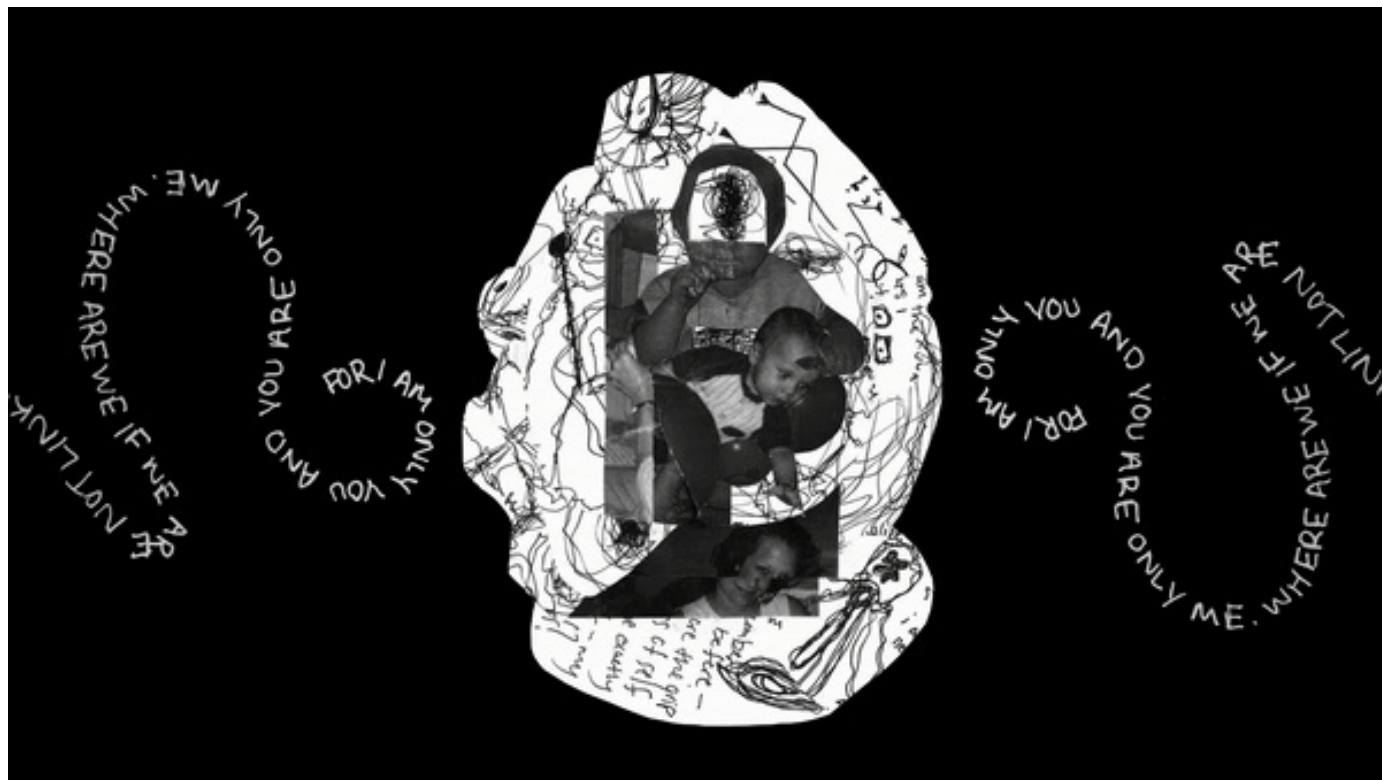


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CONTEXTS

CULTURES IN TRANSLATION



ANTHROPOLOGY

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CONTEXTS

Stanford University's Undergraduate Research Journal in Anthropology
Volume 15 | 2022-2023
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(Theme)
Cultures in Translation

Contexts is a peer-reviewed publication that creates space for undergraduates to thoughtfully engage with anthropological methods and topics.

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— *Letter from the Editors*

Dear reader,

This year's editorial team is proud to present the 15th installment of Contexts, Stanford's undergraduate research journal in anthropology. Each year, Contexts showcases exceptional student research and artwork in the social sciences that asks large, critical questions untethered to discipline or methodology.

Our authors for this year's publication focus upon what we'd like to call "Cultures in Translation." In her book, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue*, Lisa Mitchell notes the shift in popular perception of language during the late nineteenth century in British India. Languages began to be understood as parallel and commensurable, rather than complementary and unique—anything that could be accomplished in one language could be accomplished in another. Colonial-era lexicons represented new ways of thinking about, cataloging, and using language, and languages began to be thought of as universally translatable. However, the colonial approach to translation prioritized complete accuracy, whereas the southern Indian approach was more akin to adaptation. The only thing left that appeared unique about any particular language was its ability to signify culture. The debate between adaptation and translation appears here most explicitly in Alex Ellison's essay, but the question of "translating culture" follows in many others.

Brittany Linus uses the Kingdom of Kongo as a case study in the process of othering, while Karunya Bhramasandra analyzes a historical text about English language use in colonial India to discuss the ways in which this both subjugated the Indian population but was later employed to reject colonialism. Anna Perronne relates immigrant assimilation to one's own cultural capital, while Steven Zhao analyzes how Flushing residents can utilize their cultural identities to obscure their role in gentrifying the communities of people from the same background. Other essays discuss culture less overtly, but remain sharply attuned to its interplay with politics: Ngan Ha Lee assesses the exclusion and lack of support for rural women in Vietnam under the Doi Moi policy, while Rishi Raj Verma and Binta Diallo discuss the anti-work movement and coquette subculture both on and off the Internet. Ngan's and Binta's essays use socialist and Beauvoirian feminist frameworks to strengthen their cultural analyses, while Rishi's locates the onus of the Great Resignation on capitalism's creation of what David Graeber aptly titles as "bullshit jobs."

Popular distortions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis romanticize "the untranslatable" in language as a site of inquiry, then ultimately, nihilism, but more politically-conscious anthropologists are less interested in naturalizing unbridgeable difference than they are in contextualizing the processes from which these differences come to be. As young anthropologists, we embrace ethnographic refusal but reject such archaisms as a culture which is entirely unintelligible to those outside of it. If some of anthropology's more outdated logic relied upon the self/other dichotomy, we posit that any future for the discipline should make transparent the fundamental relationship between the two. In parsing through "Cultures in Translation," we thus hope our readers recognize themselves in its pages.

We would like to thank all authors for their submissions and our final contributors for their diligence in research, writing, and editing; our graduate editor, Utsavi Singh, for her scrupulous eye and skillful guidance (all while across the world!); our student services officer, Tina Jeon, for her constant warmth and support for this and the past three years; and our undergraduate program contact, Sharika Thirananagama, for her careful assistance throughout the less foreseeable aspects of the editing process. Finally, we thank you, the reader, for supporting this publication and broader undergraduate social sciences research at Stanford. We hope you enjoy this year's issue.

Warmly,
The Editorial Team

Srihari Nageswaran '23 | Aurora Feng '24 | Caroline Skwara '24 | Yuer Liu '24

— CONTEXTS Profiles

Cover Artist



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A second year undergraduate student from Tyrone, Pennsylvania—middle of nowhere Appalachia—majoring in Medical Anthropology with a minor in Interdisciplinary Art and Creative Writing. In utilizing an autoethnographic, arts-based, and body-centered approach, he focuses his studies on identity, resistance, and radical forms of care among low-income methadone-users and methadone-involved folk to push for the abolition of the methadone-clinic system. Outside of academics, Aden loves cats, golf-cart rides, and 100%-discounted goods.

Editors



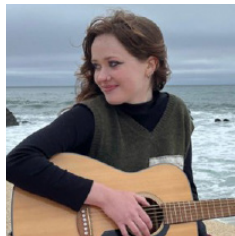
Aurora Fang

Aurora is a junior studying Anthropology and Economics. Having grown up in multiple continents and cultures, she finds herself captivated by the field of anthropology. She's interested in medical anthropology and loves talking about fieldwork with oncology patients in China and the bay area.



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Srihari Nageswaran

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Whose Fault Was It?

An Analysis of English in Colonial India

By Karunya Bhramasandra

ABSTRACT

Language undergirds the project of British colonialism because literacy determines reach, power, and influence. Investigating the impact of Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education, this essay studies the power of the English language in colonial India. It claims that Indian acceptance of English was less because of a perceived superiority of the language and more because the British made it so, equating knowledge with status. Macaulay's Minute also discussed the supposed inferiority and effeminacy of Sanskrit and Arabic, leading to a broader conversation around colonial hypermasculinity. The essay emphasizes Indian agency in wielding English as a tool to increase indigenous power in colonial India and complicates the notion of colonialism as a force from on high descending on hapless Indians. It considers the value judgments inherent in the Minute's narrativization of Indian education and, in doing so, exposes the scaffolding of colonial logic intended to undermine indigenous institutions at any cost.

During the era of British nationalist identity formation, English grew to signify much more than the language itself. It transformed into a conduit of power by the early nineteenth century, not just in Britain, a land learning how to define itself, but also in those lands that Britain defined itself against and above—namely, colonized lands like India. One branch of this burgeoning European supremacy was embodied by the ideas of Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay, a Law Member of the Governor-General's Council in India and an arguably infamous theorist on education policy. His "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) is a striking text, full of racial invective, that

promotes English instruction in India over Sanskrit and Arabic. Moreover, it denigrates the patronage of Sanskrit and Arabic literature; in Macaulay's words, "who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia?" In this essay, I will study Macaulay's conception of both the limitations and the potentiality of Indians. His claim, broadly speaking, is that India's present system of education is dooming them because of the inherent inferiority of indigenous thought and language. Scholars have later argued that Macaulay's bigoted insistence on the counterproductivity of Sanskrit

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and Arabic is actually based in fact: the British created a system in which English was hugely professionally and socially valuable, thereby increasing internal demand for the language. If we are to briefly put aside the arrogance, ignorance, and racism of the “Minute,” we can analyze that it proposes the implementation of English in a country that was arguably desperate for it. As such, we can extricate India from the narrative that English was a “colonialist imposition” on hapless natives. But we cannot forget that this welcome reception was ultimately the result of colonial rule, something for which Macaulay surprisingly takes responsibility. In his “Minute,” Macaulay counterintuitively derives credibility from two sources: assuming responsibility for the intellectual and moral deficit he perceives in India while simultaneously praising the faculties of Indians. In doing so, he allows us to investigate a crucial question: who should we credit—or blame—with the irrefutable growth of English in India? Using more modern scholarship, I aim to elucidate that Macaulay was technically correct in his analysis of Indian eagerness for English despite his incredibly problematic rhetoric. What Macaulay got wrong was Indian motivation: they did not flock to English because of any internalized belief that the language was morally superior, but because the British made it so.

Even before the Mutiny of 1857 ended the rule of the East India Company and made way for the Crown, British relations with India had ceased to be purely economic. Macaulay’s “Minute” embodies this increased investment in Indian society and livelihood: it problematizes further British financial investment in Sanskrit and Arabic education, a claim staked on the grounds of utility. Macaulay’s opinion, which he claims is embraced by Indians themselves, is that knowledge conveyed in indigenous languages is inherently inferior to that conveyed in English. Additionally, Indians in this period are slowly growing aware of the categorical fact that it is only English that gives them “access to all the most abstruse knowledge” that will ultimately provide them with “bread” and “respect.” Macaulay’s intention is to purify the taste of the masses by creating an elite class of Indians who

are “English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” who will, by way of a trickle-down effect familiar to conservatives alike across time, decontaminate Indian vernacular. It is important to establish that Macaulay was not the first to advocate such a change in educational policy; those who came before him include Charles Grant and Lord William Bentinck, both proposing a departure from Warren Hastings’ Orientalist position. The attitude of the Company shifted at this time from idolizing a golden Indian past—the view of Orientalists—to impugning what they perceived as India’s uncivilized, backward nature. It is not possible, in Macaulay’s view, to rid India of this inherent inferiority, but it is possible—and, moreover, it is the responsibility of the British—to marginally lift India from its present state. Macaulay’s argument plays into burgeoning conceptions of the benevolent colonizer, whose job was to civilize the colonized and by so doing, define colonial superiority against a fundamental, perceived lack in the colonized people. An inherently racist project, benevolent colonization was founded on the assumption that colonizers must impose civilization on the colonized. In reality, the process was much more active and deserves to be analyzed in the context of the time, wherein there was a unified Britain, but not a unified India. One might argue that it is peculiar for Indians to side with the British, adopting English over their own national languages. But it must be acknowledged that a “national” India the way we know it today did not exist at this time to resist racial bigotry. This does not imply, however, that English was a “colonialist imposition upon a defenceless and hapless India,” though Macaulay might like to construe it that way.

Macaulay’s “Minute” is, at base, a persuasive essay directed to the Governor-General’s Council to adopt his utilitarian educational policies, not as a case study of British racism “for future generations of Nationalist critics.” What better approach, then, for Macaulay to establish credibility than to humbly take responsibility for the very problem he is identifying? Having established the undeniable inferiority of indigenous languages, Macaulay outlines what he sees as the cause of their continued

proliferation. He finds this cause within the British system of government itself; he faults the money that the British “lavish on false texts and false philosophy” to explain how this financial mishandling is indicative of a deeper problem:

“By acting thus we create the very evil which we fear. We are making that opposition which we do not find. What we spend on the Arabic and Sanscrit Colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth. It is bounty-money paid to raise up champions of error. It goes to form a nest not merely of helpless placehunters but of bigots prompted alike by passion and by interest to raise a cry against every useful scheme of education. If there should be any opposition among the natives to the change which I recommend, that opposition will be the effect of our own system.”

According to Macaulay, the British are the perpetrators of counterproductive “Oriental” education despite accepting the superiority of English language and literature. The irony is clear to Macaulay: the British desire to educate the natives, direct them away from becoming “champions of error,” but are attempting to do so by funding exactly that which generates these false champions. The British have created a

toxic, recursive system that not only conditions Indian natives into believing that Sanskrit and Arabic education has value, but also gives them the ability to “raise a cry” against British reform. In short, the British have unintentionally brainwashed the Indians into opposing both utilitarianism and truth.

These are both fundamental concepts in Macaulay’s “Minute,” one pragmatic, the other more philosophical. According to scholar Elmer Cutts, Macaulay was undoubtedly influenced by James Mill’s utilitarianism, which “maintained that the primary objective in... instruction should always be ‘useful knowledge’ as opposed to ‘Hindu knowledge.’” Mill’s bigotry was as thinly veiled as Macaulay’s, who drew on this idea of utility multiple times. Macaulay’s “simple question” can be articulated like so: “which language is the best worth knowing?” In other words, which language has the most worth, the most currency, in society? His answer is unambiguous: English contains no less than “all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations.” Here we see what Macaulay presents as not just the utilitarian value of English, but the absolute value of English. It contains truth, wisdom, and vastness, and it implies community, power, and continuity. z

In the face of such a behemoth, it is “manifestly absurd” to patron Sanskrit and Arabic. Macaulay even intercepts counterarguments: he acknowledges that to understand “Hindoo” and “Mahometan” law, one must admittedly have an understanding of Sanskrit or Arabic, but this logic is indicative of an even graver problem. The content of these “sacred” texts actually “[inculcates] the most serious errors on the most important subjects,” namely, God and salvation. Sanskrit and Arabic are thus construed as vehicles of lies and fallacy. In Macaulay’s view, many Indians are recognizing this; the few that remain staunch in promoting “oriental interests” have been “called into being and nursed into strength” by the British themselves. His maternal diction here codes the British as benevolent life-givers who have unintentionally patronized false learning in the form of Sanskrit and Arabic

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education. Thus, he simultaneously claims responsibility for perpetuating the investment in Indian languages while absolving the British of blame by implying that they were well-intentioned. By no means did the British patron the languages of the subcontinent because they believed in their value, but by patroning these languages, they barred Indians from accessing truth—in other words, the English language. This is a distinction worth emphasizing: Macaulay is not intending to place blame anywhere but squarely on Indian shoulders. In his view, Indians are erroneous in seeing the value in Sanskrit and Arabic, but Macaulay contends that they do not know any better because their system of education showed them this value. It is thus up to the British to liberate Indians from this error of value.

This patronizing attitude towards Indians found much purchase within the framework of the benevolent colonizer. Macaulay understood that to justify such a radical shift in Indian education theory, the British would have to assume some responsibility for the current system's failings. He also understood that he needed to prove the positive prognosis of his suggestion, which he does by counterintuitively praising the mental faculties of Indians. In an astounding rhetorical move, Macaulay draws on thinkers perhaps more bigoted than he who assume that "no native of this country [India] can possibly attain more than a mere smattering of English." This argument expounded by other scholars is short-sighted, in Macaulay's view, who claims instead that "it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the Continent, any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos." After having spent much time belittling Indian history, religions, and culture, Macaulay uses this as his counterargument: that despite inherent Indian inferiority, they still have the capacity to learn as much English as the British. He has a startling amount of faith in the very "Hindoos" he disparages, certain that some have the capability to command substantial English. He justifies his argument here by presenting an audience for his proposed system that is not only willing,

but competent. This is ultimately the second prong of his argument — that given the truth and usefulness of English (the first prong), it is even less reasonable that altogether very adept Indians would desire to learn anything else.

This desire that Macaulay sees proliferating among the Indian people has been the focus of many scholarly studies since the publication of the "Minute." In Macaulay's mind, this desire is inextricably linked with staunch British loyalty and indebtedness, as is demonstrated by a "testimonial" from Indian petitioners "of the Sanscrit College" that he quotes. In this "testimonial," which is laced with as much rhetoric as there is racism, he posits that Indians were little more than simpering British puppets who were desperate for English. As he does not cite his sources, it is unclear whether he is repeating a real testimonial or if he is concocting one for his purposes. Notwithstanding, the loyalist rhetoric—wherein the speaker exalts the "honourable committee" and "[begs]" them for assistance—suggests that Indians had begun to equate any "progressive improvement" with learning English. Even a century later, in 1924, the same conception persisted: George Allen Odgers of Phi Delta Kappa (the education fraternity with a racist history) espoused a similar viewpoint: "The educated Indian, with his pride stung by the intense illiteracy of the masses around him, clamors for the rapid expansion of educational facilities." There is thus, a surprising acknowledgement of what both men see as Indian agency in their rhetoric: Indians are actively pursuing their own learning and growth. This view, however, has the effect of effacing Euro-American power structures that manifested the socio-political value of English over other languages; in other words, Indians weren't motivated to learn English because they saw it was superior, but rather because they recognized its use value. Later scholars like Frykenberg and Roy re-contextualize the idea of Indian agency without this framework of European superiority. As Frykenberg explains, the growth of English in India "was a process engendered by strongly 'nativist' pressures." These pressures actually emerged from a very

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pragmatic, utilitarian reality: Indians literate in English inevitably received “a more exclusive hold of higher positions within the current administration.” English was desirable, therefore, because of its professional prestige, not because of any inherent superiority. Even Macaulay makes this practicality argument: “‘We want means,’ [Indians] say, ‘for a decent living,’” and not even that, but a means “such as may just enable them to exist.” Macaulay construes Sanskrit and Arabic to be actively detracting from existence itself, and English to be its panacea. Lofty as this may seem, Macaulay is not technically incorrect: if English knowledge is linked to high-paying jobs, then English is literally the bulwark for existence. I have already established why knowledge of English was directly linked to economic gain, but, as Roy says, English “acquisition meant social... gains” too. A British official’s testimony before Macaulay’s time suggests that “‘the English language itself has... become not only of material advantage, but it is fashionable in the Indian Metropolis.’” Thus, it was also for heightened social capital that a native Indian might want to learn English. Additionally, as scholar Shefali Chandra points out, language politics was deeply interwoven with masculinity and heterosexual desire — not knowing English rendered men effeminate and played into growing British assumptions of Indian “cultural deficiency.”

Ultimately, the rise of English in India has myriad causes, including both British and Indian

pressure. Moreover, Macaulay’s rhetoric in his “Minute,” intended to highlight British superiority against Indian inferiority, is nonetheless based on some fact. Furthermore, as Frykenberg notes, “the Macaulay Minute signalled no radical change in previous policy.” Despite all of its notoriety, the “Minute” was not that influential — Indian demand for English already existed, as did policies to push English into Indian schools, and Macaulay played off of them. Additionally, these policies did not have the effect of creating a staunchly loyalist Indian elite class, as I hardly have to argue. In fact, as scholar Syama Mookerjee notes, “the movement for political freedom [around 1947] originated with a group of Indians educated through the Indo-British system and liberalized by doctrines of Western democracy and liberty.” In retrospect, this is highly ironic—it is a testament against the teleological conception of the West that Britain was adopting around the time of Macaulay’s writing. It also speaks to Indians’ ability to exploit the British system and destabilizes the notion of Indians as hapless colonized victims; they continued to participate actively to spin colonial realities to their benefit. English was by no means a natural institution in India, and its popularity was not signaled by any one harbinger — it was a living, protean phenomenon that found purchase in the subcontinent because of its indelible relationship to power and mobility.

“I Know What The Boys Want, I’m Not Gonna Play”

An Examination of Coquette Internet Culture Through a Beauvoirian Feminist Lens

By Binta Diallo

ABSTRACT

The internet has always been a strange place, and it’s only gotten stranger as its user base has gotten younger. Young people are constantly searching for new ways to define themselves. Because of this, in recent years, the internet has been subdivided into different cliques called ‘aesthetics’. Aesthetics are typically defined by a color palette, an era, and, most importantly, a celebrity (which is typically a musician, as they can occupy the space between fashion icon and poet, image and idea). The aesthetic I’ll be talking about in this paper is called “coquette”. To the uninitiated, this term conjures up nothing more than a vague image of a flirtatious woman. However, to the chronically online, this word immediately summons a gaggle of images of silk bows, floral prints, and heart-shaped lollies. In my paper, I wish to explore this specific online space, especially how it was conceived and the consequences of this conception. My big question will be, how far is too far? How much can everyday life be aestheticized and romanticized before it becomes harmful and turns into self-objectification? How does this online culture affect 21st-century teenage girls’ relationships with their femininity and the patriarchy? I’ll use Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and singer-songwriter Lana Del Rey’s lyricism as a framework to analyze these female-dominated online spaces.

“that’s so hashtag
coquette lana del rey
pussy power girl boss
lily rose depp vintage
flowers baby pink
cigarettes diet coke lolita
old wealthy men floral
patterns country club
honestly just look at
you now look at me i’m
feeling pretty no matter
the city of u bestie
(elaspamsstuff 2022)”

Background

The word coquette used to simply conjure up an image of a flirtatious woman; however, the internet has changed this. Now, at least for the younger generation, the word conjures up what is supposed to be an image of idyllic femininity: “lace blouses paired with pink miniskirts... heels and knitted stockings... [and] an endless array of pearls and gold accessories, as well as everything heart-shaped and frills galore” (Roby 2022). However, femininity is more than just how one dresses, it is also how one behaves. Because of this, coquette culture encourages daintiness and having one’s strength be just how weak one is. Of course, this limited view of the feminine is concerning, but it is not surprising given that coquette culture is an evolution of “nymphet

culture” — an internet subculture popular in the mid-2010s rooted in romanticizing Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. The aesthetics are essentially the same — both cater to young girls between 13–20, promote a nostalgic hyper-femininity, and find an idol in musician Lana Del Rey due to their shared view of her embodying an ideal brooding femininity. The only difference is that coquette tries to distinguish itself from the sexualization of youth and innocence found in nymphet spaces. However, though it may not overtly sexualize youth and innocence, it still fetishizes it. Although coquette girls may not create blogs advising other girls on how to flirt with older men or refer to themselves as “teenage teasers” as nymphet girls did, they still treat their girlhood as something to be “curated, collected, and carefully documented,” — practiced in front of a female audience, but ultimately for a male audience to approve of (Nymphetguide 2017; Hoosen 2016). These girls find practice rooms on every corner of the internet, Instagram, Tiktok, Tumblr, and even specialized online forums like NymphetCommunity. However, it’s easiest to find them on Twitter.

