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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

This year’s editorial team is proud to present the 13th installment of CONTEXTS, Stanford’s Undergraduate Research Journal of Anthropology.

Every year, CONTEXTS showcases exceptional student research and artwork in anthropology and the social sciences. Their work encourages us to rethink, reframe, and reimagine dominant narratives. They push us to ask the questions that matter.

Our authors for this year’s publication delve into the intersections of agency and power. From the alienation created by the Bracero identity to agrarian ideals around imperfect produce, the authors investigate the real-world implications of human agency and power relations. Each article has highlighted the variety of ways in which identity and power can intersect to inform social, political, and economic circumstances across the globe. Their geographic areas of inquiry span from Punjab, to Bolivia, to California.

The works included in this journal is all the more remarkable in light of the COVID-19 pandemic that has spread our campus community across the globe, and thrown unexpected obstacles in the face of independent student research for the past 18 months. We would like to thank all of the submissions received -- a record number this year-- and to our authors for their countless hours researching, writing, and editing their work.

We also thank the Anthropology graduate editor, Emilia Groupp, for her wonderful insights, and our student services officer, Tina Jeon, for her exemplary passion and support for our undergraduate community. Finally, we thank you, the reader, for supporting this publication and broader undergraduate anthropological research at Stanford.

We hope you enjoy this year’s issue.

Warmly,

The Editorial Team

Sadie Blancaflor ‘22 | Minha Khan ‘21
Psychedelic Women: The Women of Counterculture and the Summer of Love

Kheli Buckley Atluru

San Francisco is deeply rooted in its history of defying the norms. Most notably, the city’s inclination towards counterculture has played a major role in its development. This counterculture originated in the summer of 1967, also known as the Summer of Love. The summer was unlike any that had preceded it; hallucinogens were all the rage, self-expression was the new norm, and The Grateful Dead could be seen wandering the streets. Counterculture valued inclusion and the rejection of social norms. However, this value translated poorly to diversity. In conducting research surrounding the Summer of Love, I was hard pressed to find any sources discussing women’s involvement in the movement. Were women not included in counterculture, or did scholars simply leave them out of their research? In this paper, I discuss this question using the few sources available to me. Utilizing interviews of women involved in the movement, I was able to conclude that women served as a backbone to the Summer of Love and that it was, in fact, the scholars who decided to overlook their many accomplishments.

San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, filled with tie-dye, needle exchanges, smoke shops, and signs promoting free love, exists as a still frame of the city’s Summer of Love—kept as a reminder of what the city still pretends to stand for. The Summer of Love, which lasted for only a few months in 1967, was San Francisco’s expression of the broader, national counterculture movement of the 1960s. It is remembered for its involvement in sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll. However, at the time, the Summer was more concerned with diversity, inclusion, and the rejection of societal norms. Despite this aim of inclusivity, minimal sources discuss women’s involvement in the event. In this paper, I will argue that women served as the backbone for the sixties’ counterculture. Yet, academia largely erased them from the history of the era, which has been overwhelmingly told by White men. Additionally, I will argue that the rise of the counterculture movement, with female involvement, paved the way for the women’s rights movements of the sixties and seventies. Through the few articles that integrate women into the history of the counterculture movement and the Summer of Love, along with my original analysis of oral histories, I will attempt to reconstruct the role of women in this movement. In conducting my research, I came across little to no academic sources on the role of women in the Summer of Love. Instead, I located, analyzed and transcribed the San Francisco Public Library’s The Haight Ashbury Oral History Project. This project contains first person accounts of the Summer of Love, including many told by women. I use these women’s
stories to illustrate my arguments.

The culture of the 1960s grew from the decade’s interaction with both the strict social norms of the 1950s and with the Vietnam War. The 1950s were a time of perfect suburban families living according to social norms. Sex and drugs were considered some of the biggest taboos, and women often served as homemakers for their families. Those who were raised within this reality are current day Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964. In response to their strict upbringings and the expectation to conform, Andrew Achenbaum, a scholar who specializes in aging, argues that the young adults of the time “came to pursue alternate lifestyles” (Achenbaum 2017). Additionally, the confines of this era gave way to several laws prohibiting the use of recreational drugs, including California’s law against the possession of L.S.D. on October 6th, 1966. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War, spanning from 1955 to 1975, raged on in the forefront of every young person’s mind. The major controversy surrounding this war, due in part to the United States’ unnecessary involvement in it, provided the youth with an outlet for their anger towards authority and the government, expressed through active protests and anti-war sit-ins (Achenbaum 2017:2). Through both rejecting conformity and demonstrating antiwar sentiment, the youth of the 1960s began what is now known as the counterculture movement.

The counterculture movement of the late 1960s was defined by people “developing alternative cultures that emphasized authenticity, individualism, and community” (Achenbaum 2017:1). Major images of counterculture include hippies, long hair, and marijuana. However, the movement was much more than these overplayed stereotypes. As the residents of Haight-Ashbury, a neighborhood in San Francisco, stated in A Prophecy of a Declaration of Independence in 1966, counterculture stood for “the freedom of the body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness” (Cohen and Bowen 1966). The national counterculture movement was an exploration of the limitless self.

San Francisco’s counterculture had been growing throughout the sixties, similar to its growth nation-wide, and was concentrated in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Situated right next to the city’s biggest park, Haight-Ashbury was the perfect place for festivals, concerts, and unregulated drug use. San Franciscans, known to value inclusion and diversity, embraced the movement, drawing thousands of young people to the city. This influx of young, mostly White, adults, looking to find themselves and their voices, caused the peak of San Francisco’s counterculture movement: 1967’s Summer of Love (Morrison 2017). During this summer, Haight’s houses were rented out to students trying to live communal lifestyles, and musicians, such as Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead (Achenbaum 2017). Psychedelics and marijuana were also widespread and an important aspect of self-discovery for many Haight-Ashbury residents. Participants would flock to Grateful Dead hosted ‘Acid Tests,’ which “introduced locals to LSD in carefully constructed environments, where music and lights maximized the drug’s impact” (Slonecker 2017). Events like this grew in both frequency and popularity, soon becoming a part of daily life during the Summer of Love. In addition to the rejection of norms surrounding drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, sex was a popular topic and activity during this summer. Achenbaum points out that the youth explored their sexuality in an open and free way in response to being told by their parents that “polite society disapproved of premarital sex” (2017:7). This openness created space for both straight people and people of the LGBTQ+ community to explore their bodies and identities in relation to sex. San Francisco’s Summer of Love was a beautiful time of exploration and inclusivity, where the biggest value was that “all is equal” ([1] [2] (Cohen and Bowen 1966).

Despite counterculture’s major value of inclusivity, my research into the topic revealed an underlying contradiction. Barely any scholars discussed people of color or women’s involvement in either counterculture as a whole or the Summer of Love. While recognizing that the history of people of color has also been erased from counterculture, the focal point of this paper centers around women’s erasure as a whole. In my research, the only times women seemed to come up were in discussions of either Janis Joplin or of women’s decision to go “braless under cast-off psychedelic clothes” (Achenbaum 2017, 1). Though still commonplace to discuss women in relation to what they choose to wear, this revelation greatly surprised me because of the movement’s emphasis on sex and diversity. It was through reading Emma Silvers’ “Peace, Love, and Credit Where It’s Due: Women of the Counterculture” and Blake
Slonecker’s “Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s” that I finally uncovered a complex discussion of women’s role in counterculture. In her article, Silvers argues that women were a significant part of the counterculture movement and have been given little to no credit for their role. In this way, Silvers attributes the exclusion of women in counterculture to historical erasure. Slonecker, on the other hand, claims that counterculture pushed feminism to the side in favor of “aggressive male sexuality [which] inhibited feminist spins on the sexual revolution” (Slonecker:1). He also argues that, in response to the “patriarchal norms prevalent in the counterculture” (Slonecker:7), women were able to use their exclusion in ways that benefited feminist movements and happenings. In contrast to Silvers, Slonecker concludes that women were excluded from the movement itself, not from the history of it. So, were women deeply involved in the movement, or were they forced to further their purpose elsewhere? I believe that both of these seemingly contradictory opinions are true. Due to Silvers arguing in congruence with the story of Alexandra Jacopetti Hart, it is obvious that women did contribute to the summer. However, it is also possible that women served in less glamorous roles than their male counterparts, pushing them to further women’s rights elsewhere, as argued by Slonecker. From their unique positions, women were able to use the counterculture movement to their advantage in order to advance the women’s rights movement.

Women’s rights had been progressing steadily prior to 1967, with the Women’s Suffrage Movement, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act. Despite this progress however, women went through a major transition during and after World War II. During the war, women were thrown into the workforce due to the lack of male labor available. Following the return of men from the war, women were pushed back into their lives as homemakers, counteracting the progress that had been made. This homemaker lifestyle played a major part in defining the strictness of the fifties, and, in response to this confinement, Betty Friedan published “The Feminine Mystique” in 1963. This book unveiled women’s discontent with the homemaker life and attacked the assumption that this lifestyle provided women with fulfillment (Churchill 2020). It was this book, along with the creation of the oral contraceptive pill in 1960, that really sparked second-wave feminism.

Second-wave feminism emerged from the women’s rights movement and was an abrupt contrast to the nuclear family and suburban lifestyle of the 1950s. While first-wave feminism was mainly concerned with suffrage, the second wave dealt with topics such as politics, work, family structure, and sexuality (Brunell 2019). The rise of second-wave feminism and the women’s rights movement grew in response to the strict confines surrounding femininity in the 1950s, similar to how counterculture grew to counteract the more general strict social norms of the fifties. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, women sought change through petitioning the government for equal pay and an end to employment discrimination. However, asking nicely continued to show no results. Instead, the National Organization for Women was founded in 1966. With both a national organization and a new “revolutionary ferment caused by protests against the Vietnam War,” second-wave feminism expanded in ways feminism never could before (Brunell 2019).

I argue that this rise in second-wave feminism was successful, in part, because of the growth of counterculture and the new trend of fighting government power. The general population was experiencing a mindset shift in terms of their perspectives on societal norms, taboos, and the government due to the counterculture movement. This mindset shift gave room for women to also fight the norms pushed upon them, allowing the women’s rights movement to gain momentum. In this way, the success of the women’s rights movement was actually a direct result of the counterculture movement; second-wave feminism was only able to thrive because of the general population’s fight against taboos.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, artists and writers were flocking to the city’s North Beach. This community, who called its members Beats, was home to incredible writers who were very open about their distaste for the authoritarianism of 1950s society. In rejection of all taboos, Beats prided themselves on sexual experimentation, often engaging in casual sex and orgies. By the early 1960s, the Beats were home to “young men and women who felt constrained by middle-class morality and all its expectations and demands” (Allyn 2001:26). With the creation of the contraceptive pill
and the growing need within women to rebel and explore themselves, women could now discover and experiment with their sexualities without the fear of repercussion. Again, this move against feminine taboos could only take place successfully because of the countercultural rejection of repressed sexuality in the sixties.

As female sexual liberty continued to grow throughout the 1960s, so did the general counterculture movement in San Francisco. In 1966, Alexandra Jacopetti Hart, as mentioned earlier in the paper, along with her friends Ken Kesey and Bill Graham, organized the Trips Festival (Silvers 2017). The Trips Festival was a three-day event, hosted at Longshoreman’s Hall, during which attendees listened to the Grateful Dead and Ken Kesey whilst under the influence of psychedelics. This festival was an example of one of the many Acid Tests conducted leading up to and throughout the Summer of Love and is widely credited with the creation of Haight-Ashbury's counterculture community (Meline 2016). However, despite the fact that Hart was a main contributor to the establishment of the Haight, as she has previously asserted, she is rarely given recognition for her role (Silvers 2017). For example, in a piece written by Adam Hirscfelder, a White man, Hirscfelder states that “the Trips Festival was a transformative event that helped mark the beginning of the hippie counterculture movement in San Francisco... [and was] organized by Stewart Brand, Ramon Sender, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, and Bill Graham” (Hirscfelder 2016). Hirscfelder is in a position of power when writing about history because he has the ability to influence how people remember an event, even if he was not actually there. In excluding Hart from the creation of the Trips Festival, and by crediting the Trips Festival with the launch of San Francisco’s counterculture movement, Hirscfelder actively writes Hart out of her own life. In reference to the festival, Hart states: “I was there; I helped create it” (Staff 2017).

