Local Music Preservation Initiative, the Manchester Digital Music Archive, and Facebook memory groups, this article has illustrated both the possibilities and limits of current community music archiving models. Each model offers important lessons, but none fully resolve the class dynamics at the heart of preservation work.

Musical heritage is marked by ephemerality. Yet this impermanence does not make working-class culture any less meaningful. Music's transience exposes the limits of archival frameworks that privilege the tangible and institutionally recognized. A class-conscious approach centers autonomy, transparency, and care. It calls for low-cost methods,

validation of emotional forms of memory, and practices that do not depend on unpaid labor. The future of music archiving must remain inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of economic class. In striving for this future, we take a crucial step toward a more equitable and culturally rich world.

Endnotes

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- 9 Joyce Gabiola et al., "It's a Trap!: Complicating Representation in Community-Based Archives," *The American Archivist* 85, no. 1 (July 1, 2022): 60–87, <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-85.1.60>, p. 76.

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Love You to Pieces: How Religiosity and Generational Status Shape Lao and Thai American Perceptions of Sacrifice in Organ Donation

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Shayla graduated summa cum laude from Whittier College in 2025, balancing soccer and academics as a scholar-athlete who majored in sociology and minored in public health. She is applying to graduate programs in sociology and anthropology, hoping to eventually earn a PhD and become a professor, writer, and storyteller who shares Asian (American) perspectives on death, dying, and religion.

Abstract

Lao and Thai elders opposed to organ donation believe that the loss of a body part in their current lives will cause them to be born without that body part in their next lives. This belief is attributed to religion, as Buddhist reincarnation implies that an individual should make the right decisions in their current lifetime to benefit their next lifetime. While organ donation is viewed as a righteous deed by much of the American public, many Laotians and Thais are resistant to donating because it would fail to preserve the integrity of their incarnations. Understanding such notions of death and the afterlife expands organ donation scholarship by encouraging audiences to consider narratives where the relationship between one's present and future extends to one's current life and future incarnation. So, how does the belief of a missing body part persisting across lifetimes shape Lao and Thai American views on organ donation? How does this belief shape their understandings of sacrifice across immigrant generations? I conducted 20 interviews with Lao and Thai Americans and found that the value of sacrifice in organ donation is determined by the value an individual places in Buddhist beliefs of reincarnation, which declines across generations.

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Introduction

Many Lao and Thai elders find a religious dilemma in organ donation, believing that the loss of a body part in their current lives will result in the absence of that same body part in their next lives (Trompeta et al. 2012; Langford 2013). This reasoning is often attributed to religion, as the Buddhist principles of karma and reincarnation assert that the karma generated by one's actions will determine their progression in the cycle of rebirth (McCormick 2013). Lao and Thai immigrants in the U.S. may be reluctant to participate in organ donation due to these cultural beliefs. Since the cultural values passed from parents to their children may deviate from the values these parents learned in their country of origin, I ask: How does religiosity and generational status influence Lao and Thai American perceptions of sacrifice in organ donation? How does the notion of sacrifice vary across immigrant generations?

Few studies on organ donation consider the views of Asian Americans across generations, let alone the views of Lao and Thai Americans. The present study aims to contribute to the academic discussion on organ donation by using qualitative interview data to analyze how Buddhist religiosity and generational status shapes Lao and Thai American attitudes towards the procedure. I argue that the value of sacrifice in organ donation is determined by the value an individual places in the Buddhist afterlife of reincarnation, which varies across generations of Lao and Thai Americans. Donation is a greater sacrifice for first and 1.5 generation Lao and Thai Americans because they value a complete body in their future lifetimes, while donation implies less sacrifice for their second-generation counterparts because they feel more indifferent towards their next lives.

Applying Social Learning and Social Exchange Theory to Organ Donation

In studies focused on the influence of race and culture on organ donation, Lao and Thai Americans are absent or grouped into the broader categorization of Asian Americans (Trompeta et al. 2012; Morgan, Kenten, and Deedat 2013; Alolod et al. 2022). My study begins to address this lacuna by studying Lao and Thai American attitudes toward organ donation.

I use social learning and social exchange theory to guide my data analysis. Social learning proposes that "new patterns of behaviors can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others" (Bandura and Walters 1977:3). Lao and Thai immigrants who raise

American-born children expose this second generation of Lao and Thai Americans to different agents of social learning than they would in Laos or Thailand.

Social exchange theory examines interactions between people and ascribes value to social exchanges. According to Simmel ([1900] 2011), a sacrifice is made when an object is given up in exchange for another. If a greater sacrifice must be made to acquire an object, then the exchange holds greater value (Beidelman 1989). In organ donation, a donor is sacrificing part of their body in exchange for emotional fulfillment. The value of this exchange must be weighed by the potential donor, as they are providing the recipient with a piece of their life force for nothing physically rewarding in return. This applies to both postmortem and living donation since the impact of organ donation can be believed to extend beyond one's life. Organ donation, which is a process that procures an organ from one body and integrates it into another, is corporeal in nature. The nature of this process is not solely physical for everyone and the spiritual implications of organ donation are often overlooked in sociological discussions. While the physical effects of organ donation are objective, the meta-physical consequences are subjective since they can be perceived differently across cultures.

Methodology

Across fourteen months, I conducted 20 interviews ranging from 30 to 70 minutes with eleven Lao Americans, five Thai Americans, and four Lao-Thai Americans. Interviews took place after I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in October 2023 to interview human subjects; once approved, I recruited participants using social media and snowball sampling. Eight participants were foreign-born: two were first generation Americans that immigrated as adults, while six participants were 1.5 generation Americans that grew up in America after immigrating to the United States as children or adolescents. Twelve participants were American-born, second generation Americans. Eight participants identified as Buddhist, six identified with the areligious umbrella term, and five identified as Christian; one participant identified as both Christian and Buddhist. Table 1 displays the key characteristics of each participant.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Generation	Country of Birth	Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation
Milii	46	Woman	1.5	Laos	Lao	Christian and Buddhist
Maguoy	57	Man	1.5	Laos	Lao	Areligious, but believes in Buddha
Plumeria	21	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao/Mexican	Areligious
Oua Si Khai	25	Man	2	U.S.	Lao/Irish	Atheist
Naw Mai	33	Man	2	U.S.	Lao	Agnostic
Phoenix	24	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao/Hmong	Areligious, but believes in God
Jasmine	21	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao	Buddhist
Sago Palm	35	Man	2	U.S.	Lao	Buddhist
Lily	20	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao	Christian
Lotus	22	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao	Christian
Evelyniana	21	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao	Christian
Cassia	53	Woman	1	Thailand	Thai	Buddhist
Ratchaphruek	59	Woman	1.5	Thailand	Thai	Buddhist
Fig	21	Woman	1.5	Thailand	Thai	Buddhist
Marigold	20	Woman	1.5	Thailand	Thai	Areligious
Som Tam	20	Woman	2	U.S.	Thai/European	Christian
Galphimia	49	Woman	1	Thailand	Lao/Thai	Buddhist
Liana	53	Woman	1.5	Laos	Lao/Thai/ Chinese	Buddhist
Dok Khun	19	Woman	2	U.S.	Lao/Thai	Buddhist
Tulip	19	Gender non-conforming	2	U.S.	Lao/Thai	Christian

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

I transcribed all interviews then created handwritten mind-map diagrams to have summaries of participant responses at a glance. I organized mind-maps according to ethnicity, generational status, country of birth, and religious identity to identify major themes from the data. I specifically highlight two participants in this paper, Maguoy and Dok Khun, because they are representative of the patterns I found. Presenting their stories alongside each other reveals how Lao and Thai culture, especially in the form of Buddhist religiosity, influences organ donation attitudes across immigrant generations.

Perceived Sacrifice of Organ Donation Varies Across Immigrant Generations

In living organ donation, donors must consider the value of sacrificing an organ for nothing physical in return. If someone donates a kidney, for example, the kidney is exchanged for emotional gain. Postmortem donation presents a similar prospect of sacrifice when a donor places high value in their afterlife. Organ donation presents high stakes for Laotians and Thais who believe that losing a body part in this life will impact their next life. My findings reveal how the value of organ donation is determined by the perceived sacrifices, which differs across immigrant generations of Lao and Thai Americans.

For some participants, organ donation presents high stakes because of its spiritual consequences: a person who relinquishes part of their body in this lifetime may retain an incomplete body in their next life. Despite this, participants conscious of this risk were willing to donate to immediate family members. Participants who were parents, especially 1.5 generation immigrants, expressed a willingness to make the physical sacrifice of organ donation for their children.

For example, Maguoy—a stout, freckle-faced man—is a 1.5 generation Lao American who takes such pride in his children that the crinkles near his eyes grow when he speaks about them. He is familiar with taking risks for a better future, as he swam across the Mekong River from Laos to Thailand to flee the turmoil of war before immigrating to America. He is not a registered organ donor and does not consider himself religious. Despite this, Maguoy says that he believes in the Buddha and his resistant attitude towards organ donation draws on the Buddhist principle of reincarnation. This is particularly apparent when Maguoy explains why he was against the amputation of his diabetic father's leg and the possibility of donating his father's organs postmortem:

[He] know that he's going to go already, right? And he also wanted—what he believe [for the] afterlife. He want to come back with the whole body part. He don't want to be missing leg and you know, stuff like that... when you reborn, you want to—you know—be born with all your body parts.

Out of respect for his father's religious beliefs and his own belief in reincarnation, Maguoy opposed the removal of his father's leg because of the impact he believes it to have on his father's next life. Likewise, Maguoy opposes the donation of his own organs because of the impact it could have on his next life: although he will not have the same body as he does in his current life, there is a risk of having an incomplete body in his next life. Recalling Bandura and Walters' social learning theory, behaviors are learned through direct experience or the observation of someone else's behavior. Maguoy not only considers his father's views of the afterlife to inform his decision making, but he also adopts his father's views to rationalize his opposition to organ donation. His father's life is at stake without the amputation of his leg, but his father's next life is also at stake if his leg is amputated. Since Maguoy viewed his father's remaining days on Earth as limited, the preservation of his father's body for his next life prevails over the potential to prolong his father's current lifespan. Maguoy's decision regarding organ donation is influenced by the belief that the loss of a body part in this life will result in the absence of the same body parts in his next life. While previous findings on Lao conceptions of reincarnation have addressed Lao resistance to organ removal (Langford 2013), Maguoy was interestingly the only participant to explicitly attribute his reluctance to donate to this belief.

Although Maguoy has expressed a desire to be reborn with all his body parts, he explained that he is willing to donate to his children if they need them. The love he has for his children and the moral obligations of fatherhood allow him to sacrifice his future lifetime to allow his children—the present manifestations of the lifetimes following his—to continue living. His cultural and religious beliefs, though present in his wariness of organ donation, are sacrificed for his children because his children are current embodiments of his future self: Maguoy's son and daughter are not the same person as Maguoy, but their lineages, legacies, and futures are rooted in the same family tree. For Maguoy, the risk of being reborn in an incomplete body is worth taking if it means that he can continue to care for his children in this lifetime and preserve future generations of his bloodline. This decision would eventually impact his own spirit and future rebirth, but it would immediately benefit the current bodies of his children. In other words, his needs and comfort are secondary to theirs. Consistent with previous findings discussing how a child serves as a parent's

link between the past and future, Maguoy, like other participants who had children of their own, is willing to make sacrifices for his children if it would lead to a better future for them and his bloodline (Cao et al. 2020).

American-born, second-generation participants were more concerned with the present, physical implications of organ donation. Such participants were open to organ donation, agreeing that the loss of a body part in this life would not impact one's afterlife. This may be because few second-generation participants identified with Buddhism, placing little value in religion. Of the eleven second generation participants, only three identified as Buddhist. The three Buddhists stated that they were less religious than their older family members and Buddhist principles were not said to inform their decisions related to organ donation.

For Dok Khun, a 19 year old Lao-Thai American born in the U.S., religion is not a priority. As someone navigating through early adulthood in college, Dok Khun is more concerned with learning the shapes of atomic orbitals and making time for concerts, rather than attempting to reintegrate religion into her life. The circle-rimmed glasses that sat on her face during the interview made her look younger than she is and her Playboy Carti sweatshirt accentuated her youthful approach to the world. Although we discussed heavier topics like death and body disposition, Dok Khun maintained a lighthearted tone.

Considering that adulthood is just beginning for many of my second-generation participants, they are particularly concerned with their current state of being. I noticed that they all spoke in the context of living donation rather than postmortem donation when organ donation was first brought up. When I asked if Dok Khun would be willing to donate to an immediate family member, for example, she answered in the spirit of Slim Shady: "I'll stand up. I'll raise my hand." Her confidence was not reflected in the prospect of donating to a stranger, as she said, "It depends what organ. Lowkey, I'm a weak person, so I think I need both kidneys." Buddhism was not used to explain this hesitancy to donate.

Second-generation participants often considered a parent's beliefs in their decisions about organ donation. Dok Khun keeps her mother, a practicing Buddhist, in mind when it comes to matters concerning death and says, "I'm not against [donation], but my mommy is." Dok Khun does not actively practice Buddhism, nor does she believe in an afterlife, but she stated that she followed her parents to the temple while growing up and still identifies as Buddhist. This Buddhist upbringing is like the experiences shared by other second-generation participants who identified older family members as their reason for attending the temple.

Despite this, Dok Khun disregarded the Buddhist concept of future lifetimes and prioritized her current lifetime: she imagined how organ donation would impact her body in this lifetime rather than the next. She was concerned with her current physical health, though she was not concerned about this in the prospect of donating to an immediate family member. This suggests that the sacrifice of organ donation carries more valuable risk for her immediate family members and the deeper emotional bonds she has with them leads her to view this sacrifice as one she is willing to make. Dok Khun's willingness to donate to immediate family members exemplifies a pattern among second-generation participants to overlook the immaterial consequences of organ donation in order to provide for a loved one.

Conclusion

Participants in this study had varied understandings of sacrifice in organ donation, and first and 1.5 generation Lao and Thai Americans considered what this sacrifice implied for their next lives more than their second-generation counterparts did. Maguoy valued the spiritual, future impacts of organ donation, much like other foreign-born 1.5 generation Lao Americans. Dok Khun, on the other hand, valued the present impacts of donation like other second-generation, American-born participants. Second-generation Lao and Thai Americans did not strongly identify with Buddhism, which contributes to this difference in values. The extent to which social learning takes place within families may be observed in how strongly younger generations identify with the religions of their older relatives. I find that the religious dilemma of organ donation transcending lifetimes depends on the extent to which someone believes in reincarnation. Considering how my participants credit their older relatives for their participation in religious practices, the findings of this study suggest that Lao and Thai Americans keep the beliefs of their parents and grandparents in mind when making decisions related to organ donation.

Future research can use the findings of this study to further explore the relationship between social learning and health behaviors among Lao, Thai, and Asian Americans to understand how cultural beliefs can inform patients' decision-making. This study specifically supplies providers with a better understanding of how Lao and Thai Americans consider and maintain the afterlife beliefs of their foreign-born predecessors, who may believe more in the spiritual aftereffects of one's lifetime than them. Medical providers who understand this relationship can ensure the delivery of more culturally competent care, guide conversations about organ donation, and improve end-of-life experiences.

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“People of Grace”: White Evangelical Pro-Life Civility in U.S. Megachurch Sermons

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Abstract

From the 1970s to the 2016 electoral victory of Donald Trump, white evangelical political involvement, particularly pro-life evangelicalism, has unsettled American sensibilities concerning religion and politics. Scholars have long debated the extent to which pro-life evangelicalism is characterized by civility. Civility, according to sociologist John Cuddihy, entails a commitment to mutual respect and trust in a pluralistic society. Scholars documenting evangelical pro-life civility largely focus on private expressions of civility by mostly lay evangelicals or on civility as a political strategy for evangelical pro-life activists. This literature demonstrates that pro-life civility exists but does not address where it comes from and how it figures into ordinary religious life for white evangelicals. By examining how white megachurch pastors preach on abortion from 2020 to 2024, I find that civility is an integral part of evangelical spiritual formation, rather than solely a marginal or activist mode of evangelical political discourse.

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Introduction

Following the 2016 electoral victory of Donald J. Trump, scholars and journalists turned to white evangelicals to explain the success of the inflammatory political outsider.¹ Attention on this demographic was largely generated by data released by the Pew Research Center that same year. Pew’s report showed that 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump, a larger percentage than what Republican presidential candidates received in the past several elections.² Academic and journalistic interest in white evangelicals persisted even after Pew corrected this figure to

77 percent in later reports—a lower share than what Republican candidates received in 2004 and 2012.³ From the Moral Majority in the 1970s to the present, white evangelical political involvement has unsettled American sensibilities regarding the separation of church and state, the private nature of religion, and toleration. This is especially true regarding pro-life evangelicalism. Anthropologist Omri Elisha writes that abortion is “one of the defining social and political issues for conservative evangelicals.”⁴ However, academics dispute how exactly abortion defines evangelicals. Is pro-life evangelicalism characterized by civility—being both *tolerant* of different views and being *tolerable* towards other communities—and to what extent? This article contributes to this ongoing debate through an analysis of U.S. megachurch sermons delivered from 2020 to 2024.

