

# CONTEXTS

A photograph of two hands reaching towards each other against a blue sky background. The hands are silhouetted against the bright blue sky, with the fingers of both hands extended and nearly touching. The overall mood is one of connection and aspiration.

body / object narratives

Stanford's Undergraduate Research Journal in Anthropology

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**4**

Letter from the Editors

**5-15**

Histories Lost and Found: Reckoning with Mythologies of  
Poverty and Assimilation within the Black Diaspora

by Layo Laniyan

**16-21**

Living as Becoming: Envisioning Life Chances Within  
and Against Sociomedical Constraints

by Caroline Aung

**22-27**

Counting or Discounting Bodies? A Case Study of Global Health  
Interventions in Early Infant Diagnosis in Accra, Ghana

by Mahima Krishnamoorthi

**28-33**

The Role of Masculinity in the English Prison

by Josh Cobler

**34-40**

Travel-Sized Sites: Art, Souvenirs, and Tourism  
(and Subversion, Capitalism, and Erasure) in South Africa

by Lilith Frakes

**41-42**

Meet the Authors

# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

This year's editorial team is proud to present the 12th installment of CONTEXTS, Stanford's Undergraduate Research Journal of Anthropology.

Every year, CONTEXTS showcases exceptional student research in anthropology and the social sciences that asks larger, critical questions within the discipline and beyond. Our authors for this year's publication encourage us to (re)think notions of body and object, taking us through the border between life and death at hospice care, to the different performances of masculinity within English prisons, to the lingering memories and mythologies of poverty and assimilation in the black diaspora.

All of the authors this year experiment with the boundaries presented in this year's theme: body / object narrative.

CONTEXTS aims to blur and push predetermined dominant narratives in many different times and spaces, especially the intersections of established concepts and the emerging socio-political moment. Each author provides their own conceptualizations of the multiple possibilities of body, being, and life-- a joyous and cacophonous accumulation of counternarratives against the established rhythm of body and objects.

We are incredibly grateful for the amount of time and dedication that our authors spent on their pieces-- for the hours of archival and field research that went into the drafting of each piece, the many rounds of revising and editing that each author undertook throughout the year amidst a global pandemic, and the unique forms of dialogue and discourse to engage with this year's theme. We would also like to thank Anthropology faculty member, Angela Garcia, graduate editor, Alisha Cherian, and our student services officer, Tina Jeon, for their support and guidance. Finally, we would like to thank our readers for supporting this publication, which is crucial to the fostering and development of each of our researcher's intellectual pursuits at Stanford and beyond.

We hope you enjoy this year's issue.

Warmly,

The Editorial Team

**Tony Hackett '20 | Sabrina Jiang '20 | Eunice Jung '21 | Harleen Kaur '21**

# Histories Lost and Found:

## *Reckoning with Mythologies of Poverty and Assimilation within the Black Diaspora*

Layo Laniyan

*My father, a recent college graduate, left Nigeria for America in 1998, only a promise of a job with an oil company awaiting him across the water. My mother came soon after on a similar work visa, and they eventually settled down in the outskirts of Austin, Texas.*

That is all I know about my parent's immigration to the United States. That story has stood, untouched, as a kind of lore in my family for years. One never retold in its entirety - rather, one pieced together in different memories, disjointed fragments melded into something, somewhere between narrative and its interpretation. I have begun to discover more, to ascertain what transpired between my parent's migration and my birth.

The southern summers endured, the harsh winters of the Midwest braved, the hopes of the spring withered - those stories still exist in uncertainty. These narratives themselves are not truths - they are fragments from lived experiences weaved into a tenuous cohesion, an approximation. Yet, I often find myself looking back at the stories I do know. I look back to the stories of their immigration before the turn of the century, of their acclimation to Texas, of their assimilation to a land that had only previously existed as a sort of legend.

I look back at those stories and wonder what narratives they willed into meaning.

### I. Denial

*He wore the green Ralph Lauren button-down, the one he found on the clearance rack at Marshall's, the only shirt he owned to fit the occasion. She wore a strapless dress, black and yellow.*

Hindsight complicates. It colors the lens through which we view our histories. In each act of recollection, we create new versions of the past - we reframe, reconsider, fill in the gaps, contextualize where needed. And soon the line between reality and our own projections blur. I've come to understand that truth in the context of my own family's story. I've come to see it in my father's repeated refrains of "I came here with a suitcase and a promise of a

job." I've come to see it in the way that he would cling to those verses like scripture, tethering his fleeting memories in a reality he could still grasp. We are not unique. These are experiences that expose the narrative tensions of not only my family, but those of others similar.

The arc of our memories bends towards a sort of American folklore, and the stories of my parents grow to mirror traditional models of immigrant success stories - the rags-to-riches stories, the up-by-the-bootstraps folklores, the Horatio Alger fantasies. Hard work, grit, individualism valued above all - success occurring in a vacuum. In the same way that one might appraise a rose blooming through the sidewalk cracks - with an eye for its resilience and a disregard for its bruised petals

- our histories grew to emphasize all that was gained, with a disinterest for what we lost.

Now I find myself in a sort of race against time. The history of my family blurs further into myth with each retelling. The bearers of those stories themselves are rapidly disappearing. Hindsight complicates, and I find myself fighting to resist that pull, grasping at straws, trying to snatch reality from amnesia.

*Even now...*

*I feel the draw of that mythology,  
that romanticized, edited version...*

*I find myself looking back  
and wondering what was  
real, what was true*

- Dorothy Allison, *A Question of Class*

In my family's constructed history, we created distinctions. For in any success story, the gap between those who make it and those who do not must be addressed, however implicitly. So we created that gap. We had to, because the immigration story of my family is not American. They did not cross a steamboat to await the arbiters of their fates at Ellis Island. For my family's story does not fit into the American canon, of tattered rucksacks crossing the Atlantic. Our story is not captured in documentaries shown to middle schoolers, nor in the textbooks I read growing up. They did not meld seamlessly into the great cultural melting pot of our country. They did not go into their enclaves, forming communities that would be elevated as paradigms of integration for years to come. No, my parents were marked as Black immigrants in this country the second they stepped foot on its soil.

***Between me and the other world  
there is ever an unasked question...***

***How does it feel to be a problem?***

***I answer seldom a word...***

***And yet, being a problem is a strange  
experience—peculiar even for one  
who has never been anything else.***

– W.E.B. DuBois, *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*

My parents had to distinguish themselves from African-Americans, create separation between themselves and a culture that the mainstream synonymized with poverty. They had to prove they were strong, where their counterparts were seemingly weak. They had to deny their kin. With that reality in mind, it seems fitting that the history my

family now espouses does just that by placing an emphasis on individual drive and grit. I understand, because I know the alternatives to that narrative - that my family's success was not predicated on any individual merit, but rather upon chance. The reality that our immigration story could have easily ended in ruin would be too much to bear, and I admit that I find myself gravitating towards those mythologies in fear of that alternative. Yet another part of me believes the very opposite.

That tension, between two competing interpretations of my family's history, is my impetus. My own education in the US has brought me to a conclusion opposite of my parents. I believe that no event occurs in a vacuum. I am skeptical of up-by-the-bootstraps narratives, critical of respectability politics. Yet, I still hold the belief that my parents succeeded in this country because of their own abilities, grit, and sacrifice.

This paper is thus an attempt to reconcile tensions in how I understand my place in this country, in how I understand my family's place. Because Black immigrants lie at an intersection - problematized in their Blackness, in their proximity to other African-Americans. Yet, their success wielded against other parts of the Black community. What does it mean to be both the problem and the solution?

***What does it mean...***

***to be fetishized...***

***What does it mean to be the solution?***

– Jeff Chang, *We Gon' Be Alright*

The process of assimilation plays out in both implicit and explicit ways. One needs to grow acclimated to this country's traditions, customs, idiosyncrasies. On a deeper level, however, assimilation is not only a matter of adoption - assimilation is a matter of belief. As Mary C. Waters notes in her book *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identity in America*, that paradigm is rooted in the experiences of early white immigrants in the 1960s: "white immigrants from Europe would provide a model or a comparison point for the experience of other ethnic and racial groups... the models of assimilation and cultural pluralism used by American sociologists were developed based on [these] experiences" (Waters 5). In this formulation, to truly assimilate into this country is simply to adopt its ideologies. And to adopt those ideologies is to believe in the myths it tells itself.

For immigrants, the process of assimilation is always framed in terms of the end goal, in terms of ascension, in terms of achieving The Dream. But that framing leaves a gap. Because for every one success story, a hundred more fall to the wayside, left at the sacrificial altar. What of those left behind? What is the alternative to that race to the top?

Looking at poverty gives an insight into that counter perspective. Poverty allows us to look into what African immigrants seek to avoid, rather than what they seek to attain. It allows me to understand what my family ran from, rather than what we ran towards.



1910 Harris County Courthouse, lower floor interior of the courtroom. The courthouse has undergone many renovations and alterations since its completion, yet it remains the symbolic seat of government in Harris County, a hub for immigration from the African continent.

Photo credit: Wayne Wendel

## II. Pain and Guilt

*They crowded into the waiting room of the Harris County Clerk's office. An envelope holding his driver's licenses, her passport, and the \$72.00 fee sat on his lap.*

Poverty lies in a space between realities - between willful amnesia and indicting histories, between theory and praxis, between myth and truth. Narratives fill that space - narratives that sanitize it, strip it of its teeth, make it palatable, and render it comprehensible. To understand that ecosystem, one needs to make sense of the myriad sources that seek to capture or explain poverty. We begin with the origin of the myths with which we reckon today. We look to the work of Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist best known for his research into cross-generational poverty. *Lewis's Five Families: Mexican Studies in the Culture of Poverty* is an anthropological account following the lives

of five Mexican families living at the margins of society, paying close attention to the ways in which they adapt to the burden of poverty in their social structures and belief systems. Lewis introduces the idea of a culture of poverty, a sociocultural theory that he further explores in later writings. In *The Culture of Poverty*, one of his later writings published by Scientific American, he further expounds upon that concept:

*Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself...The disintegration, the nonintegration of the poor with respect to the major institutions of society...The slum economy turns inward...The individual who grows up in this culture has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence, and inferiority. (Lewis 21)*

Lewis introduces an anthropological framework to understand poverty from an outside perspective - a framework that places the fault

squarely on the shoulders of the poor. Lewis's framework portrays poverty as something internalized - poverty as a mindset, poverty as a worldview. Yet, while Lewis's framework introduces a lens with which we can analyze other narratives of poverty, its significance in the context of the mythologies that we seek to explore lies in its influence. The work not only defined Oscar Lewis's academic career, but it also forms the foundation of America's traditional understanding of poverty, as anthropologist Charles A. Valentine notes in article *Culture of Poverty: Critique and Counter-proposals*: "The idea of a 'culture of poverty' comes from the well-known work of Oscar Lewis, though it has been endlessly applied and popularized by others" (Valentine 181). Moreover, implicit in his characterization of the impoverished lies a fundamental paradigm: with the right mentality and values, one can claw their way out of poverty.

Therein lies the basis of the myth. Lewis's work drives the myths that

we cling to, the didactics we espouse to, the success stories that we elevate. And to understand that ecosystem of poverty and its mythologies, we must consider other narratives through the lens of this pervading myth. To achieve some sort of proximity to truth, to reality, one needs to make sense of fiction.

***Every moment happens twice:  
inside and outside,  
and they are two different histories***

– Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

We look to three works to explore this interplay: J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, Dorothy Allison’s *A Question of Class*, and Jesmyn Ward’s *Men We Reaped*. The works all offer competing insights into the interactions between poverty and the narratives that seek to explain it – each captures the lives of different individuals struggling within that ecosystem.

We first look to Dorothy Allison’s essay *A Question of Class in Our Own Words: Writings from Women’s Lives*. Allison, a white American writer who grew up in rural South Carolina, both chronicles her reflections on her upbringing as a poor woman and explores the ramifications of the narratives commonly used to explain poverty in her life. Specifically, she explores the narratives that surround her – mythologies, pointedly, that she has been struggling to shed since her youth. Allison describes such myths:

*The poverty depicted in books and movies was romantic, a backdrop for the story of how it was escaped...[from the left-wing intellectual] perspective, the*

*working-class hero was invariably male, righteously indignant, and inhumanly noble. The reality of self-hatred and violence was either absent or caricatured. The poverty I knew was dreary, deadening, shameful. (61)*

In this passage, Allison offers a portrayal of poverty that reframes the myth birthed by Lewis. Rather than framing poverty in terms of its sufferers, as Lewis does, Allison offers a portrayal that flips the blame onto its purveyors. She points out the fetishization, the exoticization, the canonization of poverty that renders stories like hers invisible. For Allison, this force is not only a means to misplace blame. It is a force that silences. It is a force that erases. It is a force that deadens. That portrayal renders poverty an aesthetic, reduces to it the ruins from which the American hero rises.

J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*, however, adds another layer to the perspective offered by Allison. In his memoir, Vance, a white American venture capitalist and author, explores his own connection to the social ills of his hometown of Middletown, Ohio. This narrative is unique in its larger significance – it operates as a prototypical American success story on one hand while trying to grapple with what Vance sees as the social decay of America at the same time. Particularly interesting, however, is how Vance interacts with the culture of poverty framework that Lewis employs. Vance describes similar circumstances – a slum economy turning inwards, with its own informal institutions operating in place: “Mom would officially retain custody, but from that day forward I lived in her house only

when I chose to—and Mamaw told me that if Mom had a problem with the arrangement, she could talk to the barrel of Mamaw’s gun. This was hillbilly justice, and it didn’t fail me” (Vance 78). By the measures that Lewis lists – high rates of unemployment, low wages, unstable family life – Vance lives in a culture of poverty. Yet, the community from which Vance hails subscribes to the notion of poverty as a personal failure. He points specifically to his grandparents, who “had an almost religious faith in hard work and the American Dream”(35), as an illustration of this:

*They knew that life was a struggle, and though the odds were a bit longer for people like them, that fact didn’t excuse failure. ‘Never be like these fucking losers who think the deck is stacked against them,’ my grandma often told me. (36)*

The community from which Vance hails does not reject the idea that poverty is a matter of individual choice. Rather, they subscribe to the same myth that others wield against them. Vance himself espouses similar beliefs, claiming that the difference between “friends [who] blossom into successful adults and others [who] fall victim to the worst of Middletown’s temptations” is solely a matter of “the expectations they have for their own lives”(194). Vance and his community reappropriate that myth as a badge of honor. They use myth to make distinctions amongst themselves, between the deserving and undeserving, between the righteous and unrighteous, between the victims and victors. That appropriation of myth, however, grows complicated

when placed in conversation with other narratives.

