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Dear Reader,

This year’s Editorial Team is proud to present the 11th installment of CONTEXTS, Stanford’s Undergraduate Research Journal of Anthropology.

Every year, CONTEXTS showcases exceptional student research in anthropology and the social sciences and asks provocative questions within the discipline and beyond. This year is no exception, and our authors explore topics ranging from the creative power of graffiti to the violent colonization of the Philippines, giving us a glimpse at the diversity of social, economic, and political changes happening around the world today.

Each of the articles included in this issue converge around this idea of dis/ruption.

In the tradition of editions past, we aim to facilitate a dialogue on the ways that the theme emerges in the current socio-political moment. Each author engages with issues of representation and expression to not only disrupt normative ideas and prevailing power structures, but to argue that this disruption itself is necessary, and that disruption is embodied in various ways across time and space.

We are incredibly grateful for the amount of time and dedication that our authors spent on their pieces—for the hours of archival and field research that went into the drafting of each piece, the many rounds of revising and editing that each author undertook, and the unique forms of engagement with the theme. We would also like to thank our faculty and graduate editors, Angela Garcia and Alicia Cherian, and our student services specialist Amelie Byun, for their support and guidance. Finally, we would like to thank our readers for supporting this publication, crucial to fostering and developing the intellectual pursuits of our undergraduate researchers.

We hope you enjoy it!

Warmly,
The Editorial Team

Jade Arellano ‘19 | Tony Hacket ‘20 | Joshua Cobler ‘20 | Sabrina Jiang ‘20
MEET THE AUTHORS

Ethan Chua (‘20) mostly writes heartbreak poetry, so this is new for him. He's a Chinese-Filipino junior majoring in anthropology, a spoken word poet, and a scholar-activist. His research interests include racial and ethnic identity development within the context of ethnic studies programs; transnational formations among Philippine diasporic communities; and the development of ideas of race and nationhood during Spanish and American colonial regimes in the Philippines. He's also written a dark fantasy comic, Doorkeeper, which is available in Philippine bookstores and his dorm room.

Eunice Jung (‘21) is a current sophomore studying both Anthropology and International Relations, interested in questions of deviance, criminality, and affirming life. At Stanford, she hopes to learn how to bridge the gap between critical race theory and tangible political subject formation when discussing issues of urbanization and sustainable development. In her free time, she likes full-sending to places around the world, making aesthetic-looking but gross-tasting smoothies, and destroying the white heteropatriarchy!

Katerina Fong (‘21) is an art historian and scholar hailing from Taipei, Taiwan. Her work examining the construction of fan culture in K-pop won the 2017-18 Stanford Introductory Seminar Excellence Award. Her current scholarship explores the possibilities of a decolonial art history, centering artists who trouble fixed narratives of identity and culture.

InHae Yap (‘19) is a senior in Anthropology and a coterminal Master’s student in Art History. Her research explores the consolidation of institutional networks in museums via art management practices, and affectual feelings of contemporaneity and modernity in African art.

Josh Cobler (‘20) is a junior majoring in anthropology and minoring in economics. His research broadly explores the experiences of students at highly-selective universities, with a more specific focus on understanding how race, gender, sexuality, and geographic identity shapes students' understandings and self-definitions of their own class identities.
Abstract
In this paper, I argue that any history of the Philippine-American War that does not take race -- as both a classificatory schema and a systemic instantiation of colonial violence -- properly into account is necessarily incomplete. I make this argument by critiquing the tendency of historians to treat the Samar campaign, in which American soldiers massacred native Samarenos, as an exceptional act of violence. I argue that, instead of being an exception, the Samar campaign was an instantiation of the general logic of racial classification that underpinned the American campaign and subsequently can be understood as part of what Anibal Quijano has called the “modern/colonial world order.” In order to elaborate on this classificatory logic, I analyze President William McKinley’s proclamation of benevolent assimilation, in which he announced American intent to occupy the Philippines. I show that this seemingly innocuous proclamation actually instantiated a racial logic in which “assimilable” Filipinos were positioned as evolutionarily dysselected compared to “assimilating” Americans. Ultimately, I argue that both the Samar campaign and McKinley’s proclamation cannot be understood without a critical understanding of race as an ontological division used to justify profound colonial violence.

Introduction
At the turn of the 18th century, the Philippine islands were poised to gain their independence from Spanish colonizers after more than three centuries of Spanish imperial rule. The final years of this revolutionary movement saw the entrance of American forces into the conflict, in what began as an uneasy alliance between American troops and Filipino revolutionaries against the Spanish occupiers due to the eruption of the Spanish-American War in 1898. However, in the close of the Spanish-American War later that year, Spain signed ownership of its colonies over to America in the Treaty of Paris. The uneasy alliance turned into open conflict in 1899 with the Battle of Manila, where American soldiers fired on Filipino revolutionaries attempting to enter the city. In the resulting battle, over 200 Filipinos were killed. The war was justified by President William McKinley’s stated policy of “benevolent assimilation,” in which the annexation of the Philippine islands was described as an act of paternal stewardship over an uncivilized people, in keeping with the social Darwinist ideologies of the time. By 1902, Philippine President Emilio Aguinaldo had been captured by American forces, functionally ending the war; however, several Filipino revolutionary leaders continued waging a guerilla conflict into 1913.

On September 28, 1901, during the second half of the Philippine-American War, a garrison of seventy-four US infantrymen stationed at Balangiga, Samar was ambushed by local townspeople and guerrillas under the leadership of Filipino Lt. Col. Eugenio Daza. According to American historian Brian Linn, it was not only “one of the most brilliant tactical operations of the war,” but also
a major Filipino victory in a protracted imperial conflict (25). The American response to Balangiga and the resultant campaign in Samar was one of severe retaliation, which remains infamous to this day for its violence and severity - the American brigadier general Jacob H. Smith is said to have directed his soldiers to turn the island into a “howling wilderness,” by killing all Filipino males over ten (Silbey, 195).

In many ways, the Samar campaign has been regarded as emblematic of the Philippine-American War, its unfolding putatively capturing both American imperial cruelty and courageous Filipino resistance. In subsequent response to its infamy, many historians of the Philippine-American war take deliberate steps to describe Samar as a campaign that was exceptional, not typical, in its ferocity. Brian Linn states that “even at the time the two campaigns [Samar and Batangas] were recognized as atypical, and all evidence since then, by both American and Philippine scholars, has demonstrated their uniqueness” (306). Meanwhile, in *A War of Frontier and Empire*, European historian David Silbey calls Samar “an aberration in the American effort” (196) -- describing it as “more like frustration expressed as brutality than a reasoned military response” (217).

While the American response to Balangiga was an undeniably ferocious and cruel event in an already brutal colonial war, there are nevertheless particular historical conditions and interpretative assumptions which allow both Linn and Silbey to characterize it as an exception as opposed to part of a larger imperial project. As postcolonial theorist Ann Stoler notes, imperial formations “thrive on the production of exceptions” (177). In the first section of my paper, I intend to interrogate Silbey’s and Linn’s accounts of the Philippine-American war with respect to the exceptional status they ascribe to the Samar campaign. I argue that Silbey and Linn are able to characterize Samar as exceptional only by ignoring the fundamental role race played as an organizing principle of the American colonial project. By treating racism as a consequence of individual dispositions instead of a classificatory system created to justify inequality and violence, they are able to attribute the atrocities of Samar to an attitude of American vengeance enacted by soldiers on the ground instead of the violence-enabling logic of race.

In the second part of my paper, I attempt to provide a genealogy of race in the Philippine-American War in response to the accounts of Linn and Silbey. I take as a starting point President William McKinley’s declaration of the policy of “benevolent assimilation,” in which he announced America’s intentions to colonize and assimilate the Philippines. I then examine this declaration’s relationship to the brutalities of the Samar campaign. Focusing on the notion of assimilation and the subsequent subject positions it implies (of “assimilable” Filipinos and “assimilating” Americans), I argue that the workings of race as a differentiating principle underpin the entire declaration. Therefore, the racial logic McKinley employs is deeply present, rather than suspended, during the atrocities of Samar. I make this argument using insights around the coloniality of power and being as expressed by scholars Gabriela Veronelli and Sylvia Wynter.

This paper is premised on the idea that any history of American colonial occupation that undertheorizes race is necessarily an incomplete and problematic history that elides profound existential and epistemic violence. In what follows, I hope to convincingly show that an understanding of race as a colonial and ontological project can both challenge and enrich existing historical accounts.

Interrogating the Exceptionalism of Samar

“The final campaign, in Samar, is probably the best known of the entire [Philippine-American] war,” writes American historian Brian Linn (306). Given the infamy of the Samar
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campaign and its continuing hold on popular imaginings of the Philippine-American conflict, any serious history of the Philippine-American War must take its violent unfolding into account. In response to this necessity, Linn is quick to position the Samar campaign as atypical. His position is a firm one: “that [the Batangas and Samar campaigns] continue to be portrayed in both academic and popular accounts as representative of both US Army pacification and Filipino resistance is one of the great historical fallacies of the war” (306). European historian David Silbey takes a similar approach, writing of Samar as “largely an aberration in the American effort” (196).

Instead of taking this characterization of the Samar campaign as atypical or aberrant for granted, I argue that the exceptionalization of the violence of Samar is in fact foundational to both Linn and Silbey’s work in ways that elide the mechanisms of race. In this regard, I align with postcolonial theorist Ann Stoler’s approach of paying attention to the events which seem to lie in “excess” of accepted historical narratives. Ann Stoler, whose work pays critical attention to colonial histories as sites for the consolidation of power, treats theoretical inquiry into imperial formations as “a vigilant watch over what is strategically excised from the colonial order of things and what is affirmed as clear, reasonable, and common sense” (24). How was it, then, that an understanding of Samar as an exceptional event in the American campaign became - to Linn and Silbey - a kind of historical common sense?

Both Linn and Silbey characterize the American atrocities in Samar as an emotional response to the ambush at Balangiga, situating their historical narratives in both individual and national affective dispositions. For example, Brig. Gen. Jacob H. Smith was a key figure who oversaw many of the American atrocities in Samar, said to have directed his troops to make Samar a “howling wilderness” (Silbey, 195). Both Linn and Silbey attribute these orders at least in part to the individual disposition of Smith - “Smith’s career had given ample evidence of his muddy ethics, his limited military skills, and his intemperate character,” writes Linn (312), while Silbey prefices his account of the Samar campaign with a record of Smith’s “checkered career” (194), including his illegal use of money from recruiting bounties. On a national scale, both Linn and Silbey characterize the American response to Samar as an act of emotional vengeance, with Linn writing that Balangiga “touched off an immediate outcry for vengeance” (312) and Silbey describing the campaign as “more like frustration expressed as brutality than a reasoned military response” (217).

However, this historical account of Samar as a kind of American vengeance enacted on the ground by soldiers with “checkered careers” and “muddy ethics” has serious conceptual flaws. This is primarily because both Silbey and Linn take for granted the concept of “vengeance” with which they characterize the American response. The notion of vengeance is key to both historians’ exceptionalization of the brutality of Samar - if the massacre of Samarenos by American troops could be attributed to a feeling of vengeance arising from the ambush of American soldiers at Balangiga, then the Samar conflict itself could be understood as an act of emotional caprice standing apart from the Philippine-American campaign, rather than one of systematic brutality. However, this understanding of vengeance is sorely lacking. If “vengeance” was the question, then why is it that the entire island of Samar was treated as a target, as opposed to, say, the company of Lt. Col. Eugenio Daza, who led the Balangiga ambush? How does “vengeance” explain the large-scale burning of houses, destruction of crops, and alleged orders to kill all males over ten? In other words, how was it that an entire population was made the target of a revenge ostensibly incited by the actions of a particular Filipino military unit?

Here, it becomes necessary to critically examine the work of race. After all, vengeance as an explanatory category presumes an initial transgression that is being revenged. For an act of
transgression worthy of retaliation to be attributed to most Samarenos - not just those affiliated with Lt. Col. Eugenio Daza's company - the principle of race is required as a way of making generalizations about entire populations. The Filipino native had to be conceptualized as always-already treacherous, always-already savage in order for the logic of vengeance to operate on such a large scale in Samar. However, both Linn and Silbey fail to tease out the principle of race underpinning the workings of vengeance due to both historians' understandings of racism as an attitude or disposition rather than as a systematic justification of oppression and violence realized through the classification of populations.