Hart was not the only victim of erasure from the history of counterculture. There are several women who contributed to the counterculture movement and the Summer of Love who I will now introduce through an original discussion of the San Francisco Public Library’s oral history project, The Haight Ashbury Oral History Project. The first woman I will introduce is Carol Schuldt. Schuldt had been living in San Francisco since her birth in 1933. She raised her kids on Ocean Beach in the sixties and opened her home to the runaway youth of Haight-Ashbury (Nichols 2017). Schuldt, dubbed “Mother Nature” by those she opened her home to, taught her ‘kids’ about the importance of feeling close to nature. She was well known in the community for throwing off all her clothes and body surfing on the beach’s waves. In an interview conducted by Rebecca Nichols, Schuldt describes what her role was in San Francisco’s counterculture: “We had a very big community. Everything was community in those days. And we don’t have that now. It’s so ridged now with the government police. So, in the old days... I always say the old days... in the sixties we did feel we had some control of our environ-
ally, Cohen held onto her musical passion by performing bass with her husband’s band for a multitude of concerts and festivals during the Summer of Love (Nichols 2017). Despite Cohen’s artistic contributions to the Summer of Love, history has remembered her as Allen Cohen’s wife. Allen Cohen was the creator of the Oracle, San Francisco’s widespread psychedelic publication, published from 1967 to 1968 (Nichols 2017). He was also a major contributor to the musical scene of the summer. Ann Cohen illustrated many of her husband’s books and had a drawing career separate from her husband. However, even in the interview conducted by Nichols, her work is overlooked in favor of Allen Cohen’s accomplishments. After Nichols asks Cohen about her own life and background, she continues to spend a majority of the interview asking Cohen about her husband’s accomplishments, not her own (Nichols 2017). Though The Haight Ashbury Oral History Project interviewed several women and is seemingly a more progressive look back onto counterculture and the Summer of Love, Nichols failed to focus on Cohen’s individual accomplishments. Women like Ann Cohen are plentiful, demonstrating the need for San Francisco’s counterculture history to be revisited and rewrote.

In addition to women being historically erased, some women were never able to even try to make history. Virginia Ginny Resner was born in San Francisco in 1946. When reflecting on the sixties and the Haight-Ashbury, Resner recalls that she was not very involved with the Haight until her older brothers introduced it to her. Her brothers discovered an old movie theater, called the Haight Theater, in 1966 and decided to transform it into an environmental and rock ‘n’ roll theater (Nichols 2017). They named this theater the Straight Theater, which officially opened in June of 1967. The Straight Theater was home to dance performances, plays, and rock ‘n’ roll concerts, put on by performers like Jerry Garcia (Nichols 2017). Despite her brothers being the founders of the theater, Resner remembers that, “we girls often got relegated to doing some of the really slimy-grimy kind of clean up jobs. And so, at the end of the day, when everything was said and done, at one o’clock in the morning, we were the people that were cleaning up the lobby and cleaning up the bathrooms and all of the debris at the end of the day. And I remember helping dress the windows in the front of the theater with posters and things of that nature to advertise programs” (Nichols 2017). Following gender norms carried over from the fifties, Resner was forced into the role of cleaning for the theater, instead of being allowed to contribute to the theater in a more visible way. When told by her interviewer that it was her hard work that kept the theater open, however, Resner agreed; though she was forced to do demeaning work, that work had to be done, and it was her work that kept the Straight Theater running. Resner is another example of a woman who conducted the ground-floor work of the Summer of Love in order for it to thrive.

A woman who worked alongside Resener was her childhood friend, Lonnie Bouchee Eberich. Eberich spent a majority of her childhood in San Francisco, moving to Hawaii following her parents’ divorce and moving back to the city in the sixties. In 1965, when the Straight Theater opened, Eberich began work at the theater, which served as a family for her. She was eighteen at the time and worked to clean the theater with Resner. However, Eberich was also involved in the Summer of Love in another way. In addition to her work to keep the theater going, Eberich attended a lot of antiwar protests. When asked if she felt they made a difference, Eberich responded: “Well I think we had a big part with the Vietnam War. I think with the protests… it was taken very seriously at that time. People felt… I think we felt really united at that time… as a whole… against the war” (Nichols 2017). Eberich and Resner were two of the many young women who may have not made as obvious of individual impacts during the counterculture movement, but both played integral roles in a lot that was happening at the time.

Even women who are seemingly still remembered have been wronged in their history. Janis Joplin, widely praised for her music, came to fame during the Summer of Love. Raised in Texas, she moved to San Francisco at the age of eighteen in a search for belonging and quickly became an icon (Fulker 2018). One of Joplin’s more important emerging performances was an appearance at San Francisco’s Avalon Ballroom in 1967, where she played alongside the likes of Allen Ginsberg and the Grateful Dead. At the time, she was the lead singer of Big Brother and the Holding Company, a San Franciscan psychedelic rock band. The band made several performances in San Francisco around the time of the Summer of Love, during which Joplin resided in a house half a block from Haight street (Echols 1999, 156). Festival and concert
attendees remember Joplin as having an electric stage presence and overwhelmingly idolized her (Fulk er 2018). Despite her rise to fame, Joplin was struggling with addiction and tragically died from a heroin overdose at 27 (Fulker 2018; Echols 1999). Though we remember Joplin’s music in all its glory now, Alice Echols argues that, “unlike Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison, whose music remained staples of FM rock, Janis disappeared from the airwaves soon after her death. But while she was curiously absent, her style was absorbed, without credit and in a way that obscured her influence” (xvi). Despite her major influence on the Summer of Love and the sixties’ rock ‘n’ roll, Joplin was excluded from the area she worked the hardest to be a part of, leaving her legacy in how she influenced the songs of White men. In this way, Joplin is yet another woman who did the hard work during the Summer of Love, so that the men could thrive.

As seen from the above histories of women during the sixties, women were involved in maintaining the backbone of the counterculture movement and the Summer of Love. Women were mothers of nature, artists, organizers, musicians, and cleaners. They worked behind the stage and on it. It was because of the pushback against the strict social norms of the 1950s that counterculture grew and the women’s rights movement was able to thrive, making room for the incredible women of counterculture. Why were women erased from counterculture’s history if it was so intertwined with the women’s rights movement and second-wave feminism? Because there was always a man doing the more public work, as opposed to women’s groundwork, that historians could look to in order to write history.

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ACHIEVING TRANS-CENDENCE: An Analysis of Alok Vaid-Menon’s Multimedia Approaches to the Dissolution of the Western Gender Binary

Angie Lopez

“People always ask me why they should care about trans issues if we are ‘such a small percentage of the population?’ This is about gender but this is also about something else. It’s about the potential for people to be themselves in a culture that makes that so utterly impossible. It’s about developing an alternative relationship to difference, it’s about unlearning all the ways we have been taught to fear and dismiss the unfamiliar.”

- Alok Vaid-Menon

Alok Vaid-Menon is a multimedia artist disrupting the western gender binary in a myriad of artistic mediums. The western gender binary asserts the biological truth of two separate sexes and whose two corresponding social genders and roles are biologically determined. At a time where questions of gender equality, transgender rights, and changing gender roles are entering mainstream rhetoric, an evaluation of this artist’s work is particularly significant. This work aims to evaluate the cultural significance of Vaid-Menon’s fashion and social media work in relation to the dissolution of the western gender binary.

Through a survey of the most significant aspects of their fashion and social media work, this paper argues that their gender-expansive rhetoric and artistry calls into question the legibility of the body and so subverts the fundamental “truths” of the western gender binary. Furthermore, this paper does a survey of the impact of their work, asserting its significance in acknowledgment of the difficulty of surveying the retrospective cultural impact of ongoing artistry.
When I met Alok Vaid-Menon, they were hosting an artist talk at the Cantor Arts Museum at Stanford University. They were wearing a custom Adrianne Keishing piece: a shirt and skirt combination adorned in an array of color-blocked repeating images of themselves, framed by bright pink feathers. They wore rainbow earrings, knee-length purple boots, and blue lipstick. They introduced themself by name, profession, and zodiac sign. They strayed entirely from the museum's suggested talking agenda. They were anything but mundane.

In the hour in which they gave their artist talk, they asserted their belief in the transcendence of biological, temporal, genre categorization in both their artistic and identity production, shed light on the political production of the Western gender binary and its violent effect on gender-nonconforming individuals, and left an audience of mostly older, white, upper-class art consumers invigorated with a personal stake in the creation of a new gender-transcendent society. If in an hour they were able to make a crowd of twenty believe in “their reality” (Vaid-Menon), how widespread could their influence be over the span of their expansive and ongoing artistic career? In this essay, I will be addressing how Vaid-Menon calls into existence a new cultural reality relating to a re-conceptualized understanding of gender as well as what this new cultural reality could mean for the future societal arrangements of the United States.

Alok Vaid-Menon is a South Asian-American performance artist, poet, fashion designer, model, and LGBTQ rights activist who brands themselves artistically under the name ALOK. Vaid-Menon is gender non-conforming[1] and transfeminine.[2] They assert that “feelings are real and gender is not” and mobilize this mantra in a myriad of ways. Among other trans artist-activists such as Asia Kate Dillon, Bimini Bon Boulash, and Boychild, they are a prominent gender non-conforming individual gaining media attention through unapologetic eccentricity, illegible authenticity, and intellectualized contestations of the art media they operate within to dissolve oppressive constructs of gender identity. Beginning their work as one half of trans south Asian performance art duo, Darkmatter, in 2017 when the group dissolved, Alok Vaid-Menon moved on to solo work. Since then, they have published a book, been featured in the Huffington Post, and modeled for New York Fashion Week, among many other things. Unflinchingly engaging with the complex intersections of race, gender, and aesthetics in contemporary existence, they are unapologetic in their pursuit of a future that is safe for and embraces all trans and gender non-conforming people.

Through their varied body of work, Vaid-Menon is one of many gender-nonconforming individuals currently disrupting society’s upholding of the western gender binary. Through their disruption of the normative flow of social media via their Instagram-based digital art, their call for the fashion industry to move beyond gender dynamism, and their challenges to notions of visibility within the realm of identity politics, Vaid-Menon is one of several essential figures in the current gender liberation movement whose influence is deserving of academic scrutiny. Within the US, a society so historically and institutionally entrenched in the maintenance of the western gender binary, the traction that Vaid-Menon’s work has garnered could be indicative of a larger growing cultural paradigm shift whose implications are yet to be fully acknowledged. This paper aims to evaluate the current cultural implications of Vaid-Menon’s work within the genres they are disrupting to gesture towards the future implications of their work, while acknowledging the limitations of both this paper’s singular focus and the evaluation of the day-to-day socio-political implications of artistic work that is engaged with when predominantly removed from the reality of everyday trans-specific violence. Ultimately, such an evaluation will help determine whether the US is in a moment of critical cultural flux in which the social sphere is moving towards an era of gender contestation and non-violence.

**WHAT IS THE WESTERN GENDER BINARY?**

It is important to clearly outline what the oppressive societal structure Vaid-Menon is contesting against to understand the nature and content of their work. The Western gender binary refers to the widely held cultural perspective,

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[1] “Gender nonconforming” is a term given to people who don’t conform with the gender norms that are expected of them.

[2] “Transfeminine” is an umbrella term that refers to people who were assigned male at birth but identify with femininity.
in Western societies specifically, that defines gender as existing in a binary that unequivocally defines men and women as natural and opposite, with differences between the two fundamental and enduring. The dynamism this binary creates is considered the natural root of all social interaction and so dictates the institutionally endorsed patriarchal organization of society as a whole (West and Zimmerman 1987). The authenticity of prescribed gender display has been historically justified by culturally produced notions of biological essentialism that tie gender unequivocally to a person's sex category and, until recently, pathologized any divergence between the two (Elischberger et al. 2017). However, gender can be more productively understood as a socially scripted performance of a culture's acceptable and idealized notions of feminine and masculine characteristics that are upheld in all aspects of life (West and Zimmerman 1987). It “is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence…[it] proves to be performatively—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be…there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990). In this sense, there is no original or intrinsic gender identity that any individual is born with, for gender is inherently relational. Individuals consolidate and solidify their gender through their outwards performance of it, a performance that defines and regulates their navigation of socio-cultural spheres. Moreover, gender is both created through social interaction and socio-political and historical structures, as gender is a relational space in which individuals desire to know the sex and gender category of individuals because of the cultural expectation that is being performed for their recognition at all times.