Drawing on a critical discourse analysis that I conducted of these sermons, I find that pro-life civility is irreducible to either private expression or political strategy, as previous literature suggests. Rather, pro-life civility is advocated by pastors of some of America’s largest evangelical churches. Given the centrality of sermons in evangelical religious life, I argue that civility should be understood as a contested part of evangelical spiritual formation. This carries important implications for how scholars should study white evangelicalism and abortion in particular and forms of religious civility in general.

In the 1970s, sociologist John Cuddihy defined civility in the context of American Protestantism as a commitment to mutual respect in a pluralistic society. Civility, Cuddihy describes, “holds us accountable for our appearances” to other groups.⁵ As James Davison Hunter elaborates, civility demands a “code of social discourse whereby religious beliefs and political convictions are to be expressed discretely [*sic*] and tactfully”⁶ to make oneself more “tolerable to others.”⁷ For Cuddihy, civility also includes assuming “good faith” of those with whom one disagrees.⁸ Thus, civility involves how one presents oneself to others and how one views the motives of others.

That certain streams of evangelical anti-abortionism are characterized by incivility is clear. Evangelical pro-life activist discourse is often abrasive and condemnatory.⁹ The history of pro-life evangelicalism is tainted by the Operation Rescue abortion blockades following *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and extremist violence against abortion clinics and providers.¹⁰ However, some scholars argue that other streams of pro-life evangelicalism are characterized by civility, even as they acknowledge the brashness and violence that pro-life evangelicalism is capable of. This existing research focuses largely on private expressions of pro-life civility by mostly lay evangelicals, which implies that pro-life civility is

marginal in evangelical communities. Additionally, the literature documents civility among evangelical pro-life activists, which implies that civility is merely a political strategy to render anti-abortion arguments more appealing or compelling. This raises questions about where civility originates, how lay and activist evangelicals come to adopt it, and what role civility plays in ordinary evangelical religious life.

Lay and Activist Evangelical Civility

When scholars document expressions of pro-life civility amongst evangelicals, these expressions tend to be private, confined to smaller group meetings or interviews. Some evangelicals will express in interviews that choosing an abortion is a decision between a person and God or that abortion can protect children who would otherwise have been neglected or abused.¹¹ For many evangelicals, moral opposition to abortion is a marker of their evangelical identity. Yet, as sociologist Lydia Bean observes of two white evangelical churches, church members “talked about [abortion,] but focused on personal ministry and behavioral standards within the church, not political action.”¹² They emphasized “open dialogue” and the importance of “love and compassion” when discussing abortion with others.¹³ These evangelicals assume “good faith” of those they disagree with by prioritizing dialogue or even validating the right to bodily autonomy. By downplaying the political and emphasizing the relational, they present their anti-abortionism “discretely and tactfully” to others.

There are rare instances of pastors encouraging pro-life civility, but again in private settings. Elisha recounts an evangelical pastor speaking at a Samaritans of Knoxville meeting. The pastor criticized pro-life ethics that are solely focused on preventing abortions: “We preach against abortion, but we don’t do anything to help the women who we’ve convinced to keep their babies.”¹⁴ The pastor called attention to systemic solutions to address abortion, such as investing in housing for young single mothers. This form of civility broadens evangelical anti-abortionism to include a desire for systemic economic reform similar to the pre-*Roe* New Deal Catholic pro-life movement.¹⁵

There is also significant work on civility as a mode of political strategy for evangelical pro-life activists. Consider Jon Shields’s work on evangelical pro-life activist organizations like Stand to Reason and Justice for All. Shields found that Stand to Reason trains its activists to “avoid scriptural or theological claims in the public square” to make their arguments more publicly accessible.¹⁶ At one Justice for All college campus event, an evangelical pro-life activist helped pro-choice activists install their display. At the event, a pro-choice activist expressed their surprise to Shields that the Justice for All volunteers were “regular kids,” not

“monsters with horns.”¹⁷ This form of civility is a mode of discourse and conduct aimed at rendering pro-life activism more compelling and conciliatory.

Methodology

The aforementioned research on evangelical pro-life civility demonstrates that many evangelicals emphasize dialogue, compassion, and relational engagement towards others. Simultaneously, they expand the pro-life ethic beyond mere opposition to abortion. However, this literature does not shed much light on the origins or dynamics of pro-life civility within ordinary evangelical religious life. Additionally, scholars have not yet documented instances of pro-life civility in white evangelicalism since Trump’s 2016 electoral victory. To fill these *lacunae*, I draw on a broader critical discourse analysis I conducted of U.S. megachurch sermon series topically based on politics. These sermons were delivered from 2020 to 2024. Megachurches are typically nondenominational, theologically conservative Protestant congregations with at least 2,000 weekly attendees. According to Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, megachurches provide “thought leadership” for smaller congregations on pressing social issues like the COVID-19 gathering restrictions during 2020 and 2021.¹⁸ Pastors delivering political sermon series dedicate several weeks to addressing political questions for their congregants instead of delivering one-off sermons on politics. To assemble a body of source material for this project, I sampled political sermon series on YouTube, the world’s largest audio-visual platform. Megachurches commonly post their sermon series to YouTube to share sermon content and the marketing aesthetics that often accompany sermon series. Here, I focus on the four out of the six churches in my sample that are predominantly white and whose pastors substantially discuss abortion in at least one sermon in their series.

Sermons are integral to evangelical religious life. As Gwyneth McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl write, sermons “provide mental maps of how to conceptualize [and] engage with the world materially and socially. Even when not explicitly political, sermons are likely to incline people toward different strategies of political, economic, and social action.”¹⁹ Studying megachurch political sermon series offers insight into influential, intentional evangelical political discourse situated in the period between Trump’s two presidential terms. In these sermons, pastors address congregants’ own questions about abortion, political conversation, and political action by mapping the moral valence of abortion, human nature and action, and how to navigate relationships across political differences.

I employed critical discourse analysis to analyze the sermons, an approach that has proved useful in prior

sermon analyses.²⁰ Critical discourse analysis, as developed by linguist Norman Fairclough, focuses on ideology within texts whether written or verbal. According to Fairclough, texts such as sermons “negotiate social relations between people in circumstances of doubt or contestation” and can assist communities in resolving “the dilemmas they face in defining their own identities.”²¹ Sermons can provide clarity and offer conceptual toolkits that congregants can use to navigate the political world. My research focuses on pastors’ sermonic discourse on abortion, while past literature mostly centers on rank-and-file or activist evangelicals.

Sermon Analysis

Recall that civility requires making oneself “tolerable to others” and assuming “good faith” of those with whom one disagrees. In their sermons, the pastors in my study utilize various strategies to render evangelical anti-abortionism more tolerable to the broader American public. Jonathan Stocksill, senior pastor at Bethany Church in Baker, Louisiana, downplays the political dimension of evangelical opposition to abortion. Stocksill situates anti-abortionism within a broader ethic of care which he argues early Christians embodied towards the unborn, orphans, cultural outsiders, the poor, and persecutors.²² As Stocksill insists, “This is not a political stance.”²³ For Stocksill, opposing abortion is not about enacting legislation, but performing the distinctiveness of the early Christian community relationally.²⁴ His approach strongly parallels the two churches that Bean studied.²⁵ In those churches, moral opposition to abortion was embodied interpersonally, not through political action. Stocksill, however, appeals to a broader ethic of care which links anti-abortionism to multiculturalism and economic justice.

Nate Heitzig, the son of senior pastor Skip Heitzig at Calvary Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, also calls for a more tolerable anti-abortion ethic. The Heitzigs’ vision of political engagement is almost entirely based on the notion that sharing the Christian gospel with others will necessarily improve society. One guiding metaphor for this strategy is the parable of the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). The younger Heitzig explains this parable by pointing out that salt (i.e., the Christian gospel) stings exposed wounds (i.e., other people’s sin). However, he asks the congregation, “Should we be at abortion clinics with signs that [say] ‘murderer’ to girls who walk in? . . . Is that the way that the gospel sting is supposed to interact with reality? I don’t think so. . . . I think in the New Testament you’re going to find the exact opposite.”²⁶ Instead, “we need to share the good news of Christ with the young girl who wants to get an abortion and . . . ask her why she’s feeling that way.”²⁷ Heitzig first distances himself from abrasive

pro-life activism before he, like Stocksill, emphasizes the relational over the political.

Other pastors in my study focus on assuming “good faith” of others in their sermonic maps, especially of women who choose abortion. Matt Brown at Sandals Church in Riverside, California accomplishes this by discussing the story of Rahab, who is introduced in the biblical narrative as a prostitute in the city of Jericho (Joshua 2). Brown points out that God permitted Rahab to choose how to live her life. But God still redeemed her, ultimately integrating Rahab into Jesus’s genealogy. As Brown goes on to say, “We got to remember to love people no matter what they’ve done. . . . And instead of running around as Christians telling women we want to force them what to do with their bodies [*sic*], maybe we need to let them know, ‘We love you and we think there’s a better choice.’”²⁸ Brown distances himself from abrasive pro-life evangelicals who seek to coerce others into refraining from abortion. He instead emphasizes empathy and hope for others even while maintaining a moral opposition to abortion. Like Heitzig, Brown differentiates himself from incivility, then emphasizes the relational over the political.

Matt Nickoson at Kingsway Christian Church in Avon, Indiana recounts that years ago, a couple shared with their small group that they had an abortion. He praised the group’s response. While they did not “make [the abortion] okay,” they also “did not condemn” the couple. They listened while withholding judgment.²⁹ As he tells his congregation, “In a church our size, I can guarantee you there are people among us who’ve had abortions.”³⁰ He emphasizes that while Christians should be morally opposed to abortion, they must also consider cases in which women choose abortion as a result of rape or unplanned pregnancy.³¹ In his sermonic map, Nickoson assigns agency and moral trustworthiness towards people who get abortions.

These sermonic expressions of pro-life civility situate abortion as morally wrong. However, pastors map abortion as a primarily relational, not a political or legislative issue. Furthermore, pastors distance themselves from uncivil forms of anti-abortionism and implicitly or explicitly link their opposition to abortion to other, less explicitly conservative stances such as economic reform. These expressions can be summed up by an exhortation that John Mark Caton at Cottonwood Creek Church in Allen, Texas gives to his congregation: to be “people of grace.”³² Grace here entails a commitment to dialogue, compassion, and understanding, instead of condemning others for their views or actions. In a word, grace is a theological term for civility.

Conclusion

The pastors in my study urge civility when they preach about abortion. By distancing themselves from “outrageous” forms of uncivil evangelical anti-abortionism,³³ these pastors encourage congregants to make themselves more “tolerable to others.” By emphasizing dialogue and appealing to experience, pastors assume “good faith” across political differences. However, this study leaves one important question unanswered: to what extent does sermonic discourse on pro-life civility impact congregants’ political decisions and conduct? In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson*. As a result, states like Texas have successfully criminalized abortion, classifying it in many cases as a felony when performed by physicians. *Dobbs* has had national implications, exemplified in a Texas suit against a New York doctor who prescribed abortifacients to Texas residents. Although the importance of anti-abortionism continues to wane in the Republican coalition,³⁴ white evangelicals remain the most strongly opposed religious group to abortion rights.³⁵ This diverges from these pastors’ insistence that opposing abortion is relational, not political. Thus, more analysis is needed to understand how relational views of anti-abortionism impact political activism. For example, conducting interviews with congregants at the churches in my analysis could shed light on how pro-life civility messaging impacts congregants’ attitudes towards abortion rights and policy.

This study focuses on how evangelical pro-life civility is preached from the pulpit. Evangelical pro-life civility is not merely a private and marginalized belief, nor is it solely a political strategy for evangelical pro-life activists. Since megachurch pastors are encouraging civility in their sermon series, pro-life civility should be understood as an integral part of evangelical spiritual formation. Pastors who are critical of outrageous, uncivil pro-life evangelicalism find civility an essential way to map evangelicals’ moral opposition to abortion while maintaining respect and tolerance in a pluralistic society. These sermonic maps help rank-and-file evangelicals to navigate difficult conversations with others in a civil way. Further research should investigate the prevalence of civility in evangelical discourse and practice, and scholars more generally should attend to how civility is promoted or abandoned in religious communities when their values—and the way these values are advocated in the public square—become distasteful and even harmful to their civic neighbors.

Endnotes

- 1 Stewart, “Eighty-One Percent of White Evangelicals Voted for Donald Trump. Why?”; Whitehead et al., “Make America Christian Again.”
- 2 Martínez and Smith, “How the faithful voted.”
- 3 Ayris, “‘They’d Vote Against Jesus Christ Himself,’” 648–649.
- 4 Elisha, *Moral Ambition*, 103.
- 5 Cuddihy, *No Offense*, 57.
- 6 Hunter, “Religion and Political Civility,” 366.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Cuddihy, *No Offense*, 92.
- 9 Wilson, *The Street Politics of Abortion*, 62.
- 10 Shields, “Christian Citizens,” 93–94.
- 11 Smith, *Christian America?*, 54.
- 12 Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity*, 63.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 76.
- 14 Elisha, *Moral Ambition*, 170.
- 15 Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*.
- 16 Shields, “Christian Citizens,” 95.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 18 Bird and Thumma, “Megachurch 2020,” 2.
- 19 McClendon and Riedl, “Using Sermons to Study Religions’ Influence on Political Behavior,” 783.
- 20 Gürlesin, “Understanding the Political and Religious Implications of Turkish Civil Religion in The Netherlands.”
- 21 Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 7–8.
- 22 Bethany, “The Kingdom and Earthly Politics,” 18:56.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 19:49.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 22:22.
- 25 Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity*, 63.
- 26 Calvary Church with Skip Heitzig, “Let’s Change 2024!”, 15:05.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 28:24.
- 28 Sandals Church, “Where Is God in Conflict?”, 30:30.
- 29 Kingsway Christian Church, “The Politics of Jesus | Week 3,” 26:59.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 27:17.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 27:44.
- 32 Cottonwood Creek Church, “The Identity of God’s People,” 25:12.
- 33 Shields, “Christian Citizens,” 93.
- 34 From 2020 to 2024, more registered Republicans have come to view abortion (61 percent to 82 percent) and the economy (88 percent to 93 percent) as “very important” issues in their vote. This contrasts sharply to the share of registered Republicans who saw abortion as a “very important” issue in 2020 (46 percent) to 2024 (35 percent). Pew, “2. Issues and the 2024 election.”
- 35 White evangelicals were the only Christian group in 2024 with a majority who believed that abortion should be “illegal in all/most cases.”

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Narrating the Subaltern: Bihari Memory, Silencing, and Historical Ethics after 1971

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Abstract

This paper examines the ethical and historiographical stakes of representing silenced Bihari voices in the aftermath of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Drawing on Yasmin Saikia's oral histories and Prafulla Roy's short story "Infiltration," it argues that testimonial and fictional narratives offer powerful alternatives to state-sanctioned histories, which often prioritize coherence and moral clarity over complexity and dissent. Through fractured testimony and anti-narrative fiction, Saikia and Roy recover the voices of Bihari Muslims—particularly women and stateless refugees—whose experiences of violence, displacement, and erasure are excluded from nationalist memory. Situating these texts within broader debates on narrative form and historical ethics, the paper shows how silence operates both as a symptom of trauma and a political strategy of survival. Ultimately, it calls for a historiography that foregrounds ambiguity, fragmentation, and narrative instability, proposing that fiction and testimony together enable a more just and inclusive reckoning with the contested legacies of 1971.

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Introduction

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 emerged from the prolonged structural marginalization of East Pakistan's Bengali-speaking majority by West Pakistan's political elite, where Bengalis were denied cultural, political, and economic equity. When the Awami League won a majority in Pakistan's 1970 general elections, the central government's refusal to cede power led to mass protests in East Pakistan. In March 1971, the Pakistan Army launched a military crackdown targeting Bengalis and Hindus

through mass killings and sexual violence. The ensuing war lasted nine months and resulted in atrocities on all sides.¹

While Bengali nationalist memory has centered on West Pakistan's genocidal violence, historians such as Yasmin Saikia document a more complex terrain.² Through interviews with female survivors, Saikia records women's testimonies of sexual violence committed by the Pakistani Army and Bengali militias. Particularly marginalized and demonized by the national narrative were Biharis, a group of Urdu-speaking Muslims in East Pakistan perceived as collaborators by Bengalis. Many Biharis were massacred by Bengali mobs during and after the war, but this violence is largely absent from Bangladesh's official memory. The result is a morally polarized nationalist narrative, in which Bengalis appear as victims and freedom fighters, and Biharis are collapsed into the category of Pakistani aggression. The Bangladeshi "usable past" is structured around a heroic narrative of national liberation, leaving little space for accounts confronting Bengali-perpetrated violence or expressing guilt or ambivalence regarding the treatment of marginalized groups such as the Biharis (Singh 2025, 87–9). This narrative consolidation has led to what Saikia calls a "politics of forgetting": a systematic silencing that excludes experiences that disrupt the moral arc of liberation (Saikia 2011, 14). Prafulla Roy's "Infiltration" (2008) fictionalizes the afterlife of this erasure, portraying Bihari refugees in India decades later as stateless and voiceless, visible only through bureaucratic categories and ignored by public memory. Read together, Saikia and Roy's works reveal how the Bengali narrative of liberation conceals a fragmented, ethically fraught Bihari memory and call for a more inclusive reckoning with the silences of 1971.