In her memoir, Jesmyn Ward, an African-American novelist, examines rural poverty from a unique lens, as she seeks to make sense of the death of five men in her life while chronicling her own upbringing as a Black woman in the South. Rather, she writes about the victims of poverty in her community in a way that almost absolves them. She shifts the blame external, and perhaps her treatment of Black men in her writing is the best example of this move:

*This tradition of men leaving their families here seems systemic, fostered by endemic poverty. Sometimes color seems an accidental factor, but then it doesn't, especially when one thinks of the forced fracturing of families that the earliest African Americans endured under the yoke of slavery. (Ward 131)*

For Ward, this trend is not a personal failure on behalf of the men in her life. Rather, it is the byproduct of deliberate external forces. This trauma, this fracturing to which she bears witness, is something imposed on her community, not a byproduct of the community's failings. For Ward, poverty is forced upon her community. Poverty is inflicted. Poverty is exacted.

How does that reality converse with that of Vance's? How can the two coexist in the same world? The answer perhaps lies in what distinguishes the two communities. Vance's community exists in relative proximity to what American has canonized as the righteous poor,

as Allison describes: "the working-class hero was invariably male, righteously indignant, and inhumanly noble" (61). Ward's community, conversely, exists several deviations away from that portrait, and, thus, it carries that myth differently: "I was too immature to imagine at the time that the darkness [I carried]...that conviction of worthlessness and self-loathing, could have touched others in my community. What I did not understand then was that the same pressures were weighing on us all...we distrusted the society around us, the culture that cornered us and told us we were perpetually less" (169). Where Vance's community reappropriates the myths of poverty, Ward's community internalizes them. In that contrast lies a contingency particularly relevant to our understanding of poverty: in this pursuit, some narratives hold more value than others. Because when faced with the difficult reality that Allison, Vance, and Ward all live in the same world, one realizes that factors intrinsic about each writer fundamentally colors the way in which they interact with mythologies of poverty. There lies the next step forward.

Poverty is confounding, uneven, unsettled. To attempt to derive a uniform understanding of how the poor interact with its myths is akin to grasping at straws – an ill-fated pursuit to impose uniformity on something inherently sundry. Yet, poverty can still be illuminating. Because where we may be unable to glean truths about the experience itself, we may be able to find commonalities in how different groups interact with it. In the case of our three narratives, we can glean truths about the writers and the

communities from which they came. And with that endeavor in mind, we now turn to the narratives coming out of the African immigrant experience.

### III. Anger and Bargaining

*I only recently learned of the year my mother spent apart from my father when she first arrived, spent working between Illinois and Indiana. I only recently learned about my father's first night in the US, spent sleeping on the bare floor of an apartment in the outskirts of Houston. Those were once histories erased.*

How do African immigrants come into play? How do they function in this ecosystem? How does one capture the sentiments of an entire community? What narratives should be centered, which do we build this foundation upon? And, perhaps most importantly, how does one account for gaps?

In this endeavor, what is not found is equally important as what is. Because there is a gap in narratives from African immigrants, especially in terms of stories that reckon with American mythologies. According to sociocultural anthropologist Jemima Pierre, that gap only now has: "Until very recently, voluntary Black immigration to the United States was not acknowledged and, often, Black immigrants suffered from what Roy Bryce-Laporte labeled 'invisibility'" (Pierre 149). Professor of social work Ezekiel Umo Ette, similarly, notes that "the literature on immigration and acculturation is selective in its examination of...transnation-

al community” and “very little is written in the literature about West African immigrants”(Ette xii). Thus, in order to argue for correlations and causations, concessions must be made. In the space in which we are working, where a scarcity of narratives is a fact that must be accounted for, we may only be able to achieve proximity to a full picture. With that constraint in mind, we look to the narratives that are available, the ones that may serve to capture the outlook of an entire community.

Yet, another step must be taken. To account for this relative dearth of narratives, we must reconsider the sources from which we seek to draw insight. While research and scholarship on Black immigrants have been on the rise, first-person narratives that explore the interaction between poverty and immigration are difficult to come by. Moreover, with the literature available, any source with a degree of separation from the story itself comes with flaws. Anthologies are filtered through the eyes of others. Academic papers maintain a degree of separation from their subjects, taking a surgical approach to experiences inherently human, inherently visceral. Anecdotes and folklore permute with every retelling. Piecing together something complete, that captures the multiplicity of these truths and ventures on regardless, thus requires a range of sources. Thus, literature and fiction enter the fray. Literature is a reflection of the author, of their perspective, of their upbringing, of their world view. And in this endeavor to capture the complexity of ideology through an entire community, such a source may serve us in a way that others cannot. Literature

serves as a step in that direction - to an approximate understanding that can be challenged, complicated.

With that in mind, we look to *A Squatter's Tale*, written in 1997 by Nigerian writer and lawyer Ike Oguine, as our springboard. The novel chronicles the life of Obi, a young man forced to flee from Nigeria to the United States when his finance company collapses. As he reckons with his own proximity to it, the frame with which Oguine's character understands poverty grows apparent. One instance, when a long-time friend of Obi drives him through West Oakland, is particularly telling: “I'd seen very little of Oakland since I arrived, and the streets [my friend] and I drove through were depressing: they struck me as places from which hope and ambition had been wrung out. People neglected or couldn't afford to put a fresh coat of paint on their homes” (Oguine 29). In the language Obi uses to describe Oakland, an interesting tension emerges. He describes its people in a way that almost portrays them as victims, lacking autonomy in their own suffering. The phrase “wrung out” belies the notion the state of Oakland is externally imposed. Similarly, other wording choices (such as “neglected” and “depressing”) communicates a degree of pity that Obi feels towards who he describes as “his African-American cousins”(30). Obi's understanding of poverty contradicts that of Lewis and Vance - he absolves the poor, rather than charging them. But is that a consistent sentiment?

For further proof, we return to the narratives that we do have. We turn to the writings of Okey Ndibe, a Ni-

gerian writer that immigrated to the US in 1988. In his memoir *Never Look an American in the Eye*, Ndibe tells the story of his own migration from Nigeria to the United States, where he came to edit the (now insolvent) African Commentary magazine. Immediately after the magazine's collapse, Ndibe finds himself living paycheck to paycheck. He compares his state to the panhandlers he sees on the streets, remarking that “[his] situation reminded [him] of those vagrants who haunt American street corners, a cardboard sign held aloft, inscribed with the plaintive proclamation WILL WORK FOR FOOD” (Ndibe 108). To Ndibe, the homeless exist almost disembodied, phantoms that haunt. Yet, he still regards them with a degree of pity (“plaintive proclamation”), and, perhaps more tellingly, he can see himself in them. Conversely, John A. Arthur, a Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, captures the opposite phenomenon: “As I probed into the attitudes of immigrants toward American-born blacks...their statements depicted an urban black America in which the scourge of poverty has been compounded by joblessness...low self-concept, and despair”(Arthur 78). The immigrants that Arthur interviews display a conception of poverty more in line with Lewis's framework. Those immigrants shift the onus to African-Americans, and in that gap a tension emerges.

***The trial needed to create monsters, then decree those monsters must be locked away so that the world could be made safe and right again.***

- Elizabeth Weil, In the Ashes of Ghost Ship

Yet, if that tension exists within African immigrants when they first arrive, it does not last. Obi's first foray into Oakland captures this phenomenon: "‘At night this can be a very dangerous area,’ [his friend] said with visible revulsion, ‘that is when the drug dealers begin business, and then you have shootings and the police sirens. I think they are all asleep during the day’"(29). Obi's acclimatization to the US begins with a familiarizing of the area and the people within it, and his friend functions as his guide through the process. And therein lies a compelling idea: if African immigrants do not arrive with these pre-existing understandings of poverty, they adopt them soon after they arrive. Obi's introduction to West Oakland serves to remind him the distinction between African Americans and African immigrants, imploring him to "violently [reject] any identification with what strikes him as irreversible disaster, the way one might disown and denounce a family member suffering from incurable alcoholism and kleptomania.". He is "confronted with scenes...during the drive through West Oakland... [like] the terrible images of inner-city violence and despair on TV". As a self-described "success-obsessed [immigrant]", he feels a need to "get as far away as possible, psychically if not physically, from that horrible pit"(30). Obi himself remarks on the significance of that trip in the context of his racial socialization: "that was perhaps why [my friend] took me on that tour of West Oakland - to teach me early on how to be revolted by the inner city and the African-Americans who, no matter how successful some of them may become, are in our minds chained to the inner city" (30).

The caricature of "a family suffering from incurable alcoholism and kleptomania" brings its own connotations, implicitly shifting the blame onto the victims of poverty. Similarly, other wording choices ("irreversible disaster," "horrible pit") communicate a shift in how Obi views African-Americans. If applicable to other ex-

periences, Oguine captures an important phenomenon: an element of the assimilation process for African immigrants is a kind of indoctrination. This country inculcates these mythologies of poverty into its newcomers.

In a return to other scholarship that is available, a similar trend emerges. John A. Arthur captures a similar phenomenon in his book *African Women in the United States: Crossing Transnational Borders*:

*Persistent discrimination toward Black represents a deep-seated concern among the immigrant women. The way to counteract and minimize this discrimination, according to the immigrant women, is not via assimilation but through the formation of a new Black identity that is based upon a Black African ethos devoid of victimhood mentality and powerlessness often portrayed by Black cultural and social society. (Arthur 109)*



*Hew Locke, For Those in Peril on the Sea, photographed by Daniel Azoulay. The installation, displayed in Pérez Art Museum Miami, consists of dozens of scaled-down ship replicas, creating the impression of a massive exodus taking place above the viewer.*

Arthur offers a reality in line with the world Oguine builds, adding the perspective of African women into the conversation. While we cannot, given our small sample size, make general claims about the process of assimilation for all African immigrants, a compelling possibility arises. In terms of their belief in American myths of poverty, Obi and the African women that Arthur studies may display thinking more in line with the poor white

communities of the Midwest that Vance describes than the Black communities Jesmyn Ward depicts. To understand the ramifications of that phenomenon, however, one needs to understand how those mythologies can be wielded as a sword against the African diaspora.

#### IV. Depression

*These were once histories lost.  
The fan blades did little to cut  
through summer air as they  
crowded near the clerk. The  
courtroom was almost barren:  
no onlookers filled the pews,  
no decorations lined the walls,  
no voices rung out in joy. They  
crowded the court stand, fumbling  
through that manila envelope  
once again. The judge asked  
if they had rings to exchange.  
They shook their heads no.*

How can mythology be wielded? Like a sword, eviscerating and double-edged? Like a shield, pardoning and guarding? We now look to the work of the sociocultural anthropologist Pierre for insight into the consequences of Lewis's culture of poverty framework on the Black diaspora. In her essay *Black Immigrants in the United States and the "Cultural Narratives" of Ethnicity*, Pierre calls into question the idea of Black immigrant "distinctiveness" from African-Americans, arguing that such a notion operates within a "culture of poverty" framework to perpetuate stereotypes about Black inferiority in general. In building up to that argument, she introduces the field of popular ethnicity theory and reframes Oscar Lewis's thesis in terms of it. She specifically points

to how holes in ethnicity theory become apparent when faced with the case of Black immigration. Pierre explains this by telling how the framework came about "at the turn of the century as scholars attempted to...find an alternative to the biological determinism of the concept of race"(144) and was influenced "by the massive influx of European immigrants into the United States during the early part of the twentieth century"(145):

*The White European immigrant experience soon came to serve the controlling model for understanding the incorporation of all groups into United States society...The linking of the "assimilation" discourse to the notion of immigrant "success" led to a valorization of (White) European ethnic cultural practices and the discussions of scholars soon became centered on the need for racialized non-White groups (particularly African Americans) to emulate the cultural practices of successfully incorporated European immigrants. (145-147)*

In this passage, Pierre challenges the very foundation upon which we understand immigration and assimilation, illustrating how the traditional paradigms in place function to elevate white European immigrant practices. That elevation, however, coincides with a devaluing of Black immigration and, by extension, Black culture. Thus, popular ethnicity theory, in its eschewing of the realities of racialization for immigrants, functions similarly to Lewis's culture of poverty framework:

*The "culture of poverty" discourse employs the same cultural narratives as ethnicity theory to propagate culturally racist ideas about (United States) Black experiences. It posits the behaviors and practices of the Black poor against an imagined set of "middle class" values that are, in the last instance, unattainable and then proceeds to construct the people as "unassimilable." (149)*

The true significance of this fact lies in the irony. By operating within this ethnicity theory framework, as they do when making distinctions between them and African-Americans, African immigrants actually reinforce the very sword wielded against them, to "propagate culturally deterministic notions of Black identity formation"(149). And that preservation of paradigms ultimately reinforces "the negative racialization and subordination of all Blacks—immigrants and United States-born alike"(149).

The paradigms of assimilation in place for African immigrants thus encourages a form of self-erasure, both psychological and cultural. For African immigrants, assimilation is not adaptation. It is not acclimatization. No, it is a cruel twist of the Stockholm Syndrome - the captive forced to espouse the very myths wielded against them, forced to eschew their closest relations in this country. This dark inversion of the American Dream.

*Assimilation is self-injury.  
Assimilation is self-erasure.  
Assimilation is fratricide.*

## V. Acceptance.

*They were married that day, under the fluorescent lights of the county clerk's office. He wore a thrifted Ralph Lauren button-down, she a black and yellow strapless dress. No onlookers filled the pews. No bells rang out in celebration. When they returned home to that barren apartment in outskirts of Houston, little had changed. And, it wouldn't be until twenty years later that they reclaimed that day. It would be twenty years until they reclaimed their history. These were once histories lost.*

Since the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the number of African immigrants in the United States has grown significantly. Between the years of 1980 and 2007, for example, the number of African-born immigrants grew from 101,520 to 1,023,363 (Moore 89). Yet, the immigrant group under scrutiny is still relatively small - between 1971 and 2003, immigration from Africa made up roughly 3.3 percent of all immigration to America (Shaw-Taylor, Tuch 11). Even within the Black American population, the current population of Black immigrants is small: according to census data and immigration counts as of 2000, there are little over six hundred thousand Africans from sub-Saharan Africa - roughly 2 percent of the total Black population (12). Regardless of numbers, however, this exploration exposes the realities of assimilation in this country. If this country's paradigm of assimilation is rooted in self-erasure, in fratricide, in self-injury, what are the rippling consequences?

One space yet to be explored is the area of racial solidarity, and Juliet Hooker's *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* offers a framework to work with. Hooker, a professor of political science at Brown University, argues that the practice of political solidarity has been shaped by the social fact of race, emphasizing the importance of reconciling racial injustices in achieving unity in multicultural society: "One of the fundamental features of the racialized politics of solidarity is thus the way embodied racial difference results in

different sympathy...race, more than almost any other factor, delineates the boundaries of political obligation and empathy" (Hooker 6-7). But if the entire process of assimilation is predicated upon a sort of familial severing, how does political solidarity change within the Black community? The very process of inculcation into this country's ecosystem of race undercuts the intraracial accord that seems essential. At the intersection between Hooker's thesis and our working understanding of Black assimilation, a compelling corollary emerges: the very process of assimilation may serve to actually undermine political solidarity within the Black diaspora. Other questions thus arise. Is this phenomenon prevalent within other immigrant groups as well? If this self-hatred is externally imposed, who is at fault?