Despite the social constructedness of gender, the prevalence of gender and sex as fixed and essential categories of identity is an instrumental aspect of western social arrangements. That this cultural notion is perceived to be mandatory is visible in children as young as five that begin to adopt a self-regulating process that appropriates gender ideals because they are seen as accepted ways of being and behaving. This leads to a universal discomfort in ambiguous gender presentations that evade categorization. This discomfort perpetuates social control by placing limits on an individual's free choice when it comes to gender presentation, forcing them to conform to prescribed and legible gender displays (West and Zimmerman 1987). The extent of this social control is doubly sustained through the justification of the persecution of gender-nonconforming individuals on an interactional and institutional level.

The persecution of nonnormative, gender-bending behavior can be seen at various points in history and various parts of the world. In the US, a series of laws arbitrarily criminalizing cross-dressing were enacted in the mid-twentieth century in dozens of major cities. In 1977 alone, Houston police, for example, arrested and charged over 50 people with crossdressing. These laws not only justified the persecution of gender-nonconforming and trans individuals but more broadly solidified a universal regulation of dress and behavior in relation to a binary system of gender that required (and still requires) all members of society to make their sex category visible and maintained at all times (Capers 2008).

Though these US laws have been since then overturned, the cultural pressure to conform to the western gender binary continues. Americans' stronger belief in a gender binary directly correlates to more negative attitudes towards gender-nonconforming individuals (Elischberger et al. 2017). The relationship between transphobia, sexism and a patriarchal adherence to the gender binary can be best understood through higher rates discrimination amongst heterosexual, cisgender men because of transgender individuals' ability to threaten their dominant position in society, MTF people by their voluntary relinquishing of maleness and FTM[7] people by their aspiration to an equal position of privilege (Elischberger et al. 2017). It is important to note that MTF individuals are more largely persecuted due to the doubly oppressed position as gender...
deviant and feminine (Elischberger et al. 2017). The justified violence against trans individuals as a result of the enforcement of the western gender binary results in transgender students having more elevated rates of depression, homelessness, and suicide attempts (Elischberger et al. 2017), as well as an institutional erasure of trans individuals’ achievement and general visibility within the American mainstream media, consciousness and history. The pervasiveness of the Western gender binary in the societal arrangement of the western world is an important concept to delineate if one is to understand the radicalism of Vaid-Menon’s work and the gender liberation movement as a whole.

**FASHION, FABULOUSNESS, AND ALOK**

As a fashion designer, Vaid-Menon is one of many queer artist-activists currently using the field of fashion as one of the multiple mediums in which to challenge the pervasiveness of the western gender binary. Vaid-Menon specifically has contested the historic gender dynamic within this field by advocating for gender-transcendent design that reverts to a valuing of creativity as opposed to the maintenance of gender signification.

To understand the significance of their work, it is important to first delineate the gender dynamism present in fashion. This field is, by definition, built on the translation of aesthetics into an array of visual signifiers that demarcate the beautiful versus the ugly (Gonzalez and Bovone 2012), as well as define the norms through which fundamental aspects of a person’s identity, their individuality and community attachments, are communicable (Mackinney-Valentin 2017). Historically, the division at the heart of fashion’s dynamism was that of class (Lehner 2019) but over time, the intrinsic division became that of gender (Gonzalez and Bovone 2012). Fashion, in today’s world, is largely responsible for upholding the western gender binary through the gendering of clothing (Vaid-Menon 2019a). This continued assertion of gender norms has created a social environment in which individuals must negotiate their identity and their individuality within the parameters of their assigned gender expectations or risk ostracization, violence, and repression. Though there have been attempts to acknowledge gender fluidity within the industry, especially in a politicized way (Mackinney-Valentin 2017), the complete omission of transgender voices within the industry is still an obstacle to overcome. Vaid-Menon actively contests the appropriation of gender transcendent fashion alongside the continued omission of trans voices through the reclamation of fashion through the notion of fabulousness that can transform the current conceptions of the fashion industry through the creation of work that explicitly emphasizes the influence of the trans experience in aesthetic design and consequently calls for the industry’s inclusion and appraisal of trans voices in the ushering of a new re-conception of fashion.

Vaid-Menon draws upon and contributes to a history of queer fabulousness that reimagines aesthetics to be just as capable of agency-building when taken up by oppressed groups as they are of oppression when enforced by a restrictive industry. In this sense, Vaid-Menon is one of many contemporary activists currently utilizing pre-existing queer aesthetic subversion and reclamation tactics to reimage the mainstream fashion world. Though fabulousness has no clear cut definition, it draws upon the tenets of “high levels of creativity, imagination, and originality” (Moore 2018) with the intent of creating “dangerous, political, confrontational, risky” assertions against “norms and systems that oppress and torture [queer, trans, and transfeminine people of color and other marginalized groups] every day, things like white supremacy, misogyny, transmisogyny, patriarchy, toxic masculinity, gender policing, and racism” in the celebration of a self that is not embraced by the mainstream (Moore 2018). In short, fabulousness draws upon the concept of “ethical self-making” (Moore 2018) to contest the validity of oppressive aesthetic norms. It has and continues to be used by queer and trans artists like Lasseindra Ninja in the vogue world, DJ Vjuan Allure in the ballroom world and Billy Porter in the fashion world.

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[a] Male to Female, trans-feminine women.
[b] Female to Male, trans-masculine men.
Vaid-Menon is another trans voice that not only operates within this aesthetic ideology but validates its political power by asserting its aesthetic application in the transformation of the fashion industry as a whole, not simply in the transformation of an individual life. They have articulated the legitimate value of “the role of cultural work and art in shifting paradigms and doing revolutionary political work” and applied it to their own life and design: “actually, for me to get dressed every day is part of my politics” (Moore 2018). Notably, they co-created a fashion line when they saw none that spoke to them (Vaid Menon 2019a). They merged the “outer” world of fabulousness and the “inner” world of high fashion by creating a line that spoke to the innovation and creativity that could capture the fashion world’s attention while unapologetically asserting the fabulous queerness and gender-transcendentalism that is a necessary and inseparable aspect of the line’s innovative properties.

Their first line (Figure 1) was rooted in the imagining of outfits “[they] would wear if [they weren’t] afraid of experiencing violence — to offer [their] take on gender-neutral fashion as a non-binary artist” (Juxtapoz Magazine 2017). Responding directly to both the fashion world’s shift towards “gender-neutral” fashion and trans-specific violence, Vaid-Menon makes it impossible to omit trans presence in the cultural conversation about the shifting role of gender within fashion. This unapologetic inclusion of trans realities into the realm of fashion can be later seen in Vaid-Menon’s third line which deems itself an “aesthetic argument against who and what we have been taught to regard as ‘natural’” (Tirado 2019) and goes further to name “each garment... after a term that is used to police the identities of gender-nonconforming expression” (Tira-
do 2019). In the unapologetic inclusion of trans experience as essential aspects of their design, they are calling for the industry’s inclusion and appraisal of trans voices as well as trans voices’ ability to be leaders in the transformation of pre-existing conceptions of fashion and gender. In addition to the political ramifications of their work, in order to transform the fashion industry Vaid-Menon also employs another critical aspect of fabulousness: “creative strangeness” that “surprises us because it makes fashion out of things that are not made for fashion, or it merges things together in unexpected ways” to “stretch what we think is possible” (Moore 2018). The importance of creative strangeness is its assertion that creativity is rooted in the transcendence of the norm. When applied to Vaid-Menon’s work, this ideology gives way to new conceptions of what fashion could be, beauty could be, and consequently what gender could be. In asserting creative strangeness especially in relation to common conceptions of gender, Vaid-Menon is shedding light on the untapped creative potential of aesthetic gender transcendence and urging the fashion industry to follow. This reverses the roles of conventional fashion, bringing the individual and the individual’s experiences to the forefront of the fashion conversation. Vaid-Menon is not simply operating within the fashion industry but completely reimagining the values and dynamics of the industry as a whole in a way that dissolves the need for a western gender binary and instead places trans-fashioned fabulousness at the forefront.

As a whole, through their fashion work, Vaid-Menon is drawing upon the legacy of fabulousness to assert trans agency and contributes to the legacy by explicitly amplifying the creative need for trans voices in order to catalyze an aesthetic paradigm shift that is rooted in gender-neutrality as “the renaissance of fashion” (Vaid-Menon 2019a). Gender neutrality would once again place creativity and normative transcendence at the forefront of design, absolve any limitations to fashion expression, and commence an era of fashion in which anyone and everyone is free to wear what they desired. Vaid-Menon’s work then can be regarded as a key contribution to a contemporary aesthetic paradigm shift that has the potential to contribute to a culture in which the persecution of trans people is no longer justified on the basis of gender norms, one historically upheld by the fashion industry.

#ALOK ON INSTAGRAM

Instagram, conventionally discussed as a social media platform, can and should be understood as a continuation of earlier net-based art, representing instead as a digital media platform. Early net-based art, emerging in the 1990s with the advent of the internet, is characterized as a “reflection on the medium in the medium and the deconstruction of its materialism” in order to “work against the implicitness of the “commodity” of the internet and tries to keep the medium open and variable in terms of aesthetics and function” (Daniels and Risinger 2010). These early art pieces further broke with artistic convention through their creation, not of works but more so of alternate experiences, of digital participatory environments that rendered the relationships between performer and audience (Daniels and Risinger 2010), between reality and fiction (Kholeif 2018), ambiguous. The anti-capitalist and non-conformist ideals, the ambiguity of space and relationships, and the creation of alternative experiences are important chronological continuations to consider when evaluating Instagram’s capacity to be defined as a digital platform. These are the very aspects of the social media platform that Vaid-Menon, alongside other trans digital artist-activists such as Jeffrey Marsh and Coyote Park, actively engaging with on their page. They are what allows their page to disrupt the normative conventions of Instagram in a way that sheds particular attention on the complexities of identity, gender, and visual representation in order to assert the possibilities of not just non-normative digital engagement but non-normative existence as a whole. This digital intervention is one of the key tenets of the current trans liberation movement.

First and foremost, Vaid-Menon’s Instagram self-representations call particular attention to the disconnect between representation and documentation, calling into question the cultural assumption that pictures, especially selfies, are authentic and transparent representations of their subject matter (Lehner 2019). This nonconformist artistic endeavor aligns with the intentions of earlier net-based art and opens Instagram to the possibility
of aesthetic and functional variability. To achieve this, Vaid-Menon embodies a myriad of personas, attitudes, and gender-related performances. They can be seen in a variety of contexts like the runway, the street, and the home. They are wearing everything from dresses to suits to lingerie. They purposely stray from any sort of visual cohesion, as is the presumed norm for a media influencer. Instead, they embrace the multiplicity of their being. Their page can thus be better understood as containing a variety of “conceptual, performative self-portraits, presenting a complex hybrid, intersectional subject, uncontainable and always in flux” (Lehner 2019).

This fluidity of self contributes to the dissolution of the western gender binary’s propagation of an individual’s performed and enforced legibility, calling into existence the possibility of a gender-transcendent way of being.

This fluidity, this illegibility in representation is further complicated by Vaid-Menon’s captions which, similarly, omit their normative purpose of visual clarification. On the contrary, they utilize the tools, notably hashtags, found within the social media platform to politicize selfies and relate them to a network of dissimilar images. For example, Vaid-Menon has popularized the use of #TGIF to mean “thank god it’s Friday” (Morse 2017). By disrupting this hashtag’s normative stream of images to re-imagine the meaning of #TGIF and further to re-imagine what a body could look like outside the gender binary and tying images of this body to explicit articulations of transfeminine existence, the politics of the body, and the colonialist undertones of representation present today, Vaid-Menon capitalizes off of social media’s creation of a “participatory environment” in which “you’re either a participant or you’re not there” (Daniels and Risinger 2010). This reliance on the engagement of an audience through an inescapable digital platform is yet another aspect of net-based art. Inevitably, this disruptive digital act engages users with a variety of urgent, intimate, and intellectualized socio-political issues that would be unknown to them otherwise.