Unlike other platforms, on Twitter, there is a bit

of diversity in how coquettes choose to represent themselves: ones that deem themselves more femme fatale use cherry and wilted rose emojis, while those who deem themselves more ingénue use bunny and ballet slipper emojis. However, some images transcend individual definitions of coquetry and are a staple in the subculture both on Twitter and other platforms. These motifs are roses, lollipops, and heart-shaped accessories. Each of these motifs serves to reinforce the idea of a natural difference between the sexes. Roses are traditionally associated with fragility, romance, and beauty. Lollipops are associated with sweetness, youth, and when considering the context of *Lolita*, sensuality. Heart-shaped accessories are flirty and kitschy, quirky but still feminine (Davis 2017, 36). These images are carefully pieced together to create an image of effortless femininity, which is meant to implicitly be juxtaposed with a much less pink, less glossy, messier vision of masculinity. Observing these motifs leaves us with a question: To these girls, what is a woman who does not conform to their idea of femininity? Is she a woman? What is a woman?

Introduction

In this paper, using Twitter and Lana Del Rey’s lyrics as modes of investigation, I will examine online coquette culture and see how it fits into the type of feminism presented in Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. I will begin by investigating claims that coquette culture subverts patriarchal expectations of women. I will then illustrate how these claims are false by using a lens critical of gender norms to closely read coquette memes and Lana Del Rey songs.

Finally, I will end by discussing the problems Beauvoirian feminism would see in coquette culture and how it would advise these girls to move forward to truly empower themselves; I will contrast this Beauvoirian feminist approach to empowerment with a fourth wave feminist approach.

In what is known as her magnum opus, *The*

Second Sex, existential feminist Simone De Beauvoir asks herself the same question raised above: “What is a woman?” (Beauvoir 1949: 5) Throughout her book, she manages to find an answer: a woman is the “other.” The very concept of “woman” is a male concept where men are the subject, the “seer,” the “self” and women are the object, the “seen,” the “other” (Beauvoir 1949, 13-28). Beauvoir rejects the idea of natural differences between men and women, citing the similar interests and pleasures of young boys and girls as evidence against this bio-essentialist idea (Beauvoir 1949, 285). She instead posits that one becomes a woman (Beauvoir 1949, 283). A girl becomes a woman when she begins to go through the process of puberty which “demarcates her more and more sharply from the opposite sex” (Joseph 2008). As a girl begins transforming into “flesh,” she feels herself

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(Left to Right) Figure 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, & 2f. Claudia Daniela. (2022). "Thoughts." Pinterest.

become exposed to another's gaze; here is when her womanhood begins (Beauvoir 1949, 320-21). However, Beauvoir believes that, from here, women have a choice. They can either use the fundamental freedom that all people are born with to reject male stereotypes of beauty and womanhood, or they can use it to be complicit in their own unfreedom (Warburton 2017, 1:38-1:53).

But why would women ever choose the latter when it means sacrificing their freedom? Simple: complicity is not only much easier than fighting centuries old societal expectations, but it also allows one to ingratiate oneself with men, who, in our patriarchal society, have power over women. Ingratiating oneself with those in power gives one power, therefore giving women who fit the traditional mold of femininity power over other "underperforming" women. However, what the women who choose complicity do not realize is that in a society where all women reject male notions of womanhood, they would be even more powerful than they are now.

Unity in protest, rather than in complicity, gives women more social power in the long term; however, it takes much longer to mobilize to achieve this kind of unity than it does to adhere to one's prescribed role and encourage other women to do the same. Upon this realization, it is not surprising that teenage coquettes grow impatient. Shackled by both the dependency on others one must have in their youth, and by the expectations "becoming flesh" comes with, teenage girls crave agency. Coquette girls find

this agency by leaning into male views of femininity, believing that they might be able to subvert patriarchal structures from within. Since these girls and these online spaces skew so young, their goals eventually change when they realize just how much energy and time it takes to unsettle a dominant social power. Overtly feminine imagery meant to be used to elevate the "girly-girlness" often looked down upon in a male dominant society is diluted and instead is used to please the same men that consider an expression of femininity equivalent to an expression of weakness.

It is possible to argue that the culture of coquette Twitter subverts images of traditional femininity as a way of critiquing gender expectations. This argument is two-pronged. First, any open expression of femininity is subversive in a world where the feminine is positioned below the masculine. Second, the memes presented in coquette spaces, which can be seen in Figure 2, subvert the notion of femininity as weak by juxtaposing girlish imagery with violent imagery. This line of thought ties violence with power due to its wider association with masculinity. However, both of these points are flawed and the argument overall is generally untrue. The first point disregards the fact that in order for there to be a ruling power, there must be a yielding power. Even if femininity is looked down upon, its expression is encouraged in women in order to continue othering them. The second point simply refuses to closely read the memes in these coquette spaces. Though femininity, or weakness, and violence, or strength, are juxtaposed, these memes still prize beauty as girls' primary capital in this world, above their mental wellbeing and even their lives. This troubling value system is clear in Figures 2a-c and Figure 2e. Young women within coquette internet spaces do not do anything to substantially subvert the gender norms prescribed upon them. Rather, they actively try to perfectly conform to patriarchal ideas of "womanhood" in order to gain a sense of agency, which, in actuality, is just power over women that the patriarchy does not approve of.

Is Coquette (Sub)versive?

As with any group of young people on the internet, coquette girls seek community. Twitter, a microblogging haven, is the perfect place to find this. Microblogging platforms are a halfway between traditional blogging and social media sites; Twitter and Tumblr are the two biggest examples of this with Twitter being the more popular (Davis 2017, 24). Young people use platforms like these as sites for authentic self-expression as they encourage an anonymity which allows users more freedom to express themselves, leading them to engage more with the platform and build flourishing niche communities. The coquette community was built by young women navigating the process of “becoming flesh.” The anonymity mixed with the emotional openness that these online spaces encourage effectively shuts these young girls

into their niches, creating an echo chamber where these women are only influenced by each other and other online media. Due to this, instead of consulting women older than them, these young girls often rely on their coquette spaces as their only means of navigating social conditions in which women, which they’re becoming, are limited by social, political, and economic pressures. With no mentors other than their own peers, these girls seek adults who can offer them advice while still adhering to their “aesthetic” and not being able to criticize them in real time. Enter Lana Del Rey.

Lana Del Rey is a wildly popular alternative pop singer who, in the past, has encouraged the association of herself with *Lolita*, the primary inspiration for coquette culture’s predecessor, nymphet culture. Del Rey ties herself to Vladimir Nabokov’s character most in her major label debut album, *Born to Die* (2012). In this album, there is a plethora of allusions to *Lolita*. The most obvious is the song “Lolita,” but this is not where the references to Nabokov’s work end. There are also the songs “Carmen,” which refers to the narrator Humbert’s favorite nickname for Lolita, “Off to the Races,” which begins with the Nabokov’s infamous line “Light of my life/ fire of my loins,” and “Diet Mountain Dew” where Del Rey sings about wearing “heart-shaped sunglasses,” evoking an image of the 1962 *Lolita* adaptation’s movie poster. Del Rey’s recreation of this poster in Figure 1 illustrates the intentionality of this parallel. Del Rey wants to be associated with *Lolita* because an association with this child is an association with helpless femininity and sexual appeal. These traits Del Rey wishes to be associated with are ones that Humbert falsely sees *Lolita* to represent. Del Rey’s desires become explicit in a 2011 Guardian interview, where she refers to her persona on *Born to Die* as “Lolita got lost in the hood” (Swash 2011).

Del Rey seems to have a profound understanding of how women are othered in society, and how this strips away much of the

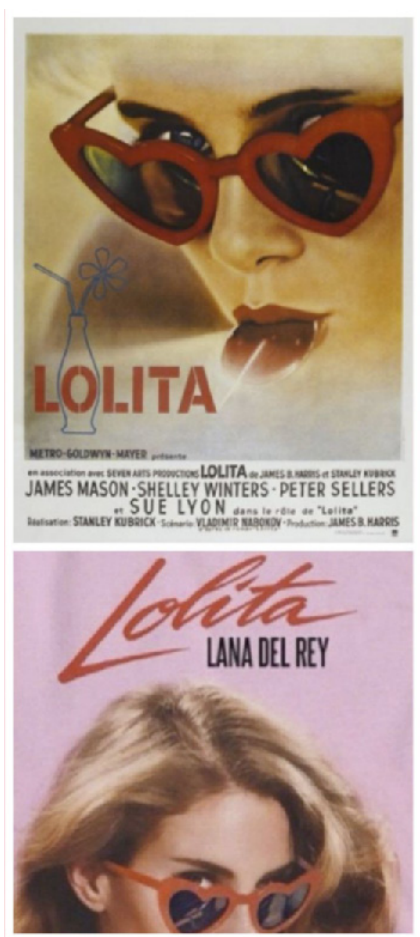


Figure 1a & 1b. Vintage Movie Poster *Lolita* Belgian From 1962.

control they would have over their lives and choices. This understanding is reflected in much of her work. It is especially clear in her song “hope is a dangerous thing for a woman like me to have -- but I have it” from her fifth major label album, *Norman F’ing Rockwell*, where she sings:

*I was reading Slim Aarons
and I
got to thinking that I thought
Maybe I’d get less stressed if
I was tested less like
All of these debutantes
Smiling for miles in pink
dresses and
high heels on white yachts
But I’m not, baby, I’m not
No, I’m not, that, I’m not...
Don’t ask if I’m happy, you
know that I’m not
But at best, I can say that
I’m not sad
(Del Rey 2019)*

Here, it is clear that Del Rey realizes how ever-present societal pressures are not only on women’s appearance but also on their behavior, and how much strength it takes to resist these pressures. The title of this song further acknowledges that though it may harm women to resist these pressures, it harms them even more to not have hope that they can eventually break out of their socially prescribed roles. Despite this knowledge, Del Rey continues to romanticize the symbolic violence — a non-physical violence that manifests in the power differential between social groups— between men and women. Though she has shown more awareness for how women are othered in her most recent albums, *Norman F’ing Rockwell* (2019), *Chemtrails Over the Country Club* (2021), and *Blue Bannisters* (2021),

this romanticization still reveals itself whenever she defends old lyrics like *Ultraviolence’s* (2014) “He hurt me, but it felt like true love,” where she glamorizes abuse, or *Born to Die’s* “Tell me you own me,” where she willingly pushes any agency she has into the hands of a man. Regardless of her worrying songwriting, any time Del Rey has been pressed, she insists that she is a feminist and that her idea of feminism is just one where “a woman feels free to do whatever she wants,” perhaps including self-objectification (Grow 2018). Beauvoir would disagree with Del Rey and say that her attempts to “find independence with dependence” will not work as she can never be fully free when she is reliant on the approval of a man’s gaze to simply exist (Beauvoir 1949, 17).

Even if Lana Del Rey delights in depicting women’s weakness the way that countless male artists have before her, it reads less as interesting and much more as pathetic when she does it, simply because she is a woman. Men have created a system where when women do the same thing as them, it comes off as an “other” trying to escape the role they’ve been prescribed. Which to put in internet colloquialisms, is “cringe”. This escape will never succeed in a world where hard lines are drawn between men and the “second sex”, and ultimately just comes off as desperate. However, De Beauvoir is old, dead, and has never donned a pair of red heart-shaped sunglasses, so what should a good coquette girl care what she says?

Lana Del Rey’s brand of feminism falls under “choice feminism”, a term coined by Linda Hirshman for a type of feminism where all individual choices that women make are inherently empowering (Ferguson 2010). Notions of individuality and pleasing oneself are central to this type of feminism. Though it may seem nice initially, choice feminism is deeply flawed as it not only tends to ignore political and cultural influences on behavior, but it also disregards the advancement of all women. Just because an action is autonomous does not mean that it is empowering. When a woman makes the choice to hurt another woman, is that feminism? Coquette Twitter frequently struggles with this question.

CONTEXTS

Defined by ideas of traditional femininity, the coquette community is harsh to anyone that does not conform, whether it is about things they can change, like the hue or fabric they're wearing; or things they cannot, like weight, skin color, and overall appearance. Since coquette culture tends to ignore cultural influences on behavior, it refuses to accept that the idea of the perfect coquette girl is one rooted in racism, misogyny, and fatphobia. Girls in these spaces often push themselves to be their thinnest, blondest, and palest as they begin to understand well-performed femininity as their primary source of capital. In these spaces, femininity is "constituted as a site of self-surveillance and discipline" (Davis 2017, 9). When one fails, the solution is not examining the problem with society and these standards of femininity, but instead examining the problem with themselves and turning an even further gendered gaze upon themselves.

Despite the male gaze it pushes even further on young girls, some think of coquette culture as subversive and freeing. *Nylon Magazine*, a lifestyle magazine focused on teen fashion and pop culture, paints the coquette aesthetic as "romantic and empowering," saying that it's all about "indulging in the very simple pleasure of both our beauty and wardrobes" and that it feels like "you're sending love letters to yourself on a daily basis" (Roby 2022). *Ploughshares*, a reputed literary journal based at Emerson College, cites critiques of coquette culture as self-fetishizing as "ageist" and says that by claiming the Lolita image, coquette girls are taking an image used to "fetishize, subjugate, and dehumanize them and turning it into an image of power, beauty, and danger." The journal then goes on to make an even bolder claim:

Using Lolita, the nymphet that is both ruined by and ruinous to her abuser, these girls are both telling a story – of autonomy being usurped, of being abused and claimed and

harmed – and using the formidable power of ghosts – to haunt, to remind, to destroy from within. In this way, it becomes an act of subversion, an act of catharsis. In the novel, Humbert describes a nymphet as "the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; she stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power." In claiming the image of Lolita, on one's own terms, for one's own ends, to embody a history, to haunt, to ruin, perhaps the Tumblr nymphet gets her revenge on Humbert by waking up "among the wholesome children," acutely and powerfully conscious of just that power that is rightfully hers, all hers, to do with what she wills (Hoosen 2016).

Nylon Magazine's claims that being a coquette can feel romantic as one is constantly pampering oneself can ring true; however, the term empowering is a stretch as being closer to the patriarchal idea of what beauty is does not give women any social power as a group. In addition, *Ploughshares'* claims ring completely false, as they are rooted in a twisted reading of Nabokov's work. The entire point of Humbert's character is that he is an unreliable narrator (Moore 2001). *Ploughshares* is taking his view of Lolita as a dark nymphet as fact, when in reality, she is just a child. A 12-year-old girl isn't a "little deadly demon... [with] a fantastic power," especially not in the sexual way that Humbert means

in this passage (Hoosen 2016). She is simply a 12-year-old girl. Neither Lolita nor coquette girls are using a power they are acutely aware of possessing to subvert the forces acting upon them. Instead, they are children, suddenly aware of their flesh, blindly scrambling to find a sense of agency however they can, even if that means by succumbing to a predatory male gaze.

It can also be argued that the popularity of violent and melancholy images on coquette Twitter, examples of which can be seen in Figure 2, reveal a small rebellion against the expectation of girls to be quiet and soft in order to be feminine. This argument would be valid if not for two factors. First, as aforementioned, coquette girls use Twitter and other social media platforms as spaces to practice their femininity and be emotionally open with each other; whatever they do not bring off Twitter, they have learned from this intense practice with each other is unacceptable to the male gaze. These memes stay in coquette's closed off community. Second, despite being dark and melancholy, these memes still prize beauty above all. Even in the most violent figure, Figure 2a, where a girl is bleeding to death on her bed, she is still incredibly poised. Figures 2a–e illustrate these girls' philosophy best: no matter what, your appearance must be put first as it is your main source of capital in this world. Interestingly, the quote in 4e comes from a Lana Del Rey song where Del Rey once again sings about relinquishing any sense of agency over her own life to a man who will never see her as anything other than dispensable.

*All the pretty stars shine for you,
my love
Am I the girl that you dream of? ...
You make me feel like your whole
world...
I'll wait for you, babe, that's all I
do, babe
Don't come through, babe, you
never do
Because I'm pretty when I cry...*

*All those special times I spent with
you, my love
They don't mean shit compared to
all your drugs
But I don't really mind...
Don't say you need me when
You leave and you leave again
I'm stronger than all my men
Except for you
Don't say you need me if
You know that you're leaving
I can't do it, I can't do it
But you do it best
Because I'm pretty when I cry
(Del Rey 2014)*

Lines 1–4 make it clear that Del Rey realizes that the state she is in is pathetic. She continues in Lines 9–17 that, in an ideal world, she would have the strength to leave the cause of her misery. However, at this point, she is too tied to him since, as she confesses in Lines 2–3, she finds her main source of value within his gaze. Rather than seeing this song as a warning to unshackle oneself from the male gaze as soon as one can, coquette girls see this song as romantic and a source of comfort that tells them no matter how bad life may get, their beauty will always be a light at the end of the tunnel, because they are “pretty when ...[they] cry.” Coquettes putting their appearance, and by extension, the approval of the male gaze above all is neither subversive nor empowering. No matter how violent or melancholy coquette Twitter memes become, they always prize the male gaze above all, showing the coquette aesthetic's true disempowering nature. This aesthetic gives participants an illusion of power due to the male approval it provides them; however, ultimately, it does not advance womankind in any meaningful way. How then should a coquette who seeks real empowerment move forward?

Can Coquette Ever Be Subversive?

If Simone De Beauvoir were still alive, she would note two major problems with current coquette culture. The first would be that coquette girls too readily accept the male view that they are just flesh. The second would be that these girls' complicity in their "otherness" holds all women back. These problems are inextricable from one another and have a common solution: these girls need to "decline to be the other... refuse to be a party to the deal... [and] renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste" (Beauvoir 1949, 9–10). Though this solution makes it seem as if coquette girls would have to give up their entire aesthetic as it is completely rooted in femininity, this is not true. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir is clear that she does not believe that women's liberation would come from acting like men or denying the parts that they enjoyed about their femininity (Beauvoir 1949, 761–62). It would come from women refusing to be the "other" and defining their femininity themselves, divorced from patriarchal beauty standards and men's gazes (Beauvoir 1949, 273–74).

Defining one's femininity involves divesting from the idea that youth and beauty are one's only value in this world. This way of thinking about feminism is distinct from choice feminism because choice feminism does not actually divorce itself from androcentricity, it just pretends to. Beauvoir recognizes how difficult it would be to reconfigure how one views gender overnight, especially for girls aged 13–20 (Beauvoir 1949, 721–27). The first instruction Beauvoir would give coquettes to help them reconfigure their view of gender would be to give up the idea that their youth and beauty are the only capital that they have in this world, as that is what makes the aesthetic so androcentric. The form of feminism presented in *The Second Sex* would tell coquettes that they must begin using these online spaces simply as a space for emotional openness rather

than as a space to practice and critique each other's femininity.

If coquettes did this, they would see the benefits almost immediately. Not only would their online spaces become more inclusive of girls with different body types, ethnicities, and sexualities, allowing them even more growth online and therefore giving them greater power in online

spaces, but it would also raise their confidence. As evidenced by Figures 2a, 2b, and 3a, self-confidence within current coquette spaces is, at best, hanging on a precarious thread that could break at any moment and, at worst, become completely nonexistent. These girls see "ugliness as a kind of death" and hate themselves despite being "obsessed with the idea of perfection" because, as of right now, they're not a "self", but an "other" (Mahoney 2022; Daniela 2021). If these girls have even one day where they perceive themselves as not fitting androcentric beauty standards, they cease to exist.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir introduces readers to the directly oppositional ideas of immanence and transcendence. Beauvoir defines transcendence as "active, creative, projecting forward into the future" and immanence as "passive, internal, and centered



Figures 3a & 3b. Erin Mahoney. (2022). "Words." Pinterest.

on the maintenance of the species" (Day 2014, 5). Men are allowed agency over themselves and can therefore achieve transcendence, whereas women are not and are forced into a state of static immanence. Currently coquette Twitter is the site of young girls' immanence. It is a closed-off, passive realm where they are completely immersed in maintaining traditional gender norms — their expressions of femininity are carefully monitored and circumscribed, leaving them to find their only escape from this repetitive imprisonment in men, as is evidenced by their affinity for Lana Del Rey's *Born to Die* and *Ultraviolence* (Figure 4) — the albums of hers which most focus on the constant sacrifices she makes so that the various men in her life can recognize her as a person, ensuring she will not disappear. Beauvoir would argue that coquettes need to take an active role in defining their femininity — like Del Rey has started doing in recent albums *Norman F'ing Rockwell*, *Chemtrails Over the Club*, and *Blue Bannisters*. In these albums, she reflects over her earlier works and realizes that growing into womanhood means defining what womanhood is for herself and that she needs to look to other women who have done the same if she wants stability, self-love, and eventually empowerment— rather than men. This realization shows when comparing one of her earlier songs, "Brooklyn Baby" (2014) with one of her newer ones.



Figure 4

You're in the wind, I'm in the water...
Me and my sister just playin' it cool...
Meet you for coffee at the elementary schools...
It's beautiful how this deep normality settles down over me
I'm not bored or unhappy
I'm still so strange and wild.
"Chemtrails Over the Country Club" (2021)

They say I'm too young to love you
I don't know what I need...
Well, my boyfriend's in a band
He plays guitar while I sing Lou Reed
I've got feathers in my hair...
I think we're like fire and water
I think we're like the wind and sea
You're burnin' up, I'm coolin' down
You're up, I'm down
"Ultraviolence" (2014)

CONTEXTS

Del Rey seems to have a similar relationship dynamic with her lovers in both songs, where they are flighty and unpredictable like wind, and she is nurturing yet adaptable like water. However, these songs differ in every other regard. In “Brooklyn Baby,” Del Rey defines herself through her lover. He is in a band, and she sings next to him, even changing her appearance by putting feathers in her hair to visually fit alongside him; she is his opposite in every way as women should be to men, yet she still takes care of him — when he is burning up, she cools him down. In “Chemtrails Over the Country Club,” on the other hand, Del Rey’s lover is an afterthought. She instead focuses on spending time with her sister and reflects on how she has grown, juxtaposing the coffee she is drinking, a symbol of the maturity now flowing through her, with the elementary school she is at, a symbol of her past, static juvenility. Rather than modeling herself and her femininity after transient men as she did before, she now defines her femininity through self-reflection and spending time with other women. Del Rey ultimately concludes that she is finally content, and the parts of herself that seemed “strange and wild” before now seem normal. Defining their own femininity, like Del Rey learns to, will allow coquettes to break out of their imprisonment and achieve transcendence, letting them be truly creative in a space that has long been contrived due to the same beauty standards being constantly regurgitated. Unshackled from an androcentric gaze, the girls in these spaces will extend out into the universe rather than remaining tucked into themselves.