Linn's account is extremely sparse on the front of race - in fact, he explicitly argues that American soldiers were not racist in their occupation of the Philippines. He writes that “critics have been too quick to ascribe sinister motives - most often racism - to behavior that has been typical of combat soldiers for hundreds of years” (220). Several decolonial scholars’ writings have long dismantled this argument - as Anibal Quijano contends, colonial projects are inherently racial ones, with race operating in colonialism to “transform relations of superiority and inferiority that had been previously understood as the product of war, domination, and power, and turn them into biological, ahistorical, natural phenomena” (110, cited in Veronelli). In other words, the very justification of colonial occupation relies on the differentiating logic of race. Subsequently, Linn's contention that racism is a “sinister motive” ascribed to American soldiers by contemporary critics fails to hold water.

While Silbey analyzes the role race played in the conflict to a deeper extent than Linn, engaging with the Social Darwinist ideologies of the period, his analysis of race is still sorely lacking as in practically every case race is articulated as a consequence of American attitudes, rather than as a justification for systemic violence. For example, he writes: “It was an easy step for white soldiers, steeped in the nineteenth century’s easy racism, to bring patterns of behavior abroad. The word ‘n*gger’ soon came to be used freely, and racist attitudes reemerged.” (111, italics mine) By denouncing racism as behavioral patterns, the use of derogatory language, and individual dispositions, Silbey misses the fact of race as instantiated through and naturalized by the colonial system in the first place.

To both historians, racism is something that occurs at an affective and interpersonal level. It is a result of individual motives and dispositions and is realized in derogatory language and attitudes. This understanding of racism has direct effects on both historians’ characterizations of the Samar conflict as a site of exception, as it means they cannot comprehend why a company of American soldiers would so systematically exact brutality on such a large group of people without attributing their actions to an unpredictable affective disposition of “vengeance.” Subsequently both Linn and Silbey’s explanations, in their designation of the Samar campaign to a space of aberration and contingency, fail to situate the campaign in the larger institutionalized imperial project which provided the conditions of its possibility.

Towards a History of Race in the Philippine-American War

In the previous section, I demonstrate that any historical account of the Samar campaign that fails to examine the intersections between colonialism and race will remain fundamentally incomplete; accounts like these are unable to explain the scope and scale of American retaliation in Samar and its ascription of possible treachery as primordial to Filipino bodies. In this section, I provide an alternative historical examination of the Philippine-American War rooted in an understanding of the “coloniality of being,” a framework advanced by postcolonial theorist Sylvia
Wynter. The “coloniality of being” refers to Wynter’s contention that ostensibly universal categories such as “the human” are in fact racialized, inasmuch as particular populations are systematically designated as being outside of or further away from humanity than others.

In order to do so, I return to President William McKinley’s famous proclamation of benevolent assimilation. In the aftermath of Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War, much political uncertainty in the United States revolved around the question of what to do with former Spanish territories such as the Philippines. This question was especially urgent because, shortly after Spain’s naval defeat in the Battle of Manila Bay, Philippine general Emilio Aguinaldo declared the independence of the Philippines and established an autonomous revolutionary government. Ultimately, instead of recognizing the sovereignty of the newfound Philippine government, President McKinley decided on a policy of colonial occupation wreathed in a language of innocuous paternalism.

Current historiography on the war often grapples with how to reconcile President William McKinley’s initial policy of “benevolent assimilation,” whose aim was ostensibly to ensure justice and personal rights for the Filipino people (CWS 859), with the violent final campaigns of Batangas and Samar which “were marked by very harsh warfare indeed.” (Linn, 327-328) As I’ve demonstrated, Linn and Silbey’s approaches tend toward an emphasis on the exceptionalism of Samar in order to explain this apparent contradiction. However, I’d like to offer an alternative framing of this history by arguing that the violence instantiated in Samar was enabled by the colonial logic of benevolent assimilation expressed in the language of McKinley’s proclamation. The power of Wynter’s notion of the coloniality of being is that it allows me to situate both benevolent assimilation and violent retaliation as part of the same imperial project. Both paternalistic assimilation and extreme violence are reliant on a particular “genre of the human” which positioned Filipinos as “dysselected by evolution” and mapped that positionality onto ostensibly phenotypical differences (Wynter, 315, 318).

Benevolent Assimilation and the Coloniality of Being

McKinley’s proclamation of benevolent assimilation should not be read as a policy oriented towards an already existing racial category of the Filipino. Instead, McKinley’s proclamation should be read as one of the first American attempts to constitute the Filipino as a racial/imperial subject requiring governance by a foreign power. After all, the very term “benevolent assimilation” created a hierarchy between a population to be assimilated and a population doing the assimilating, a hierarchy which had not existed before. Since no a priori facts can tell us whether or not a group of people can be “assimilated,” McKinley’s use of the language of assimilation should be understood as the creation of a category of the “assimilable” (and a metric of “assimilability”) dependent on racial divisions between Americans and Filipinos. In McKinley’s logic, (some) Americans never had to be “assimilated” while (all) Filipinos were always-already positioned as requiring “assimilation” into Western norms of private property and law. The creation of this category was, ultimately, a justification of colonial rule enacted through a naturalization of American power as necessary for Filipino self-determination.

Take, for example, McKinley’s injunction that the United States was occupying the Philippines to “protect the natives in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights” (CWS 858). Such a statement, seemingly innocuous in its purpose, implies a current state of chaos, conflict, and savagery which requires American intervention. Similarly, McKinley’s sentiment that the mission of the US was the substitution of “justice and right” for “arbitrary rule"
(CWS 859) implies a natural state of “arbitrary rule” in the Philippines and an inability on the part of Filipinos to self-govern - an inability characterized, of course, by a Filipino failure to meet Western notions of governance dependent on the logics of private property and individual rights.

McKinley can thus be seen as quietly articulating a “genre of the human” directly invested in Social Darwinism’s conception of human beings as either selected or dysselected by evolution - a genre in which dysselection is mapped onto ostensibly biological categories, according to postcolonial theorist Sylvia Wynter. In this case dysselection is associated with Filipinos. According to McKinley, Americans, selected by evolution and thus doing the work of assimilation, carry with them the principles of “justice and right,” while native Filipinos, dysselected by evolution, require protection from “the sway of arbitrary rule.” Other sources at the time reference Social Darwinism more bluntly as a motivating logic behind American occupation - for example, National Geographic “spoke of the United States as ‘fit representatives of humanity, invincible in war yet generous to fallen foes, subjugators of lower nature, and conquerors of the powers of primal darkness’” (cited in Silbey, 96). In orders to his troops during the Samar campaign dated October 23, 1901, Major Littleton Waller said that “it must be impressed on the men that the natives are treacherous, brave, and savage. No trust, no confidence can be placed in them” (Schott, 73).

McKinley’s proclamation of benevolent assimilation also includes the threat of violence as inherent to the assimilatory project, thus placing his policies in deep connection with - and not necessarily in opposition to - the atrocities of Samar. McKinley stated that:

all persons who … cooperate with the government of the United States to give effect to these beneficent purposes, will receive the reward of its support and protection. All others will be brought within the lawful rule we have assumed, with firmness if need be, but without severity so far as may be possible (CWS 858-859, italics mine).

The firmness McKinley talked about was unmistakably military repression, since he was speaking in the context of the installation of a new military administration in the Philippines. McKinley thus endowed the policy of benevolent assimilation with the always “preserved possibility” of violence (Stoler, 177). Furthermore, in his creation of the category of dysselected but assimilable Filipinos he also created the possibility of a more abject category, that of the “unassimilable.” “Unassimilable” Filipinos were ostensibly those who refused to cooperate with the United States government. In his proclamation, McKinley made clear that the American response to a failure to assimilate would be firmness, violence, “the strong arm of authority to repress disturbance” (CWS 859). Since unassimilability could potentially be ascribed to all members of the Filipino revolutionary movement, the framework for justifying American violence was subsequently established in McKinley’s proclamation.

In conclusion, a reexamination of President McKinley’s proclamation of benevolent assimilation through the lens of the coloniality of being reveals that his proclamation was a naturalization of racial categories in order to justify American imperial rule. The dynamic of Americans-as-civilized/Filipinos-as-assimilating given force by McKinley and its recursive implication of the categories assimilable Filipino/unassimilable Filipino can thus be seen as a particular articulation of Social Darwinism’s genre of the human, which Wynter notes was an ontological mode where white ethno-class Man was situated at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy.

Samar and the Coloniality of Being

This discussion brings me back to the Samar campaign, which - through Wynter’s work - I can now situate as a part of the imperial project instantiated by McKinley’s policy of benevolent
assimilation as opposed to an aberration or exception. The logic of assimilation profoundly regimented the subject positions Filipinos could take up during the war - either assimilable or unassimilable, never anything else. Military governors and American politicians might argue whether civic reform or military repression was a more appropriate response to the “problem” of the Philippines. However, within this dynamic, Filipinos could never be sovereign subjects in their own right, only either educable “little brown brothers” (a pejorative term for Filipinos coined by William Howard Taft, who served as the first governor-general of the Philippines) or savages who had to be pacified by force. Both subject positions - that of the little brown brother and that of the savage native - were the primary possibilities precisely because of the overarching logic of assimilation; the question was always whether Filipinos could be assimilated, never whether assimilation was the right way to characterize Filipino subjects in the first place.

Thus, the Samar campaign and the actions of the soldiers therein can be understood as a particularly ferocious orientation to the question of assimilation, motivated by a racialized ascription of fundamental unassimilability to the Samareños. In addition to McKinley’s proclamation, this fundamental unassimilability - articulated as the possibility of Filipino treachery or violence - can be situated in the transition of the Philippine-American War from a more traditional conflict to a guerrilla war. In this transition, instantiated by revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo in response to heavy Filipino losses, Filipino insurgents would regularly blend into the population, thus playing on American anxieties around who was assimilable and who was rebellious. As Capt. John L. Jordan explained: “Get after them [and] they scatter, hide their uniform and rifle, don [a] white suit they carry with them and meekly claim to be amigos” (cited in Linn, 190). In this fraught period of guerrilla warfare, ostensibly any Filipino “amigo” could be, in fact, an “insurrecto.” Thus the racialized Filipino body was treated as always-already containing the possibility of anti-imperial insurgency.

The combination of McKinley’s policy of benevolent assimilation (premised on the threat of violent repression) and American anxieties around the “chameleon act” of Filipino guerrillas reached a head in Samar, where Samareños were racially positioned as fundamentally unassimilable and fundamentally violent. It is in this context that one can understand the shelling of a “pro-American rally of over 1,000 Filipinos” (Linn, 315) by the gunboat Arayat on the island, Waller’s “execution of twelve civilians [in Samar] without benefit of trial or even the rudiments of an impartial investigation” (Linn, 317), and General Jacob H. Smith’s alleged verbal instructions to his subordinate Littleton Waller to “kill and burn, take no prisoners, make the interior of Samar a ‘howling wilderness,’ and regard every male over ten as a combatant” (Linn, 315). These events all speak to something greater than “vengeance,” as the objects of these acts of violence did not necessarily participate in either the Balangiga ambush or Filipino revolutionary efforts. These killings can only be understood through the framework of race, which primordially ascribed the possibility of violence onto Filipino natives. Racial logic thus justified American retaliation, enacted in response to imagined originary transgressions naturalized in the ‘savagery’ of the Filipino subject. This is why American soldiers could express sentiments such as US Corporal Hickman’s statement to a fellow soldier that “some of these natives are born with bolos in their hands, sir” (Schott, 54).

Conclusion

Several popular historical accounts of the Philippine-American War fail to seriously engage with race as an ontological category foundational to the project of American imperialism, either relegating it to the realm of individual and national attitudes and dispositions or ignoring it altogether.
The lack of a racial analysis is especially telling in the tendency of historians to treat the American campaign in Samar as an exception as opposed to a part of American imperial formations. This is a dangerous historiographic approach, inasmuch as it unwittingly naturalizes the benevolence of American colonizers as the status quo; by treating Samar as an exception, the rest of the colonial occupation of the Philippines can then be treated as a normal campaign conducted under the everyday rules of war. And, by failing to connect colonialism to racialization, both historians also fail to comprehend the large-scale dehumanization that did the work of justifying the American occupation.