Similarly, Vaid-Menon understands and engages explicitly with the idea that Instagram, as a digital realm, is intrinsically a relational space within their page. There are many instances in which they screenshot and post a myriad of comments, both positive and negative, that they have received on the platform and engage these questions alongside images of themselves and captions engaging these comments meta-discursively (Figure 3). Juxtaposing other’s words, their own image, and contem-

(Figure 2) Alok posing with friends on Instagram, the picture is hashtagged #tgif (Vaid-Menon 2019b)
plations of the cultural and societal implications of both, Vaid-Menon is able to create a self that is “collaborative” and “becoming” (Lehner 2019), restaging self-expression as “a complicated negotiation of the mediating pressures of language, social media platforms, digital photography, and, ultimately, culture” (Morse 2017). Restaging identity as multi-dimensional and inter-relational draws attention to the implicit ways societal and cultural norms dictate our behavior and identity alignments. By bringing these cultural norms to the forefront, Vaid-Menon is able to subvert their power and shed light on the general public’s capacities to also transgress cultural norms and still occupy space in the real world. Vaid-Menon currently has over three hundred thousand followers on Instagram and is involved in various social media marketing campaigns with Netflix and Eric Rutherford, among others. Their social media has not only generated significant amounts of traction within the LGBTQ community, but has also garnered attention from many scholars. In this sense, its current momentum could be indicative of their expansive influence in the future.

In the creation of these visually compelling interventions (Lehner 2019), Vaid-Menon is creating an alternative experience that exists in contrast to the reductive homogeneity allowed within the ideals of a western gender binary. Their digital work aims “to approach or look at the trans body outside the cis imagination” by the creation of themselves “on [their] own terms outside the grammar of cis colonial gender binaries” (Lehner 2019). Through the illegibility of their selfies, the politicization present within their caption, and the creation of a self that is interrelational and performative, Vaid Menon is able to assert a multiplicity of being that subverts the necessity for transparency and “authenticity” and illuminates instead the dynamism and sincerity of gender transcendence. The ongoing traction of Vaid-Menon’s visual interventions, as well as the growing community of trans activist-artists similarly engaging in this digital work, could in fact be indicative of the growing traction of a contemporary trans liberation movement.

ACKNOWLEDGING LIMITATION

Though Vaid-Menon is not the only activist enacting effective and disruptive work, evaluating the traction of their contributions does speak to the potential power of the larger ongoing trans liberation movement. Further, with regards to Vaid-Menon’s work specifically, it is important to acknowledge that though the cultural paradigm
Vaid-Menon is advocating for is undeniably framed in an altruistic manner, it nonetheless contributes to the creation of Vaid-Menon’s brand, and consequently their artistic revenue. Outwardly performing non-normativity is not just a call to the end of normativity but more implicitly, an investment in “a distinct mode of authenticity...dubbed “AuthenticityTM,” an authenticity that is available to artists precisely through their creative and performative rejection of social norms” (Morse 2017). For example, in their latest Instagram post, Vaid-Menon sheds light on the exclusion of trans voices in feminism, calling for the necessity of undoing gender norms, and ends the post with, “pre-order my book...to learn more.” In doing so, they are creating a necessity for their art-making practice and guaranteeing their economic security. This sheds light on the complicated consideration of the authenticity of altruistic actions with self-fulfilling implications.

Conversely, despite Vaid-Menon’s growing popularity, it is hard to evaluate the true effectiveness of their artistic endeavors in ushering in a new gender-transcendent cultural paradigm without evaluating the effects it is having on the reality of trans individuals in western society today. In doing so, one realizes how, despite the artistic traction Vaid-Menon is gaining, the day-to-day effects of their non-violent and gender-inclusive philosophies are yet to be felt. In Vaid-Menon’s own life and work, gender-related discrimination is still wholly present. Despite their celebrity status, they have nonetheless reiterated the following: “I don't really feel safe in either space: online or offline…I often worry that my Instagram contributes to the false notion that I can look like I do in all of my photos everywhere I go. That's just not the case - many times I have to go “stealth,” pass within the binary to avoid very real danger [of discrimination and violence]” (Lehner 2019). While Vaid-Menon’s work may be shifting the way the fashion and digital world regard gender norms, the application of these thought paradigms has not yet been far reaching. This complicates the issue of artist activism by calling into question its effectiveness. Seeing as Vaid-Menon is still in the midst of artistic production, their paradigm is bound to evolve and disseminate in unpredictable ways. Only with time will a holistic evaluation of their work, one that can most accurately evaluate the real-life impacts of their art, be possible. For the time being, however, trans-related violence and discrimination are still very much alive.

CONCLUSION
Overall, Vaid-Menon’s work is unapologetically engaging and subverting questions of gender, authenticity, fashion, and digital media. For their work, it is important to note the impressive amounts of media traction they are receiving at such an early stage in their artistic career. Though it is difficult to evaluate the true extent and effectiveness of their work, it is undeniable that they are an important figure in the ambitious and all expansive movement to dissolve the western gender binary. Their growing popularity, when regarded as a case study, could be indicative of this movement’s ability to legitimately usher in a new cultural and aesthetic paradigm beyond gender, though only with time will we be able to evaluate this with certainty. Vaid-Menon is one of the most contemporary examples of trans-radical artistry and activism and is a key figure in the fight for not just trans rights but more broadly the fight for gender liberation that is worth further scholarly study. This paper calls for more scholarship to address Vaid-Menon’s performance art and trans-related activism as well the particularities of racialized trans subjects and trans feminine subjects. This will enrich our understanding of not only Vaid-Menon’s work but of the work of the gender liberation movement as a whole and help us more accurately gauge this movement’s ability to incite large-scale social change. ◆
WORKS CITED


“Where the Land is Violated, Women are Violated”

Examining the Relationship Between the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Crisis and the Development of Extractive Industries

Ella Varney

Examining the correlation between the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s (MMIW) crisis and the development of extractive industries, this paper explores the ways that violence against Indigenous womxn and violence against the earth often occurs simultaneously and in relation to one another. This paper puts three topics in conversation - 1) the history of conquest and colonialism, 2) the current MMIW crisis, and 3) the climate crisis. Although there is scholarship that focuses on each one of these issues, they are rarely put into conversation with one another in an academic context. By putting these topics in conversation, this paper argues that climate change and the MMIW crisis both result from the settler systems of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Deconstructing such systems of oppression is imperative to creating solutions that mitigate the effects of climate change and end violence against Indigenous womxn. After highlighting the work of womxn led movements to advance Indigenous sovereignty, this paper concludes with a call to action: to address the MMIW crisis - and ultimately create a future that values all people and the lands that sustain us - we must center the knowledge, solutions, and care of Indigenous womxn.

Since the Bakken Oil fracking operations began in 2006, tribes in Montana and North Dakota have experienced an exponential increase in the rates of sexual violence and sex trafficking of Indigenous womxn[1] and girls. This has resulted in the rising Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s (MMIW) crisis in the region. A study published in 2019 by the University of Colorado Boulder found that from 2006 to 2012, the Bakken region saw a 45 percent increase in unlawful sexual conduct. This increase occurred in direct correlation with the region’s population doubling with predominantly white, non-Native oil workers who were brought to work on the Bakken oil fracking operations. In the first year alone, nearly 60,000 temporary workers moved to the rural Plains region. Many of these workers are not originally from the area, have temporary jobs, and are thus untethered and unaccountable to the lands and the communities where they work. Most of the assaults and trafficking of Indigenous womxn and girls have been perpetrated by these non-Native workers (Bleir, 2018).

This phenomenon is not limited to the Bakken region. Indigenous womxn and girls are experiencing these forms of violence at the hand of non-Native people throughout the United States.[2] The Navajo Nation in the southwestern part of the country is experiencing a crisis of sex trafficking which has affected many of its citizens, and
that is related to the development of oil and gas industries on or near the reservation (Tuali-Corpuz, 2017). In Alaska, the abundance of male-dominated industries such as oil drilling has played a large role in creating conditions where womxn are three times more likely than the national average to be raped, and where Alaska Native womxn are 9.7 times more likely than other Alaskan womxn to experience sexual assault (Bernard, 2014). As these examples from the Bakken region, the Navajo Nation and Alaska demonstrate, there is a strong connection between the development of extractive industries - defined here as violent processes to the land by which natural landscapes are rearranged in unsustainable ways for profit-driven means (Chase, 2018) - and the MMIW crisis. These are devastating case studies of the ways that violence against Indigenous womxn and violence against the earth often occurs simultaneously, and in relation to one another.

To understand why Indigenous womxn are experiencing these forms of harm, I will first explore the roots of the MMIW crisis by engaging with the history of conquest and colonialism in the United States. In doing so, I will illuminate how Indigenous womxn and the earth share a history of violence enacted by the colonial practices of extractive industries and gendered harm. After providing that historical context, I will then return to the current MMIW crisis in order to better interrogate the relationships between extractive industries and violence against Indigenous womxn. As extractive industries have played a major role in climate change, I will then situate the MMIW crisis within the larger climate crisis and look ahead at the possibilities for creating a more just and sustainable future. In order to construct such a future, I believe we must center the knowledge, solutions and care of Indigenous womxn. I will conclude by identifying some immediate and long-term solutions that may bring us closer to this future, and highlight the work of womxn led movements to advance Indigenous sovereignty. Although there is scholarship that focuses on each of these three issues, there are limited efforts to put the three in conversation with one another in an academic context. By putting these topics in conversation, I believe that we will be better equipped to address the MMIW crisis and begin imagining and creating a society that values all people and the lands that sustain us.

Before I go any further, I would like to recognize that although Indigenous womxn have been particularly harmed by the related nature of violence against womxn and violence against the earth, they also continue to resist, and their agency and resilience must be honored. Through this paper, I aim to help amplify their struggle; understanding that as a white woman who has privileged immensely from the colonial structures of white supremacy imposed on the United States, my positionality grants me a particular privilege in entering this conversation and having my voice heard. I recognize that this is an opportunity that has not been extended to many of the Indigenous womxn working on the front lines to end the MMIW crisis, and more broadly, to end the structures and systems that allow for mutual violence against womxn and the earth to take place. As a non-Indigenous white woman, my goal with this paper is not to offer solutions to the MMIW crisis and the climate crisis, but rather to highlight the scholarship and activism of Indigenous womxn in the hopes of bringing increased attention and support to their work. These womxn know what they need, and they know what their communities need, and my objective with this paper is to leverage my positionality in a way that helps us build a future where

[1] I have chosen to use the word “womxn” as a way to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of the gender binary and its exclusion of trans, two-spirit, and gender-queer folks, etc. I recognize that many of the authors whose work I cite throughout this paper do not do this, and in quotes taken from their work I have not changed their language. I have made the intentional choice to use the word “womxn” based off of the example of womxn and femme identifying activists who are leading the struggle to advance equity for the most marginalized.

[2] The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's crisis is not only occurring in the United States, but rather, it is also taking place in most settler colonial countries. Canada is also experiencing a similar epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, as well as other countries in Central and South America (although the problem is less documented in these regions). That said, for this specific paper, I have chosen to focus solely on the crisis occurring in the United States.
those needs are met.

This paper is also an opportunity for me to learn, to fill in the gaps in my own knowledge and understanding of this issue, and importantly, to confront my own complicity in this crisis. I was born and raised in Montana, and I have deep familial ties to the region. Some of my family immigrated to Montana from Ireland during the Great Potato Famine, and they were able to make a home for themselves on the Plains of Montana because of the Dawes Act of 1887 which authorized the United States government to steal Indigenous lands and re-allocate them to white settlers. In writing this paper, I hope to learn from the work of Indigenous womxn activists all while challenging myself to become a better advocate in the struggle for bold change, especially given that I am a settler on Indigenous lands.