Though Beauvoir’s view is important, she is a second wave feminist, and we are currently in the fourth wave — over 50 years removed from her era. Does fourth wave feminism guide coquette girls towards a different solution? Short answer: no. Long answer: ever so slightly. Fourth wave feminism focuses on intersectionality and feminist activism within the internet age (Pruitt 2022). It would most likely tell coquettes the same thing that Beauvoir, who was quite progressive for her time, tells them: in order to achieve your transcendence, you must decenter an androcentric view of yourself and your fellow women. However, among fourth wave feminists, the inclusion of other races, body types, and sexualities would not be an afterthought as it is in Beauvoirian feminism, but rather the forethought. The first instruction fourth wave feminists would give coquettes to help them achieve transcendence would be to include different types of women, who have already realized that an androcentric view of femininity will not benefit them as they will never be able to truly achieve it due to unchangeable factors like race or sexuality, within their spaces. These girls who have already started realizing what their more privileged peers have not yet realized may be able to help pull these peers out of the dark once they enter these coquette spaces. The more privileged girls can use the privilege they have to even further shift definitions of femininity until coquette is a safe space for everyone, truly defined by the simple love of the aesthetic, rather than by the need to be validated by men.

Final Thoughts

In this paper, I examined Twitter coquette culture to see how it fits into the Beauvoirian feminism presented in *The Second Sex*. I investigated claims that coquette culture subverts patriarchal expectations of women, and then illustrated how these claims were false. Finally, I tried to answer the question of where we should go from here in both the Beauvoirian feminist point of view and the fourth wave feminist point of view. I concluded that although coquette culture can be subversive, it currently is not because girls within coquette spaces too readily accept their position as the other, instead of fighting for transcendence. However, this is not fully the girls' fault as they are so young and messaging from popular magazines, reputed literary journals, and even famous musicians encourage defaulting their definition of femininity,

and by extension, definition of themselves, to men. Even when elements of reminiscence and self-reflection are at play, as they so often are in Lana Del Rey's songwriting, it can be difficult for these girls to grasp due not just to their young age but also to the other messaging in popular culture encouraging immanence instead of transcendence. This confusing messaging along with pre-existing societal pressures causes young girls to become complicit in pushing the role of the "other" upon themselves since they think it will help them gain power. These girls will reach transcendence when they begin defining their femininity for themselves; however, they do not have to lose themselves to do this. They can simply start listening to *Chemtrails* instead of *Ultraviolence*.

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A Tale of Two Translations

Adaptations in a Cultural Context

By Alexandra Ellison

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the role and impact that adaptation, specifically literary adaptation, has across audiences with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Before 1988, scholars had failed to make any sort of association between Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Ali Rıza Seyfi's *Kazıklı Voyvoda* (1928), despite the latter novel's current designation as an Ottoman Turkish adaptation of the former. Even though the plot and characterization of both stories are virtually identical, Seyfi imbued his novel with a strong theme of Turkish nationalism which renders *Kazıklı Voyvoda* closer to a superficial adaptation of Stoker's novel rather than a faithful translation of it. Historically, this is not the first adaptation to misrepresent a critical aspect of its source material, nor will it likely be the last. Ethically, this misrepresentation raises serious concerns about where audiences and authors should draw the line between an adaptation and an original piece. To resolve this concern, this paper analyzes competing translation theories, other research papers, and literature, concluding with the argument that adaptations should be allowed creative freedom to tell an interesting story, but they also have an ethical obligation to detach themselves from the source text if the integral message of the original is changed.

Growing up, my favorite video game series was *Ace Attorney*. I spent hours solving crimes and winning court cases as the bumbling-yet-lovable defense attorney Phoenix Wright, eagerly reading through pages and pages of story and dialogue throughout the game. There was one aspect of the game's story that I never questioned, however, which was the setting. Because the game was originally created by Japanese developers and then localized in English, Phoenix's exploits were set in a fictional city colloquially nicknamed "Japanifornia" among fans of the series. In the game, the background art consisted of Japanese-style pagodas and traditional kimonos, but the characters would frequently go out of their way to eat hamburgers and jelly doughnuts. Now, looking back on the *Ace Attorney* games, I realize why the developers might have chosen to

include these misplaced elements of American culture in the U.S. localization instead of keeping the games culturally Japanese; many aspects of Japanese culture (for example, the legal system) are not remotely as they are in America. It would be impossible for English speakers to solve the game's puzzles and win court cases if the clues were not translated perfectly, or if the clues did not have an equivalent in American culture. I did not think anything of it at the time, but the reality is that Japanese audiences may have played a significantly different game than American audiences did. Even though I finished many of these games well over seven years ago, I still can't help but wonder, did I actually play *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, or did I play a completely different English game that Japanese audiences would not be able to recognize?

I. Introduction and Overview

The complexities of transcultural adaptation extend far beyond video games and *Ace Attorney*. In the academic world, controversy regarding transcultural adaptation in literature can be categorized along a spectrum of two distinct perspectives: some scholars believe that adaptations should be allowed complete creative freedom, while others believe that adaptations should be faithful to the source material. From the first perspective, experts argue that literary adaptations should be allowed to make modifications to an original story to make the ideas more digestible and/or attractive to foreign audiences. This theory, otherwise known as the theory of translatorial action, states that adaptations are simply message-carriers that translate a main idea from one culture to another, and adaptations can change, add, or omit as much as they like so long as that main idea is presented in the new adaptation (Holz-Mänttari 1984). However, in the second perspective, a discipline known as descriptive translation studies, others argue that faithful adaptations in different languages are necessary because foreign audiences will have little to no prior exposure to the original piece, and unfaithful adaptations will not accurately portray the author's original message (Bastin 1988). According to this discipline, "bad adaptations" that are dissimilar to their predecessors should be marketed as separate entities, and not allowed to confuse the public by retaining the namesake of the original.

When discussing transcultural adaptation, it is helpful to make a clear distinction between translation and adaptation. In this paper, the word "adaptation" will be used to refer to stories whose content has been modified in some significant way; for example, a movie that has been remade for modern audiences, while "translation" will be used to address stories that are rendered in another language. That said,

there is a significant amount of overlap between translation and adaptation. In cases such as these, the term transcultural adaptation is appropriate to describe a piece that has been both adapted and translated for a certain audience.

One example of the powerful effects of transcultural adaptation can be found in the Turkish novel *Kazıklı Voyvoda* by Ali Rıza Seyfioğlu, which is an adaptation of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. However, when writing *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, Seyfi infused the iconic vampire story with elements of Turkish nationalism, effectively presenting the idea of a new genre—the Gothic—to Turkish audiences in a very different, nationalistic manner than it did to English audiences.

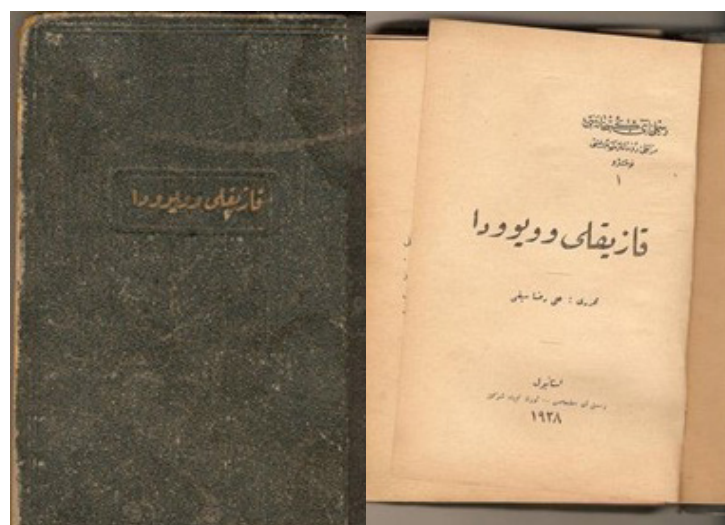
By placing the theories of translatorial action and descriptive translation studies in conversation with each other, we can begin to see a way of looking at transcultural adaptation that is better equipped to deal with the potentially misinformative nature of adaptation and translation. While it is important to delineate between adaptations and reimaginings, it is also crucial to allow adaptations enough creative freedom to accurately convey central messages across linguistic and cultural barriers. Through this new lens, it becomes apparent that audiences and scholars alike should take a stance towards adaptation which allows creators to have a great degree of creative freedom, however, if the adaptation deviates too far from the source material, there should also be an ethical obligation to represent the adaptation as a new original piece titled differently.

In the end, it is important to examine the modes and effects of transcultural adaptation because ideas and stories are retold in every language imaginable, which means that mistranslations and unfaithful adaptations have a profound impact on the way that culturally and linguistically different audiences perceive truth and morality relative to the stories they are told.

II. *Kazıklı Voyvoda* – Adaptation, Translation, or Something Else?

In 1928, Ali Rıza Seyfi published a novel titled *Kazıklı Voyvoda*—or, in English, *Vlad the Impaler*—in Ottoman Turkish. However, even though Seyfi's name was featured on the book's cover as the author, he was not the sole contributor to this piece. In fact, *Kazıklı Voyvoda* is essentially a transcultural adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which was written almost thirty years prior in 1897. In terms of adaptation, *Kazıklı Voyvoda* is distinct from *Dracula* because the setting is localized from 1800's Transylvania to 1920's Istanbul. All of the characters have traditional Turkish names, and the length of the novel is significantly shorter. However, many fundamental aspects of the original novel are kept almost exactly the same in this adaptation, such as the major plot events and the personality and purpose of every character. Among Turkish audiences, *Kazıklı Voyvoda* was treated as a Turkish original until (and likely, for some time after) January 1998, when cinema historian Giovanni Scognamiglio published an article about vampire lore in the periodical

Album, correctly identifying *Kazıklı Voyvoda* as a Turkish adaptation of *Dracula* (Gürçağlar 2001, 128). However, in modern academic circles, there is debate as to whether *Kazıklı Voyvoda* should be considered a localized Turkish adaptation at all, or if it should be regarded as a completely different piece altogether.



Cover and first page of *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, written in Ottoman Turkish, 1928 (Danacı 2010).

III. Translational Action and Creative Interpretation

In academic terms, the theory that best describes the notion of “creative interpretation” is the theory of translational action. Developed by Finnish translation scholar Justa Holz-Mänttari in 1984, the theory of translational action argues that the primary function of transcultural translation is to render a source text fully comprehensible to

audiences of a different language and culture. In *Translatorisches handeln: Theorie und methode*, Holz-Mänttari states that translation “is not about translating words, sentences or texts but it is in every case about guiding the intended co-operation over cultural barriers enabling functionally oriented communication” (1984,

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*Karaköy, commercial quarter in 1920's Istanbul, Turkey
(Eski İstanbul Fotoğrafları Arşivi 2018)*

7-8). Here, Holz-Mänttärä argues that scholars and audiences should take on a completely consequentialist and/or situational view of translation, and evaluate translations solely on their ability to communicate an idea across cultural barriers. In her paper, Holz-Mänttärä describes the ultimate purpose of translatorial action as a message transmitter (1984, 8), further supporting the idea that translations and adaptations should be allowed to change or omit whatever they need in order to properly convey the underlying message of the source text. By applying these ideas regarding translation to the idea of adaptation, it follows that the exact match between source and adaptation is not important. Ultimately, transcultural adaptations have no obligation to accurately translate the text of a novel itself, so long as the message and the commission of the original are preserved in a way that the new audience will be able to understand.

On one hand, Ali Rıza Seyfi's Turkish novel might be better understood as a translatorial adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* because it closely resembles the plot and characterization of the original English novel, and helps introduce a new, western concept of Gothic Horror to Turkish audiences in a digestible manner. In the first pages of *Dracula*, the audience is

immediately introduced to the main character Johnathan Harker via a series of diary entries cataloging his journey to Count Dracula's Castle in Transylvania. However, the first chapter of *Kazıklı Voyvoda* begins with a brief preface from a mystery narrator, who states that he has found pages of a journal on a ferry in Istanbul. Through this framing narrative, the reader is exposed to the writings of main character Azimi (the Turkish equivalent of Johnathan Harker), who journeys to Vlad Dracula's castle in Transylvania on official legal business. From here, events transpire exactly the same as they do in *Dracula* (with the exception of two minor character omissions). However, at the end of the book, Vlad Dracula travels to (and eventually dies) in Istanbul, Turkey instead of London, England (Seyfi 1928).

This significant shift from London to Istanbul constitutes the biggest change that Seyfi made from the original English version to the adapted Turkish version. As noted by Dr. Tugce Bicakci "indeed, the adaptations of *Dracula* in Turkish literature and film do not deteriorate or warp the original as Turkish critics thought for a long time, but they give the original a new impulse—a Turkish impulse—and maintain the popularity of the *Dracula* myth within a Turkish context" (2015, 23). Here, Bicakci strongly argues in favor of categorizing *Kazıklı Voyvoda* as a transcultural adaptation of *Dracula*, instead of as its own book. Even though the Turkish novel alters ideas in Bram Stoker's story, often in ways that Stoker did not originally intend, it still serves the purpose of proliferating Gothic literature and the myth of *Dracula* to audiences who would not have otherwise been exposed to the genre or the myth. Therefore, even though transcultural adaptations may alter the way that foreign audiences perceive a certain story, there is still merit in creative, translatorial adaptations because they present people with familiar ways to interpret the morals, truths, and ideas of a story into the context of the world around them.

IV. Descriptive Translation Studies and Strict Interpretation

On the other end of the spectrum, there is an argument to be made that creative adaptations misrepresent the original source text, and should be studied as a separate entity entirely. The discipline of descriptive translations studies (DTS) attempts to establish standards for good translations by providing “a series of coherent laws which would state the inherent relations between all variables found to be relevant to translation” (Toury 1995, 16). Gideon Toury, a descriptive translation studies scholar, explains that translations (and, by association, transcultural adaptations) must adhere to an existing empirical relationship to the original text to be considered a good translation. Therefore, any transcultural adaptation that deviates from this standard should be considered an inferior, empty transcultural message transmitter, and be regarded as a separate piece.

According to DTS, translators are provided with a constantly evolving norm that must be adhered to in order to maintain their status as a “good” adaptation. Translation scholar Georges Bastin sheds light on the quality of translation and adaptation throughout history in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, stating that “the history of adaptation is parasitic on historical concepts of translation” (1988, 5). Here, Bastin argues that history is filled with “pseudo-translations,” or transcultural adaptations that do not credit an original author in a different language (1988, 5). From these pseudo-translations, adaptations are then made which unknowingly plagiarize ideas from an original transcultural author, and it is very difficult to determine where the adaptation ends and the new piece begins. To help solve this problem, Bastin goes on to define adaptation as “a set of transitive operations which result in a text that is not accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text of about

the same length” (1988, 5). Therefore, Bastin’s ultimate argument is that adaptations can only be considered adaptations if they share a certain amount of similarities with the original source. At some point, adaptations which deviate too far from the original should not be associated at all with the original piece, and should be considered instead, as a stand-alone piece.

Although Kazıklı Voyvoda portrays similar ideas as its predecessor *Dracula*, advocates of descriptive translation studies would argue that Kazıklı Voyvoda should be considered a separate entity in and of itself, and that it is wrong to consider Kazıklı Voyvoda an adaptation because it changes many aspects of *Dracula* to closely align with a Turkish nationalist theme. For example, when Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula*, he designed a barbaric, foreign, Transylvanian



Fig 3. Portrait of Vlad Tepes or Vlad the Impaler, from Castle Ambras in the Tyrol circa 1450 (Stock Montage/Getty Images, 1754)

antagonist whose main purpose in the text was to contrast the “modern” and “civilized” English heroes of the time (Newman 2017). Stoker likely loosely based Count Dracula on the real-life historical figure Vlad the Impaler, but according to historian Kim Newman, “Stoker mostly just liked the name Dracula and probably knew very little about the Vlad beyond the skimpy, not-entirely-accurate historical details he mentions” (2017, v). To Stoker, the similarities between Dracula and Vlad the Impaler were inconsequential. However, to Ali Rıza Seyfi, the correlation between these two figures was crucial to the theme of the novel. Turkish audiences reading *Kazıklı Voyvoda* would immediately identify Vlad the Impaler as a historical enemy of the Turks, and would see Vlad Dracula as a national threat. According to Professor of Translation Studies Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar,

Dracula is identified with the nation’s enemies, and it is only fair that the Turkish characters should take revenge on him once he starts his second campaign against the Turks, this time by taking a trip to Istanbul. It is no coincidence that Seyfi makes the group that will eventually kill Dracula a small troop of officers who have served in the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923). Fighting against Dracula thus appears not just an individual struggle against the dark forces, but something a solid citizen should do out of respect for the memory of those whom Dracula had once impaled (2001, 140).

By solidifying and expanding upon this

connection between Dracula and Vlad the Impaler, Seyfi created a theme of Turkish nationalism that villainized Dracula to a greater extent than in Stoker’s original novel. Even though Bram Stoker likely did not think about the potential implications of associating his antagonist with a historical enemy of Turkey, Turkish audiences would be much more emotionally invested in the destruction of Vlad Dracula than English audiences would be.

Although these changes might make the transcultural adaptation more attractive to Turkish audiences, a critical issue arises when examining the cultural impact of *Kazıklı Voyvoda* as a whole. If *Kazıklı Voyvoda* is a Turkish reader’s only exposure to Dracula, they may assume that they are familiar with the Dracula myth and its Turkish, Islamic, nationalistic message. However, as English speakers, we know that Stoker never imbued these values within his novel, and that Turkish audiences are absorbing an unfaithful, incorrect version of Stoker’s ideas. As a translation and an adaptation, *Kazıklı Voyvoda* completely disregards the laws of descriptive translation studies by deviating from the themes that Stoker had initially set out to portray. Thus, DTS scholars argue that transcultural adaptations which deviate from their source material are unethical because they inaccurately advertise their own ideas as the original author’s ideas, and influence the perception of foreign audiences in a way that the original author did not intend.

V. Conclusion

Issues of adaptation are pervasive across time, language, and culture—everyone who reads books, consumes media, or engages with ideas that originate in a different culture are affected by adaptation. Ultimately, because transcultural adaptations help grow the consumer base of a specific story outside of its original market, they will always result in a modification to the source material that makes the story more engaging to new audiences. In the modern world, there are

many instances of adaptation that can be easily observed, such as a new movie adaptation of an old novel (think the 2005 “*Pride and Prejudice*” movie directed by Joe Wright), or even a Chinese restaurant that serves American dishes such as hamburgers and hot dogs. However, sometimes instances of adaptation are less clear to identify, such as a literary adaptation where the audience isn’t necessarily aware that they are consuming an adapted version.

So, to return to the question I posed at the beginning of this research paper: did I ever play Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, or did I play a completely different English game? Even though I will probably never play the original videogame in Japanese, I am fairly certain that I can say I have experienced the game alongside millions of Japanese, French, German, and Chinese fans. How is this possible?

Translation from one language to another is going to require adaptation in some form for new audiences to understand. In the case of Ace Attorney, I am confident that I experienced a similar game to Japanese audiences because I could look up fan-made images, articles, and videos that would align with my understanding of the characters, plot, and overall message of the games. In the case of Kazıklı Voyvoda, audiences who speak Turkish can be fairly certain that they are not reading a localized version of Dracula because their understanding of the plot, characters, and symbolism is drastically different from the English version of the text. To remedy this discrepancy, adaptations like Kazıklı Voyvoda which deviate from the central moral of their source should be marketed as an original novel, and broadly considered a stand-alone piece. Overall, adaptations should be allowed

creative freedom to explore whatever they like, but they also have an ethical obligation to detach themselves from the source text if the transcultural message of the original is changed.

Adaptation is contingent on the concept of ideas. Words, intonation, and references are all ways that adaptations may modify a piece of media to make it more accessible to new audiences. However, adaptations don't only rely on these specific choices to convey a message to an audience; after all, ideas are only as powerful as the minds that receive them. With any good story, there is a gap in between the words explicitly said, and the message that the audience comes away with. In this gap, it is up to the audience to interpret the ideas presented to them and contextualize the message in the world around them.

Everyone, everywhere, at all times, is a member of a cultural audience. Even though we are exposed to transcultural adaptation every day, it is up to each person for themselves to determine how the stories they read in the past might have been adapted across cultural barriers, and how their ideas regarding truth and morality are influenced by the adaptations they see.

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Colonial Reproductions of Urban Policing and Surveillance

Cairo, Paris, and Johannesburg

By Sandi Khine

ABSTRACT

This piece focuses on the colonial nature and function of policing and surveillance in urban design and urban spaces. It posits that policing and surveillance continue to reproduce colonial systems of power, colonial hierarchies, and constructions of criminality. The paper looks at three sites in particular: Cairo, Paris, and Johannesburg. These three cities are vastly different and have distinct colonial and decolonial histories, but can be productively analyzed to better understand the landscapes of policing and carcerality within each of their contexts. I argue that policing and surveillance, in addition to being a form of urban design, are employed as a tool for the ruling class to maintain power and hegemony by asserting control over city populations and their behaviors.

Colonialism in the late 19th century to the mid-20th century was characterized by population control, the management of space, and subsequently, the policing and surveillance of people, all of which colonial authorities deemed necessary to gain and maintain power. This paper looks at changes in three cities: Cairo, Paris, and Johannesburg, as they shifted from colonial to postcolonial spaces, focusing on the changes and continuities in their policing and surveillance.

Studying colonial and postcolonial cities is integral to understanding how spatial segmentation and global inequality have developed in the relations between the colonizing European west and the Global South over time. A growing consciousness around the impact of colonialism has brought about the need and emergence of postcolonial studies, analyzing systems of racial capitalism, industrialization, and labor exploitation to both study and perhaps

attempt to remedy the legacies of colonialism.

Colonial policies of segmentation, segregation, and identification have resulted in the impulse and desire to control and police groups of people deemed undesirable, and this has continued in these cities even today. Policing and surveillance, both as forms of urban planning and design, were employed during colonial rule to assert power and domination and to impose control over the residents of the city. One example of colonial policing this article covers is policing in the housing projects of Paris, where racialized, low-income neighborhoods are put under increased surveillance to posit a white French body as superior. I argue that in contemporary urban spaces and cities, thus, policing and surveillance continue to reproduce colonial systems of power, colonial hierarchies, and constructions of criminality. Therefore, policing and surveillance systems even in the postcolonial city serve primarily to protect the interests

of a ruling class — targeting and criminalizing certain racial groups and the urban poor. I also take the case of Johannesburg to argue that physical boundaries of urban segregation based on colonial definitions of race and class, have resulted in a perceived need for security and order to preserve the ruling class's sense of safety and security.

Understanding the function of policing and surveillance in postcolonial cities such as Cairo, Paris, and Johannesburg requires an analysis of their roots in colonial histories that have informed and produced the material conditions of policing today. Colonialism necessitates extraction — through processes such as the enslavement of people, and the pillaging of resources by European colonists, as well as the implementation of new capitalist modes of labor and production.¹ In this way, colonialism ensured the domination of a city, a region, and a people in all its physical and social aspects. Colonial cities, such as British-occupied Lahore from 1850 to 1940, were characterized by segmentation and segregation — through the implementation of a colonial “spatial imagination” where the urban structure of the city supplements a colonial policing order that subjects the colonized peoples.² Such structures posit an “other” against a superior western European body, and where the “other” must be controlled, policed, and surveilled in order to establish order amongst a

perceived disorder.³

This essay argues that postcolonial (marked by the demise of empires in Europe) urban systems of policing and surveillance preserve the interests of a colonial ruling class, and reproduce colonial systems of power, racialization, segregation, and violence. First, I look at the British colonization of Egypt, and in particular Cairo, where colonialism captured the city and the subjects through the intentional and systematic surveillance of both the bodies and minds of urban residents, creating policing systems whose goal was to serve the interests of the dominating colonial power. Then, I turn to urban policing in Paris, in particular in the banlieues where violent and aggressive policing and surveillance have been justified by colonial and racial dynamics between law enforcement and residents. Though Paris was not colonized, colonial dynamics are still visible in policing systems. Finally, I look at violence in Johannesburg, where the urban environment has been defined by apartheid and its formal eradication, and fears of violence have incentivized privatized policing and intense regulation and patrolling of lower-income Black townships. In these ways, policing and surveillance have become key to maintaining a colonial order and establishing the domination of a ruling class, at the same time becoming primary features of the urban design and planning of (and even when the regimes changed) postcolonial cities.