Who do we hold responsible? How do we reckon with the lacerations, with the fractures, with the scars, with the trauma that this country imposed? It would be easy for us as a nation to lament the tragedy, the irony, the injustice of it all, but our hands are dirtied as well. For this paradigm of assimilation rests upon the castle this country built. It underlies the lies we tell ourselves about The Dream; it underwrites our assumptions about mobility, our tenuous constructions of race, our entrenched understandings of ethnicity. This phenomenon, this prescription We are complicit in this erasure. We are complicit in this injury. We are complicit in this plunder.



*Payless African Food Store, exterior. The store sells a range of spices, meats, groceries, and supplies, and it is a popular staple within various African immigrant communities in the Houston area. Photo credit: Google Maps.*

Until we reckon with the injuries we impose, communities will continue to be torn apart. History will continue to be swept to the wayside. We will continue to erase this multiplicity, to shroud these interactions between narrative and interpretation, to ignore this textured weaving of lived experiences into a semblance of commonality. They will become a palimpsest, a rich history and complexity refused in the name of self-delusion. And this country, drunk on its own mythologies, will rest itself upon the wreaths of its sins, while the masses and their realities detached lie at the sacrificial altar. We will have failed them.

## VI. Resolution

*They were married that day, before an ensemble of close friends and family. He wore a black tuxedo, she a white dress. They exchanged the vows left unsaid for years, the promises deferred that first day. They made up for lost time, reclaimed a history long buried. My parents officially married in early March, in a ceremony circumstance denied them twenty years ago. And as I sat in the front pews bearing witness to their story coming full circle, I smiled.*

Too much had been lost. Too many narratives thrown to the wayside, too many silenced in canonization. And I often find myself looking back at the stories of my parents - at the stories that I do know. I find myself grasping for tales long erased. But there that day, one story had been reclaimed. One, but enough.

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# Living as Becoming: Envisioning Life Chances Within and Against Sociomedical Constraints

**Caroline Aung**

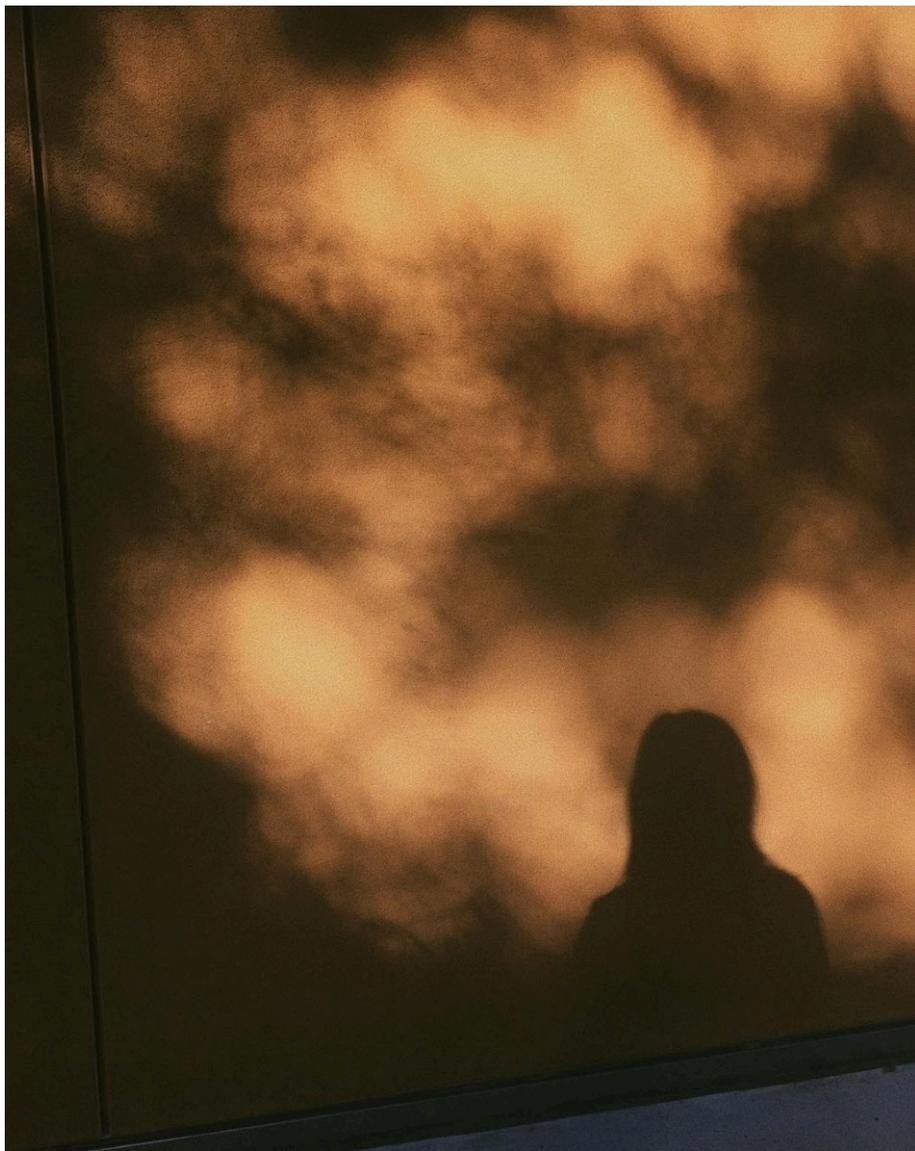
Content Warning: This essay explores topics related to death and dying.

Accompanying a nurse, social worker, and chaplain from Hospice Austin, the main hospice organization in Austin, I met Tom in his hotel room which his estranged mother had recently paid for upon learning about his three to six month prognosis. The hospice team and I shuffled into the cramped space, which smelled of old food and smoke. I noticed a skeletal puppy, whose matted fur looked like it was once white. The puppy giddily raced around us, occasionally brushing against my ankles, when I became aware of the poop by my feet. A torn coloring book laid open on a pillow, cables and wires sprawled from a drawer beneath the television, open bags of chips sat on the counter, black marks soiled the walls, cardboard boxes of miscellaneous items overflowed from the closet and crowded the bed, on which Tom reclined. He was unusually young for a hospice patient—only in his early thirties. As

he either grimaced or grinned at our entrance, I noticed the tightness of his skin over his swollen legs, which were covered in sores, and his alarmingly emaciated upper body. The nurse made strained banter with him then quickly tended to the lesions on his calves, while the social worker began outlining logistics involved in the process of cremation. When I asked Tom about what his experience in hospice has been like, he turned to explaining why he is, in fact, thinking about revoking hospice services: “I don’t wanna die... just the linguistic structure of even just talking to me... I don’t like to be talked to like this is it. And that’s kind of how it is.” The chaplain soon intervened, “Like see, that’s our job—to help people come to a place where they can say goodbye to life, and it’s different.”

Anthropologists Joao Biehl and Peter Locke engage extensively with the

notion of becoming in anthropology. Drawing from the ideas of philosopher Gilles Deleuze, they promote kinds of ethnographic analysis that pay attention to “human efforts to exceed and escape forms of knowledge and power and to express desires that might be world altering” (Biehl and Locke, 2010, p. 317). Necessarily theoretically incomplete, Biehl and Locke advance ethnographic projects that acknowledge the innate open-endedness, ambiguity, and creative capacities in the aspirations and agency of individuals and collectives. While Deleuze did not originally intend to apply the notion of becoming to individual life, Biehl and Locke draw from Deleuze’s ideas to reveal the significance of microanalysis in anthropology, attending to the personal ways that people navigate, grapple with, and transcend various social structures and schemas in which they find themselves caught (p.335). In this paper, I employ a lens of becoming to analyze the predicament of Tom, a hospice patient I met during fieldwork by focusing on how multiple sociomedical forces constrain his becoming of a particular way. I hence use the concept of becoming as synonymous to the possibility of him viewing and living his life according to his own convictions, a possibility that seems preempted by frameworks surrounding hospice care, diagnoses and prognoses, medical risk, and drug addiction. Furthermore, I utilize concepts from Christina Sharpe and Gilles Deleuze to illuminate the ways that Tom attempts to rupture the schemas that neglect his affective and practical desires and raise the question of what circumstances would make his aspirations of becoming realizable.



Film photograph taken by the author to help illustrate the concept of becoming.

Founded in 1979, Hospice Austin conducts itself as a typical hospice in admitting only people with life expectancies of six months or less, necessitating that patients in their service do not pursue curative treatment, and attending exclusively to end-of-life matters—requirements dictated by the U.S. Medicare Hospice Benefit established in 1986 (National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 2016). Aware of the hospice staff’s assumptions about the imminence of his death, Tom felt an upsetting interpersonal tension during the team’s weekly

visits. He later urgently expressed to me, “I can feel when I’m getting closer and closer to death. I’ve been dying for years. But to have someone talk to me as if I’m alive and want me to live—I need that. I need someone to talk to me as if they want me to live, like they care about me in that way. It’s important. It’s really fucking important.” He desperately resisted being perceived as terminally ill and desired relationships sympathetic to his convictions about living despite his precarious health. While the team purported to care about whether Tom lives, he felt like their behav-

iors and conversations with him failed to reflect such concern as they revolved around the anticipation of his impending passing.

In a private conversation, Tom’s nurse related to me her interpretation of the hospice philosophy when she asserted that “part of our job is to help people come around to the fact that they’re dying... If you go to your death moment completely denying the fact that you’re dying, you have no opportunity to reconcile and say goodbye to people, and that’s tragic.” She further reasoned,

*We get people all the time who don’t want to accept the fact that they’re dying, but we know that they’re dying. There really isn’t an option. Somebody who has pancreatic cancer that comes to you that weighs like ninety pounds and is not eating, and they don’t believe that they are dying. It’s just like, I hate to be—it’s not that I don’t believe in miracles, but I’m a scientist when it comes down to it. You go with the facts. You can’t give people false hope. I’m not going to lie to them either and be like, “Yeah, this is going to be just fine.” Because that robs people of the opportunity to come to terms with it, which is part of what we do.*

The nurse viewed the life chances of people deemed “end-of-life” as essentially set and thought that to give any other impression is to “give people false hope.” Her faith in the scientific objectivity of diagnoses and prognoses left little to no room for the prospect of patients’ thinking and living otherwise in her marginalization of “miracles.” Moreover, when I asked her about whether or not she thought Tom was dying, she answered by deflecting to the

medical expertise of doctors: “Oh yeah, absolutely. I don’t think—I guess part of that is because like three or four different doctors said he’s six months from dying, and I trust their word because they’re doctors, and that’s what they do.” She also viewed her approach as a form of service to her clients since she thought to treat them differently would be to “rob” them of the crucial opportunity of dying well. The primary way she helped people come to terms with their impending death is through educating them about their degenerating bodies. As she described how she interacts with Tom: “[His] legs are starting to swell—why is that happening? Well, you’ve got cancer in your liver, and there’s a thing called albumin, and it helps pull the fluid out.’ So I try to explain to them what’s happening, and I feel like the more information they get about what’s happening to their body, the more they’re able to [accept death].” The nurse again appealed to the apparent certitude of medical knowledge in attempting to guide Tom and others to accept their inevitable decline. Although the hospice team may recognize that prognoses are not necessarily “crystal-ball” truths, their interpersonal interactions with Tom did not make such recognitions apparent, evident in Tom’s consequent distress.

A 2017 literature review of medical articles that defined or used measures of good death revealed that one of the main recurring themes included life completion, involving saying goodbyes and acceptance of impending death. Moreover, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ 1969 book *On Death and Dying* has popularized notions of dying well as involving the acceptance of death, while these

beliefs may be further reinforced by how patient compliance makes hospice workers’ jobs easier and more efficient (McNamara, 1994). One hospice nurse explained,

*The best death is one where people have made peace with their families, friends, themselves, God. Those are the best deaths. And they generally are the kindest, least painful, least symptoms, problems deaths... I would say the best death is when the person who is terminally-ill has been able to face their fears, and face their end, and say the most important things, which [are], “I’m sorry, please forgive me, and I love you.” And if they can do those things with themselves, and whoever means something to them, they generally have a pretty good death.*

As such, patients are encouraged to comply with medical evidence indicating their death in order to make peace with themselves and others and minimize their physical, social, and emotional suffering. Hospice workers seem critically influenced by these views, resulting in the constraint of Tom’s affective agency through the interpersonal dynamics between him and his care providers.

The hospice structure and philosophy also seem profoundly shaped by a common trust in the factuality of diagnoses and prognoses, evident in the Hospice Medicare Benefit requiring organizations to admit only people with prognoses of six months or less and the hospice nurse’s dependence on doctors’ confirmation of individual prognoses. Historian Charles Rosenberg elucidates how diagnoses and prognoses have garnered such social control through the development of specific

disease categories, resulting in what he calls the “tyranny of diagnosis.” Despite the degree of arbitrariness and uncertainty inherent in medical analyses of personal conditions, technology, bureaucratic structures, and hospitals of the 20th century concertize pervasive ideas about objective medical narratives for individual patients (Rosenburg, 2002). While most hospice staff recognize that prognoses are not always accurate (e.g. someone with end-stage cancer has a more predictable illness trajectory than someone with, for instance, heart failure), the hospice approach tends to revolve around evidential assumptions about patients’ inevitable decline.

Tom encountered other sociomedical restraints when he attempted to find a heart surgeon willing to perform on him. During one of the hospice team’s visits, he conveyed, “My odds of dying on the table—dying or having a very severe permanent complication from on the table doing the surgery or during the days after—are fifty-fifty. And they don’t like going higher than twelve percent, and they’re like, ‘So we’re not going to do it. We don’t wanna help you.’ And I’m like, ‘Well it’s a hundred percent now that I’m gonna die. Like fifty-fifty is great odds compared to that.’” To the surgeon, the chance of complications from performing the surgery may have meant endangering his license or mispending resources; to Tom, the risk did nothing to discourage him from pursuing the sole opportunity at expanding his life chances—a fatal disjunction in interpretations of medical risk and consequently the value of Tom’s own life. Tom also believed that the surgeon sees him as a “piece of shit

druggie,” as he angrily recounted to me over the phone,

*[The surgeon] said, “You make decisions that make it more likely it’s your fault. I don’t want to do the surgery for you to ruin the valve.” But if I get two years and fuck it up who cares, I get to spend two years with my daughter. He said, “No, I don’t want to do it.” That’s when he came up with those numbers. Those numbers are good reason not to do the surgery... but I get two years. Isn’t that worth it? He’s like, “No, you don’t care about your life, why should I?” I shouldn’t talk about it because it’ll make me cry.*

The surgeon’s judgements about Tom’s heroin usage determined his calculations of the worthiness of Tom’s life, as the injurious health effects of heroin and prejudices about Tom’s shamefully negligent character as a drug addict deterred the surgeon from treating him. Tom’s future prospects thus became foreclosed by conventional thinking surrounding medical risk and drug addicts. However, these judgements along with “those numbers” that the surgeon used to justify refraining from treatment could not outweigh the indeterminable significance that Tom attributed to having a couple more years to be with his daughter, who although stays with his ex-girlfriend, centrally contributed to his motivations to live. Through the phone static, I hear his voice shaking: “Can you imagine how it feels to be looked in the eye and told that you may have two to five years more years, but they won’t do it? That’s heartbreaking, how could you do that?”