By bringing an understanding of race as rooted in the coloniality of power/being to bear on the Philippine-American War, a more complete picture of the American imperial project can emerge - one in which Samar is not an exception but rather a violent consequence of the logic of benevolent assimilation first outlined by President William McKinley to initiate the American occupation of the Philippines. Though couched in the seemingly benign language of liberal humanism, McKinley’s proclamation actually instantiated racial categories by designating Filipino subjects as “assimilable” to American social norms. This designation was also inherently marked with the threat of military violence for those populations which proved “unassimilable.” During the period of guerrilla warfare in the conflict, American anxieties around the possible treachery of Filipinos (expressed in the dichotomy between “amigos” and “insurrectos”) were realized through a racialization of particular Filipino populations as primordially unassimilable, even “born with bolos in their hands.” Subsequently, the vengeance enacted in the brutal Samar campaign can be understood as a consequence of the colonial ontologies instantiated by benevolent assimilation. By naturalizing violence as primordial to Samareno bodies, American wartime atrocities could be rationalized as retaliation even when the objects of that atrocity were civilians or populations otherwise uninvolved in the Filipino insurgency.

Ultimately, I hope in this paper to begin a larger project of reexamining current historiography around the Philippine-American War through a lens which takes into account the scholarship of postcolonial theorists such as Wynter and Veronelli, who understand race as a naturalization of colonial domination vis-a-vis ostensibly biological categories like phenotype and genetic inheritance.
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Graffiti as Counter-surveillance in Oakland

Eunice Jung
Abstract

In the status quo, mainstream critiques of the Black Lives Matter movement pigeonhole and reduce the movement to certain performative/violent acts in association with the movement—riots, protests, and violence detract from the inherent multiplicity within BLM. To explore the potentialities of Black Lives Matter and its relationship to larger structures of power that attempt to categorize and define such movement, I look to learning from graffiti as both an integral mechanism within the BLM movement but also a subversive discourse strategy that helps reorient subjectivities to larger system of power.

Surveillance Society in Oakland

On the early morning of New Year’s Day of 2009, Oscar Grant was fatally shot in the back by BART Police Officer Johannes Mehserle at the Fruitvale Bart Station in Oakland, California. Unlike previously, where incidents of police brutality of black and brown bodies are rendered silenced and unheard of, the shooting of Oscar Grant was recorded on a cellphone camera by a bystander, reshaping the paradigm of surveillance to one that also includes “omnipresent surveillance by civilians.” Such recording infuriated the nation overnight and was used as evidence for more legislative and social changes—especially pressuring police departments nationwide to invest in body-cameras for accountability.

Although the implementation of body cameras resulted in some reduction of police misconduct in Oakland through transparent accountability,¹ the visibility of violence did not stop the ongoing criminalization of the black body in Oakland. The power that came with “looking back” in body cameras has also reified the constant surveillance of black and brown bodies. Surveillance has increased through the definition of ‘hotspots,’ areas determined as spaces needing more ‘safety’ because of higher crime levels, which disproportionately affect low income black and brown communities in Oakland. Having surveillance equipment in these ‘hotspots’ abuses surveillance technology, placing them there under the guise of regulating legally coded criminal activity, such as property destruction and vandalism. The overarching narrative of transparency and safety in the implementation of surveillance hotspots in Oakland has recently been utilized to identify

² Ibid.
and isolate individuals that perform ‘violent acts’ in the Black Lives Matter movement.³

Oftentimes, the making-intelligible and overdetermination of blackness with coherent combative strategies like counter-surveillance get co-opted by institutions of whiteness; legal reforms and social change operate under the same institutional framework that continues to perpetuate anti-black violence in different and more disguised means. Instead of reducing the Black Lives Matter movement to the more visible forms of activism that are identified by surveillance technologies, it is important to acknowledge a “counter-productive” affirming of blackness that occurs in Oakland as part of a larger resistance in the Black Lives Matter movement. I argue that examining graffiti as a form of subversive activism is necessary for analyzing and deconstructing the power structures that make anti-black violence inevitable, despite social resistance and legal reforms.

Subversive Activism: A Deleuzian Approach to Social Change

How can movements evade being completely co-opted and reduced by hegemonic structures of power such as institutionalized racism and surveillance society? Initially, Black Lives Matter started as a single Facebook post by Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter platform, who responded to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of thirteen-year-old Trayvon Martin.⁴ A single hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, mobilized the entire nation; a non-organized series of posts evolved into a national foundation for the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement has had several successes with regard to legal policy reform, which includes the enforcement of body cameras on police officers. However, these strategies used by the Black Lives Matter movement—constant surveillance as a guarantee of safety or method of accountability, have been co-opted by Surveillance Society and its drive to over-determine and capture black and brown bodies onto a grid of intelligibility, using surveillance to track the lives of important figures of the Black Lives Matter movement or reducing Black Lives Matter movement to a one-facet strategy that is parodied as #AllLivesMatter. Because structures of power embedded in the construct of Whiteness seek to make the originally unintelligible Black Lives Matter intelligible to civil society, centralized power has used multiple surveillance methods that reduces the multiplicities and complexities of the Black Lives Matter.

In response to this question of efficacy in activism, the current paradigm of how movements like Black Lives Matter work in dialogue with larger structures of power needs to be reframed. In the following section, I examine an alternative approach that encapsulates the constantly adapting, hegemonic structures of power that challenge grassroots social movements like Black Lives Matter. To do so, I analyze French critical thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s work, offering different forms of spatiality, the relationship of preconceived concepts of power structures and individual subjects and objects, in order to explain the shifting and new abilities of power structures. In their joint book, A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari identify two existing types of space: striated space and smooth/nomadic space and offer, in response, a third type of space: holey space.

Striated space is the spatial relationship in which bodies and constructs are static and easily pinpointed; it is a space in which all things are marked with a single identity, purpose, and being.⁵ A surveillance strategy that utilizes striated space in order to capture low-income black and brown

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communities is surveillance cameras, which seek to find certain identifiable bodies as potential prevention for crimes. The spatial relationship between structures of power and these surveillance strategies is that black and brown bodies are marked and rendered categorizable and therefore legible by the State and Whiteness within established structures. Pinpointing predominantly black communities as surveillance ‘hot spots’ in Oakland is a form of categorization that criminalizes the black body, attempting to ascribe a fixated meaning of criminality and violence on the black body.

On the other hand, the complete opposite of striated space, smooth or nomadic space, characterizes a spatial relationship where all beings, constructs, and objects have a very fluid relationship with each other, with lack of ascribing of category. According to Deleuze and Guattari, structures of power have increasingly developed strategies to adapt to nomadic space, a space where bodies are rendered illegible and uncontrollable. #AllLivesMatter as a movement against the Black Lives Matter movement is a fluid surveillance strategy; it co-opts the Black Lives Matter movement through parody by redefining the semiotics between Blackness and “All.” All Lives Matter accuses Black Lives Matter of emphasizing one category of life (“Black life”) over others, yet still excludes black bodies from the All Lives Matter movement by refusing to recognize the differential risk that Black bodies in particular are exposed to. The meaning-making of Blackness through #AllLivesMatter movement traps Blackness with a false guide of inclusion, similar to the same entrapment of surveillance strategies in predominantly black communities that heighten surveillance in the name of transparency and safety.

These two spaces, although complete opposites, share a commonality in that they are both easily co-opted and rendered comprehensible by Western power structures. Striated space is easily organized under a Western epistemological framework of order and clarity; smooth space, although chaotic, is eventually captured as Western power structures adapt to such fluidity and extend into such spaces, ultimately becoming fluid entities. So, in response to both spaces, Deleuze offers a third space—a space that is neither fully co-opted nor understood: a space with holes that can offer a place to both hide or be fully free in such a space, and simultaneously makes is so that the subject is never entirely predictable nor understood. Because of the possibility to evade and inhabit at the same time, holey space functions as an alternative method that can only be imperfectly controlled by the State and established power structures.

Graffiti as Holey Space

Graffiti and the potentiality of cacophonous multiplicities embody Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of holey space, one that can be both illicit and licit, both effective and counterproductive, both anonymous and claimed. Graffiti is the flow of paint that permeates through both striated and smooth space, usurping both spatial relationships, rendering total State control defunct and insufficient. Graffiti that came with the Black Lives Matter march in Oakland during the summer of 2016 spurred controversy because the physical representation served multiple purposes: the art pieces shaped the conversation surrounding police brutality by representing the voice of the people, but also became criticisms of the movement as vandalism of private property. However, whether or not graffiti is productive to the movement is only the question at the surface level—I argue that graffiti and its paradoxical nature can redefine the relationship of established between hegemonic power structures and the object of desire to control, the excluded Otherness of blackness. Because

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
graffiti functions as both illicit writing and the voices of black youth, the multiplicities within graffiti confound Surveillance Society’s normalization of surveillance against the black body. Such evasiveness is the subversive activism that successful destabilizes hegemonic structures of power that seek to categorize the black body as one that is violent and controllable.

How is it possible to maintain the paradox that graffiti is both illegal vandalism and public art? In Halsey and Young’s joint essay “Our Desires are Ungovernable: Writing Graffiti in Urban Space,” they frame the graffiti artist as a performer of illicit writing in relation to the State. The State “marks the ongoing flow of paint” because the graffiti artist “interrupts the familiar, the known, the already named—in short, the categorical.”

Because graffiti artists can simultaneously possess the high art scene and infiltrate museums, like Jean-Michel Basquiat, and become disrespectful art and appear ubiquitously in the urban space, like Banksy, graffiti has been marked as an art form that is ultimately unpredictable. In response to the unintelligible duality of graffiti, the State has continuously marked the flow of paint, using multiple surveillance methods to not only contain “respectable” graffiti within the confines of the museum, but also erase and capture illicit writers that disrupts notions of “purity, order, and cleanliness” by using the city as a canvas. Positioned against other forms of art and performance, graffiti is one that cannot be truly comprehensible, which, in turn, prompts legal measures to prevent such undefinable “flow of paint.” But in addition to the actual act of graffiti that is incomprehensible, the State seeks to categorize such graffiti artists as illicit because spaces that are traditionally captured to serve a single existence of civil society, such as telephone poles, walls, or trash cans, now unpredictably can undergo a process of becoming in which they are now canvases, planes of communication, and new spaces of experimentation. With this, graffiti artists not only challenge the actual content of what art is supposed to be but also interrupt orderly functions and utilize an urban space as a canvas. So, graffiti artists disrupt predetermined notions of urbanity and of urban space—cleanliness, order, and purity—and in return are marked by civil society as the unintelligible Other, the author of disruption that must be controlled and understood by the State.

Additionally, graffiti’s multiple existences and potentialities can also disrupt fixated

Marc Carpentier, Photograph of Dos Cabezas by Jean-Michel Basquiat depicting himself (right) and Andy Warhol (left). Some rights reserved, Flickr: https://flic.kr/p/QU9cP7

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
hegemonic ideals about distribution of power. Because graffiti fails to be categorized as one being—it can be art, activism, language, and vandalism—graffiti as a practice of knowledge production also blurs the paradigm of categorization and marking of identities by the Surveillance Society. Kyle Hutcherson continues the conversation of Alison and Young by stating that graffiti:

“stands as an effective, visible, and representative resistance to hegemonic ideology/systems of power. It changes the perception of an idea, inadvertently affecting the discourse of one's social reality...The image itself acts as a catalyst for social change. Graffiti art challenges neocolonial imperial notions of the neoliberal agenda.”

To Hutcherson, graffiti has the duality of existence: it can appeal to those in power but also marginalized communities. Here, he focuses on the physical element of graffiti and how it can act as a method of subversive activism that escapes the grasp of neoliberal grasp onto social change. Essentially, the existence of graffiti itself allows for a different consciousness, a different epistemological approach onto one's political subjectivity and orientation towards hegemonic structures of power. The physical representation of graffiti is one that can be both attached to the graffiti artist, such as tagging a name or a symbol, but can also be one that is detached to the graffiti artists, one that is not claimed or rendered unintelligible to the external eye.