Colonial Order and Control in Cairo

British political scientist Timothy Mitchell in his book *Colonizing Egypt* (1998) explores the ways colonial authorities imposed ideas of modernism, European superiority, and capital economic production onto colonized populations. Mitchell analyzes in Cairo, the ways that British and French colonial authorities reconstructed the urban center to develop and enforce western and European standards of control. In their colonization of Egypt, authorities captured what Mitchell makes distinctly separate as the body and the mind, which allowed the colonial power to dominate the labor, bodies, education, and

morality of the colonial subject.

Colonialism aimed to control both the mind and the body, and policing and surveillance accomplishes both of those. For example, the control of the body following the British occupation of Egypt can be seen to have begun from birth. Births in every Egyptian village were to be officially registered through a central office, which allowed the colonial power to surveil its subjects.⁴ This control of the body is intrinsically tied to the introduction of new methods of labor and capitalist production that colonial rule brought to urban centers such as Cairo.

Further, the legacies of these methods can still be observed, even as Egypt has changed since British colonial rule and through its independence. Given that new capitalist production required the creation of large bodies of workers in order to complete large architectural projects, colonial demand for the control and order of this labor was remapped onto postcolonial society. These labor forces were also integral to the development of colonial Cairo and its urban landscape through roads and railways. Such forms of transportation, built by Egyptian laborers, were also used to transport migrant laborers to city centers to work in industries such as cotton, built on the wealth of the British colonial empire.⁵ Ticketing systems were introduced and collected for the millions of passengers who used the railways, but only issued to workers who police perceived as less troublesome.⁶ The heavy policing and disciplining of laborers on the railway led to colonial Egypt becoming a place “wherever possible of continuous supervision and control, of tickets and registration papers, of policing and inspection.”⁷

In addition to ensuring that the bodies of laborers more broadly were under constant surveillance and the control of colonial power, British rule also intended to police and surveil the native population on an individual level. The control of individual personhoods is seen explicitly in the regulation of population, sanitation, and education. Surveillance and policing — collecting subjects’ information — in order to impose measures that would enable further exploitation, allowed colonial authorities to carry out censuses, registration of births, and medical procedures, through which Mitchell understands “the concern with the individual body of the political subject” to be both military

and economic.⁸ Such rhetoric was used to impose measures of sanitation and propagate fears of diseases; the language of health and hygiene was also applied in education.

Just as qualitative surveillance of the colonial subject began from birth, so did the indoctrination of the colonial subject, where schools were weaponized to impose a “nineteenth-century notion of the body” as a machine, and disease posited as a personal moral failure.⁹ In doing so, colonial education discredited Indigenous and folk medicine and healing practices, considering them backward and ignorant in the face of Western, modern medical practices. Schooling also enabled colonial authorities to police young people’s minds by constructing a racialized Egyptian ‘character’ that is inferior to a western European one, but one that is also necessary to produce labor as part of an industrial working class, contributing to new colonial capitalist production.

Policing and surveillance are thus primary tools of colonial order and imposition; in Cairo, surveillance was necessary to bring it under continuous supervision through the indoctrination of both the mind and the body of the colonial subject. Through the imposition of policing, surveillance, and monitoring, colonial officials were able to impose disciplinary methods and assert power, establishing the state based on new ways of disciplining and surveilling a colonized population.¹⁰ These forms of power were asserted through surveillance and “continuous instruction, inspection, and control.”¹¹ Political order was achieved through disciplinary power and the control of the whole colonized population, which was possible only through surveillance and disciplinary measures.¹²

| Urban Policing in Paris’s Banlieues

A study of colonial dynamics and relations in France can tell us how colonial systems of policing have manifested in parts of Paris known as the banlieues, since the 1990s and into the present. Didier Fassin (2013) discusses

the colonial and historical contexts that shape the relationship between banlieue residents and law enforcement in *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing*. He looks at the impact of policing in banlieues through

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interviews with residents, officials, policemen, and through data collected after the 2005 riots (the immediate cause was an incident where two young men died from electrocution while hiding from police). Banlieues are deeply segregated and racialized spaces in Paris — they house high concentrations of low-income people, immigrants from Africa, and manual laborers. While the banlieues began as low-income housing projects, the way that criminality and violence have become spatialized in the banlieues has resulted in the perception of banlieues as unsafe. In response to this perception, the policing and surveillance methods used to suppress these communities have been colonial in nature and have represented a restructuring or change of urban society in France.

The framework that Fassin applies to his analysis of banlieue policing is that of Georges Balandier's idea of the "colonial situation."¹³ Fassin emphasizes that the "work of the police... is set within a history. It articulates relations of domination."¹⁴ The manner in which the banlieues have formed and been segregated is notably similar to the development of native Egyptian communities during colonial Cairo — segregation is used to impose modernity and order on the residents through constant surveilling. Therefore, the banlieues can be productively analyzed through the lens of the colonial situation. The banlieues represent the colonial impulse to categorize, name, and label, taking control of the body and mind, and in doing so, separate low-income and African immigrants from the rest of the population through institutionalized policies.

That the residents of banlieues are primarily low-income immigrants, laborers, and Black, absolutely influences the dynamics between police and the banlieues. These relationships can be seen in the ways that police officers, officials, and policies articulate their work and the usage of policing and surveillance within the housing projects. Antagonism between the racialized residents of the banlieues and the police festered, where the "colonial war was interpreted through a racial paradigm" in the 1990s.¹⁵ Ethnic differences were conflated with

criminality as France took up their own war on crime, and police recruits to the banlieues saw the people and spaces as ones to be colonized and heavily policed. Fassin pays close attention to the militaristic language used when training police officers and justifying policing in the banlieues, pointing out justifications of policing in the banlieues since the early 2000s, such as calling for "war against crime" or "war on violent gangs" or "war without mercy against criminality."¹⁶

In addition to the rhetoric about policing in the banlieues being militaristic, the language is also almost always racialized. The police officers, mostly white from Northern France come into the work with great prejudice and aggression due to the segregation and discrimination of the communities. Officers call the banlieues "jungles" and the residents, mainly of African origin, "savages", "monkeys," or "animals," stripping the banlieue residents of their humanity and therefore justifying even more violent policing.¹⁷ All of this language — militaristic, racialized, and dehumanizing — reveals how deeply colonial and racialized the relationship between banlieues and police is. The dynamics of policing that exist within the banlieues thus, reinforce colonial systems of power and surveillance because they are informed by a racialized and colonial perspective of the people in these spaces, where the white French are at the top of the hierarchy and the racialized subject is at the bottom.

For those living in the banlieues, instability is also exacerbated by policing — the function of law enforcement is meant to impose order such that parts of society, particularly the white and wealthy residents of Paris, may separate and theoretically protect themselves from a group that is deliberately racialized, stigmatized, and outcast. The way that policing maintains this social, racial, and economic hierarchy is through the segregation of the banlieues: this mirrors the way that colonial authorities segregated, divided, and imposed upon urban spaces in Egypt through categorization and exclusion. Aggressive policing in the banlieues remaps colonialism to urban society, and exacerbates, reproduces, and replicates colonial impulses to

segregate, to define, and to other, again positing a white and wealthy European body as the only acceptable one. In such colonial dynamics, the relationship between the colonized and colonizer also becomes deeply racialized: we recall the example of British colonial Lahore, where racial prejudices informed even the ways that British

colonizers implemented training at schools, assuming the Indian to be an inferior subject that ought to be absorbed into the colonial body.¹⁸ In such a way, colonial dynamics posit the racialized and colonized subject as one that needs to be re-educated to justify colonial conquest.

Violence and Crime in Johannesburg

In contrast to Cairo and Paris, contemporary postcolonial Johannesburg and its urban landscape is characterized by apartheid and its formal eradication in 1994, and the legacies of apartheid that continue to impact lives of those in Johannesburg. The social and public life of Johannesburg is based on intense contestations over the right to the land and city, producing uncertainties in movement and in space.¹⁹ The spatial landscape therefore grounds public life in the city as segmented by race and class. In "Violent Crime in Johannesburg," published in 2003 as a chapter of *Emerging Johannesburg*, Ingrid Palmary discusses how racial and socioeconomic segregation during apartheid has resulted in and is reproduced by the urban violence of contemporary Johannesburg. Apartheid and the settler colonial social, economic, and political segregation of native Black populations of South Africa from European ethnic groups has continued to define Johannesburg because of even greater segmentation, post-apartheid violence in the city, and the surveillance and policing of native Black communities in the city in response to such violence. Therefore, the contemporary landscape of policing and surveillance reproduces and replicates the violence and power dynamics of settler colonial, apartheid Johannesburg.

The urban violence that many know Johannesburg by is more complex than segregation: violence is racialized and conflict is borne from capital, labor, and wealth inequalities. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) interrogate studies of Africa and of African cities.²⁰ In particular, they describe Johannesburg as a city that has been viewed through the lens

of urban reformism, where the problems of cities are viewed as the "diseases of a social body", and thus the society must be governable, knowable, and policed.²¹ This framework has informed post-apartheid policies, and thus, the public perception that Black and poor communities in Johannesburg must be policed and "solved." The lasting impacts of segmentation of people and townships is visible in the built environment of the city. A white, European upper class upholds an imagination of security and safety, demanding spatial and social insulation for a group that must be kept away. Mbembe and Nuttall articulate that due to the increased reliance on technologies of surveillance, security, and control, "the criminal now assumes, more than ever, greater prominence in most urban imaginations."²² The desire for safety and security in the urban imagination, in conjunction with the realities of violence across the urban landscape in Johannesburg, provide further justification for more policing and more surveillance; the more an undesirable population is policed and controlled, the greater the sense of safety that a ruling class will feel. These systems of policing and surveillance, of course, mirror those of colonial cities, and post-apartheid Johannesburg is not immune to the legacies of settler colonialism.

Johannesburg's segregation is, in fact, proof that such a society, no matter how cosmopolitan and commercial, "could be founded on settler racism and oppression."²³ This is largely because legacies of settler colonial apartheid mean that the violence that permeates Johannesburg goes hand in hand with white supremacy; from segregation, to housing discrimination, to racialization and criminalization, the figure

of the Black poor in the metropolis of the city is subject to further surveillance and policing. This is reinforced by the formation of wealthy suburbs and the employment of private security firms for these suburbs. These firms, dominated by former white police officers, are meant to “protect” households from crime that is seen in Black townships, perpetuating settler colonial

dynamics of order and discipline between native South Africans and Europeans.²⁴ As such, the racialization and segmentation of post-apartheid Johannesburg results in violent policing and surveillance of poorer Black populations and the communities in which they live, reproducing and reinforcing colonial dynamics of violence and justifying surveilling.

Conclusion: Urban Policing and Surveillance as a Colonial Legacy

In these studies of colonial Cairo, the banlieues in Paris, and post-apartheid Johannesburg, the presence of policing and surveillance in these urban spaces can be understood as a product of colonial desires to impose order on native populations, as well as a political shift that created forms of urban design reproducing and replicating not only these desires, but also the racialization, discrimination, and violence that are legacies of colonialism. Mitchell's analysis of Cairo underscores how colonized and subjugated populations are indoctrinated by colonial authorities through quantification of their labor, bodies, and personhood, which are achieved through constant policing and surveillance. A closer look at the case of the banlieues in Paris demonstrate how though without an explicitly colonial history, aggressive policing is due to the racialization and discrimination of a similarly oppressed population, driven also by the fear of violence that is brought about by the inequities that colonialism fosters. And observing the urban violence and responses to it in the form of security and surveillance in Johannesburg through a settler colonial lens highlights the

cyclical and perpetuating nature of urban colonial violence and policing. This argument does not mean to isolate the violence of policing and surveillance as systems that merely reproduce colonial systems of power and oppression, but acknowledges that policing is also informed by the unique spatial, racial, and economic dynamics of cities and their histories. Rather, the focus on policing and surveillance as tools of the colonial, Western empire to assert dominance, control, and order on colonized populations serves to illustrate the legacies of colonial violence and the responses to it. Racial and colonial violence often overlap, as racial segregation and discrimination is employed to justify and further colonial impositions—further, as colonialism necessitates the violent exploitation of a labor force, these violences are often also classed. Contemporary systems of policing and surveillance in the Western hemisphere reproduce colonial violence through over-policing of poor Black and Brown communities, putting them under intense scrutiny to be further criminalized and to assert a white colonial power.

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The Doi Moi Economic Policy & Women in Rural Vietnam:

A Decolonial and Socialist Feminist Appraisal

By Hazel (Ngan) Le

ABSTRACT

Through decolonial and socialist feminist frameworks, this paper seeks to evaluate the ways Doi Moi policy fails to include, benefit, and support women in rural Vietnam. The origin and mission of decolonial socialist feminism—to entangle different systems of colonialism, capitalism, class, culture, and patriarchy—serves to provide a novel approach to understand the viewpoints of rural women. Setting up these frameworks allows an entry to closely analyze Doi Moi’s economic and socio-cultural impact on women. Economically, the privatization of agriculture and growing numbers of multinational company’s factories have rendered rural women’s labor more expensive. The nation’s priority for economic development, a result of capitalism, compromises women’s benefits by exhausting both their reproductive and workforce labor, exemplifying the case of “double burden.” Moreover, the social and cultural implications behind Doi Moi policy, analyzed in the context of Vietnam’s post-colonial patriarchy, exacerbated women’s oppression in healthcare, formation of identity, and career opportunities. By taking the decolonial socialist frameworks into consideration and recommendation, federal and local governments could develop a renovated version of Doi Moi policy that equitably uplifts rural women.

1. Introduction

Before the official adoption of Doi Moi policy in 1986, the Vietnamese government embraced the centralized planned economy, an economic system derived from the Soviet model and also popularly implemented in other communist countries (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2004). After the end of the American-Vietnam War (between 1975 and 1986), the country struggled with an economic crisis that increased the inflation rate

by 700 percent. Doi Moi aimed to lift the country out of its stagnation by establishing a “socialist-oriented market economy” that encouraged private enterprise and foreign investments (Van Akardie and Mallon 2004). Experts from the World Bank and the think tank Brookings attributed Vietnam’s miraculous growth over the past decades to the country’s switch from a strictly controlled economy to a more liberal

system. Doi Moi's transformative and beneficial impact to the country serves as the mainstream narrative in Vietnam's economic development (Packard 2006).

As Packard argues that the economic gains from Doi Moi are not distributed evenly across different groups, I aim to challenge the mainstream narrative on Doi Moi by using decolonial and socialist feminist frameworks. My research paper attempts to analyze the impact of the Doi Moi Policy on rural women through this decolonial socialist feminist approach. The selection of these two frameworks is based on several factors. First, I believe that these frameworks will help us better analyze the Doi Moi Policy based on Vietnam's unique colonial history, including years under French and Chinese colonialism, along with America's strong influence on the country's political division. In addition, an anti-capitalist sentiment by socialists is instrumental in offering a new perspective to Vietnam's mainstream, pro-capitalist narrative of Doi Moi. While Doi Moi policy has often been

scrutinized by economists and policymakers in and out of Vietnam's context, an approach by feminists, specifically decolonial and socialist feminists, is almost unseen. To understand Doi Moi's impact in its nuances, details, and specifics is to evaluate it under a novel lens — the lens of the most vulnerable and oppressed group in the community — Vietnamese rural women. The deliberate decision to choose Vietnamese rural women as the focus of my research comes from two main reasons. Firstly, the intersection of class and gender makes women in rural Vietnam the most unnoticeable and vulnerable group of women. Whether intentional or unintentional, Doi Moi policy's lack of specificity not only disregarded but also exacerbated these women's struggles. The second reason lies in the fact that Vietnamese rural women are a good example of the intersecting focus between decolonial and socialist feminism. These two frameworks hold the power to reevaluate Doi Moi by using oppressed women as the primary perspective.

2. Decolonial Socialist Feminism

This section traces the origin of the decolonial feminist framework and socialist feminist framework respectively, then elaborates on the achievements and goals that they entail. A combination of these two frameworks, in other words, decolonial socialist feminism, details how feminists' decolonial approach advances anti-capitalist sentiment.

The origin of feminist theory is largely attributed to the western hemisphere. Western culture became the automatic default for feminist frameworks: its lack of understanding with Third World women's experiences falsely portrays all of them as a monolithic group of people. Mohanty (2003) draws a comparison between western women's self-representation and the representation of women in Third World countries. While women in the western world embody independence, intellectuality, and sexual freedom with multifaceted aspects of identities, women in postcolonial countries are

limited strictly in their gender and status as "Third World" women (Mohanty 2003). The definition of gender often attached to Third World women is contained in traditional femininity, which implies these women as subordinate and perpetuating the patriarchy.

The concept of Orientalism, an ideology based on the premise to construct a binary division between the West and the "exotic other countries," also produces the fallacy long held by western feminists about Third World women's identity as victimized, uneducated, ignorant, and family-focused (El Ouardi and Sandy 2019). The dichotomy of Orientalism originates from the United States' and European countries' desire to affirm their power, control, and superiority even in the postcolonial period. It is this very dynamic of power and domination that distinguishes western from decolonial feminist approaches. The struggle for gender equality lies at the core of Western feminist activists,

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but women in developing countries bear the brunt of a more complex system of oppression, not limited to gender inequality (Herr 2014). As previously mentioned, years of colonialism have complicated the struggle for Third World women, transcending gender expectations and connecting to a larger system of class, race, religion, sexuality, and much more.

Third World feminists, also known as decolonial feminists, have argued for a deconstruction of history to change the mainstream narrative about Third World women. By placing Third World women's concrete life experience as a point of entry for research, we can see and understand the world through their perspective — a perspective that truthfully and comprehensively represents the system of oppression in their specific locations. The process of rewriting and remembering history for Third World women is not only significant in dismantling the western hegemonic patriarchy of history but also crucial to the formation of “politicized consciousness and self-identity” for postcolonial women (Mohanty 2003). Moreover, one of the most compelling reconceptualizations of the system that decolonial feminists put forth lies in capitalism, adding another layer of complexity to Marxist feminists or socialist feminists' analyses. Before understanding decolonial socialist feminism, we need to understand the origin and mission of socialist feminism.

Socialist feminism focuses on labor inequality in the home. Socialist feminists extend Marxist theory that capitalism reinforces male dominance over women through the sexual division of labor in both productive and reproductive work (Cliff 1984). Women's reproductive functions are victimized and exploited by capitalists, either limiting them to domestic work or making them bear the brunt of both unpaid housework and waged work. Cliff continues to outline that Marxist and socialist feminists advocate for women's full-time jobs, paid maternity leave, and child care, but these solutions rely heavily on the state, which often prioritizes its own interests over women's. Even under socialism, the system of patriarchy persists, and working-

class women's unpaid work perpetuates gender inequality within the working class (Cliff 1984).

While socialist feminists have argued that women's liberation requires solutions to the working class struggle against capitalism, this class-reductionism point of view prevents a comprehensive understanding of women's problems. Wynter (1982) coined the term “classarchy” to explain the emerging system of monarchy and patriarchy in the US: Black people's roles in the American monarchy, or white supremacy, was similar to women's roles in patriarchy. The analogy underlined the complexity of race, social practices, and religion, which goes beyond class struggle. Lugones (2007) transcends the limitations of socialist feminist tradition by offering a decolonial socialist feminism framework by understanding the coloniality of gender and unfixing labor as the sole referent of inequality in capitalistic society.

Instead of seeing capitalism as an isolated and sealed system, decolonial socialist feminists evaluate the role of capitalism in a system of domination as a whole, not only in colonization, but also in heteropatriarchy, cissexism, and racism (Bohrer 2019). Bohrer argues that a complex and robust decolonial feminist theory of capitalistic society recognizes the invention of capitalism through gendered practices of colonization, not just simply imposed by western influence (2019). These practices involved the exploitation and domination of colonized people, particularly women, in the service of capitalist expansion and accumulation. This gendered dimension of colonization was integral to the formation and perpetuation of capitalist society that is distinct for the colonies (Bohrer 2019). By recognizing the interrelatedness of gender, colonization, and capitalism, a decolonial feminist approach to analyzing and transforming society can more fully account for and resist the ways in which these systems intersect and reinforce each other. Generating an anti-capitalistic decolonial feminist theory originates from a commitment to historical studies at a local and regional level, which in our case is Vietnam.

3. Decolonial Socialist Feminism

3.1 Decolonial Socialist Feminism

While a consensus has been formed in academia that Vietnam's reunification marked the rising gender inequality in the country, there has yet to be a systemic evaluation of the actual causes to the gender imbalance. Leading up to the Sixth Party Congress in 1986 — 11 years after reunification — controversy took place within the government about the country's economic mistakes and the need for a major renovation, that is, Doi Moi. By December 1986, Doi Moi was officially adopted with the mission to reduce macroeconomic instability and boost economic development (Van Arkadie and Mallon 2004).

Besides Doi Moi policy, Goodkind (1995) argues that other factors — postwar gender imbalances, and reemerging Confucian patterns in household production — caused Vietnamese women's struggles in the 1980s society. While the gender segregation in the workforce cannot simply be attributed to the sexist implication of Doi Moi, Doi Moi policy

exacerbated the social expectations for women while indirectly perpetuating men's superiority in the legal system. For example, Doi Moi policy granted agricultural land rights to both males and females within the family, the prevailing patriarchal customs have resulted in men having a dominant position and practical authority over the land, further eliminating women's economic power (Bergstedt, 2016).

By prioritizing the economy, specifically for the purpose of increasing rice surplus and employment rate, Vietnam compromised its commitment to social equity. Even though the compromise brought lower rates of poverty and malnutrition, which in turn improved the lives of all women as a whole, women who lived in rural areas benefited least due to their status as a minority (Packard 2006). The intersectionality between class and gender placed rural women at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

3.2 Economic Impact

Collective agriculture was a fundamental industry in Vietnam's economy after reunification, especially for women in rural areas whose primary jobs were agriculture-related. However, this agricultural approach resulted in periods of low food production, decreased growth, and famine across the country (Kirk and Nguyen 2009). Doi Moi's plan to transform the economy started with privatizing lands and de-collectivizing agriculture. Specifically, Resolution No.10 in Doi Moi obliged agriculture cooperatives to contract land to peasant households in rural areas (Kirk and Nguyen 2009). The government granted each family the power to take ownership of the land, use the capital stock to buy supplies, and reinvest in their family's agricultural businesses. From the outlook, the policy change was undeniably a success: agriculture grew to be the driving force of economic growth, households'

standards of living improved due to better food security, and farmers had personal incentives to work harder (Liu et al. 2020).

However, from a decolonial feminist standpoint, the policy has failed to consider the gendered outcomes from such gender-neutral intentions. Although the government allotted agricultural land rights to both the men and the women of the family, persistent patri-local culture has given the men an upper hand with actual control of the land (Bergstedt, 2016). During the America-Vietnam war, most of the men fought at the forefront of the battle. Meanwhile at home, women assumed the primary roles and leadership positions, from filling in agricultural production to organizing local administration (Goodkind 1995). However, male soldiers' return to their hometowns after the war became synonymous with the reversal

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of women's leadership positions (Duong 2001). Gender stratification increased drastically in the political government, and the number of women in leadership positions on village committees fell from about three thousand in 1974 (before reunification) to eight hundred by 1979 (4 years after reunification) (Porter 1993). By the time Doi Moi was introduced, women claimed less than 10% of the central government body, which shows that the resolutions and clauses in Doi Moi did not equally reflect women's perspectives (Goodkind 1995).