Tom found himself caught in mul-

tipl sociomedical systems that preempted his viewing and shaping his life according to his convictions. Hospice workers’ assumptions about his impending death and implicit insistence on him accepting his decline, as well as the surgeon’s beliefs about medical risk and drug addicts, impaired his ability to effectively and practically live on his own terms. It may be helpful to compare these inhibiting structures to the episteme that Christina Sharpe describes: “The question for theory is how to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives, the afterlife of property, how, in short, to inhabit and rupture this episteme with their, with our, knowable lives. ‘What else is there to know’ now? In excess of: ‘Hers is the same fate of every other Black Venus’ (Hartman 2008, p. 2)?” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 51). Sharpe’s book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is largely dedicated to exploring means of undermining racially oppressive frameworks through aesthetic and literary kinds of analysis that foster new, more humane ways of seeing and being in slavery’s aftermath. It is important to acknowledge that Tom is a white-presenting male, and that racism in the U.S. remains a far more widespread and violent issue than the ones explored in this essay. Still, with Tom’s status as a debilitated, non-compliant patient and as a heroin user, Sharpe’s theoretical outlook helps to illuminate how the perpetuation of some wider trends of thought and practices rest on the disregard for and curtailment of certain lives, along with the latent possibilities for interrupting such trends.

What would it mean for Tom and others to break through the so-

ciomedical epistemes in which he seems fatally trapped? Attempts at rupture may have been reflected in his hospice nurse’s account of some of their interactions about whether he should undergo heart surgery:

*[Tom] would like to force me into yes-no answers. Oh, it always made me so uncomfortable. And he was like, “If it was you, would you do it?” And I was like, “[Tom], I can’t answer that question, I don’t know.” And he was like, “Answer it.” I was like, “If it was me, and there was any way to extend my life so I could be alive longer, I would take it. Because I have a kid.” I said that. If I truly believed—because I’m not going to tell him a falsehood, because I don’t believe that surgery is going to miraculously save his life, but it is honest to say if it was me, and I believed that there was something I could do to save my life so I can be around for my kid, I would do it. And that’s honest. But I didn’t say to him, “Yeah, you should go do that.”*

Tom tried to disrupt the frameworks of hospice and medical risk through urging his hospice nurse to view his situation in different ways, just as Sharpe encourages readers to adopt alternative analytics through which “we might imagine otherwise from what we know now” (p. 19). Through entreating his nurse to subjectively inhabit his position, Tom attempted to counter overriding interpretations of him as a terminally-ill, hopeless heroin addict. While the rupture that he seeks may not have manifested fully, these confrontations hint at the destabilization of the nurse’s hospice philosophy through her discomfort and honest (albeit hesitant) admission of identifying with his sentiments as a

parent. When I privately asked the nurse whether she is convinced of Tom's imminent death, she answers, "Yes. There's no way without—I don't know if it's six months, I don't know about that. With all of his wounds, and the fact he has this terrible edema, and he's decompensating and getting weaker, I feel like that only ends one way. But I'm a hospice nurse, that's how I think of things. I don't think in terms of cure. So I could be completely wrong, I don't know." Her response ended in what feels like part frustration, part resignation. She seemed to consider the possibility of accompanying Tom in challenging her hospice perspective, continuing to describe that helping people come to terms with their death becomes part of what one does as a hospice nurse: "That becomes part of your M.O. Where I'm kind of struggling is—does that have to be part of your M.O.? Is that just a habit? And we just have to change that for different people? And I think we do, and maybe that's what [Tom's] picking up on, is that. But then again, my job cannot be, "Let's look at all the options you have for treatment." You can't do all that. You can't be a hospice nurse in a hospice mindset thinking about helping people die—it's a hugely emotional job. It is incredibly difficult."

She recognized how her approach to hospice remains not only amenable to interruption, but also perhaps called to interruption in certain situations. Yet, she felt like violating her philosophy for particular patients has harmful visceral implications for her own life. With case loads of over thirty clients, care providers at Hospice Austin bear an immense emotional toll in tending to individuals who are terminal-

ly-ill along with their grieving loved ones. As a result, the nurse felt as if the psychological switch required in stepping outside her current way of thinking may further threaten her with unbearable emotional exhaustion. Tom additionally perceived his own existence itself as a kind of rupturing of medical expectations. He imparted narratives from his life that expressed and reinforced his self-identity as a "fighter" that transcends medical understanding, representing how he personally related to obstructing forces from medical thinking. For instance, after talking about trying to find a surgeon who will treat him, he told me and the hospice team about his previous surgeries:

*I've already pushed through it twice, where they expected me to die, and when I ask [the surgeons] questions to like, figure out things, they're like, "You have to tell us. We don't see people that have survived what you've survived." Actually, it's kind of uncomfortable because A, there's nobody to talk to that's been through my experience, and B, when I thank the heart surgeon for the surgery, the surgical teams thanked me instead... he goes, "You are the kind of patient that we wait our whole career for, because the human body is a machine, you can only do so much. At some point it's down to you, and the only reason you're alive right now has nothing to do with us. You're a fighter, and we never have seen this."*

Through this story, Tom undermined notions of medical risk through illustrating his capacity to shock surgeons into gratitude and consequently invert the expected power dynamics between himself

and medical experts. He depicted an exceptional capacity to "push through" and defy anticipations of his death to show the personally defining strength of his will to live over any imposing medical judgments. Furthermore, Tom's self-conception as a "fighter" seemed rooted in his relationship with past trauma: after telling us about the harrowing physical and emotional abuse and school bullying he endured during childhood, he related how when he was around thirteen years-old, he realized, "I don't have to have negative shit. I don't have to have people taking advantage of me. I don't have to have people do this to me." He continued to recount how during a recent therapy session, a counselor had admitted to him, "To tell you the truth, people don't live through your childhood that can hug their daughter. People don't live through childhoods that are violent and abusive, and you are just different." Tom again portrayed how he believed his life confounds medical analyses due to the bare power of his will to endure. Regardless of whether Tom's stories were accurate or not, the ways in which he narratively conceives of himself revealed his envisioned disruptive position within broader medical structures.

Songwriting may also serve as a symbolic vehicle through which Tom countered presiding perceptions of his life chances as essentially set. Following the shade of the hotel building in the humid afternoon heat, the hospice chaplain and I accompanied Tom to the parking curb outside his room where he started smoking a cigarette. We began chatting about writing music when he pulled out his phone to share a recording of a song he wrote

for his daughter to appreciate after his death. With his acoustic guitar strummed slowly in a minor key, we listened to him sing, “My sweet darling, listen well to the greatest truth that I have to tell. That is that no one can choose for you, even if it feels like they do. ‘Cause you don’t have to do anything, no matter how bad it gets, there’s always a choice to bring...Don’t give up the power that you have, that was born into you, allows you to last. And you can be anything that you want to be. You are infinity.” If we are to view writing as a process of becoming—as, in Deleuze’s conception, “always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience”—then we may understand Tom’s song as part of his own efforts of becoming (Deleuze, 1997, p. 1). He communicated the subversive, empowering, and expansive effects of realizing one’s own agency and

claiming life. Self-determining capacities can serve as acts of resistance to hindering forces, as means to endure hardship, as sources of boundless possibilities for being. In his world where systematic constraints abounded, Tom’s exhortation for his daughter to view herself as a kind of “infinity” may have reflected “a request to stand out of time together, to resist the stultifying temporality and time that is not ours,” in Jose Muñoz’s descriptions of queer political imagination (Muñoz, 2019, p. 187). The desire to become in this way remained Tom’s own abiding “truth,” which he wished to pass on to his daughter, even in the case where his strivings become curtailed by his own death.

Tom’s efforts to define himself against and outside governing sociomedical systems of thought and practices pointed to “the angst, uncertainty, and the passion for

the possible that life holds through and beyond technical assessments” (Biehl and Locke, 2010, p. 319). Working towards a particular way of becoming, he continually asserted his desires and self-identity as potentially subversive counter-forces in the face of broader schemas that restricted his affective and practical autonomy. Through interacting with hospice staff, creating and conveying personal narratives, and writing songs, Tom struggled to create “a delicate and incomplete health that stems from efforts to carve out life chances from things too big, strong and suffocating” (p. 318). His efforts hence raise the question of the possibility of altering the current epistemes around hospice care, diagnoses and prognoses, medical risk, and drug addicts in ways that would make his aspirations of becoming realizable.

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# Counting or Discounting Bodies?

## A Case Study of Global Health Interventions in Early Infant Diagnosis in Accra, Ghana

Mahima Krishnamoorthi

When I first began my three-month internship at the clinic, the head nurse, Guro, oriented me around the clinic, illustrating the protocols, and the projects that are working to resolve some of the barriers and gaps that patients are facing. Guro, a Dutch nurse who had spent the last fifteen years in Accra, felt very strongly about maternal and child health, specifically preventing maternal to child transmission (PMTCT). Because HIV can be transmitted through breast milk, healthy breastfeeding

### Introduction

I walked into the clinic through the back side gate that was guarded by multiple dogs. Although I had been entered the International Health Care Clinic in Accra, Ghana through this gate at eight in the morning every day, the seven black Labradors shouted at me, as if I was an unrecognized intruder. I moved past them and entered the clinic to find a group of women, many of whom were nursing, while listening to Amelia speak about healthy nutritional practices. On Saturdays, the IHCC, an HIV clinic that serves over one thousand people living with HIV, brings a pediatrician, a nutritionist, and a few nurses to speak to pregnant women and new mothers who have been diagnosed with HIV (See Appendix A). For a few hours, the mothers hear about how to prepare nutritious meals for their newborns with the few healthy options available to them. The program is part of the clinic's, and the larger HIV prevention and treatment community's, initiative to aid infants and children who are at risk of exposure to HIV. The clinic itself treats over two hundred pregnant women that are HIV+ and aids them in preventing mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of the disease.



*Image 1. The IHCC clinic hosts nutrition education for HIV+ mothers.*

practices for HIV+ women that are pregnant are incredibly important to convey to patients. In fact, the United Nation's new Sustainable Development Goals has placed a heightened emphasis on PMTCT in the context of better health for their children (WHO), and many global health funders have increased their budgetary outlines to better encompass PMTCT programs. The World Health Organization recommends that all HIV-exposed infants (HEI) have access to HIV virologic testing by age 4–6 weeks of life, denoted

as early infant diagnosis (EID), and two consecutive follow up tests at 12 and 18 months. Early infant diagnosis is incredibly important, especially in low-resource settings; if an HIV-exposed infant is given ART within the first 12 weeks of life, they are 75% less likely to die from an AIDS-related illness. This is one of the reasons WHO recommends that infants born to mothers living with HIV are tested between four and six weeks old, and it has proven to be an incredibly important measure in reducing mother to

child transmission. WHO further recommends that another HIV test is carried out at 18 months and/or when breastfeeding ends to provide the final infant diagnosis, given that HIV can be transmitted through breast milk. As proportionally more infant infections are now occurring during breastfeeding these tests are becoming increasingly important. However, Guro brought up protocol and funding constraints within the IHCC's PMTCT program. "Women are simply not coming for their one year and eighteen month tests and we are losing funding." The clinic was finding themselves in a curious predicament. Serving more than one thousand HIV+ patients, the IHCC receives the majority of its funding from international donors, primarily the Global Fund. The Global Fund finances the clinic's program for PMTCT on the stipulation that the clinic produces basic data that can demonstrate that the clinic is following the WHO guidelines of early infant diagnosis at six weeks, one year and eighteen months. These datasets are intended to include the rates of early infant diagnosis, the percentage of positive and negative test results, the proportion of pregnant women on antiretroviral therapy, the proportion of new mothers following best breastfeeding practices and an array of other qualitative and quantitative measures. However, as Guro explained, pregnant mothers in Accra are often not coming to their second and third follow up tests. Barriers to early infant diagnosis is a well known issue, and is certainly not limited to Accra. For women at the IHCC, I learned from Guro that they often do not have the means for making multiple trips to the HIV clinic. Guro explained the most common scenario that illus-

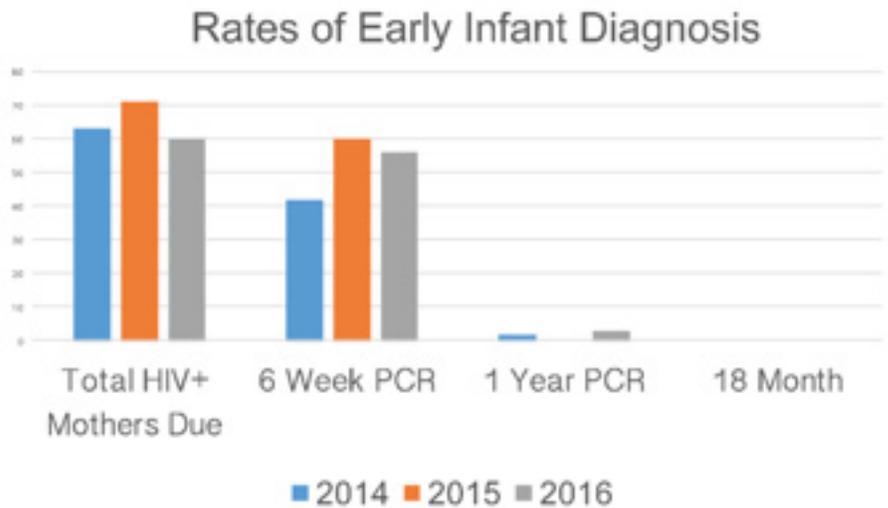


Table 1. Out of n=340 mothers in the IHCC records from Jan 2012-Jun 2017, 263 had brought their infants in for the 6 week DNA PCR test, and only 14 had brought in their children for the 1 year.

trates the decrease in rates of EID at 12 and 18 months. The IHCC, and other clinics around the world, have strategically lined up the 6 week EID visit with a vaccination visit for infants. In this way, new mothers have two important motivations for coming to clinic: to find out if their child is free from HIV and to vaccinate them from other diseases. Given that most women at the IHCC are on antiretroviral therapy, and thus are at very low likelihoods of transmitting HIV to their children, those 6 week tests are essentially always negative. And this is very promising, showcasing the leaps and bounds that health and medicine have made in the field of HIV. However, because the clinic states to mothers that their children are HIV free, there is little to no reason why a mother would want to come in for another test. In fact, at that point, the mother often feels that further testing is seemingly unnecessary, too expensive, and motivated by the clinic instead of the mother. Thus, the rates of mothers coming in for

the one year and eighteen month tests are extremely low, placing the clinic in jeopardy of losing funding from its international donors because the IHCC cannot demonstrate data that illustrates them following WHO guidelines. Guro and I decided that we would spend the majority of my three months on finding more about the barriers preventing mothers from coming in to test their newborns for HIV.