I argue that Saikia and Roy recover Bihari voices by challenging the narrative logic of state histories, which rely on coherence and closure at the cost of silencing the ambiguous and the unwanted. Their works reveal how stateless Biharis inhabit a fractured historical consciousness shaped by dislocation, enforced silence, and violence. Through their focus on the telling of these individuals' fictional and testimonial stories, they expose the ethical and cultural implications of narrative form in constructing historical meaning. Ultimately, they reintroduce Biharis as subjects whose painful stories resist closure and must not be erased.

Bihari Women's Testimonies

In her presentation of Bihari women's testimonies, Saikia distances herself from a conventional oral-history project aimed at producing a singular record: "My aim is not to arrive at a transcendental truth and create a knowable, documented, archived 'history' that would stand in as testimony for what happened in 1971" (Saikia 2011, 5).

Instead, she presents hidden memories in order to grasp the human cost of the war. Rather than treating women simply as informants who fill in gaps in official histories, she turns to what she calls the “silent testimonies of the women of Bangladesh,” whose memories “make us aware of the lacuna in the official history of 1971” and constitute “the first step toward developing a people’s history” of the war (Saikia 2011, 10). In Chicano/a studies, such narratives are theorized as testimonies—personal narratives that provide insight into the lived experiences of individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities—rather than oral histories, which seek relatively structured, archivally oriented accounts of events (Rodriguez 2019, 5).

Saikia’s description of women’s stories aligns with this testimonial mode. She emphasizes that gendered violence produces memories that surface “in speech and sudden silence,” and that “the delicate balance of women’s testimony rests on a complex duality of the potential to tell the ‘unthinkable’... through an impossibility of telling it in a coherent narrative” (Saikia 2011, 10). Approaching Saikia’s interviews as testimonies clarifies why fragmentation and silence are not methodological flaws to be smoothed over, but markers of trauma, gendered shame, and the political risks of speaking as Bihari women after 1971.

Readers, however, do not encounter these women’s testimonies in unmediated form. Saikia selected ten testimonies because of their value as representatives, signaling the degree to which she shapes the archive we receive (Saikia 2011, 98). Moments of silence and pain are mediated through Saikia’s observational and ethical stance as a listener. Saikia underscores her responsibility to convey the stories of women who trusted her, linking the act of listening to the need to redress the epistemic silence surrounding 1971 (Saikia 2011, 20–25). Acknowledging this mediation clarifies that these testimonies are not transparent windows onto experience, but are influenced by the subjectivity of both survivor and listener.

The Use of Fiction in Writing History

Historians have increasingly turned to fiction as a tool for understanding the past, especially in contexts shaped by violence and archival absence. This shift reflects the recognition that subaltern histories elude the archive.³ Scholars such as Dominick LaCapra emphasize the role of literary form in conveying trauma’s ethical and emotional weight, while Saidiya Hartman’s “critical fabulation” blends archival fragments with imaginative narrative to recover lives otherwise erased from the record.⁴ Similarly, Hayden White argues that historical writing is shaped by “narrativization,” and that the line between fact and fiction lies in rhetorical construction (White 1980, 5–27). Building on

this scholarship, I argue that fiction, when read alongside testimony and archival material, expands the historian’s toolkit by engaging with individual subjectivity.

This approach is especially vital in the study of 1971 and its aftermath. As Saikia notes, little is written about Biharis and attempts to tell their stories often meet resistance. In this landscape of erasure and testimonial fragility, fiction is essential. Roy’s “Infiltration” renders legible experiences of statelessness and silencing that archives cannot capture. Together with Saikia’s testimonies, such fiction models an ethical approach to the past that foregrounds voices which official histories have left behind.

Bihari Memory after 1971

The marginalization of Biharis in post-1971 Bangladesh cannot be understood without situating their experience within the longer arc of communal tensions between Urdu-speaking Muslims and the Bengali-speaking majority of East Pakistan. Following the Partition of 1947, many Bihari Muslims migrated eastward and were perceived by Bengalis as linguistic and political outsiders, a sentiment exacerbated during the Liberation War (Saikia 2007, 76–89). In its aftermath, Biharis were subject to physical violence, confinement to refugee camps, and erasure from the emerging Bengali nationalist narrative of redemption (Saikia 2011, 276–7). Saikia centers the experiences of Bihari women who were raped, forcibly married, or displaced, and pressured into silence for the sake of communal honor. They speak to her in “incoherent, broken, and difficult” voices, struggling against both trauma and social stigma (Saikia 2011, 275). These testimonies challenge the triumphalist framing of 1971 by exposing internal fractures and showing how women bore the burden of shame. In doing so, they recover memories denied narratable status and restore depth to the historical record. While Saikia’s testimonies document the immediate aftermath of 1971 and the gendered silencing of Bihari suffering, “Infiltration” examines how this silencing calcifies into a permanent condition of displacement and invisibility. Through fiction, Roy extends the ethical imperative Saikia initiates: to listen, with discomfort and without resolution to those whom history has excised.

“Infiltration” follows Farid, his family, and a rootless group of Bihari Muslims as they clandestinely cross from Bangladesh into India twenty years after 1971, seeking refuge in the land their families had fled three decades prior after persecution in post-independence Bangladesh. Upon arriving near his ancestral village, Farid attempts to reconnect with his roots, only to find his family’s legacy erased. The story ends as a local politician, Chaubey, who had initially branded them as “infiltrators,” reverses course after

recognizing their electoral value. With ration cards and voter IDs granted, their Indian status hinges on one condition: they must vote for Chaubey. The story ends in bitter irony, with Farid saluting the elections that have granted him identity—not as a citizen, but as a vote. Roy critiques the transactional logic of belonging, where nationhood is conferred not by true acceptance but by political expediency.

Central to “Infiltration” is Farid’s attachment to his ancestral homeland—a longing sustained by the fragmented memories of his grandfather and father, both displaced during successive national ruptures, beginning with the 1947 Partition. This first moment of nation-making after British colonial rule divided territory and fractured communities, initiating a generational cycle of dislocation that “Infiltration” traces to its unresolved aftermath (Butalia 2018, 4). Farid’s grandfather fled anti-Muslim violence in Bihar during 1947, resettling in East Pakistan with the belief that the new Muslim state would offer security. Later, his son Rahmat, an Urdu-speaking Bihari, was deemed a traitor in post-1971 Bangladesh. Farid grows up in this aftermath, inheriting a longing for Bihar from his ancestors—what Marianne Hirsch defines as postmemories (Hirsch 22). When he finally reaches Manapanthal, he finds no homeland, only hostility. The home he imagined as a site of return is inaccessible, legally and emotionally. Roy dismantles the romanticism of homeland that postmemories often sustain, revealing instead that the past cannot always offer solace.

Structural and Strategic Silence

The women’s testimonies in Saikia’s history of 1971 and its aftermath expose how silence is a condition produced by shame and fear. Among the women she interviews, words falter because sexual violence has pushed experience beyond the “archive of speech” (Saikia 2011, 13). For these women, silence is imposed by patriarchal codes that equate public speech with loss of honor, and by state narratives that canonize male heroism. What appears as fragmentation is actually a forced muteness through which survivors are permitted to inhabit the postwar nation only as spectral reminders of a history that must remain untold.

“Infiltration” transposes this logic of silencing onto the Bihari Muslim refugees who travel back to Bihar decades after the partitions of 1947 and 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh. For Farid and the others camped in the inhospitable field outside Barhali, speech is immediately legible as sedition. Having crossed the border without papers, they survive by lowering their voices and allowing local politicians to ventriloquize them as vote banks. Their silence is a tactic: it wards off detection, secures ration cards,

and momentarily stabilizes their precarious legal status. Yet the same strategic quietness simultaneously confirms their erasure: without the right to narrate their own histories, the refugees are accepted by the Indian polity only as “infiltrators” who must remain invisible once the ballots are counted.

Crucially, Rasheda, Farid’s wife, is a silent presence throughout “Infiltration,” living in the shadows of her male counterparts. When Farid decides to seek employment and protection from Chaubey, she is granted a few lines of dialogue where she urges him not to go, only to concede and “fly beside [them] like a restless bird” (Roy 2008, 529). Her absence from the narrative shows how women are doubly marginalized: first as stateless refugees, then as figures excluded from the story of their own displacement. This fictional muting echoes Saikia’s documentation of how women were silenced by patriarchal norms that equated speech with dishonor. One interviewee’s testimony breaks off repeatedly as she fears that speaking might bring further shame or punishment (Saikia 2004, 278). Saikia observes that such testimonies are fractured because of the social and political conditions that suppress the possibility of coherent self-narration (Saikia 2004, 275). Roy’s portrayal of Rasheda as a voiceless figure reflects the gendered erasures that persist in national memory. Thus, in “Infiltration,” the Bihari woman is a figure whose marginality signals a structural refusal to acknowledge female pain. Saikia and Roy demonstrate that silence, whether enforced by gendered shame or electoral opportunism, can be both symptom and strategy.

Hayden White and the Ethics of Historical Narrativity

Hayden White has argued that “the demand for closure in the historical story is a demand for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as elements of a moral drama” (White 1980, 21). “Infiltration” refuses this kind of closure, exposing the moral teleologies underpinning state histories. Farid’s trek to Bihar begins like an epic of return, yet ends in disappointment: he and his companions are granted ration cards and placed on the local voters’ roll only to vote in the forthcoming election. No homeland is recovered, no identity stabilized; the only “plot” is the cynical calculus of electoral conceit. According to White’s typology, “Infiltration” resembles a chronicle: an accretion of episodes that fail to provide the closure of a retrospective moral order (White 1980, 6). By withholding an arc that would convert exile into redemption, Roy reveals the violence that state narratives often conceal. The Bihari migrants matter to the Indian polity only as disposable vote-banks, just as they mattered to Pakistan and Bangladesh only as disposable symbols of loyalty. “Infiltration” thus performs anti-narrativity, demonstrating that for marginalized subjects like Bihari refugees, the most truthful history

is the one that resists the narrativizing White identifies at the heart of modern historiography.

White further argues that historical narration “[imposes] upon [reality] the formal coherency that only stories possess, thereby moralizing reality” (White 1980, 24). Saikia acknowledges this impulse and resists it. Confronted with women’s fragmented testimonies of violence, she writes that “the task of telling what happened... is daunting because every telling invariably betrays the original voice and disrupts the silence that has been kept intact for over three decades” (Saikia 2004, 281). In White’s terms, Saikia rejects the demand for closure and instead exposes the “embarrassment of plot” and the nature of the relationship between events and the meanings later fastened onto them (White 1980, 6). Saikia thus practices a counter-narrativity: she records, but will not “story,” thereby unsettling the narratives of state histories. Her intervention confirms White’s paradox: the very power that makes narrative meaningful can, in contexts of state violence and gendered trauma, become a danger to truth. Together, Roy’s strategic anti-narrativity and Saikia’s testimonies expose the ethical limits of conventional narrative form. Resisting closure is a necessary act when writing subaltern histories.

Conclusion

“Infiltration” and the women’s testimonies Saikia presents operate as forms of counter-history by resisting the coherence of state narratives. Where dominant historiographies impose moral clarity, these works recognize fragmentation and unresolved pain. By centering the voices of Bihari women and stateless refugees, Roy and Saikia challenge memory regimes that silence uncomfortable subjects to preserve heroic origin stories. Roy presents the disposability of stateless Biharis, while Saikia records testimonies so fractured by trauma that they resist incorporation into a linear narrative. Both reject the demand for narrativization in favor of lived complexity. These texts expand the ethical scope of historical inquiry and call for a historiography attentive to narrative form, as a terrain where justice and erasure are continually negotiated. Reading these sources together yields a deeper insight: that the form in which history is told is inseparable from the ethics of who is remembered and how. Fiction’s openness to ambiguity, combined with testimony’s emphasis on lived experience, creates a historiography that does not smooth over violent ruptures. This approach asks historians to think critically about the narratives they (re)produce. What new ethical possibilities arise when we incorporate sources typically deemed too unstable or subjective for the historical record? The legacy of 1971 demands new ways of remembering—and thus new ways of writing history itself.

Endnotes

- 1 For more literature on the marginalization of Bengalis in East Pakistan, see Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Nationalism* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), as well as A.A.K Niazi, *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1998).
- 2 The two main works that have been drawn upon for this paper are: Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Duke University Press, 2011); and Yasmin Saikia, “Beyond the Archive of Silence: Narratives of Violence of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 58 (2004): 275–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472765>.
- 3 First coined by Antonio Gramsci, this term has been defined by post-colonial scholars as individuals who have been excluded from the hierarchy of power of an imperial colony. Throughout the essay, I use it in the context of the historiography of Partition to describe any non-elite person whose experiences were left out of nationalist or imperial narratives.
- 4 This article predominantly draws upon LaCapra’s *History, Literature, and Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501705212> and Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

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Community and Ballroom: The History of Odd Fellowship in New York City since 1844

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Abstract

This research is a historical analysis that extends the modern scene of ballroom in New York City further back to practices of African American masonic traditions such as masquerades. Beginning in 1883, my research connects ballroom culture within the practices of Odd Fellowship masquerades. I focus my inquiry on multiple public events that were inclusive to ethnic communities, unions, women, and gender diverse participants.

Utilizing interdisciplinary methods spanning history, sociology, and gender studies, this article seeks to answer one foundational question: In what ways have masonic traditions such as masquerades inspired intellectual and cultural movements such as the Harlem Renaissance? I argue that the masonic contributions to the Harlem Renaissance and New York City's history should be recognized. Furthermore, the cultural apparatus created by these events illuminates complexities of Freemasonry as it intersected with ideas of masculinity, class, and race in New York.

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Records of a masonic order named Odd Fellowship are scattered throughout the history of the United States and in New York City, the African American Fellowship inspired educational and social reform throughout the East Coast and beyond. For example, Odd Fellow establishments called "lodges" housed members inducted into the order; members received ties to financial and social networks in return for their service and a monthly fee. In conjunction with the Odd Fellow manual that describes these practices,

in this article I explicate the history of African American freemasonry and argue how this institution played a role in emancipation, political change for women, and the communal cultivations of Harlem during the late nineteenth century. Moreover, I compare the history of reform with masquerades and festivals as Odd Fellowship expanded their fraternity to host public events. Masquerades, being associated with public interests, created tensions of what does and does not identify with the values of Odd Fellowship. My multi-disciplinary approach drawing from African American studies, gender studies, and sociology intends to expand upon Odd Fellowship and their contribution to United States history during the nineteenth century and leading into the twentieth century with their impact on the Harlem Renaissance.

Holding annual masquerades were not the only disagreement that the Odd Fellows faced from within. Problems ensued concerning women being accepted and supported into Odd Fellowship. Leaders held annual committees which at one point agreed to revoke regulations of women's acceptance into the fellowship and as a result received petitions and pushback from current members. These disagreements take us away from a linear narrative of progression towards the 1920's and into a struggle between community and identity. First, to connect the scope and origins of Odd Fellowship in New York City, I draw from African American Freemasonry studies and its relevance in the history of the United States.

The existence of African American Masonic lodges dates back to before the Declaration of Independence. Prince Hall, a prominent African American clergy member, pioneered the first colored lodges in the United States in 1775.¹ At this point in time, masonic lodges served functions like medieval guilds, providing housing, finances, titles, and other means of social mobility and sustenance to its members. They were also reserved spaces for political, religious, and public congregation. Lodges established by Prince Hall maintained the religious beliefs of their European counterparts, namely Christianity. However, the Hall lodges presented an opportunity for African Americans to participate in the cultural transformation of Freemasonry, and by extension, mainstream American society. One example of this prospect was the exchange of services and ideas from sailors navigating across the Atlantic Sea, promoting a network of anti-slavery advocates and allies.²

A Noble Fight (2008) by Corey D.B. Walker connects the historic development of African American Freemasonry with its engagement to the political and social challenges of the United States. My analysis resonates with Walker's insights on Freemasonry and how masonic traditions cultivated values, beliefs, and practices derived from the

juxtapositions of experiences related to slavery and freedom. For example, the phrase “rituals of race” connects the ideologies of anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminism, as a result of masonic institutions networking across local and global communities.³ Masonic lodges led by slaves not only helped afflicted communities to navigate the personal tensions of identity, but they also fostered ideas and structures for citizenship as African Americans, in addition to advancing reforms on education and politics.⁴

While Odd Fellowship is a sect of Freemasonry, it also partakes in the “rituals of race” as distinguished leaders created books and manuals detailing their institution’s history and lodge activities for new members and leaders. Every member had to be literate and would be taught to read if they did not yet have those skills. Most perplexing is that historic Freemason records rarely mention anything on Odd Fellowship. This intentional distinction is pointed out in the manual of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows or G.U.O. of O.F.: “The rich and poor, the high and low, the Prince and Peasant, men of every rank and station in life are and always have been admitted to Odd Fellowship on equal footing. Not so with Free Masonry.”⁵ While Odd Fellowship is masonic in certain aspects, membership on merit of class reveals a nuance of acceptance and status within masonic institutions during the nineteenth century. In particular, white Freemasons in the United States would not accept black intellectuals and black intellectuals could not always show charity to those excluded.