Moreover, the loss and trauma of colonialism and war in Vietnam intensified men's desire to assert control. To compensate for the mental loss and physical pain they experienced, these soldiers constructed a definition of masculinity that centered power and authority. The state reinforced this perception of masculinity by directly shaping the cultural memory to maintain a patriarchal public life (Werner 2006). Any steps closer to the achievement of gender equality during the war were torn down and replaced with the reemergence of Confucian and conservative values in the household. All of these historical factors were not carefully assessed when Doi Moi designed a policy that required only the name of one person in the family for the land tenure certificate (Kirk and Nguyen 2009). As a result of the patriarchal traditions, the husbands took hold of the land, making the wives and other women in the family economically dependent on them. Moreover, in female-headed households, which were concentrated in rural areas, the prejudice against granting loans to families without a male guarantor and the decline of collective distribution generated more poverty. This prejudice originated from the belief that women's physical abilities and labor skills were inferior to that of men. Their ability to enhance their skills was undermined because the time they spent to raise children and take care of elderly family members prevented them from training in their skills (Packard 2006).

Furthermore, the privatization of land made it hard for farmers to acquire land, pushing poor rural women to resort to any hired labor, even if it was harmful, toxic, and heavy. Despite the

"supposed" correlation between masculinity and strength, women often performed hard labor without the aid of automation and worked longer hours than men — especially women of the ethnic minorities who lived in the mountains, who traveled two kilometers to work, and spent the night in the fields (Duong, 2001). Arlie Hochschild, a socialist feminist, coined this phenomenon as the "double burden" in which women's unpaid housework weakened their economic ability. However, the Vietnamese government didn't. Women in rural areas consequently became overrepresented in the most economically vulnerable group (Goodkind 1995). Thus, the unwritten but systemic discrimination against women had been enforced in Doi Moi's agricultural plan.

Besides the agriculture industry, the gender pay gap and gender demographic imbalance in other industries also escalated. In addition to the 500,000 demobilized soldiers and other workers released after the war, Doi Moi's policy to downsize the public sector led to a major unemployment problem in the country. The decision to cut back on state-owned enterprises stemmed from the desire to end the corruption and ineffectiveness of certain numbers of civil servants, following the footsteps of Western capitalistic society (Goodkind 1995). Due to the gender bias in the male-dominated government body, the major restructurings and massive layoffs fell disproportionately on women. The number of female civil servants declined by 27.9 percent from 1989 to 1992, compared to only 22.5 percent for males (Goodkind 1995).

Decolonial socialist feminists explain this job segregation as an effect of business privatization and underestimation of female abilities. Moreover, rural women were often targeted for temporary, supplementary, and unskilled jobs in factories because their very identity as workers is secondary to their familial identities (Mohanty 2003). The gender division of labor in Vietnam reflects Mohanty's analysis: most women were street vendors, in skilled manual work, and factory working jobs, while men were more likely to work in forestry, mineral and energy, construction and transportation (Packard 2006). The perception

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that average wages tend to be lower in industries with a higher concentration of women workers was reinforced. Mohanty's decolonial approach contextualizes this division of labor within the role of colonialism and imperialism in shaping the economic, social, and political structures that marginalize women in the Global South. She argues that the exploitation of rural women is not just a product of capitalism but is also rooted in the legacy of colonialism and imperialism that has created a global system of power relations that favors the west at the expense of the Global South. This power dynamic is reflected in the way multinational corporations and employers exploit cheap labor and resources from developing countries, especially women's labor.

With the growth of industrialization in Vietnam, Bergstedt highlights what other feminist scholars have noted in cases around the world – the increasing association of women with the traditional agricultural sector and men with the world outside the farm and the emerging commercial sector (Bergstedt, 2016).

Doi Moi's plan to integrate with the global economy opened the doors to multinational corporations to extract raw material and set up factory production, requiring cheap labor in rural areas of Vietnam. Women's bodies bore the brunt of the industrialization and this modernization

period in the transnational economy (Drummond 2006).

The exploitation of Third World women by multinational companies isn't new: decolonial feminists have long addressed concerns for the social agency of women who are confined by the capitalist discipline. Foreign-owned joint ventures spurred new concerns about female labor under Doi Moi. By 1995, at least 18.5% women in certain Vietnamese factories worked on a full week schedule with a total of sixty hours per week and an average salary of 50\$ US dollar per month (Tran and Le 1997). But the exploitation of female labor didn't stop there. In certain factories, female workers were physically abused; their mouths were taped over the mouths during assembly, and those who violated rules were locked in restrooms as a form of punishment (Chung 1995).

Needless to say, women's interests, safety, and stability were deeply compromised in exchange for economic growth and international relations as a part of Doi Moi. Lugones (2003) ties this compromise to a system beyond capitalism and places the gender problem in the broader framework of household dynamics, cultural practices, structural bias, and social expectations.

3.3 Socio-Cultural Impact

Behind the increased average wages in Vietnam — a positive effect often attributed to Doi Moi policy — are social implications that were slowly ingrained into the system. Some argue that the increased wages opened up new opportunities for women to relax and entertain, but socialist feminists emphasize that only urban women, who had both money and time, could have this kind of flexibility (Drummond 2006). Economic stratification goes hand in hand with social stratification; rural women suffer from the confinement of conservative Confucian values, which strictly fixate them within the roles of wife and mother.

In particular, the 1986 Law on Marriage and the Family under Doi Moi has solidified

such stereotypical definitions of womanhood and femininity. The law concentrated public discussion with regard to women on motherhood, reproductivity, and family, solidifying women's sole identity as mothers (Phinney 2008). Such oversimplification and overgeneralization of women's identities further justified the patriarchal values in the household and intensified women's internalized misogyny.

The Population and Family Planning Program remained one of Doi Moi's top priorities to jumpstart economic development into the 1990s. Because uncontrolled population growth stood as Vietnam's crucial obstacle to development, Doi Moi policy limited each family to one or two children (Taniguchi 1995). While the objective of

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the family program was to slow down population growth, reduce the high unemployment rate, and encourage small and healthy families, negligence of gender bias in Vietnamese culture has built an even more ingrained system of sexism.

A decolonial feminist approach would have evaluated families' preferences for baby boys before imposing restriction on the number of children in households; these gender biases had integral consequences on the country's population demographic for decades to come. Although not explicitly stated, local and national politics of reproduction help women be responsible for "deciding" the sex of the children, which framed biology as something within their control (Bélanger and Liu 2006). The thinking process was undoubtedly faulted at its core. Taking on the burden of satisfying social expectations and giving birth to a boy, the majority of women utilized different strategies, most harmful and unscientific, to produce a son. Furthermore, because of the one-to-two children restriction, many women turned to abortion the moment they found out that the sex of their fetus was female. These strategies led to increasing imbalance sex ratios at birth, from 97.89:100 baby boys to baby girls in 1970 to 97.35:100 in 1975. The assumption that fertility decline would make son preference disappear didn't assess decolonial explanation of cultural values (Bélanger and Liu 2006). Fertility change isn't synonymous with a change in values or prejudices: as we see in the case of one-to-two family planning, Doi Moi policy further strengthened the bias against daughters. Vietnamese government health officials were responsible for using women as the birth machine, a tool in the nation's control plan, compromising these women's health through unsafe practice of abortion and keeping them in cycles of poverty. Rural women in particular lack access to safe abortion and birth control education; approximately 40% of those women who had abortions returned for a second abortion within three to six months of their first procedure, unintentionally destroying their health and causing more health problems later on (Duong 2001).

The government did not stop at damaging women's reproduction but also their other labor. In 1994, because the new economic calculus rendered women's labor more expensive, maternity leave was cut back from six months to four months so women could contribute more to the economic system (Goodkind 1995). Despite the fact that women's labor lies at the heart of economic development, their effort was often disregarded. Decolonial feminists' approach would also take the traumatic imprint of the war into consideration. Many of the women who were over sixty years old were disabled, ill, and unable to work, young women suffered the cycle of poverty because of overwork and lack of food stability. Doi Moi policy didn't address these issues directly so the postwar impact remained in poor and rural areas (Duong 2001).

Vietnam also underwent educational reforms as a part of Doi Moi policy to produce workers fitted with the requirements of the new economy. In 1991, the State declared that the education system should concentrate on producing a workforce that ensured the implementation of socio-economic goals (Pham 2011). When the economy is characterized by capitalism, Renshaw (1998) claims that teachers' roles would become that of surrogate managers who set worksheets for students to complete by the required deadline instead of educating for higher purposes. The focus on training students to be workers, or more accurately, robots, shifted away the concerns about gender that had always existed in Vietnam's education — the prejudice that girls don't need proper education. In rural areas, female children were often kept home from school to help with housework and support the family's business. Unlike men whose potential and work were praised and recognized, women had to render their labor to economic development from a young age. In addition, because of the lack of education and support, along with the increasingly prolific industry of sex work, many young girls turned to sex work as career paths. The rise in sex work has been partly attributed to the rapid economic growth and adoption of western cultures, both can be traced back to Doi Moi plan to associate

more with the West (Phinney 2008). While sex workers managed to reclaim their economic power, due to the indivisibility of womanhood with motherhood, and of feminine sexuality with innocence, sex workers in Vietnam are shamed and stigmatized for their immorality and ‘social evils’ (Rydström 2006). However, there’s a supply because there is a demand — Doi Moi’s global market economy instigated men’s desire for new sexual experiences outside the home and built

a notion of masculinity correlated to sexualized leisure, generating a growing sex work industry. Husbands’ entitlement and justification for their infidelity originated from the unintended consequences of the rapid socio-economic transformation. Economic stability became the benchmark for successful marriage as wives accepted their husbands’ infidelity to maintain economic and social status (Phinney 2008).

4. Recommendation and Conclusion

The government’s disregard of the country’s colonial history and lack of recognition for women’s labor were ingrained in the resolutions and clauses of Doi Moi policy. Because of such drawbacks, Doi Moi policy indirectly and directly disenfranchised an already-vulnerable group of people — poor women in rural Vietnam — and sacrificed them in exchange for global integration, economic growth, and the maintenance of the status quo. The main finding of this paper is that the Doi Moi policy is ineffective from a socialist decolonial feminist perspective. Drawing from the aforementioned frameworks, I want to make five recommendations to make Doi Moi more beneficial to rural women in Vietnam.

First and foremost, to reverse the harm done to these women, more women should be encouraged to enter local-level and national-level government bodies through the voting process in order for women’s perspectives to be reflected in legal policies. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 2018, women accounted for only 26.7% of members of the National Assembly in Vietnam. While representation isn’t everything, it is one step closer to changes. With women’s input in politics, the government could develop and implement more policies that support women economically and socially.

The second recommendation is to lower public education’s tuition to accommodate young girls in rural areas. In Vietnam, there is a significant disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of access to education. According to an

UNICEF report titled Viet Nam SDGCW Survey 2020–2021, upper secondary school completion rate for rural areas is only 46.4%, compared to 74.8% in urban areas. With the tuition as less of an issue, families could have more incentives to send their daughters to school instead of forcing them to work at an early age. More scholarships programs could be administered to give these girls more opportunities to enter higher education. Equipping women with proper education starts as a foundation for women to assert their voice and place in society.

The third recommendation is for companies to recognize women’s labor instead of taking advantage of them for economic benefits. Women workers in Vietnam are often paid less than men for the same work and are less likely to be promoted to higher positions. According to yearly data obtained from the Vietnam’s Labour Force Surveys spanning from 2011 to 2014, women received an average income of 3,000,000 Dong (equivalent to 1302 US Dollars) less than men per year, which amounts to approximately a month’s worth of income. This pay disparity between men and women was observed across various industries, including the state and non-state sectors, as well as agricultural and non-agricultural domains. In all these sectors, men were found to earn more than women. Paternity leave should be included to engage the husbands in housework that has long been delegated for just women. This solution could also relieve the “double burden” that has troubled women for decades.

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The fourth recommendation is to focus on microfinance programs that specifically target poor, lower-class women. These microfinance programs could both motivate them to start their own businesses and empower them to stop the cycle of poverty. According to the International Finance Corporation, microfinance institutions in Vietnam have helped over 10 million clients access financial services. However, women still face significant barriers in accessing these services due to cultural norms and lack of collateral.

The fifth recommendation relies on grassroots movement, from mass organizations such as the

Women's Union to individual projects, to bring awareness to women's oppression, dismantling the patriarchy from a community level. The Women's Union in Vietnam has been actively working to promote women's rights and gender equality through community-based activities such as education campaigns, vocational training programs, and advocacy for policy changes. By empowering women at the grassroots level, communities can take collective action to challenge gender norms and promote women's rights.

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ANYA BEWE IMI EBEWE:

A Case Study on Othering in the Kingdom of Congo

By Brittany Linus

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon known as “othering” is a process of fundamental differentiation between groups of people. While it exists as a guiding framework for investigating majority-minority dynamics in sociological case studies, it offers comparative literature another lens to interrogate the different socio-cultural expressions rooted in it. Deploying the “othering” framework when investigating how African peoples treat the “other,” utilizing the Kingdom of Kongo as a specific case study, reveals that the associated connotations attached to the phenomenon differ from its European counterpart and are reflected in social interactions with and perceptions of the “other.” This paper discusses how these functional and diverging connotations surrounding “othering” impact how members of the Kingdom of Kongo first interacted with the Portuguese: a group of people most likely perceived as different from the Kongolese community.

Matching the rhythm of my pounding heart, my foot taps against the floor. “Good afternoon,” I mumble into the microphone as the heads in the audience rise slightly to recognize my face. I take in a short breath and stare into the sea of eyes that stare back at me. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Each breath feels heavier than the last. I remind myself that tonight I have only one responsibility: to introduce myself as the mistress of ceremony. I have rehearsed this moment many times. Starting with my first name and ending with a simple adjective that modifies me. I am prepared. I relax, ball my fist, and open my mouth:

“I am Ozioma. I am the Ulu (second daughter) of Onyemaechi and Chinyere, the maternal granddaughter of Onwusiana and Eberechi,

the paternal granddaughter of Irokanulo and Nwaakuchi. I am an ada (daughter) of Imo state, an ada of Umunachi, an ada of the Umugbohonkwo clan, and your mistress of ceremony.”

What I said is not what I rehearsed. Among the confused looks that washed across the faces of the audience members, a few smiled delightfully, for they knew I was a daughter of the soil. Although physically distanced from Africa, and subject to the ongoing institutional stripping of the African identity by virtue of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, I remember my roots. I carry them with me not only as the names of my ancestors, but the worldview from which I, as an Igbo woman, engage with others — engage with “othering.”

| The Connotations of Othering

Othering is a process of fundamental differentiation between groups of people. While commonly explored in comparative literature, othering provides a useful lens for examining majority-minority dynamics in anthropology as an investigative framework for uncovering the ways in which peoples differentiate themselves from one another. By examining the socio-cultural expressions rooted in othering, anthropology can provide a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics and social inequalities that underlie inter-group relations.

Deploying the othering framework when investigating how African peoples treat the “other,” utilizing the Kingdom of Kongo as a specific case study, reveals that the associated connotations attached to the phenomenon differ from her European counterpart and are reflected in social interactions with, and perceptions of the “other.” This paper discusses how these functional and diverging connotations surrounding othering impacted the ways members of the Kingdom of Kongo interacted with the Portuguese — a group

of people most likely perceived as different from the Kongoleses.

The Kingdom of Kongo was a monarchy located in Central Africa during the 15th to 19th centuries with an established trade relationship with Portugal since the 1480s.¹ Tension rose between the Kongoleses and Portuguese once the Portuguese started expanding their economic influence in Central Africa.² Historical recollection of this tension, although biased favorably towards the Portuguese, highlights not only the varying social implications of othering between the two groups, but their diverging cultural, social, and economic backgrounds which inform their perception and treatment of each other. However, the difference in the ways the Kongoleses and Portuguese perceive and treat each other is not just about cultural or social differences, but also about the history of colonization and slavery, which has had a significant impact on the construction of the African identity.

| The Other as Kin

“Anya bewe, imi ebewe,” is an Igbo proverb that reads, “when the eye cries, the nose cries too.” It is our testament of empathy; what affects one person will affect the next. These four words index a philosophy of kinship spanning across various cultures and countries in which an individual stands as a part of a social network defined by social positions and roles.³ Community becomes the custodian of the individual shaped not by the world, but by how they interact with the world.

Throughout the Kingdom of Kongo, social structure based on kinship is reflected in the *kanda* ideology. *Kanda* are the matrilineal descent groups controlling and legitimizing land-ownership and political authority.⁴ The ideology centers unity between the living and dead members of each group. It thus, reckons with

the question of descent when determining land-ownership by signaling connections between one’s self and particular groups, rather than individuals. For example, terms such as “mother,” “father,” and “child” index a collective or group of people rather than individuals with direct biological ties.⁵

This ideology counters the European emphasis on independent self-governance and separateness from one’s social context and surrounding world. Otherwise known as independent self-construal, this contraposition to the Kongoleses focus on kinship prioritizes individual desires, preferences, attributes, and abilities to define one’s self.⁶ The practice of titling within Portuguese culture is an example of independent self-construalism in which an individual is defined by their works or

contributions to their social environment while still remaining separate from it. For example, Prince Henry the Navigator or *Infante Dom Henrique, o Navegador* is the title given to a central political figure who financially supported many of Portugal's maritime expansions and discoveries in the 15th century. While he did not navigate or directly engage in seafaring, his keen interest in and support for exploration by sea earned him a title that recognized his individual desires and abilities. Thus, contextualizing Portuguese philosophy of self is critical in not only understanding how it fundamentally differs from how the Kongolese define one's self, but also in signaling that self-definition is contextual.⁷ Defining the parameters by which the self is enclosed makes it easier to note who is othered through comparison to the self.

Similar to self-definition, othering is contextual as well. Based on one's socio-cultural roots, the treatment of an othered individual or group of people may differ based on location. While othering remains as the process of recognizing differences between groups of people across various cultures, it is negligent to assume that the treatment of those othered is the same regardless of sociocultural context. For example, historical accounts of Portuguese interactions with the African world suggest that the separating of the European self from Africans signals social behaviors of exclusion and dehumanization. In this context, othering is qualified by the term "oppressive," implying that a superior group is maintaining its separation from an inferior one through their view and treatment of them.

The Fashioning of Oppressive Othering

How Zurara Chronicles Dehumanization

To gain insights into the social dynamics between the Portuguese and the Kongolese, one can explore historical accounts of their interactions, such as chronicles of maritime exploration and journalistic archives. *A conquista da Guiné*, written by the Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara, is one such chronicle recording Portuguese interactions with African peoples. The particular scene of interest within the literary archive is Zurara's account of distraught African families being divided up like cattle in a land foreign to them after being stolen from their native lands, forced onto ships, and carried across oceans. The scene is heart-wrenching: faces are bathed in tears while looking up to the height of heaven, cries are met with striking palms carrying weakened bodies onto the ground in despair, and desperate lamentations fall from the mouths of those held captive. Zurara acknowledges the distressing scene by writing that "their humanity makes him weep in pity of their suffering... remembering

that they too are the sons of Adam".⁸ Yet, he does not stop nor comment disapprovingly towards the partitioning process that tears mothers from daughters and fathers from sons.

While Zurara acknowledges that he and the captured African peoples share the same humanity, he nonetheless others these captured Africans by spotlighting their spiritual or cultural customs, phenotypic traits, and African indigeneity. Critical comparison between Zurara's descriptions of the Kongolese and Portuguese paint a superior-inferior power dynamic informed by the social conditions of the African peoples and the Portuguese in the partitioning scene; Zurara not only paints the captured African peoples as incapable of changing their current circumstances, but hopelessly subject to the will of the Portuguese. Weaponizing otherness in this manner situates the Portuguese identity above the African identity, allowing Zurara to not only associate Portuguese identity with authority, but associate the African identity with subservience.

This literary tactic highlights how language can divide, uplift, and disempower humanity while underscoring the urgent need to confront the lasting legacies of enslavement, displacement, and oppression.

Examination of Zurara's descriptions of the captured African peoples illustrates how Portuguese othering dehumanizes the other regardless of their similarities. In particular,

Zurara writes that they were African peoples as white as the Portuguese, "fair to look upon, and well-proportioned".⁹ Although these individuals fit the phenotypic descriptions of the Portuguese, light-skinned African peoples were still enslaved with "mulattos" and those "as Black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body," thus being treated as poorly as their darker-skinned counterparts".¹⁰

How Imaginings Impact Perceptions

As illustrated above, Portuguese othering is a discursive regime of pervasive African imaginings, oftentimes informing Eurocentric and racial ideologies. Written by the renown poet Luís Vaz de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* is an epic poem that supports racial implications of othering through its description of African peoples. Canto V discusses the demise of Don Emmanuel de Souza, a governor of Diu in India, and his family who originate from Portugal.¹¹ In the epic, Africans are referred to as barbarians with no indicators of wealth according to the European context. In comparison, Don Emmanuel de Souza's family is written as being wealthy and civilized, even when removed from their familiar environment.¹² These descriptions indicate the existence of an unexplained hierarchy where European

status is considered superior to African status, and interactions between the two identities reflect this ideology. It builds upon the notion of exclusion paired with Portuguese othering, wherein the separation between the self and other are maintained through social interactions or lack thereof. This example also raises the question of how literature and other forms of art perpetuate racial and cultural ideologies. *Os Lusíadas* is considered a masterpiece in Portuguese literature and is often used to teach students about the country's history and culture. However, its portrayal of Africans as barbarians and the superiority of European civilization can have a lasting impact on readers by reinforcing stereotypes, informing racial discrimination, and validating social hierarchies.

The Fashioning of Integrative Othering

In contrast, Kongolese othering signals for communal incorporation. While Portuguese othering is dichotomous, Kongolese othering is best represented by a continuum with two extremes: "us" and "them." By integrating features of the other within their own cosmology, the Kongolese close the distance between the two extremes, in turn embedding the other within their own social fabric. Examining the evolution of Kongolese cosmology, which refers to the community's conception of themselves in regards to the universe, as it interacted with Portuguese schools of thought reveals a relationship

between self-formation and social implications of othering.¹³ According to this examination, the evolution of Kongolese cosmology through incorporation of Portuguese cultural signifiers is a consequence of Kongolese kinship, which conceives integrative othering.

Historical records of initial interactions between African peoples and the West lack personal African accounts, skewing history to favor the West through quantifiable domination and narration. As a result, historians must reimagine these interactions to expand historical understanding of social perception,

understanding, and engagement among African peoples. This approach requires critical analysis of historical records to better understand the connotations and consequences of othering. In the context of the Kingdom of Kongo and Portugal, this means analyzing available historical accounts of Kongolese cosmology, as a purview conceived from the integration of Christian beliefs introduced by Portuguese missionaries into Kongolese cosmology, thus reimagining Christianity in Central Africa — Kongo Christianity.