Hutcherson’s discussion of the physical representation of graffiti raises questions of ownership and anonymity of physical graffiti, complicating the (un)controllable nature of graffiti and the knowledge production that results from it. Tagging, a type of graffiti that serves as a literal declaration of identity, often is only identifiable by the artist. Because Surveillance Society cannot determine the graffiti artist responsible for the undecipherable illicit writing, it acts as a form of self-identification that evades the fluid power structures of neoliberalism. Such raw and open self-declaration of identity reclaims hegemonic attempts to categorize certain bodies into capturable categories. This way, artists can claim agency in their identities without risk of cooptation or identification by Surveillance society. Thus, graffiti is a form of activism that avoids falling into neoliberal methods of self-identifying such as participating in a march out in the open or writing hashtags on Twitter. The graffiti artist uniquely destabilizes hegemonic narratives that attempt to define blackness and its relation to larger structures of power, by opening up a space where its temporal, disrespectful nature can challenge policing of what constitutes aesthetics and art and also facilitate social critique. Therefore, the intimacy between the graffiti and the artist that writes the graffiti directly destabilizes hegemonic constructs of not only what art should be, but also affects the way external viewers see their relationship with the ever-changing urban space around them.

Graffiti existing as an imperfect form—both illicit writing and highly desired alternative art, both claimed and anonymous, both confined in art galleries and omnipresent in the urban canvas—is what renders imperfect control from the State. Regarding surveillance, graffiti acts a medium for black youth to go declare their existence and make their marks hypervisible, yet still is equally as undecodable. Surveillance strategies that depend on fixed Western epistemology of power structures and identities fail to capture and categorize graffiti because of its multiple potentialities and purposes.

Graffiti as Meaningless and More

Existing beyond a framework of embodying starkly contrasting dualities, it is important

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to recognize that graffiti can also be completely meaningless. Graffiti, then, not just embodies two contrasting ideas with paradoxically defies methods of ascribing a single code of meaning but is a constant process of redefining the paradigm of purpose and meaning. In a series of interviews with different Oakland graffiti artists, local blog *Endless Canvas* discusses agency, purpose (or lack thereof), and different interpretations of graffiti. For graffiti artist Akayo, who tags all over the Bay Area but also creates art pieces that go into museums, when asked what type of graffiti he engages in he responds with “I just do what I do, I’m not into labels.”14

Akayo’s approach to graffiti is one that “just is” and exists as his practice. For artist Akayo, there is no need to ascribe a meaning to his practice, graffiti writing doesn’t need to be ascribed a purpose or a category for it to be legitimate as an art form. Because graffiti can exist as non-productive as well, graffiti also destabilizes frameworks of productivity, which uniquely contributes to the infinite possibilities of graffiti.

**Conclusion**

Given this, graffiti holds so much potential to create, to speak, to exist, and to reshape our orientation to intersecting networks of power. Thus, in an era that seeks to mark and identity threatening bodies, graffiti serves as a single defunct cog that slowly erodes the large machine of Surveillance. Looking at graffiti overall as a method of knowledge production embodies the holey space; the unpredictability of what graffiti can possess, do, and challenge. Such unpredictability, whether or not it serves to empower or harm disenfranchised communities, indirectly (and directly) destabilizes the structures that seek to maintain the distribution of power that perpetuates institutionalized violence for black and brown bodies. Furthermore, owing to the nature of holey

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space itself as making room for the unpredictable and uncontrollable, it is also possible that graffiti
defies the demand for art to be meaningful. In an urban space, there are bound to be many holes
that proclaim and reify black existence despite the overwhelming cameras and securitization of
black and brown communities in the Bay Area. In response to overreaching surveillance strategies
that disproportionately affect low-income communities of color, it becomes possible to embrace the
counter-pedagogy of graffiti, flee from interpretation and categorization, and become a nomadic
graffiti artist.

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Princess Nokia, Cupcakke, and Female Empowerment through Hip-Hop

Katerina Fong

Abstract

The paper examines female rappers of color whose work challenges dominant male discourses in Hip-Hop to empower contemporary young women. The text focuses on contemporary rap artists Princess Nokia and Cupcakke, drawing upon a close reading of lyrical subject matter and artist interviews and contextualizing these artists within the male-dominated history of the genre and the Hip-Hop feminism movement. Based on this analysis, the text claims that Princess Nokia and Cupcakke are subversive in dismantling patriarchal norms in rap and renegotiating the terms on which women are allowed to exist, both in Hip-Hop and in society. Their rap anthems offer up a vision of womanhood which is intersectional, self-determining, and bursting with confidence.

Introduction

Since its inception in New York’s South Bronx in the 1970s, hip-hop music has served as a self-proclaimed movement for the “empowerment of urban Black and Latino youth.” Materializing out of the Black Power movement, rap represented a new artistic framework through which historically-vilified, marginalized, and oppressed voices could articulate their experiences, thoughts, and desires. However, while rap inherited from the Civil Rights and Black Power eras the self-determination, empowering potential, and moxie of decades of activism, it too fell victim to a problem: a systematic abuse of women. As a genre dominated by male artists, the “Hip-Hop Boy’s Club” glorifies values of sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy through a “lyrical and visual assault on women of color.”

There is extensive evidence of women of color taking issue with the patriarchal tendencies of rap music. dream hampton, prominent feminist African-American cultural critic, describes the painful dissonance between “all the ways hip hop has made [her] feel powerful” and provided her generation “a voice, a context” to appear “brave and fearless,” and dream’s daughter’s disdain for the rhymes that abuse and a beat that hurts. In the 1970s, the intellectual, political, and creative work of post-civil rights generation women grew into hip-hop feminism, a movement engaged in

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
challenging and dismantling pervasive systems of exploitation, including those that women saw being amplified and maintained by rap. Even as they tried to hold hip-hop “brothers” accountable for expressing brutally sexist attitudes, hip-hop feminists encountered backlash. Their attempts to defend themselves have been criticized for threatening to divide already historically-marginalized communities of color, for demonizing Black and Brown youth culture, for overlooking the importance of intra-racial loyalty to communities of color. In this trying climate, female artists came along to insert themselves and their stories into the rap continuum, using narratives and images about women that were produced by women.

Black and brown female rappers today not only take up their predecessors’ mantle of combating sexist hip-hop values, but also wage a more nuanced and subversive battle than ever before. The artists of today are subversive not just by existing, against all odds, in a male-filled genre; female rappers of color are working hard to reclaim narratives about themselves, their identities, and their bodies that echo powerfully through the speakers and lives of their female listeners.

Contemporary Black female rappers use their aesthetics to challenge dominant male discourses in hip-hop and empower themselves and others. Through their subject matter, lyrical style, and performed visuals, female MCs of the 21st century refuse to make themselves invisible or accept a singular, limiting definition of womanhood. Even more than their predecessors did, emcees such as Cupcakke and Princess Nokia shatter the expectations that surround women not only in the hip-hop sphere, but in the manifold lived experiences of contemporary young women of color.

Princess Nokia

New York-born rapper Destiny Frasqueri, also known as Princess Nokia, boldly smashes patriarchal hip-hop norms by embodying and addressing the diverse panoply of issues woven into the fabric of 21st century black and brown girlhood. Princess Nokia champions intersectionality. She stands at the forefront of a defiant young generation of female hip-hop performers of color exploring new permutations of femininity and womanhood, but also broaching cultural diaspora, spirituality, and sexuality. Her talent for morphing—her identity, lyrics, and musical delivery -- and explicit commitment to inclusive equality empower young women of all colors and walks of life.

Previous generations of female rappers made inroads in trying to offer new models for the female identity through their work. Prominent hip-hop historian Gwendolyn Pough describes Black female rappers’ willingness to radically redefine womanhood by confronting misrepresentations, inconsistencies, and contradictions and demanding a vast rainbow of new visions for representation. But, while these older female MCs of color certainly disrupted the dominant masculine discourses dictating femininity to an extent, they still remained bogged down by a limited selection of archetypes. Though Pough notes that artists wielded the power to code-switch between and simultaneously occupy different identities, hip-hop studies pioneer Cheryl Keyes still only identifies four major models for female rappers: Queen Mother, Fly Girl, Sista with Attitude, and Lesbian-- a far cry

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7 Gwendolyn D. Pough, Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-hop Culture, and the Public Sphere (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 78.
from hip-hop feminists’ proffered starry-eyed rainbow of inclusivity. While older female rap artists
deserve praise for their concerted attempts to expand and transform the notion of womanhood
within hip-hop, there is widespread consensus that newer rap music is unique in that it provides
frameworks to embrace and promote the vast heterogeneity of women of color.

Where her predecessors faltered, Princess Nokia succeeds in complicating the spectrum
of POC womanhood. Despite the traditionalism of the world of hip-hop, Princess Nokia and her
music refuse to conform to a singular category or stereotype. Decisively intersectional, Nokia’s lyrics
and artistic imagery speak to the bona fide lived experiences of the artist herself and resonate with
those of countless female listeners: “growing up poor, single mothers, dirty sneakers, cutting class.”
In opposition to conventional male rap discourses, Princess Nokia has offered a version of hip-
that represents the fluidity, openness, and intersectionality. Her music hurdles over violence,
aggression, sexism, and materialism--mainstream male rap’s “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”--
to something unexpected and unsanctioned in societal discourse: the personal issues of women. Her
music discusses topics that are eminently relevant to the lives of her constituents: Mine is dedicated
to the unique importance of hair to women of color of all backgrounds, but especially black and
brown women; Goth Kids acknowledges the emotional hardships Nokia encountered growing up
with a physically abusive foster mother. Frasqueri peppers her lyrics with an unexpected motley of
social identities, subcultures, and pop-culture gems. Songs and music videos hopscotch effortlessly
from ‘90s cult classic chick-flicks (The Craft, Clueless) to Blue’s Clues to Mortal Kombat; female
listeners feel the pleasure and validation of recognizing pieces of themselves and their lives in her
art.

Over lush hip-hop beats, Nokia “asserts ownership of every part of her being.” She gives
voice to the narratives and truths of young women like herself whose eclectic perspectives are
rarely, if ever, spoken in the rap world. Her lyrics celebrate all the labels she so proudly claims: nerd,
‘90s kid, skater, rave girl, goth, bruja, among others. In G.O.A.T., she flows seamlessly from more
conventional, braggadocious lines (“And I cash checks, and I get fly”) to rhymes about aughts-
era guilty pleasure punk-pop hits by Avril Lavigne (“Avril, I’m a sk8er boi.”) Without skipping a
beat, she goes on to name-drop more embarrassing memories from the collective tween memory
archive, “Anime and a lot of tours/ MySpace, made a lot of noise.” Comments from female listeners
on music videos and lyric websites emanate with awe for her unashamed realness: young women
love how she “is herself,” how she “just do her thing without even thinking what anybody thinks of
her.” There is something undeniably inspiring about listening to Nokia calling herself the “greatest
of all time” while spitting endearingly carefree rhymes about rainbows, unicorns, and HTML
coding. At a Dubai show, a girl approached Nokia in tears saying, “you can say the things I’m not
allowed to say... that my family would be really disappointed to hear from me. And it’s not that

13 Ibid.
these things are wrong, it's just that they're not accepted,"\(^\text{14}\) demonstrating the power and ubiquity of Nokia's message.

A willingness to make sincere self-disclosures is a hallmark of Nokia's music and identity. In Bart Simpson, Nokia draws parallels between herself and the deviant cartoon character; she calls herself “a nerdy girl with nymphomaniac tendencies” who’s “mischievous as shit.” A Manhattan skater persona and a comic-book obsession alienate Nokia from other people: “Readin' comics in Forbidden Planet/ I go home to a place of fantasy outside my own/ Always been a loner, never had a solid home.”\(^\text{15}\) Goth Kid, like Bart Simpson, touches upon the harsh loneliness, neuroses, and adolescent aches of Nokia's teen years, inciting a powerfully provocative conversation about trauma and mental health concerns prevalent within communities of color.\(^\text{16}\) Despite seeming at times like she “shit[s] glitter,” Nokia makes an effort to show her listeners that it okay to open up about the darker stuff, too.\(^\text{17}\)

Nokia's music works to uplift and validate, encouraging people to be their authentic selves, whether or not they align with her own. Her lyrics, music videos, and outfits all lay claim to the personal, intimate experiences of young women, even those normally denigrated as ‘uncool’ or ‘abnormal.’ In a musical genre, and a world, in which young women of color face a cannonade of systematic oppression, Princess Nokia is “spreading peace and love and positive ideas.”\(^\text{18}\) This uplifting effect is paramount for young women of color, who suffer some of society's greatest psychological, emotional, and socioeconomic ills.