My investigation and observations took place over three months in the summer of 2017 in Accra, Ghana. The International Health Care Clinic was an important field site given that it has an adjoining West Africa AIDS Foundation, a nonprofit organization that operates through much of the same infrastructure as the clinic. The collaboration of these two entities allowed for the space to be a very interesting field site, and working within the preexisting PMTCT program and team helped initiate interviewing of mothers and other stakeholders nearby. I spoke

to 15 informants and observed five weeks of maternal nutrition education as well as other AIDS-related conferences with local NGOs and HIV clinics.

Entering the clinic, during my eighth week of the program, I talked to a few of the pregnant women about their experiences. It was not often the same mothers every week, but the few that I was able to keep up with provided insight into their lives. I talked to one pregnant mother, who was waiting at the clinic for a medical visit, about early infant diagnosis and what she knew about the different recommended test dates. She stated that she was not planning on coming in for her one year or 18-month test dates. I asked her if there were any specific reasons why she did not feel the need to come in. She looked down at the child playing in her lap, back up at me, and said, “The 6 week test said my child was negative. My child looks fine. I don’t have the money to come here whenever I want. What would you do?”

## Body Counts

This issue of financial assistance and data collection being inextricably linked is not limited to the IHCC in Accra, Ghana. The importance of quantitative data in global health has been a recent topic of debate in medical anthropology. According to the “Global Fund’s Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation” statement, “qualitative data are important for satisfying accountability requirements for donors as well as for grant recipients” (Global Fund, 2016). Agencies like the Global Fund and PEPFAR are primarily

focused on ensuring that intervention programs they choose to fund are implemented in areas in the most “dire” of need. Essentially, this requires “epidemiological mapping” in which the agencies necessitate the identification of bodies that are diagnosed with HIV. Epidemiological mapping has become extremely useful in public health. Certainly, there are well-intentioned motivations behind this requirement; to provide a population with an AIDS response, there must exist an identified and available HIV-positive group. The more bodies that are identified as needing care and intervention in a specific region, the more likely that they may be enrolled into an apparatus where they can be subject to intervention.

As Vinh-Kim Nguyen explains in *The Republic of Therapy*, the movement towards quantifying and identifying people diagnosed with HIV had primarily begun with very specific populations, largely patients that were readily available through the healthcare system such as pregnant women, those with sexually transmitted infections or TB, and hospitalized patients. Starting in the early 2000s, though, these surveys were replaced with those that represented a broader population, aiming to create a more accurate analysis of the data. As Nguyen explains, “This shift makes sense in the context of a program that aggressively seeks to map the population available through more accurate measuring” (Nguyen 2010: 179). However, mass treatment programs that require “body counts” also create pressure within the organizations that they are funding to provide quantitative data concerning diagnosis that is often not possible. It isn’t just enough

to simply diagnose someone with HIV and send that data to the Global Fund; an HIV clinic or an NGO must “track” this patient, follow up with their treatment, find out if the treatment is working, and continuously report changes to numbers of HIV positive patients. This is a grave challenge for clinics like IHCC, who often face loss to follow up and thus cannot provide the type of data that the Global Fund requires. Specifically, the head physician at the clinic discussed with me the issues of follow up calls. “When many of our patients do not have a phone number that they can be reached at, and when the ones who do often change their phone number every few months without notifying us, it is easier to lose track of a patient than it is to keep up with them.” Even more so, in areas where identity documents are unreliable, often obtained multiple times for different sources and of poor quality, consistent data sent to the Global Fund may be inaccurate and unreliable. Guro showed me some of the data for the early infant diagnosis and when I asked if I could separate it by age of the mother, she laughed. “You can certainly try. But you’ll see everyone’s birthday is January 1st, and the year is largely a guess.” With a lack of birth certification, and birthdays being identified in late childhood based on schooling, most of the Ghanaian mothers had birthdays that might have been a few years off of their actual date of birth. Thus, these accountability requirements that the Global Fund necessitates in order for clinics to receive, and continue to receive, funding, are often impractical for clinics to garner data.

## The Requirements: Who, When, and How

The Global Fund, PEPFAR and other similar funding agencies assemble their requirements for data collection based on recommendations that are assembled by the World Health Organization (WHO). Early virological diagnosis of HIV infection in infants and children is one of the primary goals of the WHO's recommendations for HIV treatment and care. In the WHO's 2010 HIV/AIDS Programme on the diagnosis of HIV infection in infants and children, there are thirteen strong recommendations listed for clinics to carry out for prevention of mother to child transmission, and the following section discusses these guidelines and the WHO's motivations for them.

The WHO has placed a specific focus on preventing transmission of HIV to infants and children, as HIV has a far worse prognosis and progression for infants and children than it does for adults. Currently, only an estimated of 15% of HIV-exposed infants needing testing are tested in the first two months of life. Because of this, the WHO has reviewed and revised recommendations for clinics to commence concrete programs for diagnosis testing in infants and children. The WHO recommends that HIV serological testing is conducted for all infants at 6 weeks. HIV can be transmitted through pregnancy, labor and delivery, and at 6 weeks, any antibodies that are actually from the mother but moved past the placenta into the fetus, are no longer evident. Thus, at 6 weeks, the serological test can determine the status of the child by identifying any antibodies from the

child's body itself. Moreover, the WHO also strongly recommends serological testing for all infants at 12 months, regardless of the test result at 6 weeks. HIV can also be transmitted through breast milk, and most mothers are moving away from breast feeding and attempting to accustom their children to food other than their mother's milk at or around 12 months, and consequently the WHO determined this to be an adequate time to test for any HIV antibodies. Finally, the WHO recommends an 18-month test in order to confirm the diagnosis of the child using an HIV viral test that identifies any viral particles rather than identifying antibodies. These are the recommendations that were assembled by the WHO and are outlined in the PEPFAR and Global Fund's requirements for continual funding.

## Relying on the Numbers

Unfortunately, while the language within the WHO programme appears focused on suggestion and recommendation, many funders such as the Global Fund will only provide further financial assistance to clinics with the presentation of data that aligns with WHO guidelines. According to Guro, all of the funding protocols, contracts, documents and even promotional material include WHO guidelines as contingent. This can also be seen through PEPFAR's fact sheets that they present every year, a concise and easy to digest amalgamation of its latest results each year. The major table is one that is titled "Number of Individuals Supported on Antiretroviral Treatment" and it simply lists numbers of total bodies that are on AZT and are being treated at

Country/Regional Program	Direct Service Delivery Results	Technical Assistance for Service Delivery Improvement Results	Total
Asia Regional Program	641	18,987	19,628
Botswana	2,637	N/A	2,637
Burma	N/A	337	337
Burundi	N/A	18,593	18,593
Cambodia	1,265	14,304	15,569
Cameroon	814	N/A	814
Central Asia Region	N/A	1,903	1,903
Cote d'Ivoire	129,953	N/A	129,953
Democratic Republic of the Congo	30,653	479	31,132
Dominican Republic	124	25,548	25,712
Ethiopia	350,434	5,163	355,597
Guyana	2,834	N/A	2,834
Haiti	62,402	N/A	62,402
Indonesia	71	N/A	71
Kenya	727,418	16,697	744,115
Lesotho	15,662	62,790	78,452
Malawi	130,460	357,664	488,124
Mozambique	491,618	N/A	491,618
Namibia	N/A	17,878	17,878
Nigeria	610,599	N/A	610,599
Papua New Guinea	344	N/A	344
Rwanda	62,477	35,665	98,142
South Africa	483,122	2,127,580	2,610,702
South Sudan	9,379	N/A	9,379
Tanzania	71,251	16,806	88,057
Tanzania	546,947	7,667	554,614
Uganda**	344,914	80,906	425,820
Vietnam	47,815	5,648	53,463
Zambia	325,123	258,817	583,940
Zimbabwe	2,576	160,000	162,576
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,512,048</b>	<b>6,315,868</b>	<b>10,827,916</b>
Financial Collaboration Countries (Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa)	485,759	2,145,438	2,631,197
Total excluding Financial Collaboration Countries	4,026,289	4,170,430	8,196,719

\*The totals are as of September 30, 2014. Due to country updates resulting from ongoing data quality improvement efforts, totals may differ slightly from reported results in other forums. All results still reflect accomplishments through September 30, 2014.  
\*\*Uganda totals do not reflect the results of all U.S. Government implementing agencies.

*PEPFAR assembles their annual fact-sheet which represents their yearly total results. The primary demonstration of their data is shown in the table to the left, which lists raw numbers of individuals on AZT that are enrolled in clinics that are funded by the agency, a clear demonstration of abstraction and reduction of patients to numbers*

clinics that are funded by PEPFAR. Simply listing numbers of bodies clearly showcases the significance of raw quantitative data in evaluating global health interventions.

This reliance on numbers in global health interventions was heavily explored in Vincanne Adams' text, *Metrics: What Counts in Global Health*. As Adams explains in her text, from July 2010 until March 2013, members of two Senegalese health workers' unions hold a data collection strike against the Ministry of Health, while still providing care to their patients. This was meant to bring light to the health care resource distribution inequality

across the country. The Ministry of Health in Senegal allocated its resources from the Global Fund across the country, but these union members made it clear to Adams that they wanted to “withhold health data to undermine the relationship between Senegal and the international aid community” (Adams 2016: 105). This data retention strike was extremely powerful, much more so than one that would have simply affected working conditions in these specific clinics. The health workers knew that by withholding data from the Ministry of Health, the potential funding for the next funding cycle from the Global Fund and other donors would be in jeopardy, and this was exactly what occurred. Adams explains that “this strike demonstrates that regular and precise production of local health data plays a key role in the global enterprise” (Adams 2016: 106). This data retention strike also illuminates the importance of data collection in biomedical sectors of developing nations that are receiving funding from other countries. As medical anthropologist Claire Wendland places this significance of data in the context of Western views of biomedicine. According to Wendland, biomedicine, due to its neutrality objectivity, “is also seen as universally and beneficially good” (Wendland 2010: 11), and because of this, it is constructed as being completely neutral and void of any unique cultural impetus, allowing it to be freely traded, bought and sold. The ability of medicine to transcend borders “lends itself to globalization” (Wendland 2010: 7) and thus makes funding agencies able to reduce and abstract the raw data from the bodies it was taken.

## **Abstraction and Reduction in Biomedicine**

Abstraction is the process of taking some concept out of its original context or source in order to distance it and understand it in its own singularity. This conceptualization of different ideas, especially quantitative data, is often undergone in scientific research. There is certainly a necessity for raw data to be understood as it is, numbers. However, in science, this inability to place data back in its original context or source often leads to dehumanization and abstraction of individuals and people. Science can often abstract out the very humanity from which their data is extracted in the first place.

This abstraction is evident within the pregnant mothers diagnosed with HIV. Many of the pregnant mothers enrolled in treatment at the IHCC are unable to come in for their one year and 18-month diagnostic testing of their infants due to the cost of traveling, often far distances to the IHCC. However, there are certainly many clinics closer to some of these women’s homes. So why are they traveling so far to the IHCC in Accra? One of the mothers told me, “No one knows me here,” and this sentiment was shared by the majority of the women that I interviewed that lived far away from the IHCC. Stigma is still a side effect of HIV, one that isn’t listed on AZT bottles or diagnosis documents, and it can sometimes be the most debilitating aspect of the disease. As a result, it is easier for these mothers to avoid any seemingly unnecessary trips to the clinic for fear of being seen by someone that they know. If, at the 6-week mark,

their child is diagnosed as HIV negative, then they are far less likely to come to the one year and 18 month testing dates given that their “child looks fine.” Thus, the “body counts” that PEPFAR and Global Fund are aiming to collect largely ignore the intense cultural impetus that exists for so many of the women that are not represented in these data sets. Moreover, funding agencies are essentially punishing clinics for not being able to represent data as accurately and expansively as possible, leaving clinics in a unique predicament and an unending cycle of loss to follow up of pregnant mothers, inability to produce raw data, loss in funding, and subsequently less resources to reach out to mothers themselves. Thus, the IHCC find themselves in a position where it is almost incentivized to provide data, if it is falsified. At a conference of the HIV clinics and NGOs in Accra, one administrative officer stood up after a discussion of the HIV prevalence in pregnant women in Ghana and said “if we tell them the prevalence rate is decreasing then they will give us less money. We must continue to provide the upper bound of 5-6%.” This desperate cry for falsification in order to continue to receive adequate funding showcases the inability of quantitative data to solely provide an understanding of intervention impact in a region. The clinics are forced to take on the roles of the funding agencies and view their patients as commodities. Montoya brings up a new conception of the body – body as commodity, representing the lack of agency that the body itself presents. Rather, the body encompasses a value to its proprietors. Montoya conveys the irony in Webster’s

definition of commodity, relaying that to say that a thing is “capable” is to impute agency to an inanimate object. “Such a definition denies the human role in the process of commoditization” (Montoya 2011: 120). The IHCC and other clinics are, in this climate of reliance on numbers, forced to abstract their own patients and use their body counts as a way to receive funding.

## Conclusion

I argue that global health agencies and funding organizations need to change their framework in order to move away from abstraction and

body counts in order to expand biomedicine from a solely neutral and objective field to one that recognizes the importance of cultural impetus and social determinants of health. How can we reach this goal in global health interventions? Perhaps a preliminary solution is that of skepticism – we must be skeptic of the quantitative data that we see represented in factsheets such as those produced annually by funding agencies like PEPFAR. As Adams explains in her epilogue, “we need to [...] undo their claims on certainty, on standardization and truth’ (Adams 2016: 227). Secondly, and certainly the more difficult

method, we need to begin pursuing new methods of assessing health needs and evaluating interventions. This could potentially be in a metrics model that focuses on more than just quantitative numbers, or an entire radical overhaul of this system in general. Of course, this will take time, but in the meantime, we must be able to move toward this direction in global health. We cannot simply stand by as clinics are mandated to enforce regulations that they do not agree with and while women in Accra, Ghana, and around the world plead with us, saying “What would you do?”