Peter Ogden founded the first African American lodges of Odd Fellowship around 1844. Ogden was an Odd Fellow at the Victoria Lodge in Liverpool, England who was determined to make a new order of lodges accessible for all freed slaves of every class. The establishment of lodges in the United States resulted from the establishment of an Independent Order of Odd Fellows in the United States which not only separated from the older traditions of England and formed their own sectarian culture, but also refused to admit colored individuals into the fraternity.⁶ In brief, the Victoria Lodge granted Ogden authority and support to establish the first lodges in New York. However, in January 1850 the Hamilton and two New York lodges protested the Fellowship as a result of growing interest to move the main headquarters to Philadelphia:

... (the headquarters) of the Order (which had) been located in New York City for seven years, and would doubtless have been continued there if internal dissention and jealousy had not threatened the further usefulness of the Board in that city. ... Lodges (Philomathean) 646, (Hamilton) 710, (Terry) 900 protested against the removal of the headquarters...⁷

Considering this source with additional information from the manual and Walker’s thesis in mind, I argue that there were intense concerns regarding a separate yet unionized masonic identity within the Odd Fellows in New York against those in Philadelphia. It is worth noting that the first lodges Ogden established were in New York and expanded across the East Coast. In fact, the annual committee for all lodges was held in New York City. New York City during the early 1800’s for African American communities began to seem more hospitable with the development of manumission societies offering gradual emancipation, in addition to educational institutions such as the African Free Schools since 1785.⁸ The city was not only a mecca for prominent African American leaders, such as James McCune Smith, who was involved with the Colored Orphan Asylum and African Free Schools⁹ and eventually a secretary for the Hamilton lodge since 1845,¹⁰ but it was a refuge to attract newly freed slaves into the Order of Odd Fellowship that was founded by Peter Ogden as well. Moving the order to Philadelphia would disrupt the social apparatus in New York City, since Odd Fellowship was rapidly expanding by opening lodges for new manumitted members coming from the city.

The New York lodges consistently unified during moments of political tension with determination to introduce more women in public activities. The Hamilton Lodge was the first to petition the Fellowship to allow a “Ruth Degree” in 1856. This law allowed women to both be beneficiaries of Odd Fellowship and allow them the opportunity to participate in masonic activities and legislation as well.¹² However, in 1874 there is evidence that the ruling had multiple revisions, ultimately preventing women to join Odd Fellowship which caused a divide among various Odd Fellow lodges. Indeed, not only did women want to join Odd Fellowship, many Odd Fellow members had wives who they also wanted to support. The record takes note of concerns during the Odd Fellow convention stating that:

This convention was marked by stormy and acrimonious debates. Certain acts and edicts of the S(ub). C(ommittee). of M(anagement). had aroused considerable ill-feeling. ... The questions which gave rise to the debates principally, were: (1) The revision of the “Ruth Degree Laws;” (2) The institution of the Patriarchy; and (3) The edict concerning regalia.¹³

This excerpt in connection to the Atalanta Casino news source reveals an active process of representation with strong disagreements concerning women and regalia during celebrations. Despite these debates, the Philomathean, Hamilton, and Terry lodges, among other social organizations, had benefited from staying united through social gatherings. In June 1887 a grand carnival was held in



Figure 3. 64th annual masquerade of the Hamilton Lodge in 1932 at the Rockland Palace Casino¹⁶

Through this connection of ethnicity and gender I broaden my argument of Odd Fellowship in New York City from the nineteenth century into the Harlem Renaissance. This news excerpt (Figure 3) published by *The New York Amsterdam News* in 1932 presents a few drawings of ballroom participants from the Rockland Palace masquerade hosted by the Hamilton Lodge. Current scholarship on the Rockland Palace points to a location nearly identical to the Atalanta Casino (155th Street and 8th Avenue) mentioned earlier. Furthermore, this excerpt included descriptions of the clothing competitors wore, such as red and black satin dresses, flair skirts, gowns, expensive jewelry, and wigs. While not unusual like other nightclubs in Harlem at this time, this event attracted over 7,000 spectators, arguably surpassing the number of each annual masquerade held during the nineteenth century. That the masquerade drew such a crowd in 1932 during the Great Depression, when New York City enforced cabaret laws that became ambitious in shutting down establishments without alcohol licensing, is striking. This source reflects a categorization of gender by addressing crossdressers as “drag” or “muscular-shouldered, beautify gowned” men to describe the participants, while also sexualizing their attire. While the Hamilton Lodge continued in attracting attention and support during economic and social turmoil, there was more scrutiny on the participants of these events in this published text, which reflected poorly on the Odd Fellows.

Regardless, the legacy of African American Odd Fellow masquerades is deeply rooted in community building in New York City during the late nineteenth century. Masquerades created the sense of freedom and culture within the performative space of dance, arts, beauty, and humor as spectators and participants indulged themselves in the festivities. While the Hamilton Lodge is significant in historic queer studies for hosting ballroom and beauty pageant events at Rockland Palace Casino in Harlem around the late 1920’s, there was significant contribution from the

other Odd Fellow lodges prior to this time such as the Terry and the Philomathean, in addition to other unions and the Households of Ruth. This historical context of the Hamilton Lodge is why my investigation into Odd Fellowship is so crucial. By uncovering masquerade experiences and traditions from both public sources and the Odd Fellows manual, we can connect the narrative of the Rockland Palace back to the nineteenth century, starting with Peter Ogden, in order to start unearthing important histories that need to be told and to recognize those key actors who have shaped our communities, cultures, and societies.

Endnotes

- 1 William H. Grimshaw, *Official history of Freemasonry among the colored people in North America*, (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1903.) p. 67.
- 2 Corey D.B. Walker, *A Noble Fight: African American Freemasonry and the Struggle for Democracy in America*. (Illinois: Illinois University Press, 2008.) p. 50.
- 3 Corey D.B. Walker, *A Noble Fight*, p. 47.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 5 Charles H. Brooks, *The Official History and Manual of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows in America A Chronological Treatise*, (Odd Fellows Journal Print, 1902). p. 6.
- 6 Brooks, *Manual of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows*, p. 12.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 8 Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 61.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 157.
- 10 Brooks, p. 24.
- 11 “The Grandest Event of the Age Second Annual Grand Music Festival & Carnival,” *New York Freeman*, 1887. p. 3 Readex: African American Newspapers.
- 12 Brooks, p. 75.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 128.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 26–27.
- 15 “Hamilton Lodge Reception” (*New York Globe*: February 24, 1883) p. 3.
- 16 “Hamilton Lodge Ball Draws 7,000: Men Step Out in Gorgeous Finery of the other sex to vie for Beauty Prized”, *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 2, 1932. pp. 2. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

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Rehacer el mundo: Poetic Indirection in Valerie Martínez's *Each and Her*

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Abstract

In her 2010 collection, *Each and Her*, Valerie Martínez compiles 72 poems dedicated to the “over 450 girls and women [who] have been murdered in or near the cities of Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico, along the U.S.–Mexico border” (Martínez xi). Alternating between discomfiting depictions of bodies and death and gentler motifs of flora and fauna, Martínez reveals the precarious position her poetry inhabits: at once a confrontation of the crimes occurring at these borders and a preservation of the beauty and humanity of the girls and women whose lives were—and continue to be—lost. In this paper, I consider how Martínez harnesses poetic indirection to resist linear narratives of cyclical violence and reimagine the girls and women beyond the tragedies that define them, granting them an afterlife and community within readers of her work.

Acknowledgements

This article could not have existed without John Alba Cutler and Camille Considine, whose course on Latinx poetry inspired the first drafts. Endless thanks to David Marno and Caroline Godard, my faculty and graduate student mentors respectively, the MMUF community at Berkeley, and my family and friends, all of whom helped me to see a little further than I could on my own.

In her 2010 collection, *Each and Her*, Valerie Martínez compiles 72 poems, each titled simply for its numerical position within the book, dedicated to the “over 450 girls and women [who] have been murdered in or near the cities of Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico, along the U.S.–Mexico border” (Martínez xi). Alternating between discomfiting depictions of bodies and death, and gentler motifs of flora and fauna, Martínez reveals the precarious position her poetry inhabits: at once a confrontation of the crimes occurring at these borders and a preservation of the beauty and humanity of the girls and women whose lives were—and continue to be—lost. “59.,” for example, reads simply: “knowing them / only like this” (lines 1–2), before giving way to “60.,” a handful of excerpts from the

Bible—gesturing, perhaps, toward prayer. “61.,” then, follows the precedent established by earlier poems—listing the names of 64 victims in an effort to grant them a final semblance of individuality and life. Yet the fleeting presence of their names on the page—one devoid of a soul or body beyond that of the poem (which, in gathering the names of the dead, emerges closer to a mass grave than a life form)—mark a profound fear on Martínez’s part: specifically how, in writing about these girls and women, she reduces them to the context of their deaths. Indeed, Martínez condemns media outlets of this very reduction—“[rendering the] murders as spectacle, manipulating the viewer or reader’s response to the acts, while simultaneously disabling the space for the victim’s memorial” (Jaime 45).

In this article, I consider how Martínez harnesses poetic indirection to innovate new means of mourning and memorializing the lost girls and women. Farnoosh Fathi defines poetic indirection “as any literary device that, by manipulating the reader/textual interface, confounds linearity and increases a poem’s interpretative possibilities” (Fathi 77). In employing language connected to movement and bringing poetic form in tension with broader journeys of migration, Martínez’s poetic indirection resists linear narratives of cyclical violence. Moreover, she grants the girls and women an afterlife and community within readers of her work—reimagining them beyond the tragedies that otherwise define them.

Throughout the collection, Martínez threads a number of one- or two-worded poems consisting of the phrases “this way” or “sígame” [follow me], instilling upon the reader a sense of movement and direction. Indeed, the very first poem reads:

in this way
could she (lines 1–2).1

Initially, one might interpret these lines in their colloquial context, with “in this way” referring to the means through which “she” is able to conduct a specific action. Interestingly, such means, “she,” and any subsequent actions refuse elaboration; thus, the poem might refer to the girls and women attempting to cross the border as much as it might refer to an individual in the speaker’s personal life. This ambiguity establishes the tone for the rest of the collection: a sense of openness or immense capacity, as opposed to confinement within a historical fact or individual. Moreover, “this” functioning as a deixis makes possible an alternative interpretation where “in this way” refers not to the means for a specific action, but direction—as in moving or walking *in this way*. Using this interpretation, “could she” translates less as an adverbial phrase, context for an achievement, and

more as a question: as in, “in this way / could she” go, or come, or make?

This phrase appears a handful more times, building a sense of direction that is not steady or certain, but nonlinear—raising Fathi’s notion of poetic indirection. For example, compare the poems “13.”:

this way (line 1)
and “27.”:
this
way (lines 1–2).

Both remain absent of punctuation, affecting a floating sensation that wouldn’t be achieved were a period to close the boundaries of the statement. Furthermore, neither use quotation marks—raising the question of whether these words are spoken or conveyed through other means. Regardless, these poems read the same semantically and verbally; “this way,” the speaker calls, urging an unknown addressee—the reader? a people?—in their direction. Visually, then, is where the poems differ; where “13.” functions on a single line, Martínez breaks “27.” into two before indenting “way.” Written as a single line, “this way” reads in a fluid, forward motion, conveying the speaker’s confidence in a linear, forward direction. By enjambing the two words, Martínez disrupts this confidence and introduces a sense of nonlinearity. Might we interpret such as the speaker’s hesitation or doubt regarding their direction? “This... way,” they say, unsure now, compared to “13.,” as to where they’re leading the addressee? Or the indented “way”—a breaking down, perhaps, of the journey into granular steps—reminding the addressee to place one foot in front of the other? Perhaps all these interpretations are true; indeed, they constellation the “interpretive possibilities” Fathi describes as arising when linearity is confounded. Yet such possibilities implore closer investigation: who is the speaker and what is their relationship to Martínez herself, if at all? Who is the addressee and what direction are they being taken or encouraged to go? Most importantly, how do these questions support Martínez’s larger project of memorializing the girls and women lost while undertaking the journey?

To consider these questions, I turn to another directional phrase that repeats throughout the book: “sígame.” In “50.,” the speaker implores the addressee to “sígame” [follow me], however, quickly subverts this request by “55.”: “no sígame” [don’t follow me]. One interpretation invokes a dialogue between the girls themselves and individuals they encounter throughout their journey: a relative, *coyote* (a colloquial term describing someone who smuggles individuals across borders, often illegally), or even abuser. Yet, we have an excerpt spoken by an abuser; as “49.” grossly states, “Sometimes, when you cross a shipment of drugs to the

United States, adrenaline is so high that you want to celebrate by killing women!” (lines 1–3). Unlike “50.” and “55.,” “49.” explicitly bears quotation marks, emphasizing its speaker (and, importantly, their views) as separate from the poetic speaker throughout the book. Jaime notes how the abuser’s anonymity “affords him the privilege of protection [and absolves] him from answering to the repercussions of gender violence that his statement suggests” (Jaime 46), reinforcing the vicious cycles in which *maquiladora* workers are trapped. Yet, “sígame,” an imperative that traditionally demands attention and authority, appears completely in lowercase and absent of punctuation. Considering this subtlety on the page, I find it hard to believe the poem aims to reenact a moment of violence between victim and abuser.

Another interpretation, then, imagines Martínez as the speaker herself, guiding the reader, in true Dante fashion, through the work of confronting and mourning these tragedies. Here, we return to the dangerous balance introduced at the beginning of this article. On the one hand, the firm “no sígame” discloses a level of uneasiness—as if, to some extent, Martínez doubts her own poetic authority to reimagine the direction of these women’s lives beyond the context of their deaths. Indeed, words themselves function in one direction—placed one after the other in a line on the page. The poem, then, withstands as another form of condemnation—Martínez’s writing toward the fixed, straightforward reality of the women’s deaths. On the other hand, we as readers trust Martínez to steer us well. “Sígame,” she implores us, and we follow her spare trail of poetic indirection, feeling and breathing an alternate means of memorialization.

Following this trail, we find moments of poetic indirection that employ geography to an ironic effect. “3.,” for example, reads:

they pack what they have
travel north
from Durango
Sinaloa
Nuevo León
Coahuila (lines 1–6),

whereas “4.” reads:

commuters
gape and snore
around me
in this early morning
northern-bound
train (lines 1–6).

These lines emerge with evident irony. Martínez describes northward movement yet, within the space and formal conventions of a poem, the lines can only move down. Therefore, when she plots a migrant's journey from Durango to Sinaloa, Nuevo León to Coahuila, she reverses the geography, forcing the reader to travel down rather than up. This tension might be read as a quiet refusal to, as previously mentioned, reenact or retrace the journey of girls and women who, because of the crimes committed at the border, never arrive at their destination. This refusal is reinforced in of "57.," another two-word poem that states simply: "I refuse" (line 1). Sustaining our interpretation of the poetic speaker as Martínez herself, "57." emerges as a profound assertion of poetic authority. In placing the women's northward journey in tension with the poem's downward structure, an instance of poetic indirection, Martínez resists the linear path of violence prescribed upon these women. One might acknowledge this effort as futile; of course, poetry holds no power to return lost lives. What use, then, is writing about these events? What can poetry possibly hope to change, if only in regards to how we remember them?

A potential response arrives in the title of the collection, *Each and Her*, which alludes to the dedication: "*para una y todas / for Andrea Michelle Martínez (1959–2008)*" (v)—Martínez's sister whose own hardships and memory pervade the collection. Poems oscillate between referring to entire communities (in "38.": "some job applications ask women if they are pregnant or sexually active" [lines 1–2]) and referring to a subject so specific (in "54.": "you step into a moving car / concussion broken collarbone / lacerated right leg / shattered in three places" [lines 3–5]), it's hard to interpret them as anything but personal. In other words, Martínez writes to the girls and women killed near Juárez and Chihuahua; however, at the same time, she writes to the much more intimate audience of her sister, whose death precedes the publication of *Each and Her* by two years. This dual audience drives the tension of movement and direction throughout the collection. In writing "this way," Martínez denies a specific audience or direction because it refers to both the girls and women finding their way north as well as her sister escaping from the substance and physical abuse she experienced throughout her life. This duality makes the collection at once intimate yet expansive, personal yet societal; furthermore, it's this very duality that denies a linear understanding of *Each and Her*. While it calls the reader's attention to the crimes occurring at the border and implores change for present circumstances, the individual lives already lost can never be revived. Instead, by interweaving the stories of her sister and the girls and women of Juárez, Martínez places them in a community that—though perhaps originates from—extends beyond the violence and suffering they endured. "Sígame," Martínez writes, and we

follow her to a river where "a bird [cries], and up on the hill the tinkling / sound of a cowbell [rings]. The presence [is] immense, lifeless, yet / throbbing with its secret message" (lines 4–6). Within *Each and Her* Martínez grants both her sister and the women a collective afterlife. Though no longer present, they still speak their "secret message"—one that is witnessed in the form of Martínez's book, and heard, ultimately, by the reader.