Nokia relishes how ‘different, unique, and weird’ she is.\(^\text{19}\) Her optimism and take-no-prisoners attitude make her listeners feel good about embracing themselves, too. She identifies as “a bruja and a tomboy, a classic New York Boricua shorty, a feminist, a queer woman who isn't burdened, but empowered by her complexity.”\(^\text{20}\) Nor is she shy about doing so: her narrative is “obsessed with assertion;” music critic Amani Bin Shikhan describes the rapper’s raw honesty and willingness to reveal all secrets as evidence of her liberation from external validation.\(^\text{21}\) For young female listeners burdened by society’s many unreasonable, often contradictory expectations, Nokia presents a compelling example of a woman succeeding simply doing “whatever the fuck she want[s].”\(^\text{22}\)

In Tomboy, Nokia undermines mainstream male hip-hop's harmful gender narratives that demand a hypersexualized, socioculturally “traditional” femininity. Nokia also disputes gendered norms in hip-hop by pushing the boundaries of gender and sexuality. She firmly believes that gender and sexuality are a spectrum; she oscillates between masculine and feminine, even in the space of a single line (“that girl is a tomboy!”). Nokia is also openly queer, despite feeling for much of her life...

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{21}\) Ibid.
that being gay was something taboo. Nokia is vocal about using music to advocate for her fellow outcasts, especially women of color. The dreamy music video for Young Girls is a prime example: it begins with vivid images of an Eden-like utopia of sisterhood and inclusivity. Women of all ethnicities come together in a make-believe tribal commune set in the lush tangles of a jungle. As children frolic, women in quasi-tribal dress tend both earth and human, gathering roots and toting baskets while also lovingly nurturing the young. Later in the video, Nokia and her sisters come together in a circle, dancing and singing gleefully in a spiritual ritual of community, harmony, and love; simultaneously, the rapper croons, “Mothers and sisters/Daughters and son/Room for everyone, room for everyone,” furthering both implicit and explicit notions of welcome and belonging.

The song Brujas not only challenges the hold of African-American men on hip-hop, but also celebrates the increasing intersectionality of Black womanhood. As a “triple-raced” woman, Nokia proudly claims her Black, white, and Native American roots. She identifies herself “that Black a-Rican bruja straight out from the Yoruba.” Her boldness is notable given that Nokia acknowledges the “complicated and difficult” intersections of the mixed identity, the “colorism and self-hatred” ingrained in many descendants of the colonized Caribbean, and that “being a mixed person is really hard.” In the song and accompanying music video, she honors each part of her identity. The music video opens with a group of Black women with natural hairstyles standing in the ocean holding hands. In the center of their circle stands a woman representing Yemayá, the Yoruban Orisha or ocean goddess, draped in a striking beaded sky-blue veil, singing an indigenous African song. Throughout the pulsating song, Nokia demonstrates that her multifaceted ancestry and spiritual heritage are not “problems,” but the source of her power as unique instantiations of her own identity. Indeed, they seem to give her the power to talk back against those who would label her or her culture “problematic”--flanked by her poised Yoruban The Craft-esque girl gang, she chants, “don’t you fuck with my energy” while thrusting up her middle fingers. In doing so, she confidently asserts this spiritual heritage invoked by the title of her song, perhaps also her own take on black girl magic: “I cast a circle in white and I can vanquish your spite/ And if you hex me with hate then Imma conjure the light.”

Rather than focus on static, material suffering, Nokia visualizes a world in which women can also view the many disparate parts of their identities not as challenges or contradictions, but as sources of strength. Nokia envisions a more inclusive vision for hip-hop and womanhood -- one that allows women to be enigmatic, multidimensional beings, rather than stereotypes grounded in outdated, faulty assumptions. Even female listeners who do not share her exact cultural makeup reap the benefits. Nokia serves as a role model, a woman not forced to pick sides between her many cultures but who wears all of them as powerful badges of honor.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Cupcakke

Hailing from Chicago, African-American female rap artist Elizabeth Harris is better known as the “outrageously sex-positive” Cupcakke. Since rocketing to fame in 2014 with hit singles Deepthroat and Vagina, Cupcakke has remained a force of nature in dismantling patriarchal rap norms and outfitting female-identifying listeners with autonomy, confidence, and independence.

Cupcakke’s most notable contribution to the subversive canon of female rap accomplishments is her ongoing contestation and renegotiation of female sexuality. While lyrics concerning the bodies and sexual participation of Black women are integral to the rap anthems of many male artists, Black female public displays of physical and sexual freedom are far more taboo. Moreover, Cupcakke enters into a long line of women forced to bear the invisible burdens of respectability politics; as a Black woman, a member of a marginalized community, Cupcakke combats the criticism not just of mainstream society, but of other Black women who label her subversive displays of sexuality as tarnishing the reputation of the larger group. According to hip-hop feminist hero Joan Morgan, respectability politics, well-intentioned though it may be, keeps women sexually unfree and silent, with all sexual expression, representation, and freedom sacrificed “on the altar of not being labeled a ‘ho.’” In bold defiance, Cupcakke not only foregrounds her sexuality but flaunts it: in the music video for Doggy Style, she wears revealing pasties and sparkly lipstick while rubbing glazed doughnuts on her body. Her music sheds any pretense of subtlety; lyrics are stunningly explicit but also explicitly stunning. Rather than hiding her sexuality or winking guiltily at her female listeners, Cupcakke writes about her sexual exploits with a rare sense of pride. Though she prefaces her first verse by acknowledging she is “way past a freak,” an epithet meant to shame, she holds no reservations in going off on a series of detailed, sexually decadent descriptions.

Although there is precedence of women rapping about sexual desires, Cupcakke has pushed this notion to new extremes. In her eyes, if men can do it, why not women? Hip-Hop historian Tricia Rose discussed the attempts of older African-American female MCs to insert new female narratives into hip-hop’s arena of sexual politics: although she affirms their work as espousing feminist concepts of independence, self-determination, and empowerment, Rose critically positions “bad sistas” like Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and MC Lyte as working “within and against” male-scripted sexual and racial discourses, rather than in complete opposition to them. All of these Black women rappers raise incisive questions about distributions of power in sexual relationships, and often affirm Black female beauty. However, most of their music still operate within existing dominant frameworks oppressive of women of color, subtly preserving “the logic of female sexual objectification” with little real attempt to unspool the complexity of rap’s sexual politics.

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30 This term is widely used in the literature as being a set of social and cultural restraints that enforce rigid standards of self-comportment in the name of “respectability.”
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 147.
surface level, it seems paradoxical that Cupcakke's unbridled, in-your-face raps propose a far more nuanced, balanced understanding of women's relationship to sex as it exists today than those of her less extreme predecessors. Nonetheless, Cupcakke's lyrics and visual aesthetics consistently affirm a vision of sex that focuses on women: female desire, independence, autonomy, pleasure, confidence—all, critically, on the terms of women themselves.

Cupcakke refutes and redefines the discourses of male hip-hop artists who cast women as passive, subservient sexual objects. Prior to Cupcakke, older Black female rappers had a tendency to confront hypersexualization by “depict[ing] women as resistant, aggressive participants,” in Tricia Rose's words. But Cupcakke's raps carry none of the vengeful innuendo that Rose refers to. Cupcakke advances a more nuanced negotiation of sexual power dynamics, engaging in sex is a consensual, mutually-gratifying experience. According to Cupcakke, women need not be ashamed for enjoying sex, in whatever form they desire. Best Dick Sucker attacks the notion that pleasing one's partner is degrading with confident rhymes like: “If that's yo man don't let him suffer/ Do it and don't hide under the covers/ Show that ninja you the best dick sucker.” In Cupcakke's world, pleasure is shared by both the giver and the receiver, as evidenced by her joyous sexual display in the song's music video.

Cupcakke herself acknowledges that her explicitly sexual material first earned her the attention of the public, but emphasizes that she tries to “touch on everything,” going beyond “just the freaky stuff.” Cum Cake (2016), her debut album, addresses such diverse topics as sexual abuse, slavery, police brutality, street violence, poverty, and racism. Cupcakke aims to “write songs people can relate to,” resonating with the everyday behaviors, attitudes, and feelings of her female listeners. While her music is undoubtedly explicit, it is also empathetic towards the experiences of women—rap's casually-maligned participants.

The track Picking Cotton is a heartbreaking rap about police brutality, inspired by Cupcakke's hometown of Chicago, a city stained with the blood of unarmed, predominantly Black police-shooting victims. The song takes a devastating look at the enduring power of racism and slavery (“Beat us and treat us so rotten/ Still think we slaves, we just not picking cotton”), but sheds serious wisdom for her young listeners who live in fear of being gunned down for the color of their skin. She encourages solidarity (“They don't really want us to speak (shh)/ It's about unity”), discourses indiscriminate hatred (“Every white man is not corrupted as the white men we see”), and asserts her power (“I am not a slave, I am brave,” “Intimidated by our presence, so he be drawing the weapon/ Not screaming justice for nothing/ We not gone”).

The music journal Pitchfork correctly identifies that Cupcakke is “far more than her hilarious

37 Ibid, 155.
and absurdly raunchy one-liners.” She deftly negotiates the delicate balance between seriousness and levity. She tackles self-esteem and the desire for genuine romance while also delivers side-splitting, absurdist nuggets of lyrical gold. The line between prudishness and promiscuity is almost impossible to navigate, but Cupcakke does it well. The music of male rappers alternately praises and criticizes the “chaste woman, the whore, the woman who ‘plays hard-to-get,’ the baby mama, and the seductress,” but Cupcakke cuts sharply through the darkness and demonization. There is a reason her songs are so infectiously catchy: they remind female listeners that sex is fun and that they, like her, should be able to be as outrageously raunchy as they want to be. Real-life sex should mirror the lyrical playground that Cupcakke creates, one that accommodates for whimsicality, verbal wordplay, and free-association. If women can welcome lyrics like, “The dick connected to my walls, like it’s Spiderman/ My saliva don’t dry up, even by a fan... Suck ramen noodles off that dick, that’s my vitamin,” or, “Coochie guaranteed to put you to sleep so damn soon/Riding on that dick I’m reading Goodnight Moon,” why can’t women practice that same self-confidence and fearlessness in their own everyday lives?

Conclusion

With Princess Nokia and Cupcakke, there no longer remains the question of whether or not the female artist can carve out for herself a space in the male-centric world of rap. These artists have decisively laid claim to the hip-hop throne, casting their voice far and wide with rap anthems that speak to the richness of their own identities and experiences, and to the possibility of a more empowered future for all women. Their music infuses active and fun beats with meaningful lyrics that invert sexual norms and challenge the politics around social respectability that dictate the lives of women of color.

Princess Nokia’s and Cupcakke’s music, by speaking to taboo topics, disrupts the dominant masculine hold on rap and empowers young women everywhere. Their music gives voice and representation to women and girls without other role models who look like them to look up to. Their music remain powerful examples of the effects of broadening the boundaries of kinship and social acceptance. While this surface-level inquiry surveys into the effects of female rappers of color on the gendered, racialized, and sexualized politics of hip-hop, future research would benefit from widening the sample size of artists and considering the opinions of women of color who respond to the demonizing and patriarchal norms of male-produced rap music. Nonetheless, this paper provides an interesting and nuanced apparatus for viewing the subversive tendencies of female artists of color, and instills new hope in a music industry dominated by -- and previously exclusive to -- men.

43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Videography


Discography


Bibliography


Morocco in Fragments: Perspectives on Gender and Agency in Fieldwork

InHae Yap

Abstract

Drawing on my own field experiences in Morocco, this creative nonfiction piece meditates on ethnographers’ relations to informants during fieldwork and in postfield stages of writing and processing. Challenging the norms of anthropological writing, I seek here to explore ways in which we can counter the usual researcher-subject power relations by understanding how the subject gazes back at us and seeking alternate ways in which to write about ethnographic encounters in productive (though not necessarily “analytical”) ways.