How History Defines Kongo Christianity

In his article titled “Afro-Christian Syncretism in the Kingdom of Kongo,” John Thornton, a historian specializing in African affairs, investigates the harmonizing of indigenous Kongolese cosmology with Christianity as introduced by Portuguese missionaries. Thornton challenges the academic use of the term “syncretism” when referring to the incorporation of Christian features into Kongolese cosmology by acknowledging how unfixed cultural incorporation is to the African identity, thereby implying that the use of syncretism to capture solely African phenomena reflects a process of othering in the Western context.¹⁴ To make this assertion, Thornton decentralizes the Portuguese worldview and imagines himself as a part of an integrative, Kongolese community receiving Christian doctrine for the first time. Through this paradigm shift, Thornton notes that the development of Kongo Christianity is an embracing process of cultural harmonization: a process that occurred in Ancient Rome, in Medieval Europe, and during Reformation.¹⁵

Cultural harmonization requires sensitivity: where knowledge of cultural diversity is married to an acceptance of cultural diversity.¹⁶ The cultivation of a culturally sensitive social consciousness involves a shift towards using culturally sensitive terminology in academic discourse. This shift combats the ongoing Western academic practice of othering the African experience through terminology, such as “syncretism,” which is a form of oppression seeking to reduce everything else outside of the Western context.

The Problematics of Syncretism

Critical analysis of Thornton’s argument raises a concern of how pervasive oppressive othering is in written Western history. The use of “syncretism” to describe distinctly African phenomena, even though this phenomena is cross-cultural, is a Western attempt “to colonize and take over for one’s own brutal use... [turning] everything else into a mere other.”¹⁷ While accounting for the Kingdom of Kongo developing and practicing Kongo Christianity, written Portuguese records adamantly categorize the merging of indigenous Kongolese cosmology with Christian doctrine as either blasphemous, syncretic and therefore “something different,” or not Christian at all. A hierarchy of righteousness along Christian lines is implied through the deployment of the term “syncretism” and its connotations, placing Portuguese Christian belief systems and practices above Kongolese Christian cosmologies. Thornton’s argument not only underscores the need for culturally sensitive terminology in academic discourse, but calls for critical examination of how these terminologies are used when developing nuanced understandings of cultural diversity and its implications.

Connection Through Change

In contrast with Portugal’s overall linguistic and literary othering and reduction of African peoples, the Kingdom of Kongo demonstrates a desire to construct a connection with the other through cultural change. For example, Christianity was embraced by Kongolese nobility from the start of contact, thereby demonstrating an inclination towards accepting or incorporating features of Portuguese culture within the social fabric of the Kingdom.¹⁸ The adoption of foreign religious traditions within local cosmology is not a concept unfamiliar to African peoples; however, the Kingdom of Kongo is an example of an African community that changes the focus of *othered* religious practices, namely Christian values, when it is incorporated into its local cosmology. While Kongo Christianity emphasizes the Christian

concept of salvation into earthly protection, the Portuguese focus on the Immaculate Conception according to Christian doctrine.¹⁹

This construction of a connection through the embedding of components of Portuguese culture into the social networks of the Kongo community did not solely occur along religious lines. The Kingdom of Kongo, specifically its nobility, were introduced to Portuguese literacy through Portuguese missionaries. While investigating initial African-European contacts, Bernard et al. discovered that the introduction of Portuguese literacy into the region was viewed favorably by the Kongolese nobility since it strengthened their economic power. Portuguese literacy was rapidly embraced by the Kongolese to enhance administrative efficiency and to correspond with fellow kings in Europe.²⁰ With time, educational pipelines between Kongolese nobility to Europe for education were developed.

Another example of the Kingdom of Kongo striving to relate to the other is through the creation of visual and material objects. A physical semantic link between the Kongolese and Portuguese is represented by important objects and traditions within the Kongolese culture, often decorated with symbols that index features

of Portuguese culture, such as Christianity. For example, Kongolese swords were stylized with European framing and adornments with Christian elements, such as crosses or crucifixes. These swords still retain their function as status symbols still being made out of iron: an indicator of power of Kongo kings by symbolizing the stability of trade networks and commercial transactions between neighboring African communities.²¹ Additionally, *sangramento* performances reflected the interlacing streams of Kongolese culture and Christian traditions under the patronage of Portugal. The performance consisted of two acts. In the first act, the dancers wore traditional Kongolese attire and utilized bows and arrows. In the second act, the dancers changed into European-styled embroidered clothing, trading in their bow and arrows for firearms.²² Through dance and power objects, the Kingdom of Kongo adopted and incorporated visual expressions and stances of power and nobility within the European Christian tradition, in turn transforming Kongolese culture when accepting, embracing, or incorporating the other.²³ This phenomenon indicates a willingness on behalf of the Kongolese to construct a connection with the other through cultural change.

| Embracing Cultural Sensitivity

Othering is the process of fundamental differentiation contextualized by culture. While the process of recognizing an individual or a group of people as being different from one's self remains similar between the Kongolese and Portuguese, how each group treats the "other" is a vital point of comparative analysis between the European and African worlds and cosmologies. In synonymizing the other as African peoples, the Portuguese engage in social interactions that exclude and dehumanize African indigeneity. In contrast, the Kongolese seek to relate with the other as shown by its incorporation of Portuguese cultural signifiers into the social fabric of the Kingdom.

A comparison of Kongolese and Portuguese othering not only offers insight into how context

informs social interactions, but acknowledges that this comparison is a nuanced discussion between historical context, power dynamics, and individual agency. It also raises questions about the impact of historical records in developing or perpetuating racial ideologies, social hierarchies, and validating discrimination among peoples.

Othering is not a static or monolithic phenomenon; it is an evolving cultural praxis with vast social implications. The Kingdom of Kongo's approach to othering demonstrates the importance of kinship ties in shaping social interactions. By integrating Portuguese culture into their own, the Kongolese establish closer relationships with the Portuguese, rather than excluding them. This contrasts with the Portuguese approach of not only categorizing

African peoples as inferior, but treating them as such. The Kongolese emphasis on maintaining familial ties highlights the importance of social connections in shaping the process of othering. The preservation of familial connections allowed the Kongolese to establish and evolve their identity and agency when facing external pressures from European powers.

As I stand here, rooted in the names of my ancestors, I am reminded of the agency I have in not only perceiving myself, but also others. Exploring the Kingdom of Kongo's perception and treatment of the other presents to us an example of othering based in the recognition, acceptance, and celebration of differences. Such an example spotlights the impact of perception on social engagement, encouraging others to develop and embrace cultural sensitivity. In the words of Audre Lorde: "It is not those differences between

us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions, which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation."²⁴ If we dare to challenge our own perceptions of others to truly see one another, acknowledging and understanding the varying threads shaping our identities, then we hold the key to dismantling the barriers that separate us. By redefining our perception of others with empathy and respect, we can forge a path towards unity, cultivating an inclusive society that transcends the confines of prejudice and division. Let us answer Audre Lorde's call for critical self-reflection with a response of critical compassion, so that we can embark on a collective journey of empathy, respect, and transformation where our differences become bridges that connect us, rather than walls that divide us.

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Immigrant Assimilation Trajectories in the United States

Products of Cultural Capital and Contexts of Reception

By Anna Peronne

ABSTRACT

Portes and Zhou (1993) introduced segmented assimilation theory as an explanation for various racial-ethnic groups' differing assimilation trajectories. However, as supported by Stepick and Stepick (2010) and Kalogrides (2009), segmented assimilation theory problematically blames native non-white groups for negatively influencing immigrant populations. Instead, after exploring and critiquing Chua and Rubenfeld's (2014) cultural explanation for differing assimilation trajectories, I argue that social structures in the United States require immigrant groups to rely on cultural capital. Because of this necessary reliance, I support that racial-ethnic immigrant groups' differing assimilation trajectories can be explained by their available cultural capital and their positioning in United States social structures. For the purpose of this paper, I define successful assimilation as analogous to academic achievement because of its significance for upward mobility and economic attainment within the United States' capitalist structures.

Immigration remains a contentious topic in American politics. But, behind these debates, significant disparities exist between the economic mobility and academic achievement of second-generation racial-ethnic immigrant groups, particularly between Asian Americans

and Latinx/Hispanic Americans. As Stepick and Stepick(2010) argue, "In educational achievement, Asians and particularly children of Chinese immigrants...tend to outperform both natives and other immigrant groups," while "children of immigrant Mexicans...tend to perform especially

poorly compared to the native white population and other children of immigrants" (p. 1152). In an effort to explain the diverse assimilation outcomes of various racial-ethnic immigrant groups in the United States, Portes and Zhou (1993) introduced segmented assimilation theory. Their approach defines three "distinct forms of adaptation": "integration into the white middle-class," "assimilation into the underclass," and "deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values" (Portes & Zhou 1993, p. 82). However, the foundation of their theory, that assimilation into native non-white populations (the "underclass") necessarily leads to downward assimilation (low social and economic status coupled with social and economic immobility) is inherently flawed and wrongly accusatory. Why then do Asian second-generation immigrants tend to experience greater educational success and upward mobility than Latinx/Hispanic second-generation immigrants even when controlling for their parents' socioeconomic status? I argue that a group's assimilation trajectories are shaped by their cultural capital, which encompasses their understanding of and

belief in the American system, as well as their context of reception, which is shaped by social-political structures and their experiences of discrimination and stereotyping.

In the following paper, I first review Portes and Zhou's (1993) theory of segmented assimilation and offer various critiques of their approach. I then review Chua and Rubenfeld's (2014) cultural explanation for diverse assimilation trajectories and evaluate the meritorious and flawed aspects of their position. Finally, I support that social structures in the United States require immigrant groups to rely on cultural capital; thus, cultural capital and contexts of reception primarily impact a racial-ethnic groups' assimilation trajectories. For this paper, I use educational achievement as a measure of success because of "the significance of educational achievement and attainment in determining individuals' life chances" in the context of capitalist America (Kalogrides 2009, p. 159). Additionally, following the definition provided by Kalogrides (2019), I understand second-generation immigrants as "those who were born in the United States and have at least one foreign-born parent" (p. 165).

Segmented Assimilation Theory and Misconceptions of Downward Assimilation

Portes and Zhou (1993) offer a particularly grim perspective on the assimilation prospects of immigrant groups, asserting that association with native non-white groups can "prove a ticket to permanent subordination and disadvantage" marked by downward assimilation (p. 96). They argue that non-white native groups, in response to experiences of discrimination and ostracization, adopt "an adversarial stance toward the white mainstream" and establish "reactive subcultures" where "school achievement is defined as

antithetical to ethnic solidarity" (Portes & Zhou 1993, p. 81, 89). Portes and Zhou (1993) claim that unless youth "remain firmly ensconced in their respective ethnic communities," Mexican immigrants, in particular, will join these reactive subcultures, reject mainstream views of success, and experience downward assimilation (p. 81). However, this argument problematically identifies certain nation-of-origin groups as inherently vulnerable to downward assimilation and blames native non-white groups for imparting "harmful"

cultures on second-generation immigrant youth. Portes and Zhou's argument relies on a limited understanding of minority cultures, misses opportunities to critique social structures, and closely reflects cultural determinism, which claims that certain groups experience lower levels of success because of their cultural values (Stepick & Stepick 2010).

Suspicious of Portes and Zhou's theory, Kalogrides (2009) uses the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), a nationally representative sample of high school seniors, to empirically test segmented assimilation theory's suggestion that "achievement...may stagnate or decline across generations in disadvantaged schools" among Latino students (p. 164). According to segmented assimilation, immigrant students at advantaged versus disadvantaged schools (based on the SES of the student population) should experience different patterns of assimilation. However, Kalogrides (2009) negates this hypothesis. She argues that most second-generation immigrants experience upward mobility from their parents, and "there is no evidence of 'downward assimilation' in low-income schools" (p. 176). Although her argument focuses on disproving downward assimilation across generations rather than comparing academic achievement across racial groups (or

to the "standard" white population), Kalogrides' (2009) research still supports that "achievement trajectories across generations do not depend on the economic level of the school students attend" (p. 176). Regardless of the wealth of surrounding communities, students experience the same assimilation trajectories, disproving Portes and Zhou's (1993) argument, which attributes assimilation patterns to characteristics of proximate communities.

In addition to Kalogrides' (2009) critique of segmented assimilation, Stepick and Stepick's (2010) literature review, which explores explanations for multiple paths of assimilation, also problematizes Portes and Zhou's (1993) argument. They argue that Portes and Zhou wrongly blame native minority groups, an extension of cultural determinism which "[claims] the poor are poor because of the values they choose to adopt, and not because of structural impediments like racism and poor educational institutions" (Stepick & Stepick 2010, p. 1157). Portes and Zhou's (1993) argument of segmented assimilation relies on an offensively negative characterization of native non-white groups, and Stepick and Stepick (2010) criticize segmented assimilation for claiming that certain minority cultures negatively influence second-generation immigrants.

Chua and Rubenfeld's Cultural Blame

With segmented assimilation theory's issues, we must look to other explanations for racial-ethnic immigrant groups' diverse assimilation patterns. Chua and Rubenfeld (2014), in their book *The Triple Package*, present a cultural explanation for these trends. They claim that certain groups have "the triple package:" a "deeply internalized belief in [their] group's...superiority," insecurity or "an anxious uncertainty about [their] worth or place in society," and impulse control or "the

ability to resist temptation" (Chua & Rubenfeld 2014, p. 8-10). They argue that simultaneously feeling superior and insecure drives groups to prove themselves, and a superiority complex can provide an "ethnic armor" that protects against any experiences of discrimination (Chua & Rubenfeld, 2014). Notably, many children of immigrants experience "anxiety about redeeming parental success," and while this sentiment persists across immigrant groups, many Asian

immigrants believe in “family honor,” where individual accomplishments or failures reflect the entire family (Chua & Rubenfeld 2014, p. 109-10). This condition likely influences Asian American immigrants’ notable educational achievement.

However, Chua and Rubenfeld’s (2014) cultural explanation is imperfect. For one, the “Triple Package” argument fails to explain why non-successful groups do not have impulse control. Simply stating some cultures cannot or do not practice delayed gratification or work hard for long term goals seems problematically similar to cultural determinism. Although one could argue that Chua and Rubenfeld simply point out that impulse control is beneficial within the context of capitalist America and is not an

innately good or bad quality, it still “overstates the causal strength of culture over structure” (Stepick & Stepick 2010, p. 1157). Additionally, Chua and Rubenfeld (2014) assert that while Asians are not an innately superior racial-ethnic group, they claim, “They’re working harder at it” (p. 172). Chua and Rubenfeld completely miss the mark in their argument. To “work harder at it” requires a deep understanding of American systems (for example, knowing how to gain acceptance into top New York high schools). The central conclusion is not that some groups work harder; rather, some groups have critical cultural capital and benefit more than others from their contexts of reception in the United States.

The Benefits of Cultural Capital for Assimilation Trajectories

Flawed social structures in the United States disadvantage certain immigrant groups, which necessitates a reliance on cultural capital to provide an understanding of and belief in the American system. In terms of supporting educational achievement, this capital “[helps] locate and navigate the resources in the US educational system” and may look like shared community knowledge of after school programs and extra curriculars and an understanding of the college process (Stepick & Stepick 2010, p. 1160). However, research suggests that Latinx/Hispanic immigrants and Asian immigrants tend to bring different types of capital which benefit them distinctly in American society. Waldinger and Feliciano (2004), in their analysis of Mexican immigrants in the 1996-2002 Current Population Survey (CPS), found that Mexican immigrants held great social capital. They argued that Mexican immigrants are “rewarded...for *whom*

they know” with jobs through these tight social connections (Waldinger & Feliciano 2004, p. 384, emphasis in original). Waldinger and Feliciano (2004) provide the example that while “landless Mexican *campesinos* may be poor in financial resources...they are wealthy in social capital, which they can readily convert into jobs and earnings in the United States” (p. 384).

On the other hand, Zhou and Xiong (2005) examine the strong cultural capital Asian American immigrants possess. Zhou and Xiong (2005) analyze Asian Americans in San Diego based on the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey (CILS) (a non-representative sample), to illustrate the tremendous diversity of immigrant experiences within the Asian American population. They attribute Asian American’s assimilation outcomes partially to their ethnic community resources, arguing that because Asian immigrants and their children

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"[live] in a society that is highly stratified not only by class but also by race...their success depends disproportionately on family *and* ethnic community resources" (Zhou & Xiong 2005, p. 1149, emphasis in original). Notably, their argument addresses the influence of social systems (like racism and classism) and how they force a reliance on cultural capital. The distinct capital brought and attained by racial-ethnic immigrant groups impacts their assimilation trajectories.

Stepick and Stepick (2010) build from Zhou and Xiong's (2005) understanding of ethnic community resources to examine how cultural capital provides critical knowledge supporting Asian Americans' success within American systems. Stepick and Stepick (2010) argue that since "school-based counseling in low-income schools is usually underfunded and lacking necessary resources to help students effectively," children of immigrants must rely on cultural capital and group solidarity to share information and resources necessary to climb the U.S. social ladder (p. 1160). Specifically, "cross-class solidarity...provides information and assistance in obtaining the best education possible" as middle-class Chinese "share their cultural capital...by informing those of working-class backgrounds which public schools are best and which after-school academies produce the most successful students" (Stepick & Stepick 2010 p. 1155, 1160). Critically, the cultural capital available within cross-class Asian immigrant groups supports children of immigrants navigate American systems and structures, leading

to their success. While many Latinx/Hispanic groups hold significant social capital, this capital does not aid second-generation immigrants in working American educational systems to the same extent cultural capital would.

However, there is a catch to the concept of social versus cultural capital. For an immigrant to benefit from either type of capital, they must trust that the system will reward their efforts. As Chua and Rubenfeld (2014) assert in their book, "If people don't trust the system, if they think society is lying when it tells them that discipline and hard work will be rewarded—if they don't think that people like them can really make it—they have no incentive to engage in impulse control" (p. 180). While Chua and Rubenfeld focus on impulse control, their statement can be generalized to suggest that trust of the system is required for upward mobility. If youth are "skeptical about the role of the education system as a vehicle for upward mobility," they may respond to this skepticism and distrust "with opposition to the mainstream institution" and sunken hopes for their futures (Kalogrides 2009, p. 162). Historically, social structures in America have disproportionately disadvantaged certain people groups, often on the account of race or ethnic group membership. I suggest that Latinx/Hispanic immigrant groups are disproportionately disadvantaged by these systems, and it is likely that the legacy of these historical structural failures shape immigrant groups' desire and ability to take advantage of the cultural or social capital available to them.

The Context: Practices and Structures that Shape Assimilation Trajectories

In addition to the benefits of cultural capital, some immigrant groups benefit from the conditions of their context of reception in the U.S. As Zhou and Xiong (2005) define, contexts of reception include “positions in the system of racial stratification, government policies, labor market conditions, public attitudes, and the strength and viability of ethnic communities in the United States” (p. 1123). Among these contexts lie stereotype-informed social expectations and experiences of discrimination. Research illustrates that “merely reminding people of a negative group stereotype...can worsen their performance,” and the opposite phenomenon, stereotype boost, exists too (Chua & Rubenfeld 2014, p. 78). Notably, in a study of “Asian and Hispanic American high schoolers in Southern California,” researchers found that “even after controlling for socioeconomic status, positive stereotypes and ingrained expectations about superior Asian academic achievement... significantly contributed to the exceptional academic outcomes of the children of Asian American immigrants” (Chua & Rubenfeld 2014, p. 79). People are extremely susceptible to the influence of stereotypes and are positively (stereotype boost) or negatively (stereotype threat) impacted based on their racial-ethnic group membership. Critically, widespread stereotypes exist praising Asian Americans for their academic achievement and condemning Latinx/Hispanic students to low educational achievement, impacting their respective assimilation patterns in America.

In addition to stereotype threat and boost, non-dominant groups face discrimination and prejudice because of unjust structures within the United States, further shaping their assimilation trajectories. Stepick and Stepick

(2010) claim that Mexican families “confront prejudice and discrimination and often have difficulty obtaining a legal immigration status” (p. 1161). They assert that while Chinese immigrants may have low education, they generally do not face as much discrimination as the Mexican community (Stepick & Stepick 2010). While this claim is outdated with the recent racialization of COVID-19, due to historical legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which significantly limited immigration from Asia, the type of discrimination and stereotypes faced by Asian Americans tend to focus on “[reinforcing] the stereotype of the ‘forever foreigner,’” while Latinx/Hispanic immigrants are more likely to be targeted for their immigration status, socioeconomic status, or employment status (Zhou & Xiong 2005, p. 1139).

Finally, since I use educational achievement as a measure of successful assimilation, we must also critique the American school system which institutionally disadvantages students living in low-income areas, contributing to another negative context of reception. As Kalogrides (2009) asserts, “since public school attendance in the United States is based on place of residence, these economic and social influences experienced in neighborhoods are also felt in the public schools” (p. 162). While this does not mean students attending poor schools necessarily experience downward assimilation, less school support requires students to turn to ethnic community resources and cultural capital. Once again, different racial-ethnic immigrant groups tend to carry different types of capital which differentially shape their assimilation experiences. Additionally, racism in school practices must be addressed. Many researchers note that although “adversarial behavior” is

present across all racial groups (whereas Portes and Zhou (1993) attribute it specifically to “inner-city minority youths”), these “behaviors in the context of the US racist structures...lead to more severe consequences for blacks and Latinos who engage in such oppositional behaviors”

(Waldinger & Feliciano 2004; Stepick & Stepick 2010, p. 1158; Portes & Zhou 1993, p. 81). School discrimination in management and punishment practices consistently target Latinx/Hispanic students, shaping their contexts of reception and their educational achievement trajectories.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have critiqued cultural explanations and supported structural explanations for different patterns of assimilation; nevertheless, my argument oversimplifies a complex process filled with intra-group diversity. For one, the use of “Asian American” and “Latinx/Hispanic American” hides great intra-group diversity within these immigrant populations, including nations of origin, socioeconomic statuses, educational attainments, and reasons for immigration. Additionally, cases of exceptional success and notable challenges exist for all racial-ethnic immigrant groups. Individual assimilation trajectories are also likely impacted by how they understand their racial-ethnic identities, their relationship with their ethnic communities and native communities, and family structures (Zhou & Xiong 2005; Stepick & Stepick 2010). Finally, I equate success with educational achievement among second-generation immigrants, a limited view of assimilation that fails to consider other measures like sense of belonging or community. While this definition functions within the context of American capitalism, it likely disproportionately benefits certain groups who buy into the capitalist narrative and are familiar with its structure.

Instead of Portes and Zhou’s (1993) segmented assimilation theory which problematically blames non-white native groups for negatively influencing

second-generation immigrants and shaping their assimilation trajectories, availability of cultural capital and a group’s context of reception explain diverse assimilation outcomes. Similar to Portes and Zhou, Chua and Rubenfeld’s (2014) “Triple Package” argument misses opportunities to examine structural benefits and hurdles; instead, they engage a deficit-based approach and reflect aspects of cultural determinism in their arguments.

As I have argued instead, flawed social structures require a reliance on cultural capital, and studies support that different racial-ethnic immigrant groups in the U.S. tend to access different types of capital (i.e., Asian Americans with cultural capital providing knowledge to navigate American systems and Latinx/Hispanic Americans with social capital supporting employment). Apart from the benefits of cultural capital on educational achievement, groups’ contexts of reception shape their assimilation trajectories, including the impacts of stereotyping and discrimination. Significantly, blanket statements asserting that some immigrant groups are simply ‘more successful’ are incredibly problematic; social-political contexts and availability of resources shape and define various immigrant groups’ experiences.