And what, the reader must ask, might that secret message be? Jaime writes how "the development of an intimate connection between the reader and victims of femicide . . . culminates with the birthing of a collective voice, of the ability to articulate the reality and injustice behind femicide, and to speak in place of those who cannot" (Jaime 51). It's impossible to conclude this essay without acknowledging the ongoing prevalence of femicides along the U.S.-Mexico border. *Each and Her* was published in 2010; yet Juárez reported 39 femicide cases between 2017 and 2019, and 25 new cases in 2023 alone (Bolotovskiy). Martínez's poetic indirection, then, emerges as a two-way street—guiding not only the reader to a more intimate relationship with these women, but also the women to the reader, who finds themselves entrusted with the responsibility of enacting urgent, radical change. Martínez's poetic indirection refuses the linear inevitability of cyclical violence, opting instead, as "72.," throbbing with hope, states, "—to remake the world" (line 1).

Endnote

- Given that much of my analysis emphasizes the visual nature of these poems, I have intentionally set aside the standard convention of using block quotes when quoting four lines of poetry or more. This allows the reader to better engage with their original visual structure.

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Decriminalizing “Buggery” Laws in the Postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean: A Socio-Legal Comparative Analysis of Anti-Homosexual Penal Codes in Jamaica and Barbados

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Jamaal “Jama” Willis is a recent graduate of Harvard College, where he earned a degree in Government and African and African American Studies, cum laude, with a secondary in Art, Film, and Visual Studies. Originally from Kingston, Jamaica, he now resides in San Bernardino, California. Jama’s academic work focuses on human rights in the Global South and foreign policy in the Caribbean. His lived experiences—growing up in a region where homosexuality remains criminalized, immigrating to the United States where LGBTQ+ rights are highly politicized, and undergoing conversion therapy in the Global North—have deeply informed his research on the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Anglophone Caribbean.

As Co-President of the Harvard Undergraduate Foreign Policy Initiative, he organized conferences in Turkey and South Korea while researching for the Pentagon, NATO, and foreign governments. While at Harvard, Jama also interned for the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Trinidad & Tobago, and Amnesty International.

Jama is part of the incoming cohort of Schwarzman Scholars (Cohort 11), where he will pursue a Masters in Global Affairs at Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. After Beijing, he aspires to be an international human rights attorney, advancing Caribbean socio-political rights for diaspora citizens and promoting regional institutional development.

Abstract

This article examines the variation in decriminalizing homosexuality across Anglo-Caribbean states by comparing Jamaica’s resistance with Barbados’s progress. Despite recent victories, many Caribbean nations still criminalize same-sex relations due to colonial-era laws and foreign evangelical influence. I argue that while British colonialism established these laws, Global North-based “transnational illiberal networks” now reinforce them, complicating decriminalization efforts. My research examines this legal history, highlighting how postcolonial judicial sovereignty and external pressures influence LGBTQ+ rights in the region today. Drawing on decriminalization strategies from interviews and applying models like Keck and Sikkink’s “boomerang pattern,” Phillip Ayoub’s “double helix model,” and Kristopher Velasco’s norm diffusion pathway, I analyze the role of legal strategies and international advocacy in decriminalization efforts. I assess these outcomes using three variables: (1) the influence of local LGBTQ+ organizations and religious institutions on political frameworks, (2) the impact of global transnational networks, and (3) the strategic legal approaches of Caribbean lawyers toward decriminalization. By identifying the factors that drive or hinder decriminalization, this research provides context for activists, policymakers, and legal practitioners advancing LGBTQ+ rights in the Commonwealth.

Acknowledgements

With deep gratitude to Professors Steven Levitsky and Susan Farbstain, who taught me not only to be a scholar but also how to be an activist—one who looks out for those whose voices go unheard by institutions that refuse to recognize their worth. Thank you for believing in me and my scholarship.

Introduction

Seventy years after Caribbean nations achieved independence from Britain, consensual same-sex intimacy can still result in ten years of hard labor or imprisonment. These laws, copied verbatim from Victorian-era penal codes, were never indigenous to the region. Britain imposed them during colonial rule, then paradoxically decriminalized its own sodomy laws upon granting independence, leaving former colonies legally bound to moral codes their colonizer had abandoned.¹ Today, 65 jurisdictions criminalize homosexuality; nearly half are British Commonwealth nations.² In the Commonwealth, there persists a false belief that British colonialism introduced homosexuality;³ however, the British did not bring homosexuality, but rather the laws criminalizing it.⁴

In Anglophone Caribbean Nations (ACNs), inherited colonial “buggery” laws criminalized non-procreative sexual activity carrying minimum sentences of five to ten years. Following independence, ACNs retained two colonial judicial structures that impede democratic reform: (1) the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), established in 1930 as the highest court for the British Empire and still serving as the apex court for seven out of twelve ACNs, and (2) the Savings Law Clause (SLC), which protects pre-independence laws like buggery statutes from judicial review.⁵ After independence, Caribbean political elites embraced these colonial institutions through a “politics of respectability”⁶ mentality, believing that alignment with English common law would demonstrate their sophistication and readiness to govern. This psychological attachment reflects an “endowment effect”⁷ where postcolonial people overvalue what they already *possess*, creating a status quo bias toward retaining colonial laws. Paradoxically, while Britain decriminalized its own buggery laws upon granting independence to its colonies, it maintained judicial dominion of ACNs through the JCPC, leaving them constitutionally constrained by colonial courts.

While scholars have historicized anti-homosexual laws and documented the legal persistence of pro-LGBTQ+ rights groups, we lack adequate frameworks for understanding *why* some nations decriminalize while others entrench

these laws further. Within this field, a new wave of anti-LGBTQ+ networks that is slowly being uncovered. Evangelical movements and anti-LGBTQ+ groups in the Global South⁸ have transformed buggery laws from colonial remnants into active battlegrounds, with transnational networks from the Global North providing resources and strategies to local opposition groups.

This research asks: What explains the variation in the decriminalization of buggery laws between Anglo-Caribbean nations, specifically Jamaica and Barbados, despite their shared colonial legal inheritance? This article will argue that while buggery laws originated under British colonialism, transnational actors now play the decisive role in either sustaining or challenging these laws through strategic alignment with local advocacy networks. To understand this dynamic, I develop a theoretical framework accounting for the simultaneous influence of both pro-LGBTQ+ transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and anti-LGBTQ+ transnational illiberal networks (TINs) operating within institutional contexts.

This article proceeds in two parts. Part I develops a theoretical model for understanding transnational influence on LGBTQ+ decriminalization, synthesizing points from norm diffusion scholarship to introduce the concept of the “decriminalization limbo.” Part II applies this model through comparative analysis of Jamaica and Barbados, examining how competing transnational forces interact with domestic institution to produce divergent outcomes.

Part I: Theoretical Argument

Building upon Keck and Sikkink’s boomerang pattern (Figure 1) and *transnational advocacy networks* (TANs) theory, which explains how domestic actors seek international allies to pressure resistant governments when domestic channels are blocked, I incorporate recent scholarship recognizing the emergence of *transnational illiberal networks* (TINs)⁹ that mirror and counter pro-LGBTQ+ advocacy strategies.

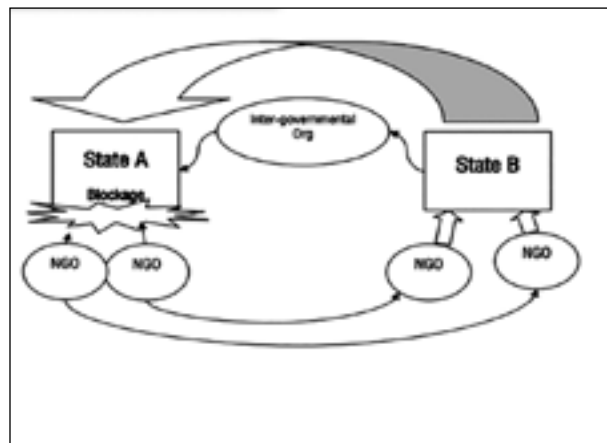


Figure 1. Keck and Sikkink’s Boomerang Pattern¹⁰

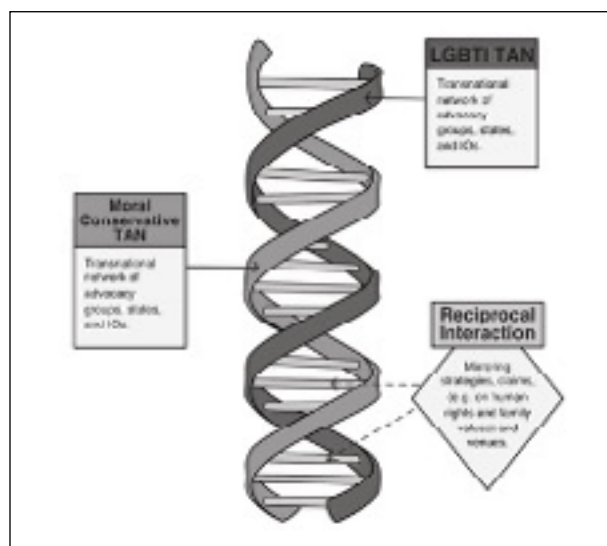


Figure 2. Ayoub and Skoeckl’s Double Helix Model of Interpreting Transnational Advocacy Networks and Moral Conservative TANs (or as I refer to as Transnational Illiberal Networks)¹¹

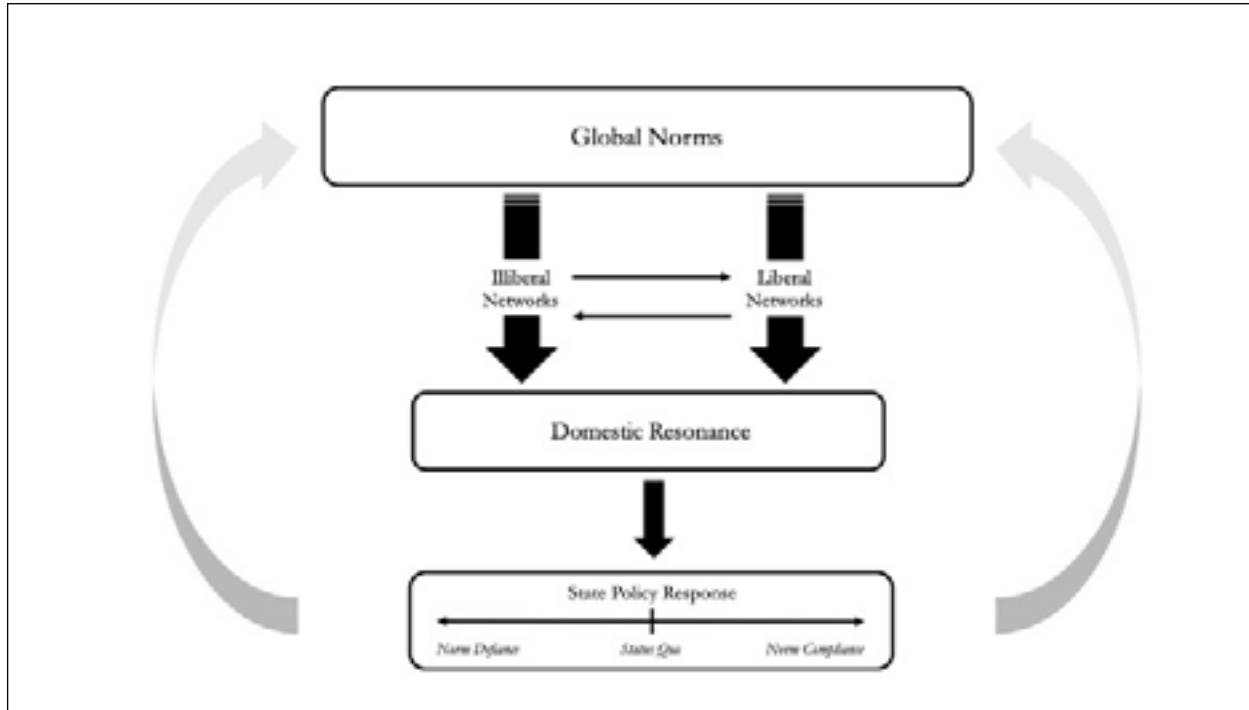


Figure 3. Kristopher Velasco's Theoretical Model^{12,13}

Drawing from Ayoub and Stoeckl's double-helix model (Figure 2), which illustrates the reciprocal relationship between pro-LGBTQ+ and anti-LGBTQ+ networks operating in the same spaces with mutually exclusive ends,

and Kristopher Velasco's work (Figure 3) on norm polarization and deinstitutionalization, this framework recognizes that both supportive and opposing networks simultaneously influence domestic policy outcomes.



Figure 4. My Theoretical Model Mapping LGBTQ+ Norm Diffusion in the Anglophone Caribbean¹⁴

My theoretical model provides a framework for understanding how LGBTQ+ rights, as a global norm, navigate resistance in various national contexts (Figure 4). The

model's pathway from "Global Norms" to "State Policy" incorporates multiple layers of domestic blockages (i.e. cultural, religious, and local anti-LGBTQ+ forces) that impede

the adoption of LGBTQ+ protections, offering a more nuanced view than the single-point resistance. This layered approach, along with the concept of “decriminalization limbo,”¹⁵ captures the ambiguity and stalling that often characterize states caught between external pressures to reform and powerful domestic opposition. Unlike binary outcome models, my framework accounts for states that are “stuck”—partially adopting global norms but unable to fully legalize rights due to entrenched conservative forces.

In contexts of decriminalization limbo, political elites often defer to the judiciary to avoid the political risks of advancing LGBTQ+ rights, particularly in religiously conservative societies. While courts generally lean toward protecting minority rights, elites strategically appeal rulings to delay change and shift responsibility. Anti-LGBTQ+ actors exploit democratic institutions—[such as referenda and courts] by invoking liberal principles like religious freedom, framing LGBTQ+ rights as incompatible with local culture. These dynamics illustrate how transnational norms from the Global North interact unevenly with Global South politics, resulting in divergent paths—such as Caribbean trends toward decriminalization and African trends toward recriminalization—often hinging on judicial, not legislative, action.

Compared to other theoretical models, international pressure alone may be insufficient against complex domestic barriers, requiring tailored strategies that combine external leverage with targeted efforts to dismantle specific resistance layers. My model identifies context-specific blockages within national settings, complementing existing frameworks that map compliance pathways or tactical options to bypass domestic resistance.

Hypotheses

I advance three interconnected hypotheses about transnational influence on decriminalization outcomes:

1. *Hypothesis 1—Network Alignment Hypothesis*: Political elites and institutions aligned with religious networks favor *TIN*-supported resistance, while those aligned with civil society organizations support *TAN*-backed reform efforts. This reveals that domestic actors don't merely respond to transnational pressure—they actively select which networks to empower based on pre-existing institutional alignments.
2. *Hypothesis 2—Strategic Coordination Hypothesis*: Local actors who align with transnational networks (either *TANs* or *TINs*) are more successful in advancing their domestic agendas than those operating independently. However, the *visibility* of transnational support matters critically: overt foreign involvement can trigger

nationalist backlash, while discreet coordination prevents opposition counterframing.

3. *Hypothesis 3—Institutional Pathway Hypothesis*: Colonial judicial structures (JCPC) create barriers to decriminalization, while progressive transnational courts (CCJ) provide alternative pathways that support reform efforts. This suggests reforming judicial structures may be prerequisite for human rights reform.

Methodology

This research employs mixed methodologies through comparative analysis of Jamaica and Barbados, nations with identical colonial legal inheritances but divergent decriminalization outcomes. Fieldwork included participation in key regional conferences: the Beyond Homophobia Conference in Kingston, the Commonwealth Equality Network meeting in London, and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa. The study draws on over 90 interviews with political elites, legal practitioners, LGBTQ+ activists, and litigants, supplemented by archival research and analysis of legal documents spanning five decades of litigation efforts in Jamaica and Barbados.

Part II: Comparative Case Studies

Transnational Networks in the Caribbean Context

The struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the Anglo-Caribbean operates within a complex web of transnational influences that both support and oppose equality efforts. *TANs* such as the Kaleidoscope Trust, Human Dignity Trust, and the Commonwealth Equality Network leverage international conferences, legal expertise, and financial resources to build local capacity and facilitate strategic litigation. These organizations exemplify Keck and Sikkink's model, wherein local activists bypass domestic political blockages by connecting with international allies who can apply external pressure on their governments.