Malgré Les Yeux

“He could be looking for work, but he is lazy, il ne veut pas,” Aicha¹ told me of her husband, Yousef, with frustration. Time was languid in summertime Morocco, where daily activity revolved around the sun’s mercy. The midday meal, for which Aicha was slicing carrots with admirable speed, occurred at the sun’s hottest. Aicha and Yousef were a couple with whom I was lodging with in Amizmiz. I was sitting with her on a cushioned bench, chatting between episodes of a Turkish soap opera. We awaited Yousef’s arrival—the creak of metal hinges, a mumbled salaam alaikum, the inevitable mispronunciation of my name: labaas, Inhee?—from the cafes, where he had been with other men all morning. He would spend the hottest part of the day at home, but leave soon enough after lunch, return and leave again for dinner, and return and leave again for the late-night meal. His movements centered my day, and hers, more so than the daily calls to prayer that blasted simultaneously from every mosque in town. “His authority,” Susan Ossman remarks in an anecdote about locals awaiting a Casablanca official, “is underlined as much by his ability to make us wait as by his decision themselves.”²

I shared Aicha’s frustration about her husband’s unemployment, although for a different reason. It was infuriating for me to sit inside as Yousef moved in and out as he pleased; my different selves—woman, ethnographer, American—bristled with indignation, unspoken protest. Still, I pointed out the obvious: “Mais, aren’t his eyes bad?” Yousef was technically a part-time employee in his friend Hamsa’s tourist company but was rarely given the work of guiding tourists through the mountains because of a medical issue with his eyesight: to look at his phone he held it right up to his eyeballs; to talk to someone sitting a few feet away, he had to squint hard and lean in extremely close to them. When I did not hear him, or pretended not to hear, he repeatedly poked my arm and then left his fingers lying there so he could yank me back into his narrow field of vision. The very act of looking became physically intrusive.

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all individuals throughout this paper.
Aicha shook her head, sighing at her husband. “His eyes are an excuse. There are still many jobs for him, malgré les yeux.”

Gendered Tea and Norms of Power: What a Woman Sees

What does it mean to work? This question initially appears obvious: to work is to spend time contributing to an economy and to society. In Marxist terms, those who do not work (unlike the proletariat) or do anything to generate the economy (unlike the bourgeoisie) belong to the lumpen class. “Lumpen” refers to unproductive populations who have traditionally been subject to moralizing dismissal by both progressive and conservative economic theories of labor. Contemporary scholars, however, are increasingly turning their attention to the lumpen classes and toward possibilities of existence beyond neoliberal forms of governmentality.3

In “Killing Time,” Michael Ralph questions these categories in light of an increasingly commonplace Senegalese spectacle: men spending their days drinking tea on the streets. People clucked their tongues and shook their heads at these “lazy” young men who spent their days brewing and sipping tea instead of gaining useful skills or seeking work. This seemingly innocuous phenomenon had become a symbol of the country’s economic stagnation – seen both as its cause and effect, entirely at fault and yet not to blame. For these men, whose sense of self, social access, pride, and masculinity were wrapped up in labor, the country’s lagging economic situation went hand in hand with social fallout. Thus deprived of opportunities to accrue wealth and status by official economic means, Ralph argues, Senegalese men both gained and lost social standing in a tea-based economy of their own making.

I came across Ralph’s article on labor and masculinity in Senegalese tea a few months after returning from my own fieldwork in Morocco, where tea-drinking was a similarly integral social practice. “The mothers serve their children sugary tea even when they’re babies,” explained a Peace Corps Volunteer, Anna, telling me of some of the roadblocks she encountered in instigating local health initiatives. “And I don’t want to interfere with a tradition that goes back hundreds of years, but like, we have western science.”

Though imposing western standards of dental care upon my neighbors was not on my agenda, tea became an object of contention in my own fieldwork, not least because its high sugar content made me break out like a middle schooler. Primarily, tea reminded me of the cafes that lined Amizmiz’s main streets, and their all-male clientele who sipped and poured and stared at the street while indulging in slow, idle talk. M-styl4 youths in tank tops and sunglasses and old men in jellabas sucked on cigarettes and took unhurried sips of tea. It is not an exaggeration to say that every other building on the main streets of all towns I passed through in Morocco was a cafe. In larger cities where tourists proliferate, cafes mimicked their European counterparts, where tables are sandwiched by chairs arranged face-to-face such that each table forms its own private cluster for customers to enjoy time alone or with friends. Few small-town cafes had time for such pretense; rows of chairs, inside and outside the cafe, faced the street, where men looked out upon whatever events may interrupt the rhythm of the day.

As a young foreign woman, I occupied an odd niche within the boundaries of gender and

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4 An adjectival form of the English word “style” in Moroccan Arabic, a slang word often used to describe the fashion-conscious Mohammed VI.
social hierarchy, allowing me to move and interact among men to a greater extent than other women in the town. Cafes, however, were off-limits, except in very specific circumstances. Thus, what fascinated me about Ralph’s article was that it represented the perspectives of the one population that was truly restricted to me—men in the public sphere—and left out the very perspectives I had become familiar with. I recalled Aicha’s gripes about her “lazy” husband. Would she—told by Yousef to find work herself, juggling several tutoring jobs, previously divorced—accept Ralph’s suggestion that such men should be seen not as lazy but as victims of economic circumstance?

Certainly it could be argued that Aicha’s perspective feeds into problematic notions of the man as breadwinner and her domestic discontent an unfortunate trickle-down consequence of broader economic ones. I told myself that I should read Yousef’s inability to find a job as a sign not of personal failure or indifference but of the consequences of the Moroccan government’s shortcomings, or even the imposition of western neoliberal economics upon African markets. But, as a lone woman walking past rows of such men drinking tea, gossiping, and staring at the street for hours on end, I could not help but feel extremely resentful.

“You literally can’t walk in front of a cafe without all these guys staring after you,” Anna remarked. I had only been in Morocco for two weeks but had already discovered that there were places in town to avoid if I did not want to be ogled at. The irony was that, as Anna and I were complaining of male cafe culture, we were sitting at one ourselves. Anna was a regular. “I go [to] this cafe a lot to use the internet,” she said. I nodded, pretending that few men I knew hadn’t already informed me of her movements through town.

Our ability to sit at this cafe, to chat at leisure among groups of men, was no doubt partly due to the cafe’s location on a quieter side street and its quasi-western style decor. More than that, though, it was because we were privy to what Paulla Ebron terms “honorary male privilege,” an ambiguous honor of being deemed “one of the guys.” Moroccan men often told me that, yes, as a foreigner, I could smoke cigarettes, walk around in daytime, and so forth. Never mind that Moroccan women who did so would be branded morally dubious.

Moreover, as Ebron observes, seeing what “male” activities you can get away with as a woman is not always the point. In her fieldwork on jali performance in the Gambia, Ebron weighs

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the advantages of learning an instrument played exclusively by men: “I listened to repeated stories about another woman researcher who had taken male privilege to learn an instrument … Her notoriety was based reportedly on being pushy, aggressive, obnoxious, and acting inappropriately … Properly socialized local women, my informants’ comments suggested, were not like that.”

To understand jali’s place within gendered social dynamics, Ebron had to behave more like a “proper” woman and forego the musical practice central to jali performance.

Indeed, just as I had begun to relax with my coffee and the pleasure of conversation with a fellow American, I looked up and saw Yousef walk into the cafe. I’d informed him and Aicha of my plans to see Anna before leaving the house that day; not even an hour had passed before he’d decided to follow me. “Salaam alaikum, Anna; salaam, Inhee,” he said, before moving to the back of the cafe. I felt his gaze on my back; as he chatted with the cafe owner in Tashelhiyt, the local Berber dialect. Anna remarked with weary sympathy, “They try to protect you here.” When I walked up to the owner to pay, Yousef rushed over to me from his corner of the cafe: “Are you okay, Inhee?” Yes, I said, and quickly turned to leave. I learned, in that moment, that I might do things normally forbidden to Moroccan women but only insofar as the man in my life would let me.

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Fictive Kin, Fictive Integration

Yousef’s concern over my state of well-being, though perhaps over-the-top even by Moroccan standards, was compounded by pressures from Moroccan government institutions. During my first week in Amizmiz, I had to register my two-month residence with Yousef at the local government office; in subsequent weeks, bureaucratic workers continually checked in with him to ask whether “that girl” was still with him. Later, when my relationship with Yousef became rocky, our mutual acquaintances walked a fine line between condemning him—“I told him not to follow you around”—and explaining his behavior: because Yousef had registered me with the authorities, he would be held legally responsible should anything happen to me. The added pressure of government surveillance thus took Yousef’s paternalism to another extreme.

It’s true that foreign residents’ movement within Morocco was closely followed by the government—guided, I suspect, by concern for the economic well-being of a lucrative tourist industry. An American expatriate in Marrakech told me that government agents regularly visited her doorman—who she tellingly referred to as her building’s “guardian”—to check on her. “I think they do it so frequently because they’re bored bureaucrats with nothing better to do,” she said. Julia, another Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV), agreed. “They knock on my friends’ doors every few weeks to ask about my whereabouts.” Whether it’s a small town such as Amizmiz, where such government workers are aware of who one’s friends are, or a larger city like Marrakech, where doormen act as obvious point persons, one is always being tracked.

The foreigners I met were, coincidentally, exclusively women, so further research would be needed to make general claims about surveillance of foreigners. Nevertheless, it’s clear that the line between protective paternalism and intrusive surveillance is blurry, if not altogether missing. Gender adds another edge to this dynamic; Yousef repeatedly told me stories of female PCV who were suddenly raped by neighbors they’d known for years or how so-and-so strangers would call demanding money if I gave them my phone number. Though I have never questioned the veracity of these stories, I realize in retrospect that Yousef used them to drill into me that I could only fully trust him and those he designated trustworthy.

Female anthropologists have written of becoming “fictive kin” in field settings where female

6 Ibid.
independence would have marked them as untrustworthy.” This gives them some mobility in terms of becoming less “strange”—through association with a local male figure and integration into a kinship structure. Yousef told me in my first week that he considered me a younger sister, effectively roping me into his family orbit. Initially, I was pleased with this designation as “sister,” hoping that a connection to him would alleviate my vulnerability as a single young woman travelling alone. And, at a personal level, I was flattered to have been designated worthy of joining his family.

Soon, though, I began noticing how Yousef’s anger flared up if I talked to people he didn’t like, such as a woman named Nadya, whom he unkindly (and untruthfully) labeled a sex worker. Rahim, a rival tour guide in the company Yousef occasionally worked for, was not to be visited unless I was with Yousef, since Rahim would surely pester me for money. Aicha, too, said that I could not trust a girl that I met on the street because she only wanted to practice her English on me.

Such behavior is not atypical; many anthropologists and PCV could attest that, as Paul Silverstein describes, “Moroccan men and women are very strategic in building webs of engagement and networks of interaction, often in competitive and agonistic ways.” These networks erupt from dormancy in intriguing ways when new variables are introduced to this matrix. When that variable is a foreigner—one usually assumed (often rightly) to have access to money and other resources and a general source of intrigue via connection to places glamorized by television—the stakes mount ever higher.

Julia, who moved largely outside of Yousef’s Amizmiz network, informed me that several men had joked to her that Yousef clearly wanted to be my father since he never let me out of his sight. Though I am skeptical about whether such men would have acted much differently had they been in Yousef’s shoes, the point is that becoming “fictive kin” with someone has as many pitfalls as advantages. “The woman anthropologist,” Ruth Behar writes, “has breasts, but she is given permission to conceal them behind her pencil and pad of paper. Yet it is at her own peril that she deludes herself into thinking her breasts do not matter, are invisible, cancer won't catch up with them, the male gaze does not take them into account.” So, too, the idea of honorary male privilege, which is just that: honorary, insofar as men allow it.

They Know Not What They Do

In The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, Anne Fadiman explores the case of Lia Lee, a Hmong-American girl diagnosed with epilepsy by American doctors and diagnosed with the illness where the spirit catches you and you fall down by her Hmong parents. It was a case brought down by extreme language barriers, distrust, and cultural misunderstanding. Fadiman’s book demonstrates how the well-intentioned desire to “help” can open up murky ethical territory where economic, personal, and medical interests collide.

Although Fadiman avoids meting out blame, Lia still ended up suffering. How can we hold individuals accountable while also acknowledging the fault of wider institutional systems? Lochlann Jain’s Malignant, an anthropology of the American cancer industry, tackles this very issue in her discussion of cancer malpractice suits, particularly misdiagnosis. Doctors’ most common defense

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is that they too are humans who make mistakes. But the issue is less that “doctors make mistakes”—increasingly a catch-all excuse—and more that their individual shortcomings are supported both by institutions (like insurance companies) and a medical culture of silence about those mistakes. “Doctors remain stuck within…legal and medical systems that continue to enforce the notion that errors are exceptions to be disavowed or felt badly about rather than the norm in need of discussion, analysis, emendation.”