**Legacies of Conquest: Unpacking the Roots of the Mutual Devaluation of Indigenous Womxn and the Earth**

The MMIW crisis is not new; Indigenous womxn have experienced brutalization at the hands of white colonizers since the conquest of the Americas began in 1492. In her book, “Borderlands/La Frontera: Nueva Mestiza,” Gloria Anzaldúa, a queer Chicana scholar, examines the gendered ways that conquest of the Americas took place and the particular harm it incurred on Indigenous womxn. Anzaldúa analyzes conquest as a boundary-drawing effort wherein, “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (Anzaldúa, 1987:25). In an effort to make sense of the world, people are constantly engaging in the systematic ordering and categorization of others in relation to themselves, drawing boundaries to contain the unfamiliar. In the United States, Anzaldúa argues that the impulse towards ordering and categorization has been exploited by white men to control, subjugate, and exploit those deemed as others - which has had particularly devastating effects for Indigenous womxn and other womxn of color. She writes, “the dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound in servitude, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people” (Anzaldúa, 1987:44). In this way, Anzaldúa describes the interconnected process through which Indigenous lands and Indigenous womxn’s bodies were conquered. As a descendant of these Indigenous womxn, she perceives herself as having an intimate connection with the land; she experiences harm when the land is harmed. This is evident in her description of the man-made border separating the United States from México:

1,950 mile-long open wound
Dividing a pueblo, a culture,
Running down the length of my body.
Staking fence rods in my flesh,
Splits me splits me
Me raja me raja.
(Anzaldúa, 1987:24)

In this excerpt the land itself is gendered as feminine - it is her own body that is wounded, staked, and split open by the border, or more specifically, by conquest which created the border. In this way, Anzaldúa illuminates the continued nature of such violence against Indigenous womxn. She is writing hundreds of years after the conquest, and yet the legacy of conquest continues to inflict harm on her, and womxn like her. This is because, while European conquest laid the foundation for the subjugation of Indigenous womxn, settler colonialism - or the continued occupation of Indigenous lands by non-Indigenous people - has worked to perpetuate it.

Settler colonialism can be understood as the process by which Indigenous land has been stolen and reconfigured as settler property, simultaneous with the theft and enslavement of African peoples to labor on such stolen land. This process has also been critical to the creation of inequitable hierarchies in which both Indigenous womxn and the earth are devalued, exploited, and subjugated (Rowe and Tuck, 2016). As the Anishinaabe artist and activist Quill Christie-Peters writes, “the foundational logic of settler colonialism is that of compartmentalization,” which is the “prerequisite to the creation of hierarchies and individualism, the building block of settler systems of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy” (Christie-Peters, 2017). In a settler-colonial society, all people are gendered, racialized, and placed into a hierarchy based on these constructed identities - a process that has naturalized white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. White suprem-
acy is an ideology of dominance that in the United States was used to justify the state-sponsored genocide of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Black people, among many other forms of racial violence and oppression. Heteropatriarchy relies on a gender binary, upon which the categories of male and female are assigned characteristics and traits, and the conditions necessary for the creation of a male-dominant hierarchy are facilitated (Arvin et al. 2013). This binary not only erases gender non-conforming, two spirit, and trans folx but also imagines womxn to be innately weak and vulnerable. Because of the interlocking ways in which white supremacy and heteropatriarchy operate, Indigenous womxn are particularly devalued - and such devaluation is often accompanied by harm.

Just as it is at the root of the marginalization of Indigenous womxn, settler colonialism can also be understood as the structure that has informed the domination and exploitation of nature by humans in the post-conquest United States. As this paper has established, settler colonialism relies on the compartmentalization and hierarchical ordering of the natural world by those who hold power. Although humans are natural beings, settler colonialism has advanced the idea that humans and nature exist in a binary - that humans are separate from nature, or rather, that humans are superior to nature. To understand this, Sherry Ortner, a leading feminist anthropologist, presents the idea of a nature/culture dichotomy, where nature is conceived of as having no agency or power - simply a passive force that is open to control by culture, or humans. Ortner defines nature as something that is devalued in a colonial society, and culture as a notion of human consciousness through which “humanity attempts to assert control over nature” (1974:72). And the devaluation - the perceived inferiority - of nature is what allows for natural resources to be extracted and exploited for profit, even when such processes compromise the long-term health of the land.

Eve Tuck, an Indigenous scholar-activist, identifies that extracting value from the earth is an innately colonial practice, and for settlers to do so, the people who live on that land first need to be removed. Neither the Indigenous people who live on the land nor the well-being of the land are valued to the same degree as is creating profit for settlers. We can see this in the MMIW crisis, wherein Indigenous women who live close to land deemed valuable because of the natural resources it holds - such as places like the Bakken region, the Navajo Nation, and Alaska - are being murdered and going missing.

No More Stolen Sisters: The MMIW Crisis

The work of scholars such as Anzaldúa, Christie-Peters, and Tuck has provided the theory to conceive of the ways in which Indigenous womxn and nature have been mutually subjugated, devalued, and exploited in the settler colonial United States. Still, it is critical that this conversation is not only thought of in the theoretical or the historical but as something that always and already mediates the lived realities of Indigenous womxn. As such, I would like to turn again to the current MMIW crisis.

In 2016, there were 5,711 Indigenous womxn reported missing in the National Crime Information Center, 5,646 in 2017, and 2,758 in the first six months of 2018 (Gray 2018). In the United States, the murder rate for Indigenous womxn is 10 times that of the national average (Martin 2019), and Indigenous womxn are 2.5 times more likely than white womxn to be raped in their lifetime (Bleir 2018). Unlike womxn of any other racial group, Indigenous womxn are more likely to be sexually assaulted by people who are not Indigenous; while only 14% of white womxn experience interracial violence, nearly 84% of Indigenous womxn experience interracial violence (Bleir 2018). It is not possible to quantify the trauma that such statistics entail for the womxn who have lived them. Still, I believe that these statistics exemplify the gravity of the MMIW crisis. In a society that has long valued Western forms of science over Indigenous knowledge systems, stories, and voices, perhaps these numbers carry the weight necessary for other white people to finally begin to listen, to pay attention, and to take action by following the lead of Indigenous womxn activists.

There are many reasons for the rising MMIW crisis, but in this paper, I focus on just one: the development of extractive industries such as oil fracking. Extractive industries drill, mine, and frack for fossil fuels for which much of the global economic system, and particularly the economies of the Global North, depends on. These economies are constantly growing and developing, and given such continuous growth, the demand for fossil fuels and other natural resources has become insatiable. And yet, the world’s remaining resources are becoming more and more limited,
and these diminished resources are increasingly located on Indigenous territories. In the United States, 5 percent of oil reserves, 10 percent of gas reserves, and 30 percent of coal reserves are found on Indigenous reservations, even though Indigenous reservations make up just 2 percent of total US land (WEA and NYSHA, 2014). For example, the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, on which much of the Bakken oil fields are located, has become one of the epicenters of oil extraction in the United States, and more than 35 corporations now extract natural resources on or around this reservation (WEA and NYSHA, 2014).

The relationship between tribes and oil companies is complex. On the one hand, the tribal nations that reside on the Fort Berthold Reservation, for example, have allowed for oil fracking to take place. On the other, Indigenous activists point to the legacy of conquest and colonialism in the United States - including, but not limited to, state-sponsored genocide, disenfranchisement from wealth, the forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands onto poor, isolated reservations, and ongoing acts of cultural genocide - for creating the conditions in which tribal governments are pushed into allowing for such extraction to take place on their lands (Brammer 2016). Given this context, we can better understand that the motivation for fossil fuel extraction on behalf of tribes is primarily an economic one as tribal governments attempt to gain their own economic agency as sovereign states, provide employment, and alleviate poverty. And it is also critical to remember that those profiting the most from the extraction of fossil fuels are not these tribal governments. Rather, most are non-Indigenous-owned corporations who make billions of dollars off the destruction and exploitation of the earth.

Indigenous womxn are particularly harmed by the development of oil fracking on or near the reservations where they live. The development of extractive industries is often accompanied by an increase in population due to the industries mostly male workforce, and this, in combination with a population of womxn who are already marginalized by systemic violence and generational trauma, creates the conditions where increased violence on the land leads to increased violence on Indigenous people (WEA and NYSHA 2014). Audrey Huntley, an Indigenous rights activist and co-founder of No More Silence, a support network for activists, academics, and researchers working to end the MMIW crisis, says that “where the land is violated, women are violated” (Brammer 2016). Lisa Brunner, a professor and cultural coordinator at White Earth Tribal and Community College in Minnesota, expands on this idea when she explains that extractive industries, “treat Mother Earth like they treat women [...] They think they can own us, buy us, sell us, trade us, rent us, poison us, rape us, destroy us, use us as entertainment and kill us” (Brammer 2016). In this way, violence against womxn and violence against the earth does not just occur simultaneously in places where natural resource extraction occurs, but rather they are entirely interconnected. And such violence takes place for very similar reasons: in a colonial society built on heteropatriarchy and white supremacy, men, specifically white men, feel entitled to use and abuse womxn and the earth for their pleasure and profit.

While the connection between the development of extractive industries and the MMIW crisis may seem evident to many of us, the United States government has largely continued to ignore it. They also continue to contribute to it. For instance, in early 2020, the Trump administration approved a grant allowing for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline which is designed to carry crude oil from Western Canada to the U.S Gulf Coast. 44 miles of this pipeline are planned to run through Montana land, right next to the Fort Peck Reservation (Brown 2020). Indigenous activists believe that the pipeline will incite both environmental and social trauma, and even more, they believe it will cause more Indigenous womxn to experience sexual violence at the hands of non-Native men (Howard and Marlatt 2018). And yet, instead of stopping the construction of this pipeline or even just planning to increase protection of the Indigenous communities that live near it, Montanan politicians have begun meeting with law enforcement to discuss how to best inhibit Keystone XL protesters (Martin 2019). Such action on behalf of the state’s government exemplifies their complicity in relation to the rising MMIW crisis. It also shows that the United States is renewing its commitment to fossil fuels, even while fully understanding the violence that such extractive industries have on bodies and lands. And in doing so, they are choosing to ignore climate change, or rather, to continue to perpetuate the climate crisis.
Co-Injustices: The MMIW and Climate Crises

Pipelines, such as the Keystone XL, are symbolic of the extraction which has caused climate change. The action taken by the Trump administration to approve the Keystone XL pipeline exemplifies how the interests of the state have yet again aligned with extractive industries that provide large profits, rather than aligning with the well-being and sustainability of our rivers, our air, our wildlife, and the most marginalized among us. This is not new - as this paper has illuminated, those in power in the United States have consistently perpetrated, or been complicit in, violence against Indigenous womxn and the land. And now we are facing the consequence of such actions: climate change.

Climate change is the result of a particular kind of human relationship with the earth built on the underlying logic of power and domination which have co-produced social injustices, such as gendered violence, and environmental degradation. To be more specific, I believe climate change to be rooted in a settler-colonial understanding of the earth and its natural resources as forms of property or commodities. As Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, an Indigenous scholar and scientist writes, “Climate injustice is the manifestation of racism that has, for centuries, been directed at Indigenous communities and peoples of colour; it is the misogyny directed at women that also shows up as brutal disregard for life on Earth; and it is the institutions and structures that perpetuate the notion that it’s okay to dominate, destroy, extract and commodify nature in the pursuit of profit regardless of the expense.” (Mersha 2018: 1421)

If we understand climate change to be the result of racism/white supremacy and misogyny/heteropatriarchy, then it becomes evident that deconstructing such systems of oppression is imperative to creating solutions that mitigate the effects of climate change, all while advancing justice and ensuring sustainability. Decolonizing settler-colonial relations with the earth and with each other is critical to achieving climate justice. We must learn how to treat all our relations with respect and reciprocity, rather than domination and exploitation. To do this, I believe it is critical to center and amplify the knowledge and solutions of Indigenous womxn who have been struggling for generations to achieve liberation for themselves, their communities, and the earth.

Towards Justice: Addressing the MMIW and Climate Crises

Up to this point, this paper has analyzed centuries of white settler domination, with a particular focus on the ways that the hierarchies of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy imposed by settler colonialism have harmed Indigenous womxn and the earth. These legacies of harm have coalesced to create the current crises that we now face: the climate crisis and the MMIW crisis. As these crises have been several hundred years in the making, I want to recognize that it will require sustained, multi-year, multi-faceted efforts to fully understand and address them. As such, I will now explore immediate and long-term solutions that Indigenous womxn are demanding and leading in response to these crises, understanding that any and all long-term solutions must seek to disrupt the ideologies of domination that allow for the mutual exploitation of Indigenous womxn and the earth. That is to say, decolonization is most necessary for us to build a society that values all people and the lands that sustain us.

Immediate Solutions

As this paper has explored, a leading cause of both the MMIW crisis and the climate crisis is the development of extractive industries. A critical first step in addressing both of these crises is to shut down all operating oil pipelines that run through tribal land without authorization from the tribal nation. This includes the Dakota Access Pipeline (also known as the Bakken Oil Pipeline) which is currently carrying 470,000 barrels of crude oil per day from North Dakota to Illinois. The Dakota Access Pipeline is continuing to operate despite the ongoing threats it poses to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Nation and the fact that it does not have a federal permit. (Bowe et al., 2021) The United States government needs to honor treaty law and respect the demands of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Nation has opposed the pipeline from the beginning - claiming that it violates federal and treaty law - and tribal members as well as thousands of Indigenous people and allies from across the country joined the movement to stop the pipeline from being built. The United States government needs to honor treaty law, and respect the demands of the
 Indigenous led movement to shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline. Not only is it critical to shut down all operating oil pipelines, going forward, federal and state authorities must not approve permits for pipelines that cross Indigenous lands and violate treaty rights. Tribal sovereignty must be prioritized above all else.