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# The Role of Masculinity in the English Prison

Josh Cobler

*Bright and early, I found myself in Warwickshire.*

*After a long car ride of green hills and hearing my driver explain why he voted to leave the EU, I entered Her Majesty's Prison Rye Hill for a morning choral workshop with the people incarcerated there. I found myself swept away completely by the beauty and technical depth of the prison choir and their kindness as they taught me how to harmonize alongside them.*

*HMP Rye Hill only houses sex offenders. Some of the people around me had committed horrific acts, things that leave such terrible scars on survivors of these actions. And yet they showed themselves to me as complicated people with complicated pasts and complicated ways of seeking redemption.*

*Over the last month, as I've been immersed in the criminal justice system of England & Wales, I've been trying to grapple with my own core beliefs—about punishment, about rehabilitation, about judgment, and most importantly, about empathy.*

*My search for answers has come up short. But what I can tell you is that, especially in my confusion and inner turmoil, the sound of the choir is haunting.*

Above is the Facebook post that I wrote and shared the afternoon after going to Her Majesty's Prison Rye Hill. It was the second male-only prison that I had visited over the course of my term at Oxford, studying the role of arts in rehabilitative programs in the English prison system. I came in completely unsure what I was going to get: I had no background or personal experience with prisons. In many ways, that lack of exposure was probably for the best, because it meant that I lacked expectations and was able to come as close as possible to entering tabula rasa, which can be incredibly useful for being empathetic and hearing people out on their own

terms. The first prison I visited, HMP Cookham Wood, was a male juveniles' prison in Kent, England, incarcerating boys and young men between the ages of 15 and 18 in single-occupancy cells. After speaking with some of the incarcerated youth, hearing stories that often involved recurring themes of poverty and childhood trauma, it was unsurprisingly easy for me to leave the overcrowded prison and say, "How can this be allowed? These are children! They have so much potential in their futures if we just give them the opportunity to succeed!" After all, I believed that children could only ever be victims of a broken system, and to incarcerate

the predominantly working class, Black youth for crimes that came as a result of poverty felt like a gross miscarriage of what I perceived as a just use of the criminal justice system. This youth prison helped me sidestep the more difficult questions underlying this experience—about punishment, about rehabilitation, about judgment, and most importantly, about empathy—that HMP Rye Hill, a prison that exclusively housed adult male sex offenders, forced me to confront.

Media representations of male-only prisons often showcase spaces of intense masculinity. While imperfect, these representations were not unlike what I observed; my own experience at HMP Cookham Wood, an all-male youth prison, certainly had a certain masculine air, with incarcerated teens often yelling, fighting, screaming, and moving in ways that showcased physical threats and power. But why was this the case? Does the structure of the prison regime necessitate or even cultivate a particular form of masculinity from those incarcerated? Drawing on participant-observation from rehabilitative art workshops in English, male-only prisons, I argue that masculinity within the prison system is a direct, structural result of the prison, and effective attempts at rehabilitation of incarcerated men will require a deconstruction and breakdown of these forms of masculinity that pervade the prison environment.

Masculinity itself can imply many meanings, and it is important to note that different flavors of masculinity take shape depending on the context and structure it is within.



*A view of the entrance to HMP Rye Hill, a category ‘B’ prison, within which 664 adult men are incarcerated. Visitors must provide legal identification upon entry, leave biometric information, and go through strict security processes that include X-Ray machines and handheld metal detector wands.*

*Credit: Newsteam / SWNS Group.*

The all-male prison is no exception to this. To conceptualize the specific form of masculinity that appears within the English prison system, Yvonne Jewkes, a sociologist and researcher on criminality at the University of Bath, writes of a “fratriarchy,” a framework that places the “facts of male power and feelings of individual male powerlessness” within the context of a patriarchal society (Jewkes 2005, 46-47). Under fratriarchal environments, men create codes of behavior that glamorize three aspects of masculinity in particular: impregnating women, providing for one’s dependents, and protecting one’s kin. Fratriarchal attitudes, Jewkes argues, are a learned response to “the imperatives of the criminal inmate culture,” often a reproduction and transformation of working-class English culture in

which men must indicate a “potential capacity for aggression” that must be “constantly maintained in the face of systemic disrespect and stigmatization” (Jewkes 2005, 45). It is this potential capacity for aggression that I argue is used as a way for incarcerated men to resist the structure of the prison.

Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, a canonical text on the construction and symbolic presence of prisons, highlights an overarching theme of the prison environment: dominance. The chapters of “The Body of the Condemned” and “Docile Bodies” examine disciplinary power, a form of power within the prison system that can be exercised through hierarchical observation and the normalization of judgment, specifically “imposing

precise and detailed norms” (Gutting and Oksala 2019). The purpose of this disciplinary power is to create docile bodies, bodies that “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault, 180). In doing so, because those who wield power are often institutions such as the state the exerciser of power, the prison regime<sup>[1]</sup> that the state implements is able to control the bodies of those within the confines of the prison, manipulating the spaces, time, and movements of bodies so as to render them docile. It is not difficult for those who have never entered a prison to imagine the ways in which prisons can control the space, time, and movement of the incarcerated body, but for the sake of clarity, I will use HMP Cookham Wood as an example.

Incarcerated youth at HMP Cookham Wood are kept within strict schedules thanks to the prison regime; they are kept in solitary cells for much of the day, only to be released during meal times, educational hours, and some brief socialization periods. Incarcerated youth must be escorted throughout the prison, expected to hold their hands behind their backs and to walk in orderly lines. As such, space and time is in the power of the prison regime and structure, effectively taken from the incarcerated youth. This control of movement creates docility among the bodies of incarcerated youth, knowing that if they fight against disciplinary power, they may face even more restrictions on their space, time, and movement—being moved to a different ward of the prison, having more time extended before reaching parole, or losing access to areas such as the recreation center. As a

result, incarcerated individuals fear losing their limited access to freer movement, causing them to surveil themselves and force themselves to act in accordance with these forms of restricted movement.

It is impossible to separate the links between these structures of dominance in prisons from their broader interactions with structures of patriarchy.<sup>[2]</sup> Feminist writers have frequently expanded on Foucault’s work to deepen their analysis of relations of gender-based power. The first wave of feminist scholarship that focused on Foucault saw parallels the transition from sovereign power (power that a king or other sovereign can hold over the body) to modern, disciplinary power (such as that to create the docile body, as described earlier) as fundamentally similar to the historical shift in more overt methods of women’s oppression to the more insidious ways that women are controlled and subjugated. One example of this, fitting well with Foucault’s ideas of surveillance, is the male gaze, which exerts control over the ways in which people will engage with space, time, and movement without the overt threat of physical violence:

*There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own over-*

*seer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost. (Deveaux, 225).*

Furthermore, if we continue to take metaphors of performance implicit within Foucault’s theories, and explicit within feminist scholarship, such as that of Judith Butler, who believed that gender itself is a performance, it becomes difficult to separate the similarities of the performances of the prisoner, forced to perform in a way that is compliant with the exertion of disciplinary power, and women,<sup>[3]</sup> forced to perform acceptable notions of gender under the male gaze. In the prison system, the male gaze necessitates that men act in accordance with fraternal attitudes of a correct performance of gender, or they find themselves at risk of a “feminization” that would weaken their authority and social system (Jewkes 2005, 47).

In the prison, this link between the dominance of disciplinary power and patriarchy become even clearer: these structures of dominance create a hegemonic masculine culture of patriarchy. David Gilmore, an anthropologist who argued that masculinity across cultures has a culturally sanctioned emphasis on toughness and aggression, writes that the “harsher

[1] By regime, I refer to its definition as “a system or ordered way of doing things,” and regime is the term that prisons in the United Kingdom themselves use.

[2] Prisons, and the English prison system in particular, cannot be separated from their connection to structures of racial and class domination either. However, a fuller analysis of the links between English prisons, race, and class fall outside the scope of this article.

[3] While I use women here, the male gaze and heteropatriarchal structures also affect non-binary individuals, LGBT individuals, and those who might normally be expected to, but ultimately do not adhere to traditional notions of masculinity.

the environment and the scarcer the resources, the more manhood is stressed as inspiration and goal” (Gilmore 1990, 224). Indeed, few environments offer “a more intensely harsh, unproductive, and impoverished set of circumstances than the prison” (Jewkes 51). She writes that physical jostling for power is “perhaps especially visible in prisons because they are such blatantly status-depriving environments and therefore create a particularly acute need for indices of relative status” (Jewkes, 53). In this way, masculinity and patriarchy can be understood as an act of resistance against the structure of the prison, which is founded upon disciplinary power. By taking up the performances of aggression, physical strength, and other aspects of masculinity, men are able to reclaim a form of “relative status” that forced docility has taken from them. It is important to note, yet again, the connection here between disciplinary power and patriarchy: incarcerated men, in their own acts of resistance against their perceived feminization in the state’s attempt to render their bodies docile, are tapping into larger patriarchal structures that privilege masculinity over femininity. Femininity in this all-male prison context then becomes less of a gender expression in its own right, and quickly becomes the absence of patriarchal masculinity—that is, forced docility and the denial of authority and agency. This is an inversion of how we often think of “an act of resistance,” which is quite often viewed positively in the context of fighting against oppression; yet here, this act of resistance attempts to leverage one structure of oppression in order to find relief from a different one. This is precisely why any rehabilita-

tive attempts need to address conceptions of masculinity: masculinity is prized within the prison, and while this may provide relief from the overbearing force of disciplinary power, it continues to further the oppression and subjugation of women through its continued reproduction of patriarchal attitudes and cultures.

The arts, however, can be a useful way to subvert this tendency to seek resistance out of heteropatriarchal structures. A wide variety of scholarly evidence exists suggesting that the arts have an immense potential to counter attitudes and behaviors arising out of performances of hypermasculinity. The arts themselves can create a space for “reflection, community, and consensus building” (Williams, 2012), all of which can offer the opportunity to find

space within the system of disciplinary power and outside of patriarchy. Other research has shown that arts programs within prisons can reduce anger from prisoners and develop empathy (Wilson et al., 2008), which directly opposes hypermasculine performances of aggression and emotionlessness. But most importantly, benefits of arts in programs in prisons are not always quantifiable (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2012). This is ever more the case when it comes to deconstructions of masculinity through arts programs. After all, masculinity and hypermasculinity as concepts are difficult to code and quantify for the purposes of quantitative analysis, as these take up culturally specific forms that take shape in different ways depending on changing contexts. However, the theoretical framing of Erving Goffman can shed some light



*Most prisons in England are located in relatively less populated, more rural areas, and those who are incarcerated are often incarcerated in locations away from their home communities. This photo was taken by the author on the drive from Oxford to a village near Ruby in Warwickshire, a small, aging, mostly white village where business services have been declining due to the loss of the railway line and station.*

on the mechanisms through which this occurs. Goffman, using the language of theater, writes about the frontstage, “where the public aspect of one’s identity will be presented in social engagement with other,” and the backstage, “where one’s basic, personal ontological security system is restored and where the tensions associated with sustaining the particular bodily, gestural, and verbal codes that are demanded in this setting are diffused,” from a social psychological lens (Jewkes, 54). In the prison setting, the gaze of the prison forces the frontstage to be constantly ‘on,’ never allowing incarcerated people to restore their own “personal ontological security system.” This lack of ontological security pushes incarcerated men even further towards toxic masculinity. Meanwhile, the arts provide a break from this, allowing a re-scripting and re-performance of the individual such that the backstage can be accessed.

HMP Rye Hill’s choral workshop provides an incredibly interesting case study of this. It was surprising that, in a prison solely for those convicted of sex offenses, the choral workshop seemed to be a space devoid of the typical forms of masculinity seen in the English prison. The workshop room was a space where the jostling of power that Jewkes describes was no longer relevant; the fraternal posturing—the yelling, fighting, screaming, and moving in ways that showcased physical threats and power—that I had expected ultimately never appeared, despite the fact that I was a stranger entering their space, which just as easily could have set off for them to perform strength to us. Even in the separation of people

by voice register, a necessary element of a choir that just as easily could have led to power dynamics between those with more ‘masculine,’ deeper voices and those with more ‘feminine,’ higher voices, there seemed to be no concern over a need to perform masculinity. Power in the room was not decided by matters as trivial as voice register. I learned during the choral workshop break about the interests and lives of those in the room—one person used to sing on a cruise ship, another had always wanted to visit Disneyland, and another was even curious about whether gay pride parades and celebrations were as large and popular in the United States as he thought they were! As I wrote in my Facebook post, they each revealed themselves to me “as complicated people with complicated pasts and complicated ways of seeking redemption.” One of my fears regarding the choral workshop was that it would be confined spatially and temporally to the location of the music room at the time of the weekly choral workshops, but much to my surprise, many of the men sang down the stairs as they exited both the room and the recreation building. The constant need to perform masculinity seemed to no longer be necessary, neither in the space of the choral workshop nor the areas surrounding it.

“My search for answers has come up short,” I wrote back in February. “But what I can tell you is that, especially in my confusion and inner turmoil, the sound of the choir is haunting.” Upon further reflection, the aspect of it that was so confusing, that created so much turmoil, that haunted me was the incongruity of it all—here I was,

in a prison for sex offenders, impressed and amazed at the kindness and humanity of them all and how they defied all my expectations for an all-male prison. But what was also haunting was what this showed me about the prison system and our ideas of rehabilitation. The site of the choral workshop provided a critical space for reflection that encouraged a breakdown of the hegemonic form of masculinity and fraternal attitudes created within the prison structure. It became immediately clear that these spaces, where incarcerated men were able to free from the masculine posturing required of them within the prison, created an opportunity to restore the humanity of those whose incarceration had dehumanized them and provided few means for rehabilitation and restorative justice. And while these types of arts programs shouldn’t be seen as a panacea, it is extremely distressing to see these programs’ funding frequently at risk of being cut; indeed, the coalition government of the United Kingdom—which saw the right-wing Conservative Party and the centrist Liberal Democrats work together in government from 2010–2015—slashed funding for arts programs in prisons (Robertson 2013).

At the same time, as arts programs in prisons continue gasping for air, trying to survive the difficult political realities of being connected to prisons and being viewed as ‘non-essential,’ I worry that we may lose sight of the overarching structural problems with prisons in the first place. If there is anything that has haunted me since my visit to the two prisons—and made even clearer by diving into the topic of masculinity in prison—it is that

the prison system is not working, as its very structure only reproduces and replicates forms of oppression within prison cultures. An optimistic observer might come to the conclusion that the prison as an institution is broken. But instead, I would posit that it is working exactly as designed. The prison system as it exists today in England is not set up for rehabilitation. It is created to punish. The exertion of disciplinary power within the prison regime is not an unintentional consequence; rather, it occurs there by design.

While arts programs like the ones I participated in were useful in disrupting the fraternal attitudes and behaviors that incarcerated

men needed to adopt in order to survive, no amount of choral practices, painting classes, woodworking workshops, or Shakespeare plays within prisons will be able to fix the underlying structural problem of prisons, even if these arts programs do immense good in the meantime. It is not the lack of arts programs that is the underlying problem in the failure for prisons to rehabilitate those incarcerated within them; it's the institution and site of the prison itself, the way that the prison regime replicates and recreates patterns of structural violence. To disrupt this violence, we must go bolder than looking to the prison as a justified site to separate those we deem criminal. We must go beyond

sites of punishment and instead look toward a site of restoration ones in which—like the choral workshop—new spaces of self-reflection can be created, and rehabilitation can occur.

Based on my own experience as a participant-observer in an arts program whose goal was rehabilitation, it seems that the English prison has never served as a site for complicated people with complicated pasts to find ways of seeking redemption. Maybe instead of funneling working class English men into prisons that only reify violence, it's time we build those redemptive institutions instead.