Conversely, *TINs* including the Alliance Defending Freedom, World Congress of Families, and American Center for Law and Justice mobilize religious networks and “traditional family values” messaging to maintain restrictive legal frameworks.¹⁶ These competing transnational forces transform local LGBTQ+ advocacy into a battleground where international human rights norms clash with conservative religious ideologies. (See Appendix A for detailed information on specific networks operating in Jamaica and Barbados.)

Local Networks: Domestic Mobilization and Counter-Mobilization

The domestic landscape of LGBTQ+ advocacy reveals a stark polarization between change agents and veto players, with both sides drawing heavily on their transnational partnerships. Pro-LGBTQ+ organizations in both countries operate as grassroots movements that have evolved from HIV/AIDS advocacy into broader human rights campaigns, utilizing strategic litigation, public education, and international networking to challenge discriminatory laws. These groups face significant resource constraints and societal hostility, making their transnational connections crucial for accessing legal expertise, funding, and legitimacy. Anti-LGBTQ+ opposition is predominantly organized through religious networks that leverage moral authority and congregational mobilization to maintain the status quo. These faith-based organizations benefit from deep community roots and institutional support, often coordinating their efforts through umbrella groups that can mobilize quickly against pro-LGBTQ+ initiatives. (See Appendix B for detailed information on local actors in both countries.)

Unpacking Legal Tactics: A Comparative Analysis of Decriminalization Strategies¹⁷

Within the theoretical model, TANs operate through boomerang effects, providing local activists with resources, legitimacy, and strategic coordination to circumvent domestic blockages. Conversely, TINs exploit pre-existing colonial institutions to create strategic blockages that counter TAN pressure on state institutions. The divergent outcomes in Jamaica and Barbados illustrate how the balance between these transnational forces, combined with domestic institutional contexts, determines the effectiveness of decriminalization strategies.

Jamaica: Religious Opposition Mobilization Through TIN Networks

Jamaica's decriminalization efforts exemplify how visible transnational support can inadvertently empower opposition networks. Since 2013, five decriminalization cases have triggered systematic counter-mobilization by religious groups backed by TINs to intervene as *amicus curiae* or interested parties. Rather than pressuring the government toward reform, international visibility has provided opposition networks with evidence to support their narrative of cultural imperialism. Organizations like the World Congress of Families and Caribbean CAUSE established regional coordinators who serve as "Watchmen" and "Warners" who rapidly mobilize anti-LGBTQ+ groups as interested parties whenever cases are filed, transforming individual constitutional challenges into broader cultural

battlegrounds.^{18,19} The result: a disproportionate number of opposing intervenors relative to those supporting LGBTQ+ rights, creating sustained institutional blockages that have stalled reform for over a decade.

Key litigation includes *Maurice Arnold Tomlinson v. The Attorney General of Jamaica* (2023), currently on appeal, which demonstrates how TINs leverage visibility. The individualized approach, while providing international visibility for advocates like Tomlinson, has proven vulnerable to TIN counterframing strategies. TINs exploit visible TAN support to reinforce narratives of cultural imperialism, arguing that decriminalization represents foreign values imposed on Jamaican society. This dynamic validates the theoretical model's prediction that TANs must remain 'discreet and minimal' to avoid enabling TIN counternarratives.

Lastly, Jamaica's continued reliance on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) as its final appellate court compounds these challenges. The JCPC's conservative interpretation of the Savings Law Clause consistently protects pre-independence buggery laws from constitutional scrutiny, creating what advocates describe as a "legal deadlock." This colonial-era judicial structure enables TINs to argue that both pro-LGBTQ+ advocacy (through TAN-backed support) and anti-LGBTQ+ laws (through colonial legacy) represent foreign influence, obscuring the democratic imperative for human rights protection.

Barbados' Regional Coordination: TAN Success Through Strategic Adaptation Strategic Timing and Quiet Diplomacy

Barbados' successful 2022 decriminalization through *René Holder-McClean-Ramirez v. Attorney General of Barbados* demonstrates how strategic adaptation overcomes TIN opposition. The key was not merely having transnational support but structuring that support to prevent opposition mobilization. Three strategic decisions proved decisive: First, legal coordination occurred through the regional Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), a regional network rather than visibly foreign organizations. This provided technical expertise while maintaining local leadership, preventing anti-imperialist counterframing. Second, COVID-19 restrictions limited traditional channels for religious mobilization (public demonstrations, media campaigns) allowing for a legal strategy of "quiet diplomacy" to proceed without mass opposition. Third, the litigation strategy, coordinated by Senior Counsel Douglas Mendes, employed deliberate discretion that shielded them the public spectacle that characterized Jamaica's approach. As practitioners noted, learning from Jamaica's experience, the moment you make it a public spectacle, you give the opposition exactly what they need to mobilize their base. In doing so and COVID-19 acting as a media blocker,

religious groups missed critical deadlines to register as interested parties, fundamentally reducing pressure on the Attorney General's office.

Most critically, it should be noted that Barbados' transition to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as its final appellate court in 2005 provided a progressive legal framework that supported decriminalization efforts. The CCJ's narrow interpretation of the Savings Law Clause enabled the High Court to rule that substantially amended post-independence laws no longer qualified as "saved law," opening them to constitutional scrutiny. This judicial transformation supports the theoretical model's prediction that transnational courts can remove colonial legal barriers while remaining insulated from direct TIN pressure.

Barbados' success reflects how effective TAN engagement requires behind-the-scenes technical support while maintaining local leadership and minimizing visible foreign involvement—preventing TINs from exploiting anti-imperialist narratives while providing necessary litigation resources.

Comparative Analysis and Strategic Implications

The divergent outcomes reveal how the balance between transnational forces, combined with domestic institutional contexts, determines decriminalization effectiveness. In Jamaica, TINs leverage both the JCPC's conservative jurisprudence and robust religious networks to create systematic blockages. Jamaica's individualized approach, while generating international attention, provided multiple intervention points for TIN mobilization. Each case became a cultural battleground where religious coordinators enabled rapid mobilization against each litigation effort. Barbados' regional coordination strategy, conversely, minimized TIN mobilization opportunities through strategic timing and discrete advocacy. The absence of *visible* foreign assistance prevented effective counterframing while still providing necessary technical support through regional networks.

The institutional analysis revealed the importance of judicial frameworks—JCPC and CCJ. Jamaica's retention of the JCPC maintained colonial-era legal structures that TINs exploit to preserve traditional values, while Barbados' transition to the CCJ provided a progressive legal jurisprudence supporting human rights interpretations. This suggests that judicial reform, such as removing colonial courts, may be a prerequisite for effective decriminalization. All Caribbean states that have decriminalized are no longer subject to the legal jurisdiction of the Privy Council but instead operate under the CCJ.

The research illuminates how TAN effectiveness depends on strategic adaptation to local contexts. Successful

TAN engagement requires behind-the-scenes technical support while maintaining local leadership and minimizing visible foreign support. This prevents TINs from exploiting anti-imperialist narrative while providing necessary resources for effective litigation.

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

This study contributes three key insights to transnational advocacy literature. First, it demonstrates how TINs strategically exploit colonial-era legal structures and religious institutions to create systematic blockages against progressive norm adoption. Second, it reveals how the visibility of transnational support can inadvertently strengthen opposition networks through enabling counterframing narratives. Third, it shows how institutional contexts—particularly the choice between colonial-era and progressive judicial frameworks—fundamentally shape the effectiveness of competing transnational networks.

The "decriminalization limbo" concept captures a common but understudied outcome where states remain trapped between external reform pressures and domestic opposition. This contributes to norm diffusion literature by identifying how political elites strategically defer responsibility between government branches to avoid electoral costs while delaying substantive reform.

The comparative analysis of Jamaica and Barbados provides empirical validation for understanding how transnational networks interact with domestic institutional contexts to shape LGBTQ+ rights outcomes. These findings extend beyond the Caribbean context, offering strategic guidance for LGBTQ+ advocacy in other postcolonial contexts where competing transnational networks shape domestic policy outcomes. As illiberal networks increasingly challenge liberal democratic norms globally, understanding these dynamics becomes crucial for protecting human rights and advancing inclusive democracy.

Appendix A: Transnational Networks Operating in Jamaica and Barbados

Pro-LGBTQ+ Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs)	Leadership/Base	Key Activities in Caribbean
Kaleidoscope Trust	UK-based	Strategic support and funding for regional conferences; invited Lady Phyll to Beyond Homophobia Conference
Human Dignity Trust	UK-based	Legal and technical assistance for litigation strategies; partnership with ECADE
Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN)	Commonwealth-wide	First officially recognized LGBTQ+ network within Commonwealth; mobilizes across 47 states
Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE)	Saint Lucia (registered 2015)	Regional umbrella for 22 territories; trained 1,000 activists through 50 trainings
Arcus Foundation	US-based	International funding source supporting regional advocacy
CariFLAGS	Caribbean regional	Foundational network established 2008, basis for ECADE development

Pro-LGBTQ+ Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs)

Anti-LGBTQ+ Transnational Illiberal Networks (TINs)	Leadership/Base	Key Activities in Caribbean
Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)	Alan Sears (Scottsdale, AZ)	Consults in Belize on anti-LGBTQ+ laws; holds UN consultative status
American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ)	Jay Sekulow (US-based)	Founded by Pat Robertson; allies with governments on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation
Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute (C-FAM)	Austin Ruse (NY/DC)	Influences UN social policy; supports anti-LGBTQ+ laws in Belize
United Families International (UFI)	US-based conservatives	Campaigns against same-sex marriage; influences UN family policies
Family Research Council (FRC)	Tony Perkins (Washington, DC)	Supports international coalitions promoting anti-LGBTQ+ policies
World Congress of Families (WCF)	Illinois, US	Organizes international conferences coordinating anti-LGBTQ+ strategies

Anti-LGBTQ+ Transnational Illiberal Networks (TINs)

Appendix B: Local Actors in Jamaica and Barbados

Jamaica

Pro-LGBTQ+ Groups (Change Agents)	Focus Areas	Anti-LGBTQ+ Groups (Veto Players)	Institutional Base
Equality for All Foundation Jamaica Ltd. (J-Flag, TransWave)	Legal advocacy, community organizing	Jamaican Coalition for a Healthy Society (JCHS)	Medical/professional networks
Solidarity Yaad International	International advocacy	Jamaica Lawyers Christian Fellowship	Legal profession
WE-Change	Social change advocacy	Advocates International (Shirley Richards)	Legal/religious networks
Jamaica AIDS Support for Life	Health advocacy	Jamaica Association of Full Gospel Churches	Pentecostal denomination
Jamaica Network of Seropositives	HIV/AIDS advocacy	Jamaica CAUSE	Religious coalition
		Love March Movement	Mass mobilization
		His Way Out Ministries	“Ex-gay” conversion

Barbados

Pro-LGBTQ+ Groups (Change Agents)	Focus Areas	Anti-LGBTQ+ Groups (Veto Players)	Institutional Base
B-GLAD (Barbados Gays, Lesbians and All-Sexuals against Discrimination)	Anti-discrimination advocacy	Family-Faith-Freedom, Barbados	Religious coalition
EqualsBarbados	Legal equality	United Pentecostal Council of the Assemblies of God	Pentecostal denomination
Trans Advocacy and Agitation Barbados (TAAB)	Transgender rights	Mount Zion’s Missions Inc.	Evangelical ministry
United Gays and Lesbians Against AIDS (UGLAAB)	HIV/AIDS advocacy	Victory Pentecostal Church of God Group	Pentecostal network
Community Education Empowerment and Development (CEED)	Education/empowerment	Restoration Ministries International	International ministry

Endnotes

- 1 Jean-François Mignot offers a more historically grounded framework through his four-wave model of decriminalization, which better accounts for how colonialism and global politics have shaped legal attitudes toward homosexuality. The *first wave*, beginning with Revolutionary France in 1791, introduced Enlightenment-driven reforms that abolished sodomy laws. These reforms influenced parts of Europe (e.g., Belgium, the Netherlands, some Swiss cantons) and independent states like Brazil and Mexico and even extended to the Ottoman Empire (1858) and China (1912). However, in this *second wave* was categorized by the British Empire, who expanded its criminalization efforts globally, using anti-sodomy laws (such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code) across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. France's colonies often retained non-criminalization, as did Dutch and Spanish colonies such as Indonesia and the Philippines. The *third wave*, following the Cold War, extended to Eastern Europe and post-Soviet states, some of which retained or repealed Soviet-era laws. India decriminalized homosexuality in 2018 through a landmark Supreme Court ruling. Yet Africa remains an exception: while some states such as South Africa (1998), Angola (2019), and Botswana (2019) have decriminalized, many others—particularly former British colonies—retain or have reintroduced criminalization. The influence of Islam, religious conservatism, and foreign evangelical networks continues to hinder progress in many African and Muslim-majority states. Mignot warns of a *fourth wave* of recriminalization, particularly in Muslim-majority and sub-Saharan African countries, sometimes through national laws and sometimes through sub-state Sharia jurisdictions (e.g., Aceh in Indonesia, northern Nigeria). All states that currently provide the death penalty for homosexual acts fall under Islamic law. Mignot's model highlights the inadequacy of modernization theory, which assumes a linear and Western-centered trajectory of liberal progress, ignoring how colonial institutions and political resistance shape uneven paths toward decriminalization. See: Jean-François Mignot, *Decriminalizing Homosexuality: A Global Overview Since the 18th Century*, *Annales de démographie historique*, 2021.
- 2 Human Dignity Trust. "Map of Criminalisation." Human Dignity Trust, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>.
- 3 In many postcolonial states, homosexuality is still framed as foreign, immoral, and incompatible with national identity—despite these prohibitions themselves being imports.
- 4 See Tamale, Sylvia. *Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa*. University of Chicago Press, 2019; Chitando, E., and P. Mateveke. "Africanizing the Discourse on Homosexuality: Challenges and Prospects." *Critical African Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 124–140.; Rodríguez, Encarnación Gutiérrez, and Rhoda Reddock, eds. *Decolonial Perspectives on Entangled Inequalities: Europe and The Caribbean*. Anthem Press, 2021.
- 5 The official website states that the court continues to serve the same function for many current and former Commonwealth countries that "have chosen to retain it." The use of "chosen" suggests that postcolonial states had an active choice in adopting the court, despite the fact that the Appellate Jurisdiction Acts predate decolonization and were never repealed by the British government. In reality, this was not a true choice, as many Commonwealth states inherited the court through constitutional transplantation following decolonization. Postcolonial states must now undergo complex legal and constitutional reforms to remove this court, adding institutional burdens to the decolonization process. Meanwhile, the British government retains the authority and ability to repeal the jurisdictional act itself. Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. "Committees." Privy Council Office. <https://privy-council.independent.gov.uk/privy-council/committees>.
- 6 See Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*. January 1, 1993.
- 7 Russell Korobkin, "The Endowment Effect and Legal Analysis," 97 NW. U. L. REV. 1227, 1228 (2003).

- 8 The term "Global South" generally refers to countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania that are historically marginalized within global economic and political systems. While geographically broad, the term signifies a shared legacy of colonialism, economic dependency, and socio-political exclusion, rather than a strict hemispheric location.
- 9 This term is used here to describe and conceptualize Global North evangelical and anti-LGBTQ+ networks whose interference in the political, legal, and normative diffusion of LGBTQ+ rights undermines democratic values. These networks manipulate local civil society actors and disrupt international human rights obligations in postcolonial states that are still navigating democratization and legal reform following independence.
- 10 Figure shows how blocked domestic groups appeal to international networks, which pressure the state from outside. Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- 11 Figure depicts pro-LGBTQ+ TANs and moral conservative networks as intertwined helixes influencing the same domestic space. Ayoub, Phillip M., and Kristina Stoeckl. "The Double-Helix Entanglements of Transnational Advocacy: Moral Conservative Resistance to LGBTI Rights." *Department of Political Science, University College London*, London, UK, and *Department of Political Science, LUISS*, Rome, Italy. Received 22 February 2023; revised 31 July 2023; accepted 29 September 2023.
- 12 Figure shows pathways from global norms through domestic resistance to state policy outcomes. Velasco, Kristopher. *Transnational Backlash and the Deinstitutionalization of Liberal Norms: LGBTQ+ Rights in a Contested World*. Princeton University.
- 13 The actors of anti-LGBT networks do not deny the existence of pro-LGBT norms. Rather, they acknowledge that both the pro-LGBT movement and the counter-mobilization reference the same point of discussion, but they argue about its meaning and implications (Ayoub and Chetaille 2017: 4). *Transnational Backlash and the Deinstitutionalization of Liberal Norms: LGBTQ+ Rights in a Contested World*, Kristopher Velasco, Princeton University.
- 14 Figure illustrates how global norms encounter layered domestic resistance through cultural, religious, and institutional blockages, with TANs and TINs competing to influence outcomes, resulting in three possible states: decriminalization, limbo, or recriminalization.
- 15 In interviews, Anglo-Caribbean activists used this term to describe the stalemate that occurs when legislatures defer action on LGBTQ+ rights, leaving courts to adjudicate. Courts, citing separation of powers, often defer back to legislatures, resulting in protracted legal limbo. This political-judicial deferral delays protections and sustains criminalization. The role of political elites and institutional framing of LGBTQ+ norms is central to my theoretical model.
- 16 For an analysis of how transnational advocacy and illiberal networks frame/counterframe LGBTQ+ rights in the Anglo-Caribbean, see: Willis, J. (Forthcoming August 2025). *Unseen Networks in the Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights in the Caribbean: How Transnational Actors Undermine Decriminalization/Reform*. *Weather Epicenter*.
- 17 For an analysis of how transnational advocacy and illiberal networks organize around LGBTQ+ rights in the Anglo-Caribbean, see: Willis, J. (Forthcoming August 2025). *Unseen Networks in the Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights in the Caribbean: How Transnational Actors Undermine Decriminalization/Reform*. *Weather Epicenter*.