Another immediate step to address these crises is to restore tribal authority over tribal lands, including criminal jurisdiction. Due to the Supreme Court’s 1978 Oliphant vs Suquamish Indian Tribe ruling, tribal nations cannot prosecute non-Indigenous people for the murder, kidnap, or traffic of tribal members. This case has effectively limited the ability of tribal law enforcement and prosecutors to protect their citizens. (Smith 2020) Not only does criminal jurisdiction for tribal nations need to be restored, the United States government must prioritize supporting tribal nations in developing effective and efficient responses to MMIW cases. Restoring and enhancing tribal governmental capacity to respond to violence against Indigenous womxn will provide for greater local control, safety, and accountability.

The changes recommended above are steps I believe must be taken in order to ensure more safety and accountability for Indigenous womxn, but they should not be equated with justice. They do not replace the full restoration of tribal authority to govern their people and their lands. Tribal sovereignty, safety for Indigenous womxn, and the sustainability of the earth are interconnected. As such, decolonization is the long-term solution we need to dismantle white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, and the particular harm these systems have inflicted on Indigenous womxn and the earth.

**Long Term Solutions**

In their article, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe decolonization as nothing less than the dismantling of colonial power structure, with the goal being the restoration of Indigenous land and Indigenous self-determination (Tuck & Yang 2012). Through this definition, we can understand decolonization as the tangible return of land back to Indigenous peoples, which will in turn allow for the full restoration of tradition, culture, and control of governance, land, and resources to Indigenous people (Whyte, 2018). At its core, decolonization is giving back what has been stolen through the violence of conquest and settler colonialism and reimagining a society that centers Indigenous people to ensure Indigenous sovereignty. As such, decolonization means respecting the land on which we are all living and the people to whom it belongs.

While we may not have all of the answers for what decolonization of a settler colonial nation would look like, we also know that we make the road by walking. With deep appreciation, I will now highlight the work of some of the many Indigenous womxn who are helping guide us toward collective liberation through small and sustained local actions. I will detail the work of Indigenous seed-keepers who are involved in seed rematriation projects to reclaim Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems.

The Indigenous seed rematriation movement has come about from the need to return seeds that were taken away from their community back to their homes, to be planted again by Indigenous people. This work is being spearheaded by womxn led organizations, including the Indigenous Seedkeepers Network and Sierra Seeds. As Indigenous professor and food justice activist Elizabeth Hoover explains, in some Indigenous cultures, womxn and seeds are connected: womxn carry the seeds to birth the nation and plant the fields to feed the nation (Hoover 2021). Hoover goes on to explain that the term rematriation was intentionally chosen to honor the connection between womxn and seeds, and also to refer to the interconnected process of reconnecting Indigenous people to their seeds, reconnecting seeds to mother earth, and in turn connecting people and the land. (Hoover 2019) As Mohawk seed keeper Rowen White, who heads the Indigenous Seedkeepers Network, says about seed rematriation, “it simply means back to Mother Earth, a return to our origins, to life and co-creation, rather than patriarchal destruction and colonization” (Hoover 2021).

Seed rematriation projects have even helped stop the construction of pipelines. The Ponca tribes of Nebraska and Oklahoma have planted sacred corn seeds along the proposed path of the Keystone XL pipeline. The Keystone XL pipeline not only runs through ancestral Ponca land, it also falls on the path of the Ponca Trail of Tears; the path the Ponca people were forced to take after being violently removed from their homelands in Oklahoma by the United States Army and required to resettle in Nebraska (Hoover 2019). It is at this point of trauma - at the very place where the
To address the MMIW crisis and the climate crisis - and ultimately create a future that values all people and the lands that sustain us - we must center the knowledge, solutions, and care of Indigenous womxn, such as those leading seed rematriation efforts. Seed rematriation projects are localized examples that prove our capacity to construct a new world, to build a more just, equitable, and joyous future. A future where access to basic necessities like food are not subject to the demands of capitalist profit. A future where the heteropatriarchal gender binary has been replaced by gender justice. A future where all womxn and our ancient mother earth are respected. ◆

WORKS CITED


Rowen White’s words into practice.


Soyboys and Soygirls: A Reformed Feminist Vegetarianism

Cameron Lange

“As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out.”
— Alice Walker, “Am I Blue?”

“Vegetables are for girls...If your instincts tell you following a vegetarian diet isn’t manly, you’re right.”
— Article in Men’s Health magazine (quoted in Rothgerber 2013:1)

Over the past few decades, academic support for and discourse surrounding feminist vegetarianism, an outgrowth of 20th century ecofeminist theory, have declined precipitously. In this paper, I attribute the feminist vegetarian movement’s near fade into obscurity to two major factors: feminist vegetarian theorists’ failures to adapt to fourth-wave feminism, and the rising ubiquity of meat analogues, which destabilize the binary gendered food model on which feminist vegetarian theory rests. I argue that feminist vegetarianism may be salvaged in light of such challenges both in theory and in praxis. In so doing, I generate suggested feminist vegetarian responses to four theoretical attacks and highlight the liberatory potential of meat analogues as a feminist reclamation of a formerly masculinized food space.
Introduction

The struggle to keep dead animals off of Americans’ dining room tables is a women’s struggle. While men formerly dominated the animal rights movement and still hold most leadership positions, women now comprise 68-80 percent of membership within the movement and are generally more likely than men to be vegetarian (Gaarder 2011:55). Correspondingly, a strong alliance has formed between feminism and vegetarianism, fostering the emergence of a joint ideology in the late twentieth century under the then-burgeoning umbrella of ecofeminism. Feminist vegetarianism holds that meat is inherently masculine while vegetables are feminine and that the oppression of women and animals is intrinsically connected. For decades, feminist vegetarian demands that all women abstain from meat consumption were at best lauded, and at worst considered unproblematic.

In the early twenty-first century, however, a novel challenge arose to the feminist vegetarian worldview: the meat analogue. To be clear, the veggie burger itself is nothing new, and, “for almost as long as the hamburger has been served, plant-based approximations” like falafel, bean, and lentil patties “have been nipping at its heels” (Adams 2015). However, vegetarian ‘meat’ engineered to replicate the texture, smell, taste, and appearance of animal flesh is a far more recent phenomenon spurred on by corporations such as Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods, founded in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The wildly popular Beyond and Impossible Burgers continually make waves, both being designed to “bleed,” a choice that serves no purpose other than to more closely imitate the… experience of biting into a juicy beef patty” (Todd 2019). Moreover, it is not immediately clear whether meat analogues might be gendered as female due to their vegetarian compositions, gendered as male due to their burger-like appearances and taste, or not gendered whatsoever. As such, Beyond and Impossible Burgers have the potential to destabilize the original feminist vegetarian worldview, sitting rather uncomfortably outside of the binary meat:vegetable, man:woman model on which feminist vegetarianism rests.

Feminist vegetarians’ silence about meatless meat points to a broader ineptitude among these aging outlooks to preserve their cultural applicability. Indeed, not only has feminist vegetarianism fallen out of touch with the contemporary landscape of meatless meat, but it has also failed to adapt to fourth-wave feminist thought, which emphasizes intersectionality and critiques reliance upon notions of the universal woman (i.e., upper- or middle-class, white, American). New generations of feminists are less amenable to the imposition of even more dietary restrictions upon women, reliance upon strict male/female gender binaries that fail to make space for genderqueer individuals, demands that working-class women spend substantial amounts on expensive vegetarian meals, and the erasure of the cultural value of meat to women of color. Ultimately, I will argue that twentieth century feminist vegetarian theory can be brought to bear on contemporary society, but it must be revised to accommodate both increasingly intersectional feminism and the heightening ubiquity of meat analogues in the American diet.

The Original Feminist Vegetarian Doctrine

Feminist vegetarian consciousness begins with the realization that, in some essential way, our social beliefs about gender are projected onto the food we eat. This claim may seem radical - how often do we perceive our meals as gendered? - but gendered food associations become more obvious if we think about it. Hollywood and advertiser-driven messaging delivered to most Americans dictate that yogurt, salad, brownies, and cupcakes are intrinsically female; steak, beer, bacon, and corndogs are intrinsically male (McPhail et al. 2012:475). Upon reflection, a clear pattern emerges: female foods reside within a plethora of nutritional groups, but most foods gendered as male are meat.

Feminist vegetarians, like activist Carol Adams in her landmark (1990) text The Sexual Politics of Meat, takes this account one step further by identifying links between the oppression faced by women and by animals. First, like women, female animals experience additional violence as a result of their sex, making them “doubly exploited: both when they are alive and then when they are dead” (Adams 1990:21). Female animals are “repeatedly and forcefully impregnated” (Brown 2016:3), painfully separated from their offspring, and jailed for their eggs and milk, serving as “surrogate wetnurses” until their “(re)productiveness ends” (Adams 1990:21) and their bodies give out, at which point they are slaughtered.
Meat and patriarchy have gone hand in hand for centuries, even before the conception of the factory farm slaughterhouse. Among pre-capitalist cultures, herbivorous societies tend to boast gender egalitarianism, but within their omnivorous counterparts in which men tend to fulfill a ‘hunter’ role, scholars have noted greater patrilineality, worship of male gods, and “sexual segregation in work activities, with women doing more work than men, but work that is less valued” (Ibid., 59). Over time, as societies develop technologically and replace generalized hunter-gatherer roles with discrete meat production industries from which most people are quite removed, cultural associations between meat and patriarchal power structures remain entrenched. During the 1500s, for example, King Henry VIII was depicted in paintings eating various meat dishes, while his six wives were painted with fruits and vegetables (Ibid., 48). Indeed, “the killed and slaughtered animal yields… imagery of ferociousness, territorial imperative, armed hunting, aggressive behavior, the vitality and virility of meat-eating” (Ibid., 244). Although “men’s protein needs are less than those of pregnant and nursing women,” commonly held beliefs dictate that “active men need animal meat” while more “placid” (Ibid., 49, 61) women may successfully subsist on plants. The ferocity evoked by meat may present additional appeal to contemporary Western men. When men feel threatened by an influx of professionally and socially powerful women, they may reassure themselves of their masculinity by consuming “large slabs of bleeding meat, which are the last symbol of machismo” (Ibid., 58). To be clear, although fast food meat is not bloodied and raw, it still connotes patriarchal violence. A central motif within fast food advertisements is the juxtaposition of a highly sexualized woman with an enormous burger (Ibid., 334), reducing both the woman and the animal to objects, packaged for hedonistic heterosexual male consumption. Adams’ abstract theorizing can be corroborated empirically, albeit to a limited extent. Scholars have noted the emergence of strong statistical parallels between animal and gendered violence—men who abuse animals are more likely to batter, stalk, and assault women (Flynn 2011:456). The reverse statement also holds true. In addition, a study gauging male and female participants’ approaches to meat consumption concluded that Americans tend to feel as though “deliberately reducing meat intake violates the spirit of Western hegemonic masculinity” (Rothgerber 2013:9). Male participants expressed “more favorable attitudes toward eating meat, denied animal suffering, believed that animals were lower in a hierarchy than humans,” and tended to employ “direct, unapologetic strategies that embrace eating meat” (Ibid., 4). By contrast, women utilized “indirect, apologetic strategies” to justify their meat consumption, minimized “thinking about the animal” (Ibid.,), and ate less meat in general. Ultimately, the extent to which participants favored and justified meat consumption correlated directly with their general adherence to masculine social norms (Ibid., 8).