It is similarly unproductive to attribute the unemployment of men like Yousef wholly to the shortcomings of economic and political systems or their ability to harass women as “part of the culture.” As anthropologists, typically trained in western universities with direct ties to private sector institutions, we often harbor guilt about our inherently imbalanced relationship with our interlocutors, who are usually from low-GDP countries or lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Challenging ourselves to think about these questions is good reflexive practice, a key tenet of contemporary anthropological practice. But to deny wrongdoing on the part of our informants if, for instance, they trespass upon our privacy or even our sense of personal safety is to do a disservice to them.

I am reminded of Cecil King’s description of how anthropologists patronize indigenous peoples in their efforts to be considerate: “[Indian, Metis and Inuit peoples] are seen out of the images built out of anthropological studies of them … [anthropologists] have provided us with the cop-outs: ‘Indian time’ if we are late, “It’s not the Indian way” if we don’t want to do something.” Explaining individual actions without care or attention to specifics can, in King’s view, only smother the subject. Or to take another instance: if a man remarks that a woman is reacting to a situation in a certain way only because “she’s a woman,” she does not take offense because the statement is necessarily untrue. What makes such a remark alarming is rather the implication that her womanhood disallows any possibility of her making individual decisions and actions, whether they be wrong, right, or even stupid. To be accountable for one’s actions is one of the strongest claims to subjecthood a person can make; to do otherwise is to infantilize—doctors, Moroccans, and Inuits all.

Non Curo

My therapist’s words were soothing, if slightly mechanical and rehearsed. “I’m glad you’re


This is, of course, to say nothing of the question of why the field has historically – and into the present day – concentrated on populations from former colonies or, at the very least, marginalized peoples within western, highly capitalist societies.

working towards these goals. It sounds like you were very powerless in Morocco, and by writing, you get to regain that power by narrating your own stories.”

I found myself intrigued and unconvinced. Comforting as that statement was, upon further reflection, I decided I felt rather ambivalent about it. What does it mean, to have power in narrating one’s own stories? And why should my narrative of a story that involves multiple actors be privileged over theirs?

It’s true that I felt powerless in Morocco. I was a young woman doing independent fieldwork alone in a rural town, who, in addition to the usual sex- and race-based harassment that non-male non-white foreigners frequently encounter, found herself increasingly the object of contention among pre-existing rivalry networks and small-town hostilities. By the end, I didn’t feel safe in my host home; I slept with a fruit knife, my pathetic, plastic-handled comfort.

And yet:

I find it difficult to call myself a victim, in the sense of one who is powerless. For although in these situations I lacked any agency or control, I always carried meaningful power. I had financial power: supported by a wealthy private institution, I was able to buy myself a plane ticket and leave my fieldwork early. (Many of the people I met only occasionally had the means to visit other parts of Morocco.) I had political power, simply by possessing a gold-embossed navy booklet, a passport that declared me allied to the United States. (Even the Moroccan government, approximately 20% of whose GDP is supported by tourism, cares far more deeply about the safety and wellbeing of foreigners than its own constituents—or so many people I encountered believed.) I had “expert” power: my academic standing as a university-trained researcher among people who had only completed high school, at best, meant that whatever I said was often regarded as final. And most importantly, I wielded representational power.

Power—the means and ability—to narrate and disperse people’s stories, as I do now.

I recently came across the bracelet that Aicha’s small daughter gave me. It was precious to her, this flimsy wire bracelet of purple beads, still covered in the dust of Amizmiz. She was shy when I first met her, and I slowly drew her out by drawing little doodles on a sketchbook. After that, she wouldn’t leave me alone, always insisting that I play with her, until she was eventually sent to her grandmother’s house for the rest of my stay; apparently, Yousef thought she was annoying me. She was, but I missed her. We were both lonely and bored in that house. The bracelet fell out of a storage box, and I wondered if Yousef had actually expected me to pay for her college education abroad, as he’d joked I might.

There are points in this essay that now strike me as odd or problematic in their representation of the people I encountered in Morocco, particularly my inadvertent perpetuation of the stereotype of men in a predominantly Muslim country as sexist, prone to harassment, etc. But, the unease with which I regarded men like Yousef had little to do with any immediate concern for my physical safety. Rather, I believe that gender and bodily physicality allowed such men to equalize our relationships, which, as I rightly point out, were otherwise imbalanced by other kinds of power I wielded. (As my editor points out, “Representation is a powerless power when you’re sleeping with a fruit knife, but it matters so much more at the end of the fieldwork period.”) In fact, I easily befriended several Moroccan men who were far more secure in their economic and social standing—their masculinity, perhaps; to them, I was no more than an object of curiosity, rather than as the social currency that men like Yousef seemed to treat me. These acquaintances and the nuances they provide to this broader picture failed to make their way into this essay. Only the clarity that time brings has allowed me to address equally all aspects of my fieldwork, good and bad.
Despite these misgivings, I have left the essay largely intact as a way to honor the blunt emotional response that marked my postfield experience. Its faults, namely its ambiguity, are telling: the narrative style is clinically analytical but results in a conclusion that is ambiguous as it is brutally honest; the content is deeply personal but refrains from elaborating my feelings. I believe that this was because, during the time of writing, my day-to-day life was still marked by panic attacks and heavy disassociation, and I needed that sense of stability offered by academic writing in order to help structure my erratic emotions. Nevertheless, there is a real sense of anger and loss that imbues the rhythms of the writing, even as it is contained by its structure. To rewrite or radically re-edit the paper would be to neutralize that feeling.

"It will make sense," Michelle Rosaldo writes, "to see emotions not as things opposed to thought but as cognitions implicating the immediate, carnal 'me'—as thoughts embodied."13 We lose a great deal of meaning when we discount the ways in which so-called rational thought is structured by feeling, and how affective life is equally structured by social context. Fieldwork is frequently an emotionally-fraught venture, but the feelings it invokes are often treated as incidental or secondary to research, rather than as a rich vein of potential for deep ethnographic understanding. Thick description, as coined by Geertz, should also extend to the researcher’s subjective self.

A year ago, I wrote that I did not believe my therapist when she suggested that writing this piece would allow me to regain any sense of power. I didn’t understand, then, that by “power” she meant my ability to control the way my experiences were affecting my daily life, not social or political power. “Morocco in Fragments” was written as a piece about gender, agency, fieldwork, etc., as disparate pieces that made up my experience in Morocco. It can still be read as such. But I think it is more effective when seen as my attempt to grapple with the way my fieldwork experiences shattered my once-unified senses of self—as a woman, American, ethnographer, etc.—and a desperate attempt to glue those shards back together.

Coming apart, and falling together.

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Bibliography


From the Shadows:
An Ethnographic Examination of
Stanford Students’ Relationships with Cannabis
Joshua Cobler

Abstract

After the legalization of marijuana in California, cannabis held a unique legal status at
Stanford University: disallowed due to prohibitions from federal law but legally accessible due to the
end of restrictions by state law. This piece explores Stanford students’ relationships with cannabis in
this period, identifying student usage of marijuana as tools to both build and deepen platonic social
bonds and to create pathways for control within romantic and sexual relationships.

Introduction

The music spilled out from the building and onto the veranda of the Enchanted Broccoli
Forest, a Stanford house known among students for its biweekly Wednesday night happy hours.
The name “Enchanted Broccoli Forest,” or EBF for short, actually came from the name of one of
the first all-vegetarian cookbooks, or so I had been told. However, the house wasn’t known for
being vegetarian, and it definitely wasn’t known for its love of vegetables; it was known for its love
of another type of green. The bright, flashing lights and uncomfortable warmth from inside pushed
my friends and I back outside and onto a couch on the front porch.

As I sunk down further on the couch, I felt the stiffness of the the vape pen in my pocket.
I pulled it out, took one deep inhale, and blew out a single, long puff of smoke. My friend Mark,
already somewhat drunk from an “oddly-boozy homework night,” reached for the pen. “Fuck it,” he
slurred. He put the pen up to his lips, inhaled for a little too long, and then coughed out a large cloud
of smoke. “I don’t need to work for the FBI after all,” he joked before coughing again uncontrollably.
Just days before, he told me in an interview about how he had been abstaining from weed for federal
job purposes, but I guess the final weeks of the quarter drive people to crave an escape. One thing
led to another, and soon the two of us found ourselves juveniley competing to see who could blow
the “coolest” smoke clouds.

Marijuana usage at Stanford had always seemed relegated to the shadows. Whereas drinking—
even for those underage—has become normalized on campus through a visible drinking culture in
fraternities and nearby houses, the federal prohibition on marijuana has led many students to be
less overt about their marijuana usage. But in the wake of California’s medical cannabis program
and the Adult Use of Marijuana Act (Proposition 64), which legalized recreational cannabis in the
state in 2016, marijuana has become easier to legally acquire for California college students (Hudak
2016). Though marijuana accessibility on campus had rapidly increased, it wasn’t clear if social
attitudes were moving as quickly. In order to better understand Stanford students’ relationships to
marijuana, I spoke to a variety of Stanford undergraduates who had consumed it in some fashion
while in college. I propose that marijuana can take on different social roles in different social
contexts, such as between friends, without a romantic component where marijuana functioned as
an important social lubricant for many students. In other contexts, like romantic relationships, it sometimes functioned as a tool to control one’s partner, demonstrating the valence of marijuana culture more broadly.

Marijuana as a Social Tool

Marijuana itself is often used to fill a social need on campus. While its psychoactive effects propel its popularity among college students, its primary function for many students is as a kind of lubricant for human interaction, as seen by the way it is most popularly consumed: smoking. To better illustrate the ways in which cannabis would be used as a way to build and deepen social relationships, I will highlight two specific cases: Charles, who tended to smoke only with his friends in their rooms, and Rachel, who found weed a useful tool for making friends within her sorority and nearby fraternity. While these two used marijuana for different aims (Charles used it to develop his already existing friendships while Rachel used it to form new ones), the manner in which they did so sheds light on the social nature of cannabis and how the physical object of the joint or vape pen filled with the drug facilitated these social relationships.

I first sat down with Charles, who I had met in my freshman dorm but also spent much of the fall quarter of sophomore year doing microeconomics problem sets with. Charles had always been soft-spoken and shy. But, over the course of this year, he opened up quickly, which may have been a result of my room being small and cramped enough to provide enough privacy for him to speak what was on his mind. But more likely than not, he opened up because, if he remained silent, I would have to fill the void, and I was fairly certain he didn’t want to hear me speak for hours straight.

I set the recorder right next to him on the futon and then told him how I was attempting to understand Stanford students’ relationships to cannabis. “Weed, as they call it,” he joked. The majority of his weed usage had been with his friends in our freshman dorm, reaching weekly usage as a way to celebrate and relieve the stress of finishing each linear algebra problem set every Wednesday night. “It’s the same as drinking, I guess,” he said. “It’s something for a group of friends to do.” For Charles, the physical space and liminal moment that is college alters the rules of what is acceptable and unacceptable, leaving the door open to frequent usage of substances such as marijuana. “College is, as I’m seeing it, a time where I can have fun, and I don’t have to be professional or focused all the time.” Charles told me he does not expect to continue using marijuana outside of college—a sentiment shared by his roommate when I spoke to him. According to Charles, marijuana usage in the unique college period—a temporally finite period that further played into the taboo nature of the substance, as it would only be considered acceptable to use during this liminal college period—helped create a special bond between him and his college friends, as weed soon began to encompass a certain ritual usage. It would nearly always be used with his friends after they would finish problem sets for classes. While Charles described alcohol as another drug that could be used for the purposes of developing closer social relationships with his friends, the secretive nature of weed on campus seemed to help bond him and his friends as well—when they would smoke, they would do so in their rooms, hidden away from residential staff, trying to mask the scent by blowing the smoke directly out the window. Social bonds seemed to be created in part due to the level of vulnerability that occurs with sharing in a secretive action; however, that is not the only way bonds

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1 In this paper, I will use the term “social” to describe non-romantic relations between friends. From my observation, I discover that social relations and romantic relations at Stanford, at least on the surface level, have different presentations.
were created—even the physical action of exchanging the vape pen helped create these bonds.