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“Unemployment for All”

Media Misrepresentations of an Occupational Revolution

By Rishi Verma

ABSTRACT

The Great Resignation was an unprecedented social phenomenon that emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Despite the recovering economy, the Resignation witnessed a large-scale exodus of employees from their jobs. The complex nature of societal changes during this time has contributed to a lack of comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. In particular, many corporations dismissed the Resignation as a temporary trend triggered by government policies. This paper employs historical, economic, and sociological lenses to explore the multifaceted causes of the Great Resignation, contextualizing the movement amidst rising worker discontent. I argue that the Resignation should be recognized as a legitimate labor movement in its own right, highlighting the disconnect between corporate discourse and workers' lived experiences. This paper emphasizes the need for ethical and meaningful progress by bridging this disconnect and fostering a deeper understanding of the Resignation as a significant social movement.

“This ain’t the american dream they keep tryna sell us” - (u/say10)

“What are you going to do, fire me?” – u/bluepiehax

“It’s a toxic environment with ignorant people at the helm.
I won’t be in tomorrow or ever again” – u/hestolemysmile

“I quit. And go fuck yourself” – u/tylerro2

A collection of text messages posted on the subreddit r/AntiWork from workers to their bosses

“Unemployment for all, not just the rich!” So reads the banner for r/AntiWork, one of the fastest-growing communities on the online social network Reddit. The subreddit consists of self-proclaimed “idlers,” an allusion championing idleness and rebelling against the Protestant work ethic (Weber 1904), with ideologies ranging from progressive to anarcho-communist. The

top posts depict workers critiquing modern labor practices under capitalism and subverting their employers, with some seeking to abolish work altogether. What began as a fringe, far-left movement imagining a world in which no one had to work has rapidly become mainstream. The subreddit grew rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic, ballooning from just

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13,000 subscribers in 2019 to 1.7 million in 2022, and is filled with employees detailing their dissatisfaction with exploitative working conditions and dramatically quitting their jobs in text messages to their bosses.

These immensely popular text exchanges are part of why the subreddit was described by the annual Reddit recap as the “poster child of the Great Resignation” (Codrea-Rado 2021), a term ascribed to a broader economic trend beginning in early 2021 in which millions of workers resigned in an unprecedented fashion. As the COVID-19 pandemic led to a year of stringent lockdowns starting in March 2020, millions of workers were laid off and the quit rate fell to a seven-year low, as is typical of a recession. As vaccines soon became widely available and the world began to economically recover in 2021, the unemployment rate fell to pre-pandemic levels. Yet, a record number of Americans paradoxically quit their jobs in a phenomenon known as the Great Resignation, or the Big Quit. More than 4.5 million workers quit in the month of November alone, contributing to a total of 33 million resignations in 2021, an astounding statistic that accounts for more than a fifth of the US workforce and represents an all-time high (Zagorsky 2022). The movement shows no signs of stopping; a recent study noted that close to 55% of workers plan to look for a new job within the next year (Foster 2021). As we gradually emerge in a post-pandemic society, with companies and politicians urging a ‘return to normalcy,’ it is clear the labor force wants anything but.

While the existence of the Great Resignation is difficult to dispute, its causes are far more nuanced and strongly debated. The recent origins of the movement as well as its ongoing and evolving nature have led to a mess of media headlines, each professing to uncover the true cause of the Great Resignation. Many journalists have argued for a simple secret ingredient which, if resolved, would suddenly lead to a return to pre-pandemic normalcy. These have led to numerous attempts to reframe and redefine the movement in accordance: the “Great Discontent” (Gandhi and Robison 2021), the “Great Renegotiation”

(Rosalsky 2022), the “Great Redirection” (Mellon 2022), the “Great Retirement” (Olen 2022), and the “Great Rethink” (Krugman 2021) are just a few of the many phrases that have appeared on the cover of newspapers like the New York Times in recent months. Despite the incredibly varied rhetoric surrounding the Great Resignation, two primary intertwined narratives have captured corporate and political media. In these circles, it has become popular to argue that the movement is nothing but a reaction to present economic conditions and that younger generations are entitled and lazy.

In this paper, I argue that there is a foundational disconnect between corporate discourse and workers’ lived experiences. The corporate preoccupation with extrinsic factors contributes to a deliberate misunderstanding of popular sentiment and a dismissive rhetoric that will ultimately shift the way society views work. In order to navigate the multitudes of causal factors that have been proposed for the Great Resignation, I develop a three-pronged approach that understands the movement’s immediate context, economic factors, and broader sociological trends. I first walk through the pandemic as an inciting incident for the movement and discuss the numerous short-term desires of quitting workers. I then refute the economic factors that corporations argue have financed the Great Resignation and provide alternative perspectives. Finally, I understand the changing societal conceptions of work by tracing worker discontent across the previous decade. I contextualize the Great Resignation amid broader sociological trends and thus understand the Great Resignation as a labor movement in its own right. I then make clear that corporations are not treating the movement seriously and that this response is fundamentally flawed. It is only by viewing the Resignation through this lens that corporations can draft a correct and ethical response that both preserves the current system and returns agency to the workforce.

Short-term Triggers

Most scholars agree that the Great Resignation originated as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. Though other causal and sustaining factors have been proposed, from remote work to tight labor markets to worker burnout, the timing of the Resignation makes it clear that the pandemic was the proverbial ‘straw that broke the camel’s back.’ Connel Fullenkamp, a professor of economics at Duke University, first notes that the pandemic has eliminated thousands of local businesses, as many small firms could not survive reduced demand amidst a year of lockdowns. Some workers simply do not have jobs to return to, and even though there are more jobs than workers, “these jobs aren’t necessarily in the same places where the unemployed people are” (Fullenkamp, in Hartsoe 2021). In addition, a large portion of the Great Resignation has been in service-oriented industries, like hotels and restaurants, which involve close contact with consumers. With a large portion of the country remaining unvaccinated and with constant resurgences in COVID-19 cases due to novel variants, workers may be reluctant to accept the health risks of returning to service industries (Hoff 2021). In particular, many schools and daycare centers have not reopened, which has led to cascading effects as workers in other industries are forced to remain at home to care for their young children without other childcare options (Hartsoe 2021). Women, who are much more likely to assume the additional burdens of childcare and housework responsibilities than men, have resigned at greater rates, and the gender gap is highest in states with the greatest childcare disruptions (Pandey 2022). Alongside parents, millions of baby boomers have left the workforce. Elderly populations are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic, and many have chosen to simply fast-track their retirement rather than return to the workforce and risk catching the virus (Olen 2022). Between COVID-19 exposure, a lack of childcare facilities, retirees, and lost jobs, the pandemic has made employment dangerous

and sometimes impossible, even for workers that desire to return to work.

While these health-related factors are important for a contextual understanding of the Great Resignation, they are largely minimized in both mainstream and corporate media. Vaccines have become widely available, and COVID-19 is beginning to be treated as endemic, rather than a pandemic. As society recovers, health concerns will ultimately decrease in importance. However, the impacts of the pandemic have not been limited to just the demographics most at-risk. Anthony Klotz, a professor studying workplace resignations at Texas A&M University, who both predicted the movement and coined the term “Great Resignation” (Cohen 2021), views burnout and exhaustion as some of the driving factors. The pandemic accentuated workplace stresses and was a constant source of uncertainty and negativity (Ducharme 2021). As employees began remote work during lockdowns, the boundaries between work-life and home-life quickly vanished. Workers had little time off and were forced to take on longer hours to compensate for virus-related disruptions, which had the most prominent impacts on parents struggling to take care of and school their children on top of their work (Modestino et al. 2021). Workers in service industries were especially hard hit: the pandemic exacerbated already irregular work schedules, and many were forced to police unruly customers refusing to obey mask mandates and other regulations. Staffing shortages further increased responsibilities, resulting in a vicious cycle of burnout and resignations (Johanson 2021). As the pandemic seemed to continue with no end in sight, these workers chose to simply quit industries that treated them as disposable and to prioritize their mental health.

The issue of burnout has also highlighted companies’ lackluster responses. Even though the World Health Organization defines burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” (“Occupational Stress” 2019), corporations have largely treated

burnout as a workers' problem. Instead of fixing the underlying job stresses that are causing burnout, the emphasis in white-collar industries has largely been on simple fixes that workers can perform, like practicing yoga, self-care, and meditation, or seeking out support groups (Barton et al. 2022). While these strategies have been proven scientifically to improve mental health, they are ultimately insufficient. Christina Maslach, creator of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the primary scientific measure of burnout, notes, "none of these strategies will ever be successful if they place all the onus on the worker" (Maslach, in Ducharme 2021). As the Great Resignation completes its second year, some firms have finally begun to address burnout. Companies, especially in the tech industry, have attempted to identify and cancel unnecessary meetings and have held workshops to foster empathy and resilience. LinkedIn, Bumble, and HubSpot have given workers an extra week of paid leave (Colvin 2021), and while these measures might appear to be making serious progress, they are ultimately more performative than effective. The fact that the best solution that companies can offer is to instruct employees not to come to work raises serious questions about the very nature of work and the harms it may be causing. This reveals a fundamental disconnect between corporate rhetoric and worker desires. Even the most worker-friendly corporations have failed to address the root causes of burnout, instead preferring simple solutions like additional time off that don't require deep reflection about work-related stresses. Workers have described these measures as a "hollow gesture" and a "Band-Aid" — a week of vacation cannot make up for a year of poor work-life balances (Ducharme 2021). For blue-collar workers, even less progress has been made. In industries like fast-food, nothing has changed to address the long hours and uncertain schedules or to support workers in the face of obnoxious customers. Though the circumstances strongly differ across industries, workers have collectively realized that they are being taken advantage of by their employers.

Closely related to burnout, toxic workplaces have only worsened over the pandemic. The r/

AntiWork community has rallied in its protest against poor working conditions. The thousands of "idlers" who have posted about their resignations decry toxic hustle culture, seeking better work-life balances. In that sense, the term anti-work is a bit of a misnomer, as the community is explicitly "not against effort, labor, or being productive," as many companies perceive them ("r/AntiWork Wiki"). Instead, members maintain that they would be willing to return to work provided that labor conditions improve and that work features less prominently in their lives, painting a clear picture of what companies can and should do to address the Great Resignation. Work is not problematic in and of itself, but rather in its present manifestation under capitalism. This is necessarily accompanied by "exploitative economic relations" and "hierarchical social relations at the workplace," which is reflected in the numerous anti-boss posts ("r/AntiWork Wiki"). This rhetoric is ultimately proving effective at driving away employees: a note by Goldman Sachs claimed that the subreddit poses a long-term risk to labor force participation (Cheung 2021). Rather than avoid work altogether, the goal of r/AntiWork is a recognition of the right of one to self-respect and their own free time.

In order to obtain more free time and improve their work-life balances, many workers have sought the continuation of remote work. First introduced due to the pandemic, remote work has eliminated extended commutes, expensive meals at the cafeteria, pointless meetings, and the constant surveillance of supervisors. Both productivity and mental well-being have skyrocketed and people can spend more time with their families, all from the comforts of their own homes ("State of Remote Work" 2021). Several surveys have found that between half and three-quarters of all employees want to work from home for at least half the week, with most preferring a hybrid schedule instead of a full return to the office (Maurer 2021). Despite clear preferences for telework and improvements in productivity for companies, many employers have begun to demand workers return to office buildings — most notably, Apple and Google. A series of interviews with mid-level and senior-

level executives revealed a significant disconnect between workers and decision-makers. Corporate circles have largely focused on the experiences of leaders, who experienced few of the stresses that lower-level employees faced and thus enjoyed both the sense of community and control present in physical buildings. They explicitly ignore large-scale surveys of workers which reveal strong preferences for telework, instead assuming that the workforce, similar

to their own beliefs, would rather commute to the office (Tsipursky 2021). By prioritizing the perspectives of business executives, this rhetoric silences the voices of employees and perpetuates a false sense of company-wide solidarity and consensus. In this sense, corporate media can be understood as both exclusionary and harmful, as employers impose what they believe is best for their employees in complete contradiction to their actual desires.

Unraveling Economic Incentives

Each of these reasons proposed for the Great Resignation ultimately emphasizes worker agency and the conscious desire to quit given problematic trends in the workplace. However, there is perhaps a simpler explanation, which frames the movement as a reaction to economic incentives. This narrative, the one subscribed to by many politicians and business owners, argues that stimulus checks and unemployment assistance made work undesirable and unnecessary. This is the position taken by Neil Bradley, Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer of the Chamber of Commerce. Bradley argues that “paying people not to work is dampening what should be a stronger jobs market” (2021). The \$300 weekly benefit given to unemployed workers resulted in over a quarter of them earning more than they would have when they were working, thus eliminating all incentives to work and driving the labor shortage (Bradley 2021). This is also the cause that most employers identify, especially for low-skill and low-wage jobs like in fast-food chains. John Motta, chairman of the Coalition of Franchisee Associations, bluntly states that “stimulus and unemployment are killing the workforce” (Taylor 2021b). According to this perspective, employment at low-wage, high-stress, or labor-intensive institutions simply does not make sense given the magnitude of unemployment benefits. Instead, these stimulus policies are creating a dependence on government handouts, as workers would rather stay at home and collect checks than return to work. In response, politicians and policymakers

have advocated for the elimination of the stimulus checks, which were akin to a limited form of a universal basic income. Seventeen conservative governors chose to end federal unemployment benefits several months early, despite funding from the government through the CARES Act. Acting in response to a report that significantly fewer than expected jobs were added to the market, Governor Henry McMaster of South Carolina called the stimulus checks “dangerous federal entitlement” that ultimately disincentivized work and were the primary reason for the scarcity of workers (Zhao 2021).

Despite these widespread conservative claims, there is little evidence that stimulus checks and unemployment insurance are the primary reasons that few have returned to the workforce. First, it is important to note that workers who voluntarily quit were largely ineligible for the additional \$600 a week (later reduced to \$300 a week) in unemployment insurance provided by the CARES Act (Iacurci 2020). Only workers who are laid off or fired are allowed to collect unemployment insurance; just in certain exceptional cases, such as having been directed to commit a crime, could a worker resign and still earn benefits (Iacurci 2020). A study conducted by economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco directly addresses Bradley and Motta’s claims, finding that the labor disincentives of unemployment insurance benefits were very limited (Petrosky-Nadeau and Valletta 2021). Unemployed workers have simply been waiting for acceptable job offers, and most

would rather work than remain unemployed and live off benefits. In September of 2021, the additional federal unemployment insurance benefits were fully phased out across the United States, but there has been no subsequent large-scale return to work as the underlying issues of childcare scarcity, pandemic concerns, and burnout have remained and companies take no decisive actions. Instead, removing these benefits has denied relief to those who need it and plunged many into poverty. A study by the investment banking company JPMorgan Chase found that the reaction to cutting benefits was not a rush to find jobs, but rather cutbacks in spending (Popken 2021). While financial incentives may have contributed to the origins of this movement, they clearly are not the cause of it.

The economics of the movement can better be understood through the concept of leverage. Tom Spiggle, an employment lawyer and senior contributor for Forbes, identifies the leverage afforded to workers by the pandemic as one of the “real reasons” behind the worker shortage (Spiggle 2021). Before the pandemic, workers

were simply not in a position to demand change, with firms holding the upper hand. The economic insecurity created by the pandemic ultimately gave workers the “bargaining power” they needed to enact meaningful change (Spiggle 2021). Typically after recessions, people want to return to work, thereby increasing bargaining power for firms. The pandemic was unique in this respect because it was not tied to a business cycle bust and thus had a rapid recovery. Demand increased rapidly as consumers were eager to spend and businesses to hire, giving increased power to workers (Mitchell et al. 2021). This is more clearly articulated by Liz Elting of Forbes, who notes that increased consumer demand after the pandemic created at least 3 million more open jobs than unemployed workers (Elting 2021). The laws of supply and demand have ultimately created market conditions that enabled the Great Resignation. Employees who resigned could be confident that they would not simply be replaced, but would drive compensation upwards and discover better employment opportunities elsewhere.

A Culture of Laziness

Even now that the impacts of unemployment benefits have largely been discredited, companies have continued to paint workers as mooching off government benefits. Across the country, employers have blamed economic conditions for employees not showing up to work. A sign posted at a local Outback chain in Memphis claims that “people just do not want to work” due to “stimulus money and tax time” (Taylor 2021b). A similar sign on the California restaurant Steaks ‘n Cakes reads, “due to government handouts no one wants to work anymore” (u/BioSalsa 2022). These signs are just a few examples of a broader corporate obsession with blaming employees rather than themselves, which emphasizes that employers are not taking this movement seriously. This is reflected in online blogs advising CEOs, often proposing bad-faith solutions. The website “Business Because” suggests that employers

simply look for new employees in unconventional places, searching beyond traditional recruiting platforms like LinkedIn toward employee referral programs instead (Meley 2022). One McDonald’s franchise in Florida has begun offering \$50 for anyone willing to show up to an interview, but still had trouble finding job applicants (Taylor 2021a). Companies have held out hope for a simple fix that would mark a return to the status quo, with employees rejoining the labor force, without addressing the exploitative jobs that workers have decried.

This has also contributed to an entrenchment of traditional beliefs surrounding lazy younger generations and a common perception that workers have lost respect for the values of hard work and perseverance. This perspective is best described by Nicholas Eberstadt, a political economist at the American Enterprise Institute

and author of *Men Without Work*. He observes a general “flight from work” that began with the new millennium (Eberstadt 2016). In his eyes, the Great Resignation is not a novel movement of its own merits, but rather a continuation of a quarter-century trend towards laziness, especially among younger generations, that was simply accelerated by the pandemic. Identifying precedent with past recessions, Eberstadt calls “staying out of work even during good times... an American tradition” (Ukueberuwa 2022). Even though workers would likely be happier and less isolated if they returned to work, they are so consumed by video games, social media, and other passive forms of leisure that they are unable

to recognize that they could achieve more with their lives. He identifies stringent lockdowns as contributing to this degradation of social mores by preventing “higher pursuits of pleasure,” so that people succumbed to idleness and became unambitious (Ukueberuwa 2022). Non-workers began to find it more attractive to spend close to a full-time job’s worth of time watching television instead of more socially acceptable activities, like working or even helping with chores at home (Daniels 2023). Workers are not suddenly recognizing that they were underpaid, but rather idleness has become more financially and socially attractive over the course of the pandemic.

An Emerging Labor Movement

This perception of idle workers passively consuming media all day may fall prey to the fallacy of historical exceptionalism. For centuries, older generations have claimed that the youth is lazy and lacks maturity, having been blessed with technology that lets them avoid hardship or hard work. Instead, the Great Resignation may be a manifestation of a larger trend of discontentment with work over the past decade. In October 2019, while both employment and the stock market were at record highs before the pandemic ravaged the global economy, a survey found that more than half of U.S. workers were unhappy with their jobs. Rising automation and globalization over the previous decade has led to falling job quality, making workers “angry, discouraged and resentful” (Kelly 2019). There has been a strong and rising sentiment, especially for low-income families, that companies and managers do not care for them. These causes for unhappiness match exactly with the self-professed reasons workers have quit in the Great Resignation. In addition to creating new health-related troubles, the pandemic heightened festering unhappiness with work and gave workers the opportunity to quit.

Indeed, there is a growing perception among the public that the American Dream is dead and that hard work is no longer an avenue to success.

More than a decade ago, 41% of Americans believed that the American Dream no longer existed (Rapoza 2011), and that number had risen to more than 75% by 2017 (Montone 2017). With work no longer providing meaning nor social mobility, people have begun to question: why work? In the landmark and widely popular book *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, professor David Graeber of the London School of Economics argues that the Puritan-capitalist work ethic is no longer valid in this technological age. The idea of work as a social duty and almost religious obligation has fueled an increasingly consumerist society (Graeber 2018). As automation and productivity have increased, there is not a true need for as much work as before, but the societal emphasis on a strong work ethic has led to the creation of so-called “bullshit jobs” instead of increased leisure time. He argues that over half of the work done by society is actually pointless and could be eliminated. Instead, managers desire prestige and importance, measured by their number of subordinates (Graeber 2018). This continues a trend in corporate discourse that prioritizes the voices of executives and their need to feel valuable at the expense of similar feelings in their subordinates. Companies have demeaned workers and stripped them of their agency by giving them bullshit jobs, which has contributed

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to a broader feeling of dissatisfaction and worthlessness. Workers have attempted to find a sense of purpose in their work through social impact, career trajectory, or managerial appreciation, but they have ultimately failed. They have finally realized that their jobs contribute nothing to society and have responded by leaving these inessential jobs.

This points to two possible solutions that might address rising worker discontent. The perhaps simpler approach would require a changing of company cultures to ones which place clear expectations on workers and value the contributions of each individual, alongside increasing benefits and compensation to reinvigorate the American Dream. The more radical philosophy is that of ‘post-work’ scholars. Work does not need to be so intimately tied to our sense of identity and choosing not to work stressful and meaningless jobs may be the most reasonable option of all. Scholars envision a world in which work is simply not necessary to survive and in which people can find success and meaning through other means, emphasizing leisure and self-fulfillment. These scholars argue that the pandemic did not make people any more idle as much as it let them reevaluate their priorities. Kathi Weeks, a professor at Duke University and author of *The Problem With Work* claims that “the pandemic gave us a kind of forced separation from work and a rare critical distance from the daily grind” (Weeks, in Manjoo 2021). Before the pandemic, workers were simply caught up in the relentless cycle, working because it was the socioeconomically necessary and societally expected action to perform, unaware that there were alternatives. The pandemic distanced workers from the workplaces they had spent their lives at, thus helping them envision and temporarily enact an alternative lifestyle without work. It further acted as a generational traumatic event, instilling much of the world with a deep-seated fear, and thus causing many to reevaluate what they value as important in life (Manjoo 2021). Sociologist David Frayne writes in his book *The Refusal of Work* that “work has increasingly spilled its demands into our homes, drawing upon our emotions and

personalities” (Frayne 2015: 6). Even dream jobs are still jobs, and workers would rather spend time with family and on leisure. Rather than lockdowns just creating an unhealthy culture of laziness, they helped workers realize that their work is all-consuming and that they could choose to live completely free instead.

There are clear indications that Great Resignation is deeply connected to these broader trends questioning work, representing not just a series of isolated incidents but rather a modern labor movement. Graeber, Weeks, and Frayne are listed as recommended reading on the r/AntiWork wiki, which is the closest equivalent to a voice or head of the Resignation. This movement is successfully beginning to change the way we view work. Universal basic income, which was until very recently a fringe political idea, has rapidly gained traction and been trialed in several cities across the country, contributing to a possible future in which not everyone needs to work to survive (Napoletano 2021). The 4-day workweek, which was once intensely criticized, has also gained mainstream popularity and has been debated by politicians across Western countries. The pandemic made clear that better work-life balances are possible and that workers deserve more leisure time with family, which has led to a push for fewer working hours without a corresponding decrease in pay (Jaffe 2021). Early signals indicate that the shift to remote work will be permanent and that hybrid schedules, in which people only come into the office one or two days per week, will become the primary mode of employment (Bloom 2021). The labor shortage has further allowed workers to seek out jobs with better working conditions that value their contributions. Even as the labor market shifts in companies’ favor, recruiting and HR experts believe that workers will forever be unwilling to take on low-quality jobs (Fox 2021). The pandemic and the Great Resignation have made people realize that work holds too much significance in their lives, and corporate rhetoric has reinforced beliefs that companies will be unwilling to address the issues plaguing them. Instead, they will simply move on to better opportunities, no longer willing to settle.