The connection between the oppression of women and animals can also be verified linguistically. Many of the most common insults employed to denigrate women liken them to animals (bitch, catty, cow, heifer, queen bee, shrew, snake, sow, ad infinitum). Equally unfavorable animal metaphors for women are utilized by Spanish speakers (Rodríguez 2009:95), suggesting that this linguistic linkage is not a rare cultural oddity, but rather reflective of a broader pattern of gendered violence globally. Few gendered animal metaphors utilized to describe men exist in English and Spanish, and such metaphors generally liken men to powerful, physically large, non-domesticated animals (Ibid., 83). Furthermore, it is quite common for female survivors of rape and assault to state, “I felt like a piece of meat,” recalling the butchered animal to express what it is to be reduced to an object and “victimized by male violence” (Adams 1990:67). In far too many cases, “the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women” (Ibid.), though the two are not entirely analogous. To activists like Adams, the proper response to this linked oppression thesis is for feminists to abstain from meat consumption: “Meat eating is the re-inscription of male power at every meal… if meat is a symbol of male dominance, then the presence of meat proclaims the disempowering of women” (Ibid., 241). Furthermore, vegetarianism has historically served as a uniquely female mode of resistance to oppressive power structures. Food preparation is a role traditionally delegated to women, so when women “find themselves muted… food becomes the spoken language of dissent” (Ibid., 213). As such, many feminist vegetarians find strength in situating themselves within a more
Some scholars argue that feminist vegetarianism reinforces oppressive dieting standards already imposed on women by patriarchal social structures. Women’s bodies inarguably receive more scrutiny and judgment than men’s do, both in the mass media and in quotidian social interactions. Further, prevailing gender norms dictate that women be “thin and beautiful, that they should value health and have expertise in health promotion and risk prevention (e.g., nutrition, dieting, exercise), and that they should be skilled at self-control” (Chrisler 2012:612). When viewed through this lens, meat-eating might be understood as a bold feminist act: women “reclaim[ing] their right to food—meat in particular” (Bailey 2007:46), and the power that accompanies it. By contrast, not only does forced vegetarianism serve as an instance of this oppressive virtue of dietary restraint but also, vegetarianism can be connected to disordered eating behavior. Women with disordered eating are more likely to identify as vegetarian than control groups (Bardone-Cone et al. 2012:1249), potentially because vegetarians eliminate from their diets one protein type that necessarily results in a slow fade into obscurity. In large part, challenges to feminist vegetarianism are based on a broader discontentment with the “Universal Woman” of white, Western feminist theory” (Deckha 2012:529). Indeed, the animal studies field is populated largely by American middle-class white feminists, who tend to view gender “as ontologically separate from other differences,” thus assigning “a secondary role to the work that other social forces (of race, culture, and otherwise) perform” (Ibid., 533). This limited understanding of how several oppressive social forces intersect and layer atop one another can problematize both feminist vegetarian knowledge production and the dietary restrictions feminist vegetarians set for the monolithic “woman.” Feminist vegetarian theory faces four primary challenges, each of which presents an untapped potential for a novel response. These responses constitute a path towards salvaging the core tenets of feminist vegetarianism, even while acknowledging its more problematic elements.

Some scholars argue that feminist vegetarianism should also alter their rhetoric to avoid implicitly conveying to the sizeable population of women experiencing or in recovery from eating disorders or disordered eating habits that they are actively anti-feminist if they do not adopt a particular dietary restriction. While vegetarianism may be the correct moral choice, it is not a feasible nor healthy choice for each and every woman, and certain exceptions must be made explicit within feminist vegetarian scholarship. That said, attempts to broadly equate ethically-grounded vegetarianism with attempted weight loss or policing of the body must be critically examined. Feminist vegetarians eliminate from their diets one protein type that necessarily results from extreme, systemically enacted material violence but remain free to consume as many other high-calorie foods as they wish. Furthermore, while the ‘disordered eating habits-vegetarianism’ link has been well established, it is not clear that the reverse causal relationship also holds true. Finally, for the same reasons as a woman’s potential decision to wash her own dishes after eating, clean her house, or otherwise voluntarily complete homemaking tasks should not be rejected prima facie, the fact that vegetarianism can be construed as adherence to a gender norm is not independently sufficient for it to be labelled as harmful. Other scholars have critiqued feminist vegetarian theory for relying too heavily on essentializing, binary notions of gender. All characters in the feminist vegetarian universe are labeled either as men, “consumers of flesh—literal and representational,” or as women, “objectified and consumed” (Hamilton 2016:115). As a result, feminist vegetarianism’s expansive story of defiance. Additionally, given the centrality of body politics to feminist thought, Adams argues that vegetarianism enables feminist theory to be actively “practiced… through [women’s] bodies” (Ibid., 213), a radical personal reclamation of autonomy and power.

**Problematizing Feminist Vegetarianism**

Since the publication of Adams’ landmark text (1990), the third wave of feminism has given way to the fourth, and several critiques directed towards feminist vegetarianism have facilitated the theory’s slow fade into obscurity. In large part, challenges to feminist vegetarianism are based on a broader discontentment with the “Universal Woman” of white, Western feminist theory” (Deckha 2012:529). Indeed, the animal studies field is populated largely by American middle-class white feminists, who tend to view gender “as ontologically separate from other differences,” thus assigning “a secondary role to the work that other social forces (of race, culture, and otherwise) perform” (Ibid., 533). This limited understanding of how several oppressive social forces intersect and layer atop one another can problematize both feminist vegetarian knowledge production and the dietary restrictions feminist vegetarians set for the monolithic “woman.” Feminist vegetarian theory faces four primary challenges, each of which presents an untapped potential for a novel response. These responses constitute a path towards salvaging the core tenets of feminist vegetarianism, even while acknowledging its more problematic elements.

Some scholars argue that
understanding of the world fails to leave space for nonbinary and genderfluid people who cannot be placed cleanly into either category, as well as for feminine men and masculine women who defy traditional gender norms.

To address these concerns, feminist vegetarians could begin by overtly acknowledging the absence of genderqueer individuals from their field. More scholarship is desperately needed examining genderqueer people’s relationships to and perceptions of food, as well as discussing the roles non-gendered foods like bread and cheese play within the landscape of gender and food studies. Unfortunately, it is likely that genderqueer scholars are deterred from entering the field of feminist vegetarian studies because the structural worldview held by feminist vegetarians appears hostile to the very existence of genderqueer people. As such, feminist vegetarians must radically rethink both their choices of terminology and their broader representations of gender expression, gender identity, and sex. Namely, feminist vegetarian scholars tend to employ vocabulary relating to femininity/masculinity, gender, and biological sex synonymously in weaving narratives about the perceived masculinity of certain foods, the sexism, and violence faced by women, and the suffering that biologically female animals must endure due to their reproductive abilities. In actuality, all of these concepts are quite discrete. Feminist vegetarians must, then, better delineate which set of terms are implicated by each of their arguments. At times, feminist vegetarians may still need to equate ‘femininity’ with ‘woman’ or equate ‘woman’ with ‘possessing female sexual reproduction system,’ but when possible, they ought to explicitly justify their decisions to draw these parallels: namely, the need to efficiently and coherently identify oppressed groups as part of broader liberatory political strategies. Plenty of intersectional feminist organizers and activists utilize gendered language in an inclusive manner while advocating for the uplifting of girls, women, and other gender-marginalized folks, providing a clear blueprint for a feminist vegetarian future.

A third critique argues that vegetarianism is a privilege kept out of reach for many who cannot access or afford vegetarian foods. In trying to feed themselves or their families, socioeconomically disadvantaged women may understandably “be averse to experimenting with novel foods” like specialty vegetarian products, which tend to be both expensive and potentially “unappetizing” to family members, making them likely to be wasted (Asher and Cherry 2015:82-83). Even if such women were amenable to purchasing vegetarian foods, pursuing a vegetarian diet is not always feasible. Many low-income women live in “food deserts,” or “areas with little to no access to full-service supermarkets or fresh foods” that instead tend to be populated with establishments peddling liquor and fast food (Ibid., 83). People of color disproportionately lack access to affordable, healthful foods: “white neighborhoods in Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, and North Carolina have quadruple the number of supermarkets as black neighborhoods” (Ibid., 83). As such, feminist vegetarian demands that all women pursue vegetarian diets at risk of patriarchal complicity have been labeled as classist, racist and paternalistic.

It would be prudent for feminist vegetarians to simultaneously apply pressure to and make space for these concerns. First, feminist vegetarians might argue that it is the very patriarchal systems they are challenging that result in a society in which many women cannot afford to purchase healthful food. Given that, “it is not a randomly produced feature of the world that women and children make up the greatest poverty class or that the health of women and children is especially precarious” (Bailey 2007:51); when food is scarce, men tend to eat before and more than women around the world. Second, in the process of critiquing feminist vegetarianism’s reliance upon a wealthy, Universal Woman, this critique implicitly relies upon its own Universal Woman: the Western Woman. In fact, “most of the human population lives in relatively non-industrialized countries and tends to have extremely little or no access to nonhuman animal products” (Lucas 2020: 83), implying that on a global scale, omnivorous diets are associated with wealth and prosperity. Indeed, “in many parts of the globe, it is more expensive to lead a nonvegetarian lifestyle than a vegetarian lifestyle,” as “Western levels of flesh consumption” are sustained only by the usage and destruction of “enormous amounts of plant and land resources” (Deckha 2012:535), as well as by exploitative labor conditions. Even within the United States, vegetarian diets tend to be cheaper overall than their omnivorous counterparts. If food is purchased online and matched calorie to calorie to form balanced meals, it costs $2.00 less per day
to be a vegetarian in America than it does to follow omnivorous U.S. dietary guidelines (Sweeney and Green 2018:120); if food is purchased in person at a grocery store and matched calorie to calorie in the same manner, vegetarian diets save Americans about $750 each per year (Flynn and Schiff 2015:478). That said, the generalized applicability of these figures may fall short as they are frequently derived by comparing cheaper vegetarian staples like beans, lentils, and tofu - rather than more expensive specialty goods like Tofurky - to mid-priced meat alternatives. Furthermore, in food deserts, even vegetarian staples may not be readily available or affordable. At this juncture, as before, feminist vegetarians must be willing to make clear exceptions to their demands that all women pursue vegetarian diets. They ought to supplement these exceptions with suggestions of alternative ways in which women from a diversity of class backgrounds can contribute to feminist struggles against violent power structures without sacrificing nutrition.

Another point of contention against feminist vegetarianism claims that meat and various meat-centric dishes have cultural value to women of color, and it is unethical to deprive people of identity-affirming food. While meat is central to many groups’ heritages and cultures, I will here focus on Black women’s connection to meat as a case study. Psyché A. Williams-Forson’s Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power (2006), for example, examines the varying ways in which Black women “have used chicken to express and define themselves over time” (7). Cooking and serving chicken has awarded many Black women the opportunities to enjoy a modicum of economic freedom, while Black wives and mothers’ preparation of chicken for their families’ lunches granted them the metaphorical opportunity to travel outside of the domestic sphere and the real opportunity to perform creative culinary artistry. “Soul food,” which tends to contain meat, is also a bedrock of the Black culinary tradition. Meat is a particularly meaningful component of soul food; when the cuisine originated during American slavery, it was prepared with “the parts of animals that white masters did not want to eat,” making its consumption in the present day “a show of ethnic pride to reclaim what was previously despised” (Bailey 2007:46). As discussed above, exacerbating the issue, it is difficult to downplay the whiteness pervasive to feminist vegetarianism that the editors of the Journal of Critical Animal Studies, in a moment of jarring self-awareness, described women of color as “eerily absent from the burgeoning critical animal studies field” (Deckha 2012:533). As a result, calls for women of color to abandon a food group they associate with reclamations of power and cultural identity can come across as tone-deaf. In response, it is critical that feminist vegetarians first abandon their essentialist worldview and begin to overtly state that minority women are not women first and people of color second. Other identities and axes of oppression (nationality, race, sexuality, class, etc.) need not be bracketed for feminist vegetarian arguments to remain persuasive, nor for gendered oppression to remain problematic. It is also imperative that animal studies journals more prominently feature scholars of color, and that members of the feminist vegetarian community critically assess why so few scholars of color have found places within their ranks. Even after these efforts are made, however, the essential problem remains: feminist vegetarians cannot concede that people to whom meat holds cultural importance are exempt from their vegetarian demands. Given the centrality of meat to the traditional cuisines associated with many ethnicities, such an approach would preclude any widespread movement towards feminist vegetarianism. Moreover, the elimination of animals’ perceived moral status has legitimized genocide, slavery, and colonialism, as “concepts of race and culture depended on ideas about animality and humanity” (Deckha 2012:530). One need only recall the horrors of social Darwinism or the animalization of enslaved Africans through “comparisons with apes and monkeys” to recognize a pattern of dominant social groups relying upon “view[ing] their victims as animals in order to execute the violence” (Ibid., 538). Vegetarianism follows as a logical first step towards rejecting this violence. This approach adds intersectionality to feminist vegetarian theory by understanding “the similarities between the condition of women and animals as turning not on one or two difference categories operating discretely, but through an intersectional matrix in which race and culture figure decisively” (Ibid., 541).