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# Travel-Sized Sites: Art, Souvenirs, and Tourism (and Subversion, Capitalism, and Erasure) in South Africa

Lilith Frakes

Tourism as a practice deserves heavy scrutiny. Few can disagree that the underlying principle of tourist travel enables its participants to be exposed to cultures, countries, and customs other than their own. However, the implications of tourism set amongst 21st century world politics, class difference, and race dynamics calls to question more actively the intentions of the tourists (specifically Western) when traveling to the Global South. The rise of the tourism industry and commercialization of cultures that has resulted has produced massive markets of souvenirs curated for the Western tourist gaze. In South Africa, souvenirs within the tourism industry, has created contention in the status of art and what it is meant to evoke to its purchaser. This paper will provide a brief overview of Souvenir Studies and debates within the discipline about authenticity and primitive art followed by a discussion of the prev-

alence of the tourism industry in South Africa, specifically in regards to souvenir purchases by tourists. This topic is made more complex by South Africa's history of colonialism (under the Dutch and English) and apartheid (the institutionalized social and political policy by which White South Africans controlled a stratified society based upon racial categories from 1948 to its repeal in 1991). The findings of my own field work in a case study of visual art for sale in Cape Town attempt to unpack trends in tourist art that cater to Westerners' conceptions of Africa, but also how such art can be used for identity claims in South African communities and an example of how tourist art can be subverted to tell a different story about what South Africa looks like. Last summer while working as an intern at the Iziko Museum's Archaeology department in Cape Town, I had the opportunity to conduct "field work" in various souvenir markets across

the city. Through a case study analyzing trends in visual art in the souvenir industry in Cape Town, inherently linked to memories of colonialism and apartheid, it is possible to identify by which images tourists want to remember South Africa, the evolutionary "Motherland" of humanity, and how the industry both caters to and subverts this Western gaze.

While anthropology has always included artifacts from even before the museum system from the 19th century, modern souvenir studies, despite its shallow existing academic scholarship, spans a multitude of disciplines (Swanson and Timothy, 289-299). Consumer behavior, art history, geography, museum studies, anthropology, history, philosophy, retailing, literary criticism, and sociology all play a part in analyzing the status of souvenirs and tourist commodities within their contexts of selling, and the people who choose to buy them. The term itself, souvenir, "is originally a French verb indicating the action to remember. Translated as an English noun it represents an object through which something is remembered" (Olalere, 1). Pierre Noara's famous "lieux de memoire" (or "sites of memory") refers to the certain places or objects of heritage or cultural value that evokes powerful memories of heritage to communities (Nora, 7). In a similar way, after their acquisition, souvenirs can in a similar way act as portable "sites of memory" to their owners. Yet despite the exciting implications of what souvenirs can mean, they are often disregarded as a serious field of study. Perhaps this comes from their duality; being "simultaneously granted significance and disregarded" (Ramsay,

200). Souvenirs are regarded highly by their purchasers, and yet often discounted by academics as a “misguided preoccupation” of tourists (Swanson, 491).

Much of this debate centers around ideas of authenticity, as many souvenirs stake a claim to a preserved culture or tradition while inherently existing “for commercialization to generate income” (Swanson, 491). Most tourists themselves hold a notion of what constitutes the “authentic” in the space they have chosen to visit before they even arrive, and typically evaluate souvenirs to bring home by that personal standard (Swanson, 492). And yet, the range of souvenirs that people choose to encapsulate their memories of a certain space differ wildly. Arriving home with a purchased souvenir, the object can capture what qualities the tourist found unique about their place of travel, and embody how they chose to shape that memory (Swanson, 492). Thus, authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, who arrives in a foreign land with a preconceived idea of what about it is “authentic” and returns home with evidence of this predisposition in the form of souvenirs. To souvenir producers and sellers, the importance of “commoditiz[ing] the intangible meanings of souvenirs, and turn[ing] them into a tangible, consumable product[s] for sale” has impacted the shape of the industry in countries that are economically shaped by being tourist destinations (Swanson, 494). The resulting commoditization process has been criticized for “stealing the spirit” of the artwork it boasts to be authentic (Swanson, 495), as made-in-mass by people who have no cultural attachment to their products or

production, or by indigenous people to who cultural significance has become synonymous with the tourist industry. Such debates of authenticity and agency within souvenir consumption find fertile ground within the tourism industry in 21st century South Africa.

Here it is important to make a distinction in the categories that fall under souvenirs, especially regarding “primitive art.” In the 19th century, the Arts and Crafts Movement in the US and Europe was grounded in a yearning for a pre-industrial past, one that affirmed “the joy of labor” and shifted relative value towards those qualities associated with craft (Davis, 196). The distinction between “craft” and “art” in the perceived collective and utilitarian nature of objects “places emphasis is on ‘skill’ of the producer (‘artisan’) versus ‘genius’ (‘artist’)” (Davis, 196). The emphasis placed on objects created by hand alludes to older technologies of production and social relations to other people, and thus souvenirs as such are “primitive” artifacts of a backwards society that tourists want to recall. This “‘taste for the objects of colonial others’ by elites distraught by the rise of consumer capitalism is the assertion of a pan-humanism that is, nonetheless, hierarchical” (Davis, 196). The connection that many want their souvenirs to impart about the culture they have visited promises to transcend the global hierarchy of race and class when it only serves to further perpetuate it.

Tourism arose as a major industry within the South African economy in the wake the end of apartheid (Mathers, 526). Political unrest and human rights violations made tour-

ism unpopular in South Africa before the democratic election of 1994, but afterwards [the country] was opened up more to tourism both as an economic opportunity, and as a way to bolster national identity (Grundlingh, 120). The development of tourist sites in many post-colonial countries is, at least in part, seen as desirable because of the slew of “economic potential” which accompanies tourism (Barillet, iiv), and powerful Western institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank have aided this process, creating many World Heritage Sites in South Africa both in relation to its colonial and apartheid histories. And, with a staggering upward growth projected to reach almost 20 million international tourists by the year 2023, the tourism industry in South Africa has certainly succeeded in becoming an economic pillar of the country (Lock, 2019). Surveys from the Ministry of Tourism indicate that the top five overseas countries with the largest number of tourists visiting South Africa were the USA, UK, Germany, the Netherlands and France (“Tourism and Migration”). Though most of these economic gains are reaped by the corporations owning hotels or tourism packages (domestic and international), for many, involvement in the tourist industry in South Africa comes in the form of selling souvenirs to tourists.

However, an industry based around the commodification of memory in a nation still reeling from the trauma of racism and discriminatory state policies is not without contestation. Motivations, especially by Western white tourists to visit South Africa have been met with deserved scrutiny, because as national narratives begin to be challenged “for their

depictions of society and its past, tourism continue[s] to provide a safe haven for a troubled history that glorifies colonial adventure and a repudiated anthropology of primitivism” (Witz, 277). As scholarship has investigated, most international tourists aim to fill their itinerary in South Africa with visits to game parks (Mathers, 527), “cultural villages” (Mathers, 527), townships (Witz, 286), and the city capital Cape Town (Burgold, 169). These encounters have been propelled in part by the government’s interest in boosting tourism with acts and documents detailing the framework for development in the industry (Heath, 282), and are overwhelmingly dominated by tourist’s desire “to experience at one and the same time a trip into a primeval ‘natural’ past and traditional ‘African’ culture” (Mathers, 527). And because according to “the South African Tourism department, shopping and nightlife are the top activities for tourists in South Africa” (Olalere, 1), this representation to tourists of a “frozen... peculiar Disney-like version of its past and present” (Mathers, 533) is predominantly apparent in the souvenirs that tourists buy.

In a fascinating study conducted from 2012 to 2016, over 360 international tourists in South Africa were surveyed “to examine the influence of product attributes on souvenir purchasing decisions” (Olalere, 3). In survey responses, the three highest reasons provided as to why tourists choose to buy the souvenirs they did were because of the item’s “authenticity,” the “connection” it fostered, and the purchase’s ability to foster “empowerment” for the maker or seller (Olalere, 5). Despite the seemingly

benign intent of each of these words it is important to problematize what has come to be perceived as authentic, connecting, and empowering to a market built around the perpetuation of what tourists want to remember their time in Africa by. As previously mentioned, the search for authenticity is central to selecting souvenirs. What makes an object “authentic,” on the other hand is hard to pin down. Some anthropologists have pointed to attributes including “product uniqueness; cultural and historical integrity; the craft’s utilitarian function; esthetics; quality of workmanship; the artist’s connection to the product, having produced it with his or her own hands; [and] being able to watch the artisan in his or her creative element” (Swanson, 492). Interestingly, many of these criteria focus just as much on the object’s creator and their process of creation as it does the souvenir itself. Sellers are aware of this romanticized appeal and many integrate it into their sale technique, working to “enchant objects [to buyers] by fostering a sense of attachment to objects and their place of production/purchase” (Ramsay, 204). This sense of transparency of production and familiarity with the creator makes the object as a souvenir a richer source of memory. Not only can this souvenir then encapsulate a sort of historic sense of preservation in South African culture and remind one of their time on the country, but it also calls to mind a social connection to its creator, and thus a sense of knowing a “real” South African. This sense of attachment to both product and production creates a sort of “double fetish” to consumers (Ramsay, 204), the notion that seeing an object made makes it

almost twice as authentic to tourists as seeing it on a shelf, much to the irony that the human connection that validates the purchase is itself a staging of authenticity for the benefit of the tourist. The idea of “connection” as a desirable quality in souvenir consumption is thus a fabrication as well.

Ironically, a disruption of the hierarchy of race and class is exactly what tourists try to achieve when purchasing a souvenir that carries implications of “empowerment” of the vendors. One prevalent example of “pro-poor” tourism in South Africa are township tours (also known as slum tourism), where buses of international tourists are taken through townships, a form of apartheid relocation housing for citizens classified as black. A remnant of the racist architecture of apartheid, townships embody the real systemic oppression against black South Africans that has not been dismantled under the new South African democracy. Though regarded as “morally dubious” by some, township tours are marketed by tour companies as having educational and philanthropic values through witnessing the difficulty of life in townships, as well as exposing tourists to the “authentic Cape Town” (Burgold, 162). In fact, one opportunity all township tours boast of engagement with local habitants through purchasing souvenirs. Thus, through physically handing money to a former victim of racist policy, the facade of financial empowerment to the local poor is enacted, while tourism companies make the real profit. This transaction allows the tourist to feel they have “empowered” the local individual through purchasing a souvenir, when in fact, tourism

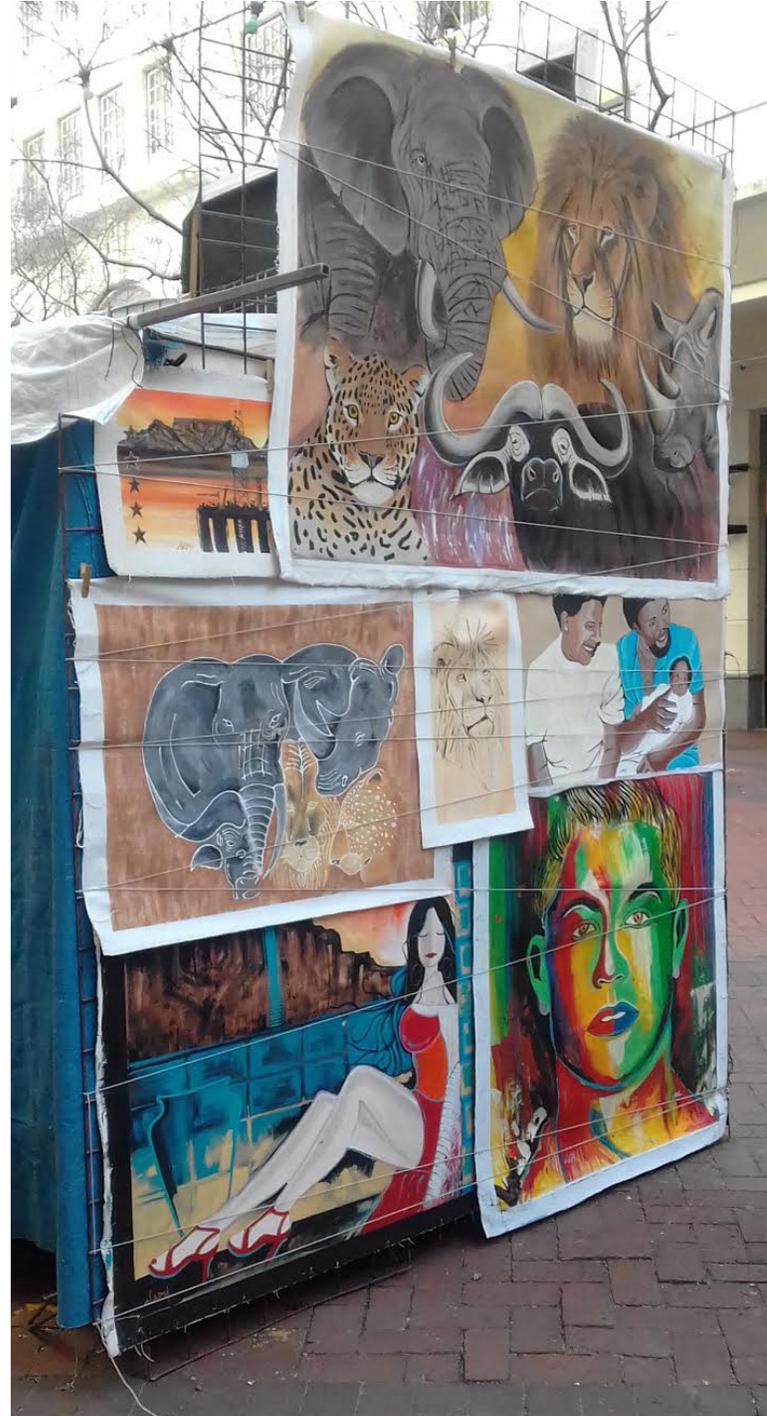
income through such avenues is one governmental technique to ignore the citizens who still suffer from the same living conditions today as when they did under apartheid. And thus, “the tourism industry and its supposed potential for poverty alleviation is exposed as, if anything, an agent for supporting the continuation of apartheid geography” (Mathers, 528).

Keeping this analysis of the primary attractions tourists hold for South African souvenirs in mind, it is possible to narrow the scope of discussion to one specific category of souvenir prevalent in South Africa; visual art. Of any type of souvenir, pictographic representations may be the most straight forward in terms of examining what tourists wish to remember their trips by. The num-

ber of stalls in Cape Town alone that sell (and oftentimes create on sight) paintings make it clear that the tourist market platforms hand-painted representations as one of the most valued souvenir reflecting their view of South Africa. In the pursuit of defining what tourists want to remember from “The Motherland,” identifying patterns in visual tourist art is essential.



(fig. 1, Frakes)



(fig. 2, Frakes)

Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show examples of the ubiquity of representations of African animals in art marketed to tourists in Cape Town.