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though workers would likely be happier and less isolated if they returned to work, they are so consumed by video games, social media, and other passive forms of leisure that they are unable to recognize that they could achieve more with their lives. He identifies stringent lockdowns as contributing to this degradation of social mores by preventing “higher pursuits of pleasure,” so that people succumbed to idleness and became unambitious (Ukueberuwa 2022). Non-workers began to find it more attractive to spend close to a full-time job’s worth of time watching television instead of more socially acceptable activities, like working or even helping with chores at home (Daniels 2023). Workers are not suddenly recognizing that they were underpaid, but rather idleness has become more financially and socially attractive over the course of the pandemic.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown a large disconnect between corporate responses to the Great Resignation and the voices of the people resigning. Workers have complained about burnout, toxic workplaces, and the very nature of work itself, but companies have resisted meaningful change. Instead, they have focused on factors out of their control — stimulus checks, lazy workers, and mental health resources for employees — which allow them to place blame upon others and sidestep the question of internal reform. It has been out of my scope to determine what the correct or ethical approach for companies should be and the extent to which they should implement worker demands. It is clearly not in the interest of a firm to strengthen the position of the worker or to desire fewer working hours, but there seems to be a complete unwillingness to make even minor concessions that may benefit both the worker and the firm. There is strong evidence that there may have been a permanent shift in the way society thinks about work, which must first be recognized by corporations in order to be addressed. Further research will be needed to determine what strategies companies can adopt to effectively answer the fundamental

issues at stake, change corporate cultures, and appease workers.

Absent any such changes, there may be numerous possible implications of the current rhetorical disconnect. Already, movements like universal basic income and four-day workweeks have started to become mainstream, indicating that workers may turn to political machinery to protect them when corporations do not. In this case, the short-term resistance to changing company cultures may have long-term consequences in the societal conception of work. It may also ultimately end up that workers run out of savings and are unable to stay out of the labor force. The current system does not allow for individuals to stop working entirely, and this would be especially pronounced for low-income, low-skilled workers. However, even if resigning employees return to work, it is unlikely that this will result in a return to pre-pandemic sentiments. There has been a clear trend of worker discontent from before the pandemic, and this dissatisfaction has finally been voiced. These ideals will not simply fade into the background and disappear, but can only fester. It remains to be seen how this simmering discontent might

manifest itself, which will largely depend upon whether corporations take deliberate action to address burnout and provide meaningful work. The anti-employee discourse has compounded with an unwillingness to adjust corporate practice, as the Great Resignation continues without any end in sight.

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Concealing Gentrification through Multiculturalism in Flushing

By Steven Zhao

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the primarily Asian working class neighborhood of Flushing, Queens has undergone rapid gentrification. This gentrification is induced not by white professionals, but by other wealthier Asians developing the area. Moreover, there has been little news coverage critical of Flushing's gentrification. This paper posits that the lack of visibility surrounding Flushing's gentrification is in fact a result of the gentrification process being both led by and committed against Asian people. Drawing upon the idea of neoliberal multiculturalism from literature and closely reading media portrayals of gentrification in Flushing, I argue that the relative wealth and cosmopolitanism of Flushing's Asian developers has allowed them to shape narratives on Flushing's gentrification. As a result, they are able to present their own wants as those of the entire community, while obfuscating the significant class divisions within Flushing. I conclude by noting possible limitations of this paper and suggesting possible directions for future research in this field.

Gentrification is transforming cities worldwide, from the boroughs of New York — where gentrification first started in the 1960s — to the heart of Mexico City, where remote U.S. workers have driven up housing prices (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2013, 23; Fajardo, Ramirez, and Gonzalez 2022). The way gentrification reshapes cities is inextricable from class. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines gentrification as:

A process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents.

However, in the U.S., gentrification is more commonly viewed through a racial lens, with affluent white professionals usually displacing working class people of color. This is unsurprising given how economic inequality is structured through race in the United States, but it is also an insufficiently nuanced point of view in light of how normative ideas of diversity and global economic

development have affected American capitalism. Emphasis on representation of minorities in elite spaces has allowed select people of color to join the professional class, or even assimilate into the American bourgeoisie. As global economic growth has spawned new members of the ultra rich across the world, non-white international capitalists have improved their ability to allocate capital within the U.S., joining forces with their American brethren. Given how closely the gentrification process is related to corporate investment (Zukin 1987, 129), it seems appropriate to ask if neoliberal capitalism's increasingly multicultural nature affects gentrification. In particular, if gentrification is synonymous with whiteness in our collective imagination, is it as noticeable when it is perpetuated by people of color? Thus, I raise my central question:

Does cultural ignorance towards communities facing gentrification obscure the visibility of the gentrification process?

To answer this, I use Jodi Melamed's (2011) conception of neoliberal multiculturalism to frame my argument. Melamed labels neoliberal

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multiculturalism as today's dominant cultural ideology, describing it as a belief system where neoliberal policy is considered the key to racial equality and victors of neoliberalism are anointed gatekeepers of multiculturalism (138). I posit that under the superficial antiracism of neoliberal multiculturalism, gentrifiers of minority background can weaponize their high status and cultural identity to whitewash their gentrification of people perceived to share the same culture. To support my thesis, I will explore my case study of the primarily Asian working class neighborhood of Flushing, Queens, where Asian immigrant and Chinese international real estate developers have heavily concentrated gentrification efforts. I will first provide an overview of Flushing and how gentrification has affected the neighborhood. Drawing from scholars in critical race theory and urban studies, I will then establish a theoretical foundation primarily based on neoliberal multiculturalism through which to examine gentrification in Flushing. Having collected primary sources on gentrification in Flushing and its perpetrators, I will apply this theoretical framework to substantiate my argument. Finally, I will note possible limitations of my thesis arising from the specificities of my case study, and suggest how other researchers may build off this paper to further explore this topic.

Flushing is a neighborhood in Queens, New York, located at the East End of the 7 Train Subway Line. With regards to demographics, a 2010 government census indicated that 69.2% of Flushing residents were of Asian descent. The more recent 2020 census did not specifically tally Flushing's demographics, but data from parts of Flushing such as Murray Hill indicate a similar proportion of Asian people. In particular, Flushing is known for its East Asian population: the Flushing Chinatown is one of the largest in the world, and there is a significant Taiwanese and Korean presence. Flushing also has a substantial Latinx population, with 14.9% of the population in the 2010 census identifying as such. Economically, Flushing is low-income and working-class. In 2021, Flushing had a median household income of \$60,896, around 80% of the median household income for the entirety of New York, and its poverty rate was 17.1%, or

25 percent higher than the New York average poverty rate of 13.9% (NYC-Queens Community District 7--Flushing, Murray Hill & Whitestone PUMA, NY). Traditionally, many in Flushing have worked low-wage jobs in retail, healthcare, food and personal services (Hum and Stein 211).

In short, Flushing is predominantly a working class Asian community. In recent years, however, intense gentrification efforts have threatened to displace the residents of Flushing. To understand Flushing's gentrification, I read from academic scholarship and journalism that one way gentrification has manifested is through the rapid building of luxury housing (Hum and Stein 2017, 211; DeFilippis and Teresa 2020, 60; Ngu 2020; Qin 2022). In addition, in October 2022, I also interviewed Bryan Serrano, a Flushing resident who was previously involved in anti-gentrification efforts, and is now studying at Stanford. Serrano notes that the construction of luxury developments has far outpaced that of affordable housing, claiming that for one recently built condo, only 3% of its housing was allotted for low-income residents. To qualify for this housing, applicants had to be means-tested before applying to a lottery.

Another way gentrification has reshaped the cityscape is the new presence of higher-end, "trendier" businesses. These businesses are primarily East Asian in both ownership and intended consumer base, illuminating an important truth about Flushing's gentrification: unlike most American cities gentrified by upper middle class white people, Flushing's gentrification is powered by middle-upper and upper class East Asians. In particular, Serrano describes Flushing's gentrifiers as primarily wealthy Chinese people from abroad ("The Pratt and NYU type"). This is consistent with the aesthetics and services of Flushing's new restaurants, which are tailored towards Chinese middle and upper-class tastes. As someone who grew up in China, when I visited Flushing this past summer, I was struck by how aesthetically similar these restaurants were to the trendy eateries back home. Foodwise, they often fulfilled specific niches of Chinese food beloved by middle and upper-class Chinese that are hard to find elsewhere in the U.S. These new gentrified restaurants are often too expensive for Flushing's working class citizens, replacing

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the traditional “cheap eats” establishments people have relied on for years (Serrano 2022; Ngu 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the real estate firms spurring Flushing’s gentrification through investment are also East Asian-operated. As an example, one of the most notable gentrification efforts in Flushing is the Special Flushing Waterfront District. The project is spearheaded by three real estate firms: United Construction and Development Group, F&T Group and Young Nian Group (Ngu 2020). United Construction and Development Group was founded by a Chinese immigrant, F&T by two Taiwanese American immigrants and Young Nian is a subsidiary of a Shanghai international conglomerate (Ngu 2020). Naturally, the East Asian backgrounds of these developers has helped them better cater to the middle and upper class East Asians flocking to Flushing.

In contrast, original residents of Flushing are losing their homes and sense of belonging. The way the developers treat the working class minorities who have traditionally populated Flushing is calamitous. Rents have skyrocketed, displacing many residents and causing countless local businesses to shut down (Ngu 2020; Qin 2022; DeFilippis and Teresa 2020, 60; Serrano 2022). During our interview, Serrano, who comes from a low-income family, said that he was doubtful he would be able to return to Flushing to live in the future due to absurd increases in rent. Serrano and Ngu both note that illegal home conversions have become common, in which multiple people share a basement, attic or bedroom to live in to make rent. From Ngu’s interviews of people who grew up in Flushing, many report that Flushing appears unrecognizable, as so many of the restaurants and grocery stores they once frequented have closed due to a tripling in rent prices. While it is common for neighborhoods to undergo changes as time passes, it’s not reasonable for the residents to be given such a minimal role in the evolution.

Perhaps most indicative of how some Flushing residents feel they have lost their homes is the following line from Situ, an interviewee from Ngu’s (2020) research into Flushing:

For some wealthier Chinese people, they honestly feel like being poor is a crime. Like it’s something to be ashamed of and get rid of.

Flushing residents are becoming pariahs right in their own community.

Despite how gentrification has harmed Flushing, people from outside the neighborhood are largely oblivious to what is happening. The little mainstream news coverage of Flushing’s gentrification has been mainly neutral or positive; the only critical viewpoints have come from Asian American writers with more nuanced understandings of the Flushing community. This leads to my central question of how cultural unawareness of social groups being gentrified may affect the visibility of their displacement.

To answer this, I now give a theoretical framework based on the work of other scholars through which to analyze gentrification in Flushing. In her book “Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism”, Jodi Melamed (2011) uses the term “neoliberal multiculturalism” to describe contemporary attitudes towards diversity. Neoliberal multiculturalism as a belief portrays the neoliberal status quo as conducive to multiculturalism, positing neoliberalism as the “the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity” (Melamed 2011, 138). Functionally, it “legitimizes global arrangements even as it obfuscates the racial procedures that continue to structure global capitalism” (Melamed 2011, 145). Despite frequent overtures to “inclusiveness,” neoliberalism upholds past racial disparities, as evinced in the U.S. by the abhorrently high imprisonment rate of African American men and the continued exploitation of labor and natural resources from the global South (Melamed 2011, 145–146). Melamed’s theory of neoliberal multiculturalism holds powerful explanatory potential with the situation in Flushing, where the media has largely ignored the gentrification process, and it will form the backbone of my analysis.

Importantly, neoliberal multiculturalism also renders those opposed to neoliberal reform as outcasts. For example, the 2006 *National Security Strategy* by the Bush administration names

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“disgruntled immigrants of color in the U.S.” (thought to be more susceptible to terrorism) and left wing governments in South America as persona non grata (Melamed 2011, 149–150). There are clear racial lines demarcating who is and is not accepted by neoliberal multiculturalism, and so as to maintain its veneer of racial fairness, Melamed (2011) argues that neoliberal multiculturalism works in tandem with anthropologist Aihwa Ong’s concept of differentiated citizenship (138). Differentiated citizenship under a neoliberal context means that people are treated differently depending on their value to the neoliberal system (Melamed 2011, 138). Through differentiated citizenship, those who have benefited from neoliberalism—including people of color—are honored as “worthy multicultural global citizens,” while its victims are disparaged as “monocultural, deviant, inflexible, criminal” and overall antisocial (Melamed 2011, 138). By selectively rewarding individual people of color and maintaining existing economic structures, neoliberal multiculturalism maintains the mirage of equal opportunity for all while preserving the racial inequities baked in our global economic system. As a supporting example, Melamed claims the following:

“For example, upper-class women in Arab and Muslim countries who have welcomed and consumed luxury goods identified with modernity have been coded as multicultural citizens, whereas women who do not share these resources or dispositions have been coded as insufficiently modern for global citizenship.”

Returning to our case study of Flushing, Melamed’s framework offers a potent explanation for why mainstream coverage of Flushing’s gentrification has been so lacking. The East Asian people operating Flushing’s developers are highly-learned, cosmopolitan, fluent in English and wealthy. In contrast, the Flushing residents being displaced often lack formal schooling, are monocultural—many only speak Chinese—and struggle with poverty. It is the former who have validated the American Dream through their wild success, and thus have been anointed as “worthy multicultural global citizens”; meanwhile, the working class citizens

of Flushing have been ignored for not taking upon American neoliberalism’s false promise of prosperity. Through their credibility among the multicultural elite, Flushing’s developers may have been able to manipulate the narrative around the neighborhood’s gentrification, spinning it into a positive tale of increased diversity and prosperity.

To lend credence to this hypothesis, I note that similar occurrences of elite capture have been documented in other Asian American communities. Notably, in Chicago’s Chinatown, Chinese business owners have played to essentialized stereotypes of Chinese life to reel in tourism revenue. In their research of Chicago’s Chinatown, Carla Almeida Santos and Grace Yan (2008) note that today’s normative idea of a multicultural society is “portrayed as an ideal landscape where the solution to social ills was to promote a harmonious, tolerant, and positive relationship among different ethnic groups with high cohesion” (883). To cater to this defanged, non-political version of multiculturalism, Chinatown must be repackaged into an essentialized version of itself, appealing to Westerners’ stereotypical views of Chinese culture while obscuring the nuances and intra-ethnic conflicts within the Chinese community (Santos and Yan 2008, 883). Through interviewing multiple business owners in Chicago’s Chinatown, Santos and Yan (2008) discover that Chinatown business owners purposefully appeal to Western stereotypes of Chinatown to boost revenue; moreover, these employers impose the same stereotypes on their employees to maintain Chinatown’s united facade for American tourists, hiding the worker exploitation-induced class tensions within Chinatown’s community (890). Ontologically, the Chicago Chinatown’s business owners and Flushing’s developers are strikingly similar: both are bourgeois, living confirmations of the neoliberal multicultural American Dream who wield immense material power within their respective ethnic enclaves. Given how the Chicago Chinatown’s shop owners have been able to control their neighborhood’s image, it seems believable that the real estate honchos of Flushing—who are even more sleek, cosmopolitan and familiar with discursive norms surrounding multiculturalism—can manipulate narratives surrounding gentrification in Flushing.

CONTEXTS

With the above framework in mind, we set to establish that through their anointed status under neoliberal multiculturalism, Flushing's developer's are able to shape popular narratives regarding Flushing's gentrification. We will primarily focus on how F&T Group—one of the biggest developers in Flushing, and certainly the most public-facing one—has portrayed Flushing' gentrification with two major press outlets: the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal. In 2016, the New York Times released an article on F&T Vice President Helen Lee's renovation of the food court in one of F&T's Flushing malls. The piece, written by white American freelancer Helene Stapinski (2016), uncritically regurgitates all of F&T Group's talking points, and fails to question how gentrification may affect the actual people living in Flushing. Lee is described as well-educated, cosmopolitan and successful in a lucrative industry: "studied finance at N.Y.U., went on to Harvard" and "has worked in the family business [F&T] for the past two and a half years" — in other words, your ideal global citizen under neoliberal multiculturalism. From the beginning, the article reinforces Lee's credibility and portrays her as the "right" kind of Asian — a willing contributor to today's modern economy who is thus qualified to represent the Flushing community. Then, throughout the article, Stapinski portrays F&T's catering to wealthier East Asians as a service to the Flushing community, completely obscuring the effect of F&T on Flushing's working class population. Stapinski describes how Lee has chosen restaurants to create "a potential destination for local bankers, doctors and business and condominium owners," and then states, "The compass guiding her search is food that she herself would like to eat." In light of Flushing's demographics, it is questionable why the establishments in a working class neighborhood should mainly cater to the professional-managerial class, and why licensing decisions should be left to the discretion of a real estate conglomerate heir. Yet, the New York Times portrays this as the correct way of servicing an area that is rapidly gentrifying. The reader is misled into interpreting F&T's development of Flushing as something unequivocally positive. Additionally, the article overlooks Flushing's working-class population, echoing Lee's dismissal of them. Stapinski characterizes the pre-renovated food court as "a confusing mix

of restaurants and retailers selling low-end merchandise," and quotes Lee as saying, "[The food court was] Like jeans nobody wanted." Here, neoliberal multiculturalism is once again at play: only the "worthy multicultural global citizen" is treated as valid; the Asian working class is entirely shunned. In reality, plenty of Flushing residents wanted the old low-end food court, because it was affordable and serviced their needs. Or, as Serrano said during his interview, "I love cheap eats! What's wrong with cheap eats?"

In 2021, journalist Anne Kadet (also a white American) reported for the Wall Street Journal on Tangram, F&T's just-completed \$800 million development. Kadet's article, titled "New York Developer Bets on \$800 Million Project to Make Queens Feel Like Shanghai," similarly ignores the Flushing working class. The title itself assumes that making Flushing more like Shanghai—more glamorous, more cosmopolitan, more mainland Chinese—is somehow beneficial to Flushing. The article often mentions how Tangram will serve the "community," which, in this context, refers to the middle and upper-class Asians (especially mainland Chinese) who are gentrifying Flushing, rather than the long-time residents of this area. As an example, after describing the spate of upscale Asian stores and restaurants Tangram will introduce, Kadet cites a retail expert who describes this as "catering to local tastes" and "understanding the drives and needs of the community." Again, F&T has misled mainstream news coverage into believing that it is serving the Flushing community, when it is actually serving the well-heeled consumers who have been responsible for the displacement of the people of Flushing. The article also notes how Tangram will "cement" Flushing's status "as a top U.S. destination for Asian people." It is implied that this is another positive effect of Tangram (and F&T's development); there is no consideration of how tourism can affect local life or increase rent. Finally, the article also emphasizes Tangram's presence of Chinese-language amenities: tenants must display signs in both Chinese and English, the development's movie theater carries Chinese subtitles and the fitness center offers classes in both Chinese and English. Again, this seemingly caters to Flushing's local community, but in light of Tangram's prices (\$680,000 for a studio, \$3.39 million for a penthouse according to the article), it

is obvious that the amenities are instead intended for the people coming to gentrify Flushing.

In both the New York Times' and the Wall Street Journal's reporting on F&T's development, F&T exerted full control over the narrative, portraying their development efforts as undoubtedly beneficial to Flushing. Neither piece interviewed or even mentioned the residents of Flushing, instead taking the words of F&T's leadership at face value. Under the framework of neoliberal multiculturalism, F&T executives such as Helen Lee took advantage of their status as "worthy multicultural global citizens" to essentialize Flushing's community in accordance with their own benefit, ignoring the nuances and inner conflicts common to any community.

In this article, through delineating the case study of Flushing, providing a theoretical framework and applying that framework to media portrayals of Flushing's gentrification, I have established that under the all-encompassing ideology of neoliberal multiculturalism, gentrifiers of minority background can utilize their cultural identity and status as esteemed global citizens to obscure their gentrification of people of the same background. While I hope that this conclusion can help others gain a better understanding of gentrification today, it is important to mention the limits of this paper's results. This paper's case study is specifically conditioned upon East Asian

gentrification committed against East Asians. While I am inclined to believe its results extend to other instances of intra-cultural gentrification, there is no guarantee. Of greater uncertainty and interest is when minorities gentrify those of a different cultural background. There is some precedent for this: geographer Katharyn Mitchell explored Hong Kong Chinese real estate speculation in Vancouver during the 1990s. Mitchell (1993) notes that there was significant backlash in response from affected white Canadians, and while some of it was genuine concern about displacement, much of the pushback was instead rooted in xenophobia (274). In response, Hong Kong developers appropriated the language of multiculturalism and accused their opponents of racism and intolerance, conflating their right to develop Vancouver land with racial equality (Mitchell 1993, 264). Clearly, attempts at development against ethnic groups with hegemony are harder to conceal, but even then, Hong Kong capitalists were able to manipulate the ideology of multiculturalism to some advantage. It also remains unknown how the scenario of ethnic minorities gentrifying the communities of other different ethnic minorities may play out. These are all exceedingly relevant questions in an increasingly multicultural capitalist era, and I hope this paper's results can provide some direction for how to further explore multicultural gentrification.

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Meet the Authors



Karunya Bhramasandra is a coterminant in Modern Thought & Literature. Her research focuses on South Asian American ethnography with an emphasis on contemporary literature and family-making practices, both of which came together in her Senior Thesis in English on South Asian American YA novels. In her free time, she enjoys drinking large vanilla lattes at CoHo and convincing her friends to walk around campus instead of bike.



Binta Diallo ('25) is a sophomore Human Biology major whose academic interests include epidemiology and medical anthropology. She believes that despite the lines commonly drawn between the objectivity of science and the subjectivity of humanities, both must work in concert for continued advancement. In her free time, she can be found either in the KZSU basement or in her dorm with her bass.



Alexandra Ellison is a sophomore from Washington State, majoring in Political Science at Stanford University. Her academic interests relate to contemporary literary studies and political philosophy, and in her free time she enjoys reading, engaging in public service, and crocheting.



Sandi Khine is a sophomore studying East Asian Studies and Science, Technology, and Society. Their research interests are in digital anthropology, surveillance technologies and migration, and contested borders. Sandi creates fiber art informed by their immediate environment and their ethnic background and loves to talk about discourses of Asian American literature and liberatory futures.



Hazel (Ngan) Le is a first-year student intending to double-major in Comparative Studies of Race and Ethnicity and Management Science and Engineering. Hazel is passionate about understanding the way economics interacts with gender through media analysis and research. In their free time, Hazel loves coffee-hopping, painting, and listening to new music.

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Brittany Linus is a junior at Stanford University pursuing a B.S. in Symbolic Systems with a minor in African and African-American studies. As an undergraduate student with a keen interest in storytelling, she leverages her technical design experiences and academic pursuit of cultural nuance to construct narratives that are not only engaging by design, but thought-provoking in context. At Stanford, Linus has worked on digital humanities projects at the Archaeology Collections and Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA) where she has developed digital archives, virtual exhibitions, and graphic designs.



Anna Perronne is a current sophomore majoring in Political Science and minoring in CSRE. As a multiracial/multiethnic person, she is deeply interested in racial-ethnic identity development and how people's identities interact with social structures around them. She is also passionate about educational equity, especially for Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S. Aside from academics, she is very crafty, and loves crocheting, sewing, and up-cycling thrifted clothing. She also works at Antoine's Cookie Shop in Town and Country and plays ultimate frisbee on Stanford's club team.



Rishi Verma is a sophomore studying theoretical computer science. He is passionate about the ethics of technological disruption and addressing inequities in education. Outside of academics, Rishi dances with Basmati Raas, Stanford's garba-raas team, plays the marimba, and enjoys woodworking and hiking.



Steven Zhao Steven is a sophomore from Beijing and Atlanta studying Economics and Computer Science. He is interested in China's political economy and Chinese diaspora communities across the world. In his free time, he enjoys listening to indie music and rooting for the Atlanta Hawks.

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