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Polisario In Their Own Words: Examining Nationalism in Exile in the Western Sahara

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the Polisario Front, despite nearly five decades of exile in the Tindouf region of Algeria, succeeded in cultivating and maintaining a distinct Sahrawi national identity. While existent literature often marginalizes Sahrawi voices or frames the conflict through the lens of conflict irresolution and peace studies, this project seeks to reorient discourse on the Western Sahara by drawing on rarely used Polisario-authored documents across French, English, and Arabic. The paper explores how the Polisario Front institutionalized a shared national consciousness among a historically nomadic and politically disparate population through examining three mechanisms: political reorganization, loaned territoriality, and national education programs. Additionally, this paper seeks to challenge much of the existent literature on the Western Sahara by simultaneously demonstrating the agency of both the Polisario Front and individual Sahrawis and the minimal influence of outside powers in regards to the creation and maintenance of a distinct Sahrawi national identity.

Introduction

Despite its desolate geography and limited strategic utility, the Western Sahara has had a significant impact on contemporary North African geopolitics. In addition to being one of the most protracted conflicts of the twentieth century, the territory has been the cornerstone of the Algero-Moroccan regional rivalry. Yet, despite its significance, the Western Sahara remains largely absent in Western discourse on African geopolitics. Of the studies which do exist, few focus on the experiences of the native Sahrawi people. Fewer yet give credence to Sahrawi-authored documents, preferring to instead rely on documents sourced from Western embassies and international bodies.

The existent twenty-first century literature on the Western Sahara has been dominated by the field of political science. Consequently, the conversation frequently centers on the conflict's implications for the greater North Africa/Sahel region. This has resulted in the relegation of Sahrawis to the margins in discussions of the conflict. Many prominent texts, such as Anour Boukhars and Jacques Rousellier's

2013 anthology, characterize Sahrawi identity as a colonial byproduct,¹ thereby arguing that the term "Sahrawi" is an artificial construct and a byproduct of Spanish colonialism.²

This tendency to marginalize Sahrawi agency is mirrored in Arabic-language literature. Additionally, these sources frequently seek to reinforce state narratives on the topic at the expense of academic objectivity, with Moroccan articles on the topic often adopting a polemical tone³—going as far as describing Algeria as a "fratricidal" state and adding the adjective "separatist" to any mention of the Polisario Front.⁴

In this project, I seek to reorient the conversation on the Western Sahara away from geopolitics and conflict irresolution, a stance which often essentializes the Sahrawi experience. Instead, this paper will aim to answer the following question: How was the Polisario Front able to cultivate and maintain a distinct Sahrawi national identity despite its prolonged exile? Through the acquisition and analysis of historically neglected Polisario- and Sahrawi-authored documents, this paper will explore three major areas of inquiry: political reorganization immediately following exile, "loaned" territoriality in Tindouf, and the impact of the education system in Tindouf.

Historical Background

Located at the intersection of Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, the Western Sahara acts as a bridge between North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Largely desert, the territory has historically existed on the periphery of Arab and Sub-Saharan empires.⁵ Although endowed with rich coastal fisheries and phosphate deposits, geographic constraints historically made control and exploitation of these resources difficult.⁶ While nominally annexed by Spain in 1884, it wasn't until 1934 that all of the territory's major cities came under Spanish control. Nonetheless, much of the inland remained outside the bounds of any practical Spanish governance, allowing Sahrawi tribes significant autonomy.⁷

By the 1970s, Spanish withdrawal from the Western Sahara was becoming increasingly evident. Furthermore, both international and regional forces began pressing for Spanish withdrawal. The United Nations first declared the Western Sahara a non-self-governing territory in 1960, and passed seven additional resolutions between 1966 and 1973 calling for the territory's decolonization.⁸ A 1975 International Court of Justice ruling ordering an independence referendum, which only reinforced this view.⁹ In the same year, the colonial government began to prepare for the transition to native rule, transferring control of several military installations to the Polisario Front.¹⁰

For a moment, a successful independence referendum leading to Polisario rule in the Western Sahara seemed imminent. However, following Spanish president Francisco Franco's sudden death, Moroccan and Mauritanian negotiators met with Spanish ministers in Madrid. The subsequent 1975 Madrid Agreement placed the Western Sahara under joint Hispano-Moroccan-Mauritanian administration until both Spanish withdrawal and a referendum on Moroccan integration were complete.¹¹ The next year—following formal Spanish withdrawal from the territory—roughly 60,000 Moroccan armed forces, bolstered by Mauritanian auxiliaries, entered the Western Sahara. While outside observers expected a quick Moroccan victory, the conflict would become one of the most protracted of the twentieth century, ending only with the signing of a 1991 ceasefire agreement that saw Morocco maintaining control of over 80% of the Western Sahara territory, including the entirety of its coastline. In contrast, the Polisario Front was relegated to controlling only 20% of inland desert on the Mauritania border.¹²

Soon after the outbreak of war in the Western Sahara, roughly one-third of the Sahrawi population joined the Polisario Front in relocating to Tindouf. While this arrangement was meant to be temporary, the 1991 ceasefire and subsequent failed mediation attempts have resulted in the Polisario Front and a substantial portion of the Sahrawi population living in extended exile. There, over the last 49 years, the population has remained a “nation in waiting.”

Political Reorganization

In order to create a unified national identity, the Polisario front had to first destroy existing tribal identities. Historically, the Sahrawis were a nomadic people, divided up into more than a hundred distinct tribes.¹³ During the colonial period these tribes held significant influence and played a role in both local and colonial administration.¹⁴ Following the outbreak of the Western Sahara war, roughly a third of the Sahrawi population—including many tribal leaders—relocated with the Polisario Front to the Tindouf region of Algeria. This abrupt uprooting and sedentarization provided Polisario a unique opportunity to co-opt tribal legitimacy while simultaneously destroying tribal identity.

In 1975, the Polisario Front held the Guelta Conference, bringing together individuals from various tribal and political affiliations. Immediately following the outbreak of war, several Sahrawi groups defected to the Moroccan side.¹⁵ To counter this trend, during the Guelta Conference all political groups and tribes present were ordered to disband and swear loyalty to the Polisario Front in exchange for political positions within the organization.¹⁶ Through this exchange of political power for loyalty, the

Polisario Front was able to absorb the legitimacy of these long-standing colonial and tribal institutions, and integrate talented administrators and tribal notables into their nascent organization.

Throughout the Western Sahara war, the Polisario Front underwent rapid emancipation and secularization. The need for military-aged men in the armed forces necessitated the emancipation of women into administrative roles.¹⁷ This is evident throughout early Polisario governmental documents, which repeatedly emphasized the need to educate and empower women to take charge of the camps.¹⁸ As a result, Sahrawi women were uniquely positioned compared to women in other revolutionary republics.¹⁹ Unlike their contemporaries, whose emancipation was often nominal, the Sahrawi situation normalized women's participation across all levels of Polisario political and administrative life.

Furthermore, the Polisario Front aimed to make political representation as accessible as possible. By doing so, they would simultaneously reinforce their legitimacy among the Sahrawi populace and better integrate the recently tribal Sahrawi population into a singular Sahrawi people by granting them an active stake in the new government. This is most evident through examining both the 1976 provisional constitution and modern 2023 version. A cursory comparison of the two shows the increasing decentralization and democratization of the Polisario government in Tindouf—transitioning from power centralized around a revolutionary council in 1976²⁰ to one where power is distributed across various branches of government and legislative houses.²¹

“Loaned” Territoriality

A significant benefit of the Polisario Front's exile in Tindouf is its “loaned” territoriality. By relocating to and operating within Algerian borders, it becomes impossible for Morocco to completely eradicate the Polisario front—and by extension Sahrawi nationalism—without invading Algeria. This “safe haven” is invaluable militarily, allowing Polisario to stockpile weapons and erect military installations without fear of Moroccan reprisal.²² Furthermore, the Algerian government grants the Polisario Front significant autonomy in governance of the region's refugee camps.²³ Thus, permanent civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools can be constructed and administered by Polisario.

The significance of this self-governance in relation to maintaining a distinct national identity is only evident when compared to the experience of Sahrawis in Moroccan administered institutions. Usage of Hasaniyya, the Arabic

dialect spoken by Sahrawis, remains heavily censored in Moroccan occupied Western Sahara. Additionally, flying Polisario flags is illegal and those wearing Sahrawi cultural clothing frequently face discrimination at the hands of Moroccan authorities.²⁴

Beyond providing a safe haven for the preservation and practice of Sahrawi culture, the juxtaposition of treatment between Moroccan and Polisario administration has been a useful propaganda tool for the Polisario Front. Throughout Polisario educational materials, the difficulty of “the exodus” and brutal treatment at the ends of Moroccan security forces is continuously emphasized.²⁵ Several interviews with Polisario field commanders only serves to reaffirm the utility of highlighting such contrast in lived experience. As frustrations with numerous failed peace talks and international mediation attempts continue to mount, the tangible development and safety of Tindouf provides a crucial impetus for preserving the Sahrawi national identity across generations.²⁶

The Polisario Education System

Central to every nationalism is a primordial national mythos. While the initial relocation to Tindouf and early political reforms allowed the Polisario Front to firmly establish such a mythos, it is their educational system that has perpetuated it. Most aspects of Polisario’s primordial claims are standard practice among nascent nationalist movements—historical presence in the land, distinct literary tradition, etc. However, the Polisario Front differed from their contemporaries in two ways. First, they claim that they were naturally urbanizing before the arrival of Europeans. Second, they claim that the borders of the Spanish Sahara were not arbitrary, but rather, were always inhabited by a homogeneous population distinct from neighboring territories.²⁷

While superficially bizarre, the claims of pre-European urbanization and co-optation of colonial borders make sense when properly contextualized. The Sahrawis were culturally and linguistically similar to other groups who existed in the Moroccan and Mauritanian hinterlands. So great was this similarity that in several correspondences, including a letter addressed to the Moroccan king, the Polisario Front languishes the war as a conflict between two brothers.²⁸ The Polisario Front leadership was keenly aware of this fact and its dangers. Early referendum efforts were already being derailed by Morocco, who would flood voter rolls with Moroccans from border areas in an attempt to pass them off as Sahrawi.²⁹

Soon after their arrival to Tindouf, Polisario leadership began planning a unified school curriculum in the

camp. Their initial goal was to dismantle the aforementioned tribal identities which had previously been principal Sahrawi identity. Additionally, they aimed to distinguish Sahrawis in the greatest extent possible from their Moroccan and Mauritanian neighbors.³⁰ Therefore, co-opting Spanish colonial borders—and all the settlements which lay within it—became a defense mechanism against Moroccan interference in referendum voter rolls.

In order to successfully disseminate this nationalist narrative, the Polisario Front would need to make education accessible. Historically, Sahrawi tribal societies were highly stratified.³¹ Through mandating education for all Sahrawis, the Polisario Front aimed to simultaneously erase tribal hierarchies and gave previously marginalized groups, such as women and orphans, a stake in perpetuating the Sahrawi national identity over their previous tribal one.³² Furthermore, during the initial decade of the conflict, many Sahrawis believed that short-term return to their homes was possible. As such, Polisario leadership believed that by educating a wide segment of their population, they were fulfilling their mission of educating a nation in exile.³³

Conclusion

Several barriers exist to researching the Western Sahara. While extensive literature and funding is present for a variety of topics in the Mashriq—especially in the United States—the Maghrib remains comparatively understudied in anglophone literature. This literature gap is further compounded by the region’s linguistic diversity, causing many American researchers to rely on more readily available English language governmental sources.

This project sought to fill an existing gap in the literature on the Western Sahara by drawing on rarely used Polisario- and Sahrawi-authored documents to examine how the Polisario Front was able to cultivate a distinct Sahrawi identity despite enduring an extended exile in Tindouf. The extensive political reorganization enabled by the abrupt sedentarization in Tindouf provided the Polisario Front a unique opportunity to consolidate political power in Sahrawi society. The subsequent centralization allowed for the implementation of a variety of educational and infrastructural developments that only served to aid in differentiating Sahrawis from other ethnic groups existing in the Moroccan and Mauritanian hinterlands.

Ultimately, this project demonstrates that the Polisario’s exile in Tindouf strengthened the organization’s ability to cultivate Sahrawi nationalism. By creating a proto-state across a series of refugee camps in Tindouf, the Polisario Front was able to ensure the continuity of Sahrawi nationalism by embedding it in everyday life.

ميهارب اثيروم جالس يئر ةم لكلم لملقلا صنل ا. ةرحلا ءارحصلا ةديرج
[Full text of President Ibrahim Ghali's speech at the closing ceremony of the
Fourth Student Conference]. نويغلا ةيالو (ةرحلا ءارحصلا ةديرج
(فوننت ةيالو), August 8, 2022.

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46, no. 46 (2023):
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Contested Geographies: Maroon Spaces and the Colonial Erasure of Providence Island (1818–1838)

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Abstract

Maroon communities have long been central agents in shaping the Caribbean, resisting colonial domination and reconfiguring landscapes according to their own needs and worldviews. Providence Island is no exception. Yet, the spatial practices and territorial presence of Maroons on the island have been systematically erased from colonial records, which privilege European spatial agency and imperial narratives. This paper examines the geography of Providence Island between 1818 and 1838 by triangulating historical cartography, scientific surveys and archaeological evidence. Drawing on interdisciplinary methodologies—including findings from the Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project (OPSCIAP)—the paper explores how European powers deployed instruments of control to overwrite Maroon geographies with imperial spatial imaginaries. Engaging with recent historiographical interventions by scholars such as Tessa Murphy, Lauren Benton, and Justin Dunnivant, the study argues that Maroon communities on Providence Island cultivated a counter-geography rooted in African-descended cultural practices, environmental adaptation, and resistance to colonial surveillance. Ultimately, this research contributes to decolonizing Caribbean historiography by foregrounding Maroon geographies and ways of living.

Acknowledgements

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Maroon communities have played a central role in the settlement of the Caribbean for centuries. However, not only have their ways of life, culture, and traditions been marginalized, but their very existence has been systematically erased from official records. Providence Island is no exception. Archaeological evidence from the *Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project* (2019–2024) reveals the development of a rich material culture and substantial settlements, including locally produced ceramic colonoware and engaging in trade.¹ Yet, the European legal documents *On the Island of Old Providencia* (1834) and the *Plano de las Islas de Sta. Catalina y Providencia* (1818) fail to acknowledge the Maroons' presence.² This study argues that such omissions were part of a broader colonial project to suppress non-European spatial agency and it seeks to reconstruct the lived realities of Maroon communities through the approaches of historical archaeology. This methodology integrates visual analysis, material culture and spatial analysis to interweave multiple lines of evidence in order to produce a robust interpretation of the past. The archival silences of Maroons can be navigated and resisted through the analysis against the grain of this broader range of sources.

Providence followed a distinct trajectory in the Caribbean, as it did not develop large-scale plantation agriculture nor come under sustained direct European administration. Originally colonized in 1629 by English Puritans, early attempts to establish a plantation economy proved unsuccessful. For almost two centuries, between 1671 and 1817, Maroon communities in Providence maintained a remarkable degree of political and economic autonomy.^{3,4} However, this autonomous landscape shifted dramatically in 1818 when French privateer Luis Aury established a base on the island for his multinational and multiethnic privateering fleet. The long-established Maroon communities—who had flourished independently for generations—suddenly faced external threats to their sovereignty and way of life. The year 1818 also marked the beginning of a renewed European interest in the island, marked by an influx of geographic surveys, maps, and scientific documentation over the following decades. This renewed engagement was not only political or economic—it was spatial. In many ways, it was a war about space. While Maroon communities had shaped the island's geography through lived experience and cultural practices, European powers began to reimagine and represent the island through the tools of empire: cartography, topographic surveys, and published maps. These efforts imposed a Westernized imaginaire of the island's landscape, attempting to overwrite Maroon geographies with colonial visions of order, access, and control.