Taking to the streets of Cape Town to identify said patterns, I identified two pervasive motifs stood out, perhaps the most common being representations of African animals. As game drives and safari parks are such a popular draw to international tourists, this is not wholly surprising. The notoriety of the “Big Five” most famous African animals (lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and Cape buffalo) has drawn Westerners since the colonial era, to hunt or more recently to see in their “natural” environments. In fact, across the world, foreign animals inspire a staggering amount of souvenirs, perhaps because they encapsulate what is exotic and familiar about a place “whilst at the same time retaining the foreignness and mystery of a historic culture” (Beard, 514). This allure for the foreign yet familiar is the same one that drove European game hunters in the 19th century to flock to South Africa, aiding colonial expansion, displacing indigenous people, devastating flora and fauna, and providing a clear example of the Global North as a consumer for the Global South’s “raw material” (“History of Hunting”). In many ways, the Western colonial drive to capture the embodiment of a wild frontier lives on through these souvenirs. More often than not, these depict African animals devoid of setting or context, some painted in bright surreal colors. If the most common trend among paintings for sale to tourists in South Africa is surreal depictions of African animals, it begs the question of what such images are selected to evoke of tourists’ time in the country. It stands to reason that paintings such as displayed in figures 1 and 2 call to mind a sort of wild paradise, uncivilized and

exotic, depicting the abundance of wildlife one will scarcely find away from fenced game parks that take governmental priority to restorative land distribution. In purchasing paintings of typically African animals as souvenirs to remember South Africa by, the tourist engages in a sort of fantasy of an idyllic colonial-era fantasy, where what is “African” is at the disposal of the Western gaze, and can exist even after colonial forces have destroyed the landscape and ecology they choose to remember. When pieces of souvenir art aren't depicting wild animals, the majority point to a second trend in street art in Cape Town, depictions of faceless black people. Often placed among idyllic tribal scenes and dressed in matching traditional clothing, these figures harken back to a scene that most tourists will not see reflected in their visit to South Africa, yet one they evidently wish to remember the country by. These images portray anonymous black bodies, ubiquitously dissolving individuals to a faceless black population in a way that appears to other Africans while fetishizing their pre-colonial ways of life. This dissolution of individuality harkens back to the division that divides primitive crafts from high art, that idea of the individual genius as opposed to the collective uniformity of primitive production. These depictions also frequently include individual silhouettes of black African women (fig. 3 hold several examples). Voluptuous and sexualized, they are treated similarly to the faceless masses in so far that they are defined by their bodies, unidentifiable and in mass, available for purchase to the western buyer. Such paintings posit Western tourists in the position



(fig. 3, Frakes)

of colonial settlers, wherein they have to ability to “buy” black bodies, which are depersonalized and turned into abstract bodies without lived experience or humanity. If the dominant presence of such art in the tourist market places can be correlated to what images tourists readily consume as souvenirs, these paintings indicate that tourists want to remember an othered, simple, and undeveloped version of South Africa, one that exists outside of time and the progress they associate with their own societies.

Art made for tourists often reinforces what tourists want to see in order to be profitable. And, in turn, this art can skew tourists’ perceptions of the destination and its cultures in ways that are inaccurate and stereotypical. Western tourists specifically “seek out artefacts that are clearly



(fig. 4, Frakes)

Fig. 3 and Fig.4 illustrates another trend in art popular in public marketplaces in the city. Images of numerous, faceless Africans, often including an indigenous and tribal motif, dominate common tourist marketplaces.

recognisable as 'African.' South Africa does not always fit the mold of what foreigners expect from Africa, a continent that retains an image of primitiveness, wildness and raw emotional expression, and to some extent builds its tourist industry on this image" (Mathers, 531). Within this cyclical method of production between what tourists want to see and what is made available for them, authenticity appears to exist solely in the eye of the beholder, that is if the beholder is a western tourist (that souvenirs exist for the purposes of tourism and the pre-

conceived, often over-simplified notion that they have of the place before they go). This paper thus far has examined the subjectivity of authenticity in tourist art in Cape Town based on the tourists' conception of South Africa, and in doing so has privileged this gaze even through deconstructing it.

However, it is critical to remember that the Western tourist gaze is not the only one. During the time of my research I was fortunate enough to be working as an intern in the Archeology and Collections departments of the Iziko South African Museums. Discussing the goals of this research paper with my South African colleague and supervisor in the collections department, Janene Van Wyk, I was made aware of a perspective I had not yet considered; that of how ubiquitously African art can operate within circles of "colored" South Africans (the apartheid category for mixed raced citizens that has continued after the dismantling of that legal system). After discussing my conclusions regarding the status of South African tourist art, [she?] responded:

*You say tourist art, but these things, like they sell in the square, these things I see all over my colored friend's homes. The coaster sets with African animals on them or the bright paintings of people on the wall. But this is not in the home of a Zulu or Xhosa, they have this idea of their people. They tell colored people "you have no culture" -- I have had some cheeky bastards say it to my face! But for colored people... those African images are there (van Wyk).*

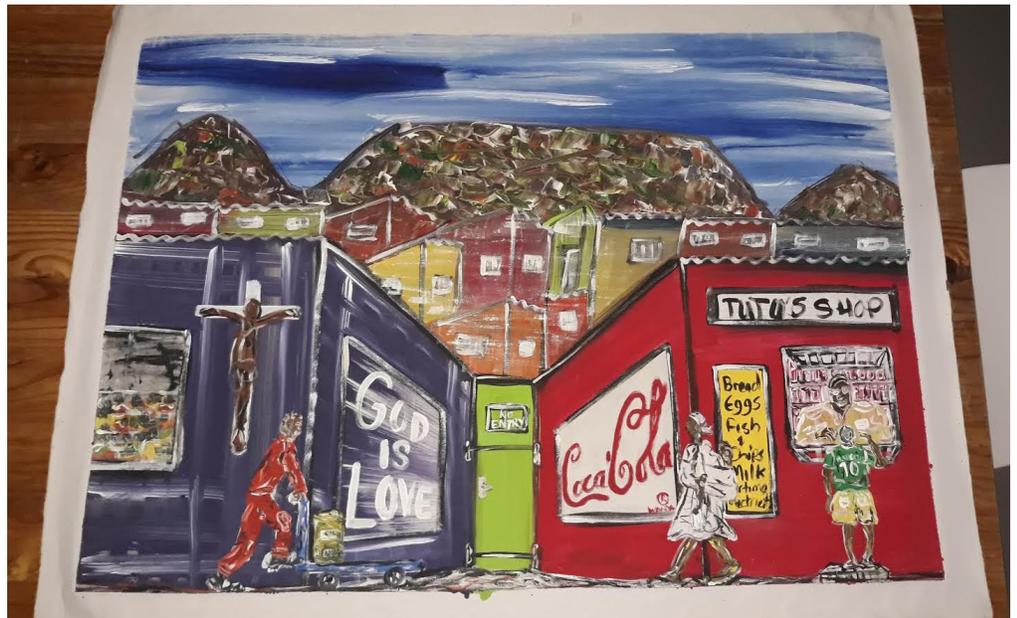
Through this conversation the identified generic troupes of sim-

plified Pan-African iconography were confirmed from the view of a South African citizen, but rather than seeing these patterns as one which is utilized through the tourist gaze to paint an unsophisticated and portrait of an entire continent, she recast them as a tool to ground identity claims in post-apartheid South African society.

Analyzing a final case study of subverting tropes in tourist art while bearing in mind the subjectivity of what constitutes authenticity in South African art, and the preconceptions a western author brings to this discussion, can reveal how tourist art can be subverted to tell a different story about what South Africa looks like through souvenirs. Amongst the typical patterns in South African visual art marketed to tourists, the image in Figure 5 stands out as a unique perspective on the city of Cape Town. The setting itself stands apart from most art available, it is grounded in the city itself and depicts a realistic scene, not that of an idealized African Savanna, but the color, people, and even the trash in the streets of Cape Town. Figure 5 also privileges the angle of perspective of someone walking on the street, providing a mechanism of framing that foregrounds the maze-like shops of Cape Town streets, and the natural beauty of the mountains that surround the Cape as looming, distant, and unreachable through the city's infrastructure. Interestingly, many of these barriers call to mind the architecture of apartheid and colonial powers which exerted control over black African movement and freedom. Table Mountain was an important place to Khoisan peoples of the Cape before Dutch coloniza-

tion forced indigenous people off of the land. Access to the mountain became restricted to the Afrikaans elite during the colonial period (Van Sittert, 163), and was also racially restricted during apartheid to white recreational climbers (Bam-Hutchison, 18th July). Today, a cable car ride up Table Mountain is a luxury few colored or black residents of Cape Town can afford, and is predominantly utilized by white South Africans and tourists. These ongoing political disputes of land access in current day South Africa can be traced back to the country's colonial era, and the barrier to entry that the black population experiences in regards to the land, itself a significant site of memory and heritage, does not restrict access to white South Africans and tourists (Van Sittert, 162). In Figure 5 that restriction in access to land is accentuated and explored. The building to the left bears a massive crucifix and the words "God is Love." South Africa is a predominantly Christian country, but Christianity is often seen as an oppressive force and a colonially-imported form of control (Bam-Hutchison, 18th July). However, under the structure of apartheid, the Church was one of the few sanctioned places to gather, and thus became a form of assembly utilized to enable revolution under apartheid as well (Bam-Hutchison, 18th July).

The shop on the right hand side of the street in the painting displays a massive "Coca-Cola" logo, a common sight when walking the streets of the city. However, the popularity of coke in South Africa traces back to a history rooted in the corporation's exploitation of black workers under the apartheid system. During apartheid, the Coca-Cola company



(fig. 5, Frakes) This photo depicts a potential antithesis to the trends previously outlined in the paper, focusing on the lived reality and politics of contemporary Cape Town rather than on the faceless African collectives or big game animals more commonly found.

placed "far more importance...on their products' profitability than the well-being of the black Africans who produced, delivered, or consumed the soft drinks" (Spivey, ii), utilizing the governmentally institutionalized racism to underpay black laborers. The personal testimony given to Dr. Bam-Hutchison's class of a woman growing up under apartheid illustrates the lived reality of oppression that the American institution took part in, as her older brother dropped out of school at sixteen in order to provide his four siblings, and after a full day of work at the Coca-Cola bottling plant, could afford a rare meal for his siblings of white bread and a shared bottle of coke. Between these two buildings in figure 5, there is an aptly placed door bearing the sign "no entry," indicative of the forces of religion and capitalism (both forces of colonial and apartheid power) which work to constrict black Africans.

Figure 5 is a piece of tourist art which seemingly subverts the expectations of what most tourists seek in souvenirs of South Africa (according to figures 1-4). In fact, despite its intended audience and colors indicative of tourist art, this painting seems to blur the line between the qualifications of primitive tourist art, and simply "art." However, at the end of the day the tourist industry is built around what its consumers want to memorialize about their time in Africa, and pontificating about how this painting may balance my previous opinion about the all-encompassing oppressive nature of the tourist industry on the arts in the tourism driven economy of South Africa, may in actuality be a ploy to justify what I want to buy into about my own time in Cape Town. However, through analyzing souvenirs as sites of memory that reflect a tourist's representation of a place after they have gone home, survey work

done of the predominantly Western tourist's souvenir purchases in Cape Town has revealed that they evaluated the purchases they made as being authentic, creating connections, and for purposes of empowering the seller. These criteria are used to examine the biggest trends in South African visual tourist art for sale in markets across the city of Cape Town, and how this art is catered to the Western Tourist Gaze. However, this argument itself privileges the Western gaze though its analysis of

the function of these paintings as reflections of Cape Town. This art also has a place in claims of identity in the scene of post-apartheid identity politics of South African communities today. Of course, to say visual tourist art in the city of Cape Town is a monolithic category would be a faulty generalization. An analysis of Figure 5, a piece of visual art sold in a tourist market in Cape Town appears to subvert the tourist market's aforementioned biggest trends and a proclivity to

cater to the tourist gaze of predominantly Western consumers. As objects of both cultural and capital value, the status of souvenirs within the tourism industry of South Africa will always be contested to a certain degree, and their role as portable sites of memory will vary accordingly, depending on their owners' associations; be it colonialist attitudes, claims to identity politics, or a lovely vacation.

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# MEET THE



**Layo Laniyan** ('22) is a sophomore from Houston, Texas, and he has called the city home for 11 years. His parents immigrated to the US one year before he was born, and he is the oldest of three. The experiences of his parents immigrating and acclimating to the US largely motivated his gravitation to studying narrative and race at Stanford. He is majoring in English, with an interdisciplinary concentration in race, ethnicity, and representations of the body. Within the major, he is interested in post-colonial literature, Black studies, comparative race studies, and literary theory. He is specifically interested in researching how representations of the Black body manifest in literature and how those manifestations underlie larger interactions between the raced body and established structures in the United States (such as the legal and medical institutions). He is also interested in the intersections between literature, anthropology, and the medical sciences. He hopes to combine these focuses in future research. Outside of classes and research, he loves urban dance, soul food, and watching *The Good Place*.



**Caroline Aung** ('20) is a senior from Austin, Texas studying medical anthropology. She is interested in the intersections between ethnography, medical ethics, community-based participatory research, and public health. Through the Stanford Ethics in Society Honors program, she is writing a thesis about the social and ethical dimensions of treating hospice patients who hope against their imminent death. After graduation, she hopes to further explore how anthropological perspectives can be applied beyond academia to promote the health and wellbeing of marginalized populations. She loves listening to indie-rock, reading and attempting to write poetry, and casual running.

# AUTHORS



**Mahima Krishnamoorthi** ('20) is from Modesto, CA and is concentrating in Medical Anthropology. She has specific interests in understanding the sociocultural discourse of particularly debated biomedical topics like HIV and abortion. Her undergraduate honors thesis focused on the impact of stigma on care and support networks for women in the Bay Area who have abortions. At Stanford, Mahima was involved as a volunteer at Cardinal Free Clinics, a teaching assistant for the university's comprehensive sexual health education course, and a research assistant at the Global Child Health lab in the Stanford School of Medicine. Following graduation, Mahima will be moving to New York to conduct women's health research during a gap year before medical school.



**Josh Cobler** ('20) is a junior majoring in anthropology and minoring in economics. His research broadly explores the experiences of students at highly-selective universities, with a more specific focus on understanding how race, gender, sexuality, and geographic identity shapes students' understandings and self-definitions of their own class identities.



**Lilith Frakes** ('21) (she/her) is junior at Stanford University, majoring in Anthropology and Comparative Literature. Previous publications include several book reviews for John's Hopkins' Imagine magazine, and several pieces featured in the Leland Quarterly Win/Spr '19 edition. Frakes is passionate about questions of heritage anthropology and archaeology, tourism, decolonization, art, and non-human primates. Though the covid-19 pandemic has halted fieldwork for the foreseeable future, Frakes hopes to continue investigating these topics personally and academically.