Looking Forward: Meatless Meat as Praxis

Even after the revision of feminist vegetarian theory, an elephant in
the room remains: the problem of meatless meat. Unlike their animal flesh-based counterparts, Beyond and Impossible Burgers do not have clearly gendered connotations, granting them the unique opportunity to spark radical reimaginings of meat that unsettle the very gendering of food.

A case can be made for meat analogues being perceived as female. The media is continually flooded with headlines such as, “Impossible Burger meat has 18 million times more estrogen than beef,” and social media platforms are rife with posts about veggie burger meat leading to male breast growth and loss of virility (Hamblin 2020; Carman 2019). In actuality, such messages are based on misinformation about the impacts of soy consumption on the human body; no differences have been found in testosterone levels between vegans and carnivores (Hamblin 2020). However, soy, a primary component of most meat analogues, has been associated with an “effeminized’ masculinity” since the “effeminate rice eater’ stereotype [was] used to justify 19th-century colonialism in Asia” (Gambert and Linné 2018:131). This trope persists today through the pejorative ‘soy boy’ label, which originated as an alt-right meme. While this term is obviously, to some extent, satirical, alt-right “irony and ambiguity are worth taking seriously” because they allow “extremist views to hide in plain sight” (Ibid., 145) and become normalized. Correspondingly, ‘soy boy’ quickly made its way from the specialized alt-right vocabulary into mainstream vernacular, with implications for how ordinary people perceive the gendering of meat analogues.

There also exists a count-argument that meat analogues are associated with masculinity, simply filling the role formerly played by animal meat. Beyond and Impossible Burgers have “leaned into the manliness of a hearty, red-liquid-dripping burger,” utilizing marketing strategies that avoid “potentially off-putting words like ‘vegan’ or ‘veggie burger,’” that have featured NBA players on their Instagram accounts, and “emphasize[d] how similar their products are to meat in taste and texture” (Todd 2019). As such, both companies seem to be making clear efforts to associate their products with masculinity and to co-opt the cultural associations typically placed on animal flesh. In 2015, a Manhattan veggie burger won the title of ‘best burger of the year’ from GQ, formerly Gentleman’s Quarterly magazine (Adams 2018), more firmly establishing its masculine connotations. Indeed, Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods are in the business of imitating meat, not in the business of sparking reflection among consumers about the gendering of food.

To attempt to resolve this dilemma, we may examine Impossible Burger advertisements and discern whether they present as masculine or feminine. Below are two Impossible Meat advertisements created for fast-food chains Burger King and Fatburger.

Neither advertisement presents overtly masculine or feminine connotations. Figure 1 is a screenshot from a video commercial featuring several customers, some with male and others with female gender presentation. Each participant samples the Impossible Burger and expresses their surprise that the burger patty is not made of ‘real’ meat, but rather of “plants” (Commercial-Break 2019). The ratio of male-passing to female-passing participants in the commercial is 2:1, but no clear effort is made to exclude either group from the dialogue. The burger is wrapped in brightly colored paper indistinguishable from the rest of Burger King’s food packaging.

Figure 2 is a promotional image advertising Fatburger’s addition of the Impossible Burger to their otherwise-beef burger menu. Again, the meatless patty is presented in
a traditional context adorned with lettuce, tomato, and pickles, with its shocking plant-based status revealed to the audience in bold text. While both advertisements are overt about their burgers’ meatlessness, unafraid to use the word “plants,” they present their meat analogues to be as visually beef-like as possible. As such, the burgers are portrayed as simultaneously plant and animal flesh; both female and male.

These conflicting masculine-feminine associations, or lack of gendered associations altogether, unsettle the binary gendered politics of food and make the meat analogue a promising next frontier of feminist vegetarian praxis. Meatless burgers, being comprised of vegetables rather than animal flesh, may then represent a feminist infiltration of what was formerly a signifier of patriarchal domination. Rather than personally rejecting meat outright, consumers of meat analogues challenge and reinvent the very idea of meat and the violence formerly inherent to this form of food. Meat analogues also represent an auspicious form of feminist vegetarian praxis because they are becoming increasingly accessible to working class women and people who live in food deserts. Impossible Burger is now sold at such fast-food chains as Burger King, Fatburger, Qdoba, and White Castle; Beyond Burger is sold at Carl’s Jr., Hardee’s, Del Taco, Dunkin’, and Subway at menu prices nearly comparable to their meat counterparts (Wida 2020). Both brands also sell their products at a variety of national grocery store chains. With development and time, Beyond and Impossible Meat may become even cheaper, making them hopeful candidates for a non-violent protein source that most, if not all, can enjoy.

Conclusion
So long as scholars work to make space for women who fit outside the academy’s traditional ‘Universal Woman’ and to embrace new types of ‘meat’ that fit outside the animal/vegetable binary, the feminist vegetarian thought developed so many years ago can be dusted off and brought into a twenty-first century context. Especially as American meat consumption skyrockets to record highs—the average American now ingests 2.8 pounds of meat every week (Bentley 2017)—we must remember that a burger is never just a burger. It is animal flesh, environmental policy, labor, nationality, race, gender, socioeconomic class, cultural identity, and land, all loaded into an innocuous-seeming disc compact enough to hold in a single hand. Similarly, a veggie burger is far more than just a patty. It represents a direct confrontation with the masculinization of meat and a bold feminist reclamation of what once symbolized structural violence and subjugation.

As feminist scholarship and consciousness evolve, it is imperative that feminist vegetarian analyses, and feminist food studies as a whole, avoid getting lost in the academic sands of time. Food is biologically necessary, but the choices we make every day about this consumer product—what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat—are deeply informed by sociological, cultural, and psychological forces. As a result, the food on our plates at each meal uniquely reflects attitudes, identities, and power structures. Returning now to the familiar haven of our dining room table, sweet and savory aromas fill the air, and the rallying cry of our second-wave feminist predecessors seems to echo across time and space: the personal is political. To eat or not to eat anything is necessarily a political act and not one to be taken lightly.
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Is Home Where the Heart Is or Is Heart Where the Home Is?

Sehajleen Kaur

This piece is a response to Andre Aciman’s “Parallax,” an excerpt from the collection Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere, which recounts his challenge grappling with multiple identities and living in various different parts of the world (Alexandria, Egypt; Paris, France; New York, United States). Aciman explores the ambiguity of “home,” and “Is Home Where The Heart Is Or Is Heart Where The Home Is” backs the uncertainty surrounding home and identity through personal experience and inquiry.

What is home? What would you consider your home? Is home wherever your house is? Is home a physical place or is it just a concept? Is it an integral part of your identity?

I didn’t know how to answer the question “Where are you from?” for most of my life. I was born in Punjab, but I spent my early childhood in Brazil and have been living in California for the past decade. Which place do I resonate with enough to call my home? Certainly, all three of these locations have shaped parts of my identity. But am I “from” Punjab, Brazil, or California? Am I “from” none of them or all three of them?

In “Parallax,” André Aciman (2011) explores the complexity of tying one’s sense of self to some place—to “home.” He begins by explaining that he is neither Egyptian nor British nor Italian, even though he indubitably had strong ties to each place; he is French—Paris is his “soul home.” He is neither African, although he was born there, nor is he Asian, even though his family is from there. He is “profoundly, ineradicably” European. But immediately after he declares this, he proceeds to say that he is “an imaginary European. An imaginary European many times over.”

Immediately, Aciman hooks in readers by a set of contradictory statements. How can he fail to identify with any of the places he mentioned even though he has a direct connection to them?

Aciman then backtracks to his early years, noting that he spent much of his childhood “fantasizing about living in Europe,” thinking of Alexandria, his birthplace, as just a tragic, inferior Paris. Even Alexandrian beaches, as gorgeous and picturesque as they were, were just inadequate unless he imagined them being somewhere in Europe, like Greece. When he saw antiquarian statues, he imagined them as longing to be returned to Europe. He explains that now he cannot remember Alexandria without equat-
Oftentimes, we long for items and experiences we do not presently have, but the ones that we do have are tinged by our desire for more. The objects of desire can become so thoroughly colored in our yearning that the yearning becomes an indispensable part of our identity. For example, some people went through high school obsessing over their dream college; when they remember their four high school years now, it is hard to disconnect their college or university from their high school experience.

Aciman then mentions a time when he caught his aunt gaping at the Alexandrian sea, remembering the Seine, mirroring Andre’s feelings that her real home was Paris and Alexandria was just a counterfeit Europe. Here, Aciman pauses to reflect. Since his aunt, a woman who had lived in Paris, compared the two beaches, should he harbor some appreciation for Egypt? From these musings, he begins to see Alexandria as what she truly is, instead of just viewing her as a copy, a forced imitation of a dreamland. Sometimes, we are only able to admire something after seeing it through someone else’s eyes. The author’s recognition of this strange characteristic of human nature allows readers to relate to his story.

Aciman further suggests that people are unable to live in the present, unable to see what is in front of them because they immediately get transported to some other mental space. Yet it is precisely because of this imbalance that people are able to view and understand what is directly in front of them. Ultimately this “distortion” points out “an inability to connect with the present.”

This transience between present and dreamland enables the dreamland to become embedded in and inseparable from the present. This transience could become an inhibition to the “consummate experience,” but instead gives one permission to lead a nuanced life, full of peculiar inconsistencies and compelling imbalances.

Aciman seamlessly maneuvers through different physical locations and mental spaces, reflecting a complex train of thought. Different chronological periods are interwoven throughout the piece. In that vein, he unfolds his thoughts on the notion of time:

“Caught between remembrance and memory anticipated, the present does not exist. The present does not exist, not because—recall my grandmothers here—the boy in the present already foresees the past before the future has even occurred, or because there are essentially two hypothetical homes, neither of which is the real home, but because the real inhabited space has literally become the street between them, or call it the transit between memory and imagination back to imagination and memory.”

Yet it is this intricate syntax coupled with abstract analyses that creates respect for his writing, and his ambivalence accurately mirrors the human condition. Most people are not completely certain of their sense of self, and Aciman’s work normalizes the ambiguity of identity.

Parallax. Parallax is the effect of seeing something differently when viewing it from different angles. Our life is a parallax. Love, memory, writing, and identity are “unstable gesture[s]” and “unstable move[s].”

We are made up of a mélange of varying life experiences. Different experiences influence our views, dreams, aspirations. Different experiences guide how we love and how we express anger. Different experiences contribute to how we react to pain and joy.

Aciman then reveals that when his family did eventually move to Europe, they found it to be “unfamiliar.” At once, they became fond of any part of Europe that reminded them of Egypt. The Europe they had fantasized about for years no longer seemed like a “soul home,” but something “foreign.” Egypt now seemed authentic.

But the Alexandria they missed was the Alexandria they had dreamed of Paris in. Europe ceased to have value unless Egypt was summoned with it. After he moved to America, the imagined and the remembered, the “yearning” and “nostalgia” had become intertwined. In fact, he goes as far as to say that
memory and imagination are twins who live along an artificial border permitting them to “lead double lives and smuggle coded messages back and forth.” This metaphor lets the audience understand the author’s stance and emphasizes how intertwined “longing” and “recollection” are, and how difficult it can be to distinguish between them.

Parallax does not only affect the vision, but the “cognitive, metaphysical, intellectual, and ultimately aesthetic” parts of a person. Parallax is “a fundamental misalignment between who we are, might have been, could still be, can’t accept we’ve become, or may never be.” Parallax makes us behave counterintuitively, makes us think we have to behave contradictorily to our natural instincts in order to connect with other people and the lost part of ourselves.

The writer’s otherworldly, almost ethereal definition of parallax adds to his convoluted memoir. It describes how parallax has become ingrained in every part of his life, making him a credible source to expound upon the implications of parallax.

Parallactic distortion in a sense molds our interactions with other people, our view of the world, and ultimately our own identity. Because of this distortion we are separated from both reality and fiction while being anchored to both.

Aciman then mentions W. G. Sebald (acclaimed by literary critics as one of the contemporary essayists, novelists, and poets for his works’ themes of memory and history), who delineated that because of displacements, the past and present indubitably exert