To better understand this bond-creating process, it is useful to view cannabis as a gift to be shared—the giving, receiving, and returning of this gift helps create social bonds among those partaking in its use. In social situations for college students, being high can be seen as, what Marcel Mauss would call, a “spiritual bond” among participants, a direct result of the vulnerability that comes out of the act of exchange (Mauss 2016, 75). As one of my interlocutors told me, “The high that you get allows you to get to know someone a lot better than if you were drunk.” Even the physical action alone of putting one’s lips to the same joint merges the physical with the spiritual, and the constant exchange of marijuana between participants—the concept of “puff, puff, pass”—creates equal participation in the substance’s psychoactive effects. This helps build the “magical dowry” of many gifts that is “identical for both the giver and the recipient,” and the identical and equal nature of taking a hit and then immediately sharing the joint with another person helps build the “spiritual” nature of cannabis that facilitates the social bond-making process (Mauss 2016, 133).

Walking up to the front door of Mu Iota with one of my friends, I could already hear the music blaring. I had been expecting dead silence—it was a Wednesday night, and Mu Iota’s nearby neighbor, the Dionysus House, usually dominated this hour of the Wednesday night party scene with their trademark event of the night, Wine and Cheese. The expansive ground floor where members of the fraternity normally held their parties was the only area of the building that I was familiar with. So, as I ventured up the stairs, I felt as though I were stumbling through a winding labyrinth. I couldn’t tell if it was an objectively confusing building or if it was my general sense of exhaustion that made the process of finding the right room that much more difficult.

After what felt like hours of wandering through Mu Iota, I finally ran into Rachel, the student I had planned to meet there. “So sorry, I didn’t expect this party!” she said as we ran into each other on the staircase. “I’m just in my friend’s room.” I followed her to the room of one of her teammates—a junior living in Mu Iota—and, after a brief introduction, Rachel and I plopped down on the couch opposite of her teammate’s desk. She was no stranger to this fraternity; she had become an honorary part of their “smoke crew” over the course of the year, along with other members of her sorority who enjoyed “lighting up” on weekday evenings as a “nightcap” from a long day of classes. “So, it’s okay for us to smoke in here?” I asked Rachel. She responded affirmatively. Soon, we found ourselves in a familiar position: the gift-exchange process of passing a vape pen back and forth between us.

While Charles tended to smoke only with people who were already his friends, Rachel saw marijuana as an object that could facilitate the creation of new social relationships. “Once I joined a sorority, I was able to meet a lot of girls who were into [smoking weed], so I was able to do that with them. And then, I have a couple [of] people now who are in Mu Iota,” she said. “So that’s been a lot of fun, to be able to go there and meet new people, but also to just have a good time and not get trashed. You know, to just be able to get chill, get calm, and then ride my bike home and fall asleep. It’s really nice.” The concept of going to a different location—such as a fraternity—in order to meet new people and get high points to the social nature of cannabis as an object. In social situations for college students, according to my interlocutors, it would be viewed as taboo—perhaps even selfish—for a person to not share the joint that they are smoking from. This is most clearly seen when juxtaposed with another common drug: alcohol. For example, not sharing the drinks that one has implies inhospitality in a social setting. Similarly, with cannabis, it is inhospitable or rude to smoke and not offer those around oneself a hit. Or, as Marcel Mauss claims, to “refuse to give,
to neglect to invite, as to refuse to take, is equivalent to declaring war; it is to refuse alliance and communion” (74).

The Sexual Undercurrents of Cannabis

Shortly after I received a medical marijuana recommendation and purchased a vaporizer pen, a floormate, Luke, decided he wanted to try it out. It was a Tuesday night, which was typically reserved for microeconomics problem sets with my usual study group. Luke had a tendency to drop in and talk with us before he went off to do his own assignments. But this night in particular, he didn't have a lot to do, so getting high wasn’t off the table. I handed him the vape pen. After I explained to him how to use it, he took a hit and attempted to exhale the vapor into the cool breeze blowing outside my window.

*Cannabis sativa*, one of the two most popular strains of marijuana and the strain of cannabis that Luke had just taken a few inhales of, “produces a euphoric feeling” that is known to uplift the user—as opposed to *Cannabis indica*, which is “more mellow and relaxing”—making sativa a popular strain of choice for medical marijuana patients experiencing depression symptoms (Hudak 2016: “Cannabis Species”). For Luke, this uplifting high made him surprisingly talkative, helping him talk through connections he was making in the art history class he was taking at the time. After half of an hour of him sprawling out on my floor and talking to us, he got up and announced that he was going to leave. The rest of us didn’t think too much about it, and after we finished the problem set, I sent a joking message to Luke’s then-girlfriend about how he had just chosen to get high in my room while I was doing homework.

Within seconds, I got a series of short, frantic messages back from her. “He just left my room,” she wrote back. “Was he really high the whole time?” Realizing that I had now just awkwardly intruded into my friend’s romantic relationship, I wasn’t sure whether the socially acceptable response was to have her defer all further questions to him or to just tell her everything. I chose the latter. I spoke to Luke after the experience, and he found the miscommunication and misunderstanding more entertaining than anything. For a while, his then-girlfriend, still reeling from a sense of embarrassment from not realizing he was high while they had sex, made a point to ban his marijuana usage, a prohibition which I then watched him flagrantly violate on multiple occasions a week, sometimes in private with me and other times around her. “Best sex I ever had,” he mentioned after that initial experience, providing dangerous insight into what role cannabis provided in his own romantic life.

Prior to this, I had assumed marijuana usage for Stanford students was nearly entirely social. Stanford tends to have a stronger hookup culture, but according to my interlocutors, marijuana usage is not particularly prevalent in it—alcohol tends to be the drug of choice in facilitating hookups at parties. But, as I spoke to more and more of my peers, the theme of marijuana holding an important place in their sex lives kept coming up.

Marijuana usage was still stigmatized among even Stanford students who were marijuana users, making it an attractive option to keep cannabis usage within the shadows of a relationship. As French philosopher Gilles Deleuze wrote, “[W]ith drugs, there is something very unique where desire directly invests the system of perception,” and especially space-time perception (Deleuze 2006, 152). Those interested in drugs wanted to understand how desire “directly enters into perception, directly invests perception,” a phenomenon that leads to the “desexualization of drugs” (Deleuze 2006, 152). Marijuana provides a gateway for desire itself to change the user’s perceptions, to affect “modifications of speed, thresholds of perception, forms and movements, micro-perceptions,
perception on a molecular level, superhuman or subhuman times” (Deleuze 2006, 152). Deleuze's description of drug use as psychoanalytic desexualization in which the libidinal energy of drugs is entirely sublimated into non-sexual creative or destructive aims, however, does not line up with the lived experiences of my interlocutors. Even if on a theoretical level, drugs cause desire to “invest the system of perception” and thus become desexualized, strong sexual undercurrents remain in the imaginary of Stanford students.

“[Freshman year] was a time I explored a lot of things: a party lifestyle, to some extent, [and] sexual relations. And I kind of felt that experimenting with weed was something I wanted to do,” my friend Mark told me, describing what his cannabis usage had looked like before he had his period of abstinence from the substance. “My girlfriend at the time was somewhat into weed, and I felt like I should try it.” Since at the time Mark wasn't a frequent marijuana user and had few friends who used it, marijuana became relegated to the domain of his romantic life. Consuming edibles with his girlfriend became a unique source of bonding for the two of them, and the separate forms of vulnerability that came with being high and with having sex were combined. Marijuana then became associated with romantic relationships for him and this relationship in particular, a contextualization which he has since been in the process of changing.

For Joanna, another student I interviewed, her first time experimenting with marijuana was similarly in the context of a relationship she was in at the time. Her then-boyfriend asked her if she wanted to try weed, and she obliged. “The first time, I was going to play it super-duper safe. [My boyfriend] was super enthusiastic about it, so I was like, ‘Yeah, I’m gonna still give it a shot,’” she said. Joanna was nervous about what her first high would be like—would she embarrass herself or endanger herself in some way? So, she relied on her partner to keep her in check. After this first initial experience, all of her other uses of marijuana occurred after her boyfriend would ask her to get high with him. This set up a new power dynamic within their relationship in which all of her marijuana consumption would go through him. “He'd know people who had access [to weed], and I didn’t,” she said. Marijuana and the experience of getting high would additionally serve as a proxy for other aspects of their relationship—he would have a tendency to be more reckless, especially with how high he would get, leaving Joanna to be the one to step in to prevent him from doing anything dangerous. “He would always be the one to bring up the ‘do you want to get high tonight?’ question,” she told me. “And I would be willing, but not as desiring of getting high [as he was].”

According to other students, differences in consumption patterns—for marijuana, but also for alcohol and other substances—can cause rifts in romantic relationships. Partners could attempt to leverage their weed usage, or lack of usage, against the other person. This is not unique to marijuana or drugs in general; however, the sexual undercurrent of marijuana makes it attractive to those trying to subtly exert or claim power over another person. Sexuality itself “represents the precise point where the disciplinary and the regulatory, the body and the population, are articulated” (Foucault 2003, 252). What Foucault means is that sexuality is the point of intersection between regulatory power and the individual body. That which controls sexuality controls the population. Thus, I draw the connection that marijuana's (and other drugs') connections to sexuality make it a useful tool for disciplinary and regulatory control. These forms of control could be asserted within a relationship, using drugs as a way to exploit existing power imbalances to varying degrees of success.

In the case of Luke, whose ex-girlfriend attempted to prevent him from smoking marijuana, attempts at exerting these forms of power through marijuana regulation on an individual level failed, judging by his continued usage of the substance through the end of their relationship. This
was partially a result of the already existing gap in cannabis experience between the two of them, experience which put Luke in a higher position of power and made it nearly impossible for his ex-girlfriend to completely prevent his usage of the substance without resorting to more extreme disciplinary and regulatory measures that she was not willing to take. But for Mark and Joanna, subtle control over their consumption patterns was exerted. Each of them found themselves put in positions of dependence in relation to their partners through marijuana usage. They were each introduced to marijuana by their romantic partners which created a knowledge power imbalance, vulnerability within their relationships was manufactured through marijuana consumption, access to marijuana was controlled by the partner, and existing power dynamics within their relationships would become magnified through marijuana usage.

Conclusion

Mark and I stood on the balcony of my residence, pressing our bodies against the railing and looking out onto the street. A light sprinkle of rain trickled down on us. He pressed the vape up to his lips, took a deep inhale, and released the smoke back into the cool breeze. I looked over at him. His eyes were starting to glaze over, but he didn't notice me turning to look at him.

He pressed the pen back up to his lips and took another hit. It had now been about two weeks after breaking his initial “no weed” streak at EBF Happy Hour, when he decided that he didn't need to work for the FBI, which required three years of being drug free before the time of applying. Within those two weeks, he smoked more weed than he had in most of his life. The academic work I had been doing in investigating marijuana’s effects on social bonds rang true in our friendship. But, at the same time, I was worried about him. Mark had been aware that I had spent the past few days writing about Stanford students’ relationships with marijuana, and he was excited to find out that he had made it into the introduction of this paper. But, after spending hours and hours in the library, listening to the same audio transcripts of my friends describing how marijuana played out in their social and sexual lives, I couldn't help but think about what I saw in Mark: an attempt to reclaim marijuana, which was used as a subtle object of control in his first and only serious relationship, and transform it into one he could enjoy with friends.

He broke the silence by telling me that he should probably head back to his room and get some rest before a dentist appointment the next morning. “You should find better ending material for your essay than me taking a few hits and leaving,” he joked as he collected his belongings. I assured him that I had more than enough material.

Throughout this essay, I have repeated the same sentiment about cannabis at Stanford: it is often relegated to the shadows. I had assumed that marijuana usage was simply not as popular as alcohol usage, that it was concentrated in the hands of a few pockets of the student population, and that it was something students just didn't feel the need to advertise or speak too much about. But, in its relegation to the shadows, marijuana holds a certain darkness within it. This darkness is not inherent to the substance itself, but the aura of mystery and shame which surrounds it is able to be manipulated by others. It is not simply an object used to get high; it is one with deep, social norms embedded within it, norms that can facilitate new social and romantic relationships, but also norms that allow the exploitation of power dynamics within these relationships. And its relegation to the shadows allows its darker sides to remain hidden.
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