Maroon Geographies: A Brief Historiographical Dive

In recent decades, Caribbean historiography has undergone a meaningful transformation. Scholars have moved beyond the confines of plantation-centric narratives and imperial frameworks to explore the region as a space of contested power and sovereignties. One big shift in historiography was the development of the concept of overlapping geographies. Tessa Murphy's *The Creole Archipelago* (2021) is central to this reorientation, challenging hegemonic notions of borders and empire by focusing on how colonialism played out on the ground. *The Creole Archipelago* makes a significant contribution to Caribbean and borderlands history by re-centering the often-overlooked southeastern islands of the Lesser Antilles as critical sites of negotiation. By conceptualizing these islands as a "Creole Archipelago," Murphy reframes a fragmented geography divided by European empires into a unified region marked by mobility and contestation.⁵ Her work foregrounds Kalinago maritime knowledge and ancestral canoe technologies that connected people and places beyond imperial frameworks.^{6,7} Murphy offers a geographic vision attuned to the messiness of lived experience in contrast to cartographic representations, forming a conceptual bridge to sites like Providence, where Maroon survival strategies demand interpretive frameworks beyond imperial cartography.

Another important transformation in the field has been the examination of Maroon experiences in the Caribbean through the lens of historical archaeology—a field that calls for an interdisciplinary methodology whose greatest strength lies in its ability to combine and contrast diverse forms of evidence. By bringing together archival documents, museum collections, and re-evaluations of earlier excavations, historical archaeology enables scholars to pose new questions and gain deeper insights into the lived past.⁸ Justin Dunnivant exemplifies this interdisciplinary turn, combining archival research with archaeological fieldwork to uncover the histories of Maroon communities often omitted from written records. Rather than peripheral or marginal spaces, Maroon landscapes are now understood as dynamic sites of freedom-making—working in their own logics, or "maroon geographies."⁹ Dunnivant's work underscores a broader historiographical shift: through new methodologies, Maroons are increasingly seen not merely as reacting to colonial violence, but as proactive agents engaged in spatial experimentation and reclamation.

Matthew Reilley's investigation of nonelite white communities in Barbados further demonstrates the analytical power of historical archaeology. Drawing on written records, oral histories, and archaeologically recovered material culture, Reilley departs from narratives that center

plantation hierarchies and instead calls "into question traditional interpretation of poor white relations to capital as well as the nature of racial identities and categories."¹⁰ Building on this literature and its methodological insights, this paper aims to shed light on the silenced experiences of Maroon communities at Providence Island, a site largely overlooked within Caribbean studies.

Imagined Providence Island

Through the publication of the *Plano de las Islas de Sta. Catalina y Providencia* in 1818, European cartographers advanced a systematic project of erasing Maroon communities' physical and lived spaces. This map, produced by the Spanish *Dirección de Trabajos Hidrográficos*—an institution dedicated to surveying and publishing materials on territories of interest to the Spanish Crown—reflects a colonial vision of space that prioritizes European control and movement while disregarding the existence of long-established Maroon communities. The cartographic representation is deeply rooted in European spatial logic. It meticulously maps ship routes to the island's ports and landing areas, even specifying the time required to reach these locations (see Figure 1). By emphasizing maritime accessibility, the map serves as a strategic tool for facilitating European arrival and subsequent dominance. Additionally, the map labels key geographic features such as *canales* (channels), *puntos y puntas* (points or tips of the island), and *entradas* (entrances), reinforcing a spatial framework centered on European navigation and access. Notably absent, however, are any references to the island's long-standing Maroon settlements, particularly those located in the hills and that could be easily seen by anyone arriving via the ocean.¹¹ Unlike other Maroon communities in the Caribbean and the Americas—who often sought refuge in swamps, as in North Carolina, or deep in the mountains, as in Jamaica—the Maroons of Providence Island did not rely on concealment. Instead, their autonomy and freedom from colonial rule was visibly asserted through settlements perched atop hills, now archaeological sites, standing in plain view from the island's shores.¹² This deliberate omission is significant: by disregarding the lived spaces of Maroon communities, the map constructs an imaginaire of the island as an uninhabited or unclaimed space, ready for European intervention. Ultimately, this cartographic production exemplifies how maps are not just neutral tools of representation but instruments of power, shaping historical narratives and legitimizing territorial control.



Figure 1. *Plano de las Islas de Sta. Catalina y Providencia* [Material cartográfico]. Madrid: Dirección de Trabajos Hidrográficos, 1818. Accessed March 12, 2025. <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~335220~90103107>.

Justin Dunnivant further complicates the effects of the “representation of space,” in the creation of maps in the Colonial Caribbean. His work investigates the cartographic maps of St. Croix produced during the Danish occupation and how they obscure regions that were central to Maroon geography, even though cartographers were likely knowledgeable of the Maroon community.¹³ Referring to this erasure, Dunnivant coined the concepts of “archival and cartographic violence” in the Caribbean islands. The *Plano de las Islas de Sta. Catalina y Providencia* exemplifies this cartographic violence by systematically omitting Maroon settlements and lived spaces, reinforcing a colonial imagination that prioritized European control and navigation.

This erasure, however, was not confined to a single map—it was reinforced through systems of reproduction, circulation, and scientific publication in Europe. The influence of such representations extended beyond Spanish cartography, shaping broader European perceptions of the island. Twelve years later, in 1830, the *Service Hydrographique de la Marine* in France published *Îles Providencia et Sta. Catalina*, an almost identical cartographic representation of the Spanish *Plano*. Though not explicitly labeled as a copy, the overwhelming similarities in content and structure leave little doubt that it was a direct duplicate with only minor annotations (see Figure 2). The map’s fundamental features—such as the names of channels, points, and entrances—remain unchanged, simply translated into French. The visual style and spatial organization are also nearly identical, further illustrating how colonial knowledge production relied on replication rather than original surveys.



Figure 2. *Îles Providencia et Sta. Catalina*. [Division 12 du portefeuille 143 du Service hydrographique de la marine]. Paris: Service Hydrographique de la Marine, 1830. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Accessed March 12, 2025. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b5970812j>.

This transnational circulation of cartographic materials between Spanish and French institutions exemplifies what Jordana Dym and Karl Offen identify in “Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader” as a crucial element of colonial power. The reproduction of the *Plano* parallels a more famous historical example they cite: Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 world map, which was the first to label the New World as “America.” This landmark map, created by a German cartographer working from second-hand accounts, became influential not through its accuracy but through its reproduction.¹⁴ Similarly, the reproduction of the Providencia and Santa Catalina maps across different European powers helped solidify an imaginary of the island that erased Maroon presence, reinforcing European claims to the space while marginalizing the lived experiences of its inhabitants. As Dym and Offen suggest, understanding “how maps work (and how they do work)” reveals that these cartographic productions did more than document geography; they actively participated in a broader epistemic project that legitimized colonial control and silenced indigenous and Maroon histories.¹⁵

This European system of erasure of Maroon agency extended beyond cartography into European written accounts. Collett’s 1834 survey “On the Island of Old Providencia,” published in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* (1837), exemplifies this pattern. While purporting to “collect, register and digest” information about the island through an ostensibly objective and scientific approach, the account ultimately reinforces the European colonial imagination. Collett immediately frames the island’s significance through a European lens, stating it “claims attention from the notoriety of its having been the resort of both former buccaneers and more

modern privateers, as well as from the fertility of its soil” (203). This narrative centers European piracy as the island’s defining historical feature, with landmarks like “Morgan’s Head (named after the noted buccaneer)” (207) reinforcing this Eurocentric spatial memory. Though Collett briefly acknowledges that “the population, by the last census, was 342 persons,* about one-half of whom were slaves” (207), he offers no further discussion of these enslaved individuals’ identities, spatial practices, or lived experiences. Free people of African descent or Maroon communities are not mentioned in his survey of the island. Could perhaps Collett have misrepresented the Maroons in his account as “slaves”? It is impossible to say. Still, this glaring omission effectively renders Maroon communities and effectively half of the recorded population as objects rather than agents in the production of space. The recorded practices in this seemingly scientific document certify and officialize strictly European forms of spatial agency. This way, written surveys had a role in complementing the cartographic erasure documented in the Plano and its French reproduction.

Given the dominance of European spatial imaginaire in official records, reconstructing the lived geographies of Providence Island requires methodologies that can access spatial narratives beyond colonial framings. Historic archaeological investigation provides a critical window into this counter-geography, revealing how Maroon spatial memory and agency manifested in material form. As Singleton argues, *marronage*—especially grand, sustained forms of *marronage* as practiced on Providence Island—is the best form of overt slave resistance that archaeologists can investigate.¹⁶

Lived Providence Island

The Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project (OPSCIAP), launched in 2019 and rooted in historical archaeological practices, has been conducting excavations and ethnographic research to illuminate these suppressed histories. One of the most significant findings has been the presence of colonoware—a type of earthenware produced by African-descended communities across the Atlantic world—as a material marker of Maroon life on the island. Far from being simply ceramic pieces, colonoware embodies cultural memory. Colonoware ceramics embody the cultural legacies of displaced peoples, providing material evidence of how Maroon inhabitants actively transformed and inhabited spaces that European cartography systematically erased.¹⁷ The discovery of eighty colonoware sherds, primarily concentrated in the island’s southern region, offers compelling evidence of Maroon spatial agency and cultural resilience.¹⁸ At site 14: Path to Peak, Bottom House, the highest concentration of colonoware sherds (48% of all ceramic materials found) dates to approximately 1822—precisely when European cartographic surveys were attempting to erase these communities from official

records (see Figure 3).¹⁹ This temporal alignment powerfully underscores the deliberate nature of the erasure—these Maroon communities were actively producing material culture at precisely the same moment European cartographers and surveyors were rendering them invisible in official records.

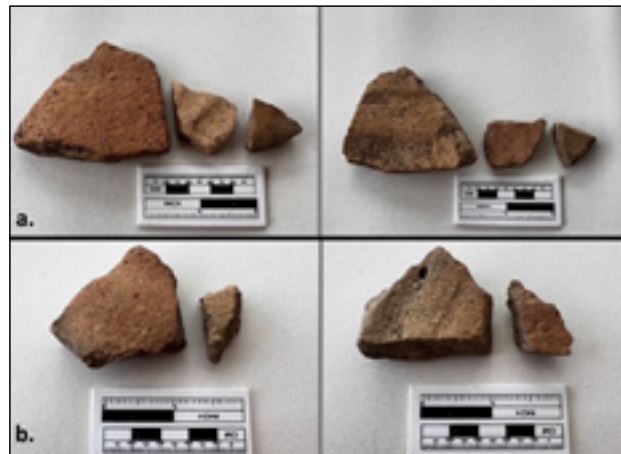


Figure 3. *Colonoware pottery sherds, inside and outside. South site 14. [Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project].*

These artifacts bear specific characteristics that speak to local production practices, showing how Maroon communities from Providence were shaping space based on their African-descent traditions. The ceramic pieces were produced using coiling and hand-molding techniques, and with local materials available on the island.²⁰ The inclusion of quarts and locally sourced “mal rock” (named for being too friable for construction) as flux material speaks to the local nature of these pieces.²¹ The pieces also had red/pink and light tan clay coloration and they used open-air firing rather than kiln production, with variable thickness and absence of decorative embellishments.²² These choices of material, from the use of “mal rock” to open-air firing, reflect a deep understanding of Providence’s resources and landscape, a distinctly place-based knowledge product of generations who have lived on the Island. Crucially, the making of ceramics is not merely a craft—it is a spatial practice that requires moving across the landscape to locate clays, gathers people at production sites, creates firing locales, and transmits generational knowledge about soils, resource distribution, and firing conditions. These practices collectively form a web of relations and embodied infrastructures that map how Maroons understood, used, and reshaped the island.

This is where the concept of spatial agency becomes even more clear. If colonial maps represent space as a grid of surveyed lines, property claims, and imperial control, colonoware represents a very different spatial imaginaire—

one grounded in mobility, environmental intimacy, communal labor, and the maintenance of autonomy. As Hauser (2011) argues, the presence of colonoware fundamentally challenges colonial narratives by illustrating networks of localized production and community organization among Maroon populations.²³ This aligns with Neil Roberts's concept of the "materialization" of freedom: these ceramics are not just remnants of daily life, but active expressions of fugitivity, alternative sovereignty, and survival. Rather than imagining freedom as a static endpoint, it is a process—one materially realized in the lived experiences of marronage.²⁴ Murphy's understanding of fluid geographies rooted in lived experiences, rather than in rigid imperial boundaries also applies here. The colonoware thus becomes both a technological adaptation and a mnemonic device: a means of forging continuity in exile, of remembering otherwise, and of claiming sovereignty in the face of erasure. Together, these perspectives reveal how Providence Island was not just a site of escape, but a geography of reinvention.

Where European cartography and written accounts erased Maroon presence from the island's representational space, these ceramic artifacts materially inscribe their existence into the landscape. This Maroon geography, invisible in colonial maps yet physically inscribed into the landscape through everyday material practices like pottery production, challenges the totalizing claims of colonial spatial representation and recovers a history deliberately obscured by European imaginaries of the Caribbean.

Conclusion

The case of Providence Island underscores the power of cartography not merely as a tool for navigation but as a central instrument in the colonial project of erasure. Through the systematic omission of Maroon settlements from official maps and documents, Spanish, French and British powers sought to reimagine the island as a space for European spatial agency. This spatial rewriting not only denied the long-standing presence and agency of Maroon communities but also facilitated the colonial logic of dominance through representation. However, through archaeological investigation, interdisciplinary scholarship, and theoretical frameworks like those of Tessa Murphy and Justin Dunnivant, we can begin to recover the geographies of survival, autonomy, and resistance that defined the Maroon experience on Providence. These counter-histories challenge the sanitized landscapes of imperial maps, revealing the island as a site of contested sovereignties and lived complexity. As such, re-centering Maroon geographies is not only a matter of historical justice—it is a vital step toward rethinking the spatial narratives that continue to shape our understanding of the Caribbean past.

Endnotes

- 1 Tracie Mayfield. "Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project" (ICANH, 2023), 8–9.
- 2 C. F. Collett. "On the Island of Old Providencia." (*The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 1837), 203–210; *Plano de las Islas de Sta. Catalina y Providencia* [Cartographic Material]. 1818.
- 3 This period without direct European control was historically known as the "Period of Abandonment." However, recent scholarship by Courtney Besaw revises this terminology as the "Maroon Period" as a way to highlight the local population's agency.
- 4 More on the history of the Island: Providence, as a territory, is composed of the main island of Providence and the smaller adjacent island of Santa Catalina. It is a small territory in the outskirts of the Caribbean, 418 kilometers off the coast of Nicaragua. English Puritans first settled there in 1629, but early attempts to create a plantation economy failed and colonizers quickly left. The island experienced a major turning point in 1638 with a revolt by enslaved Africans and Maroon members. The uprising was quickly suppressed by the English administration, but it left an enduring desire for alternative logics of living. Just a few years later, in 1641, the Spanish Armada seized control of the island. In 1666, the infamous buccaneer Henry Morgan occupied Providence to use it as a strategic base for his eventual attack on Panama in 1671. This would be the last recorded episode of direct European control over the island. After that, and before 1822, the island experienced the "Maroon Period."
- 5 Tessa Murphy. *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 6.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 7 See also: Lauren A. Benton's *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires* (2010) also explores the concept of uneven and overlapping geographies. Her work with piracy, treason and convict transportation shows how imperial control was disrupted and not contained in monochrome mapping conventions.
- 8 Archer, Steven N., Kevin M Bartoy, and Society for Historical Archaeology Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology. *Between Dirt and Discussion: Methods, Methodology, and Interpretation in Historical Archaeology*. (New York: Springer, 2006), 6.
- 9 Justin Dunnivant. "Have Confidence in the Sea: Maritime Maroons and Fugitive Geographies" (*Antipode*, 2021), 884–905.
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- 11 Courtney Besaw. "Maroons on Providencia: An Archaeological Look at Self-Emancipation and the Peripheries of Empire in the Western Caribbean." (University of Pittsburgh, 2024).
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Justin Dunnivant. "Have Confidence in the Sea: Maritime Maroons and Fugitive Geographies" (*Antipode*, 2021), 884–905.
- 14 Jordana Dym, Karl Offen. *Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 32.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 16 Theresa Ann Singleton. 2020. "Archaeology of Marronage in the Caribbean Antilles." (*Revista Do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia*, no. 35), 11.
- 17 Jeb J. Card. "The Archaeology of Hybrid Material Culture." 1st ed. *Southern Illinois University Press*, 2013.
- 18 Tracie Mayfield. "Old Providence and Santa Catalina Islands Archaeological Project" (ICANH, 2023), 71.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Mark Hauser. 2011. "Routes and Roots of Empire: Pots, Power, and Slavery in the 18th-Century Caribbean." *American Anthropologist* New Series.
- 24 Neil Roberts. *Freedom as Marronage*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 98–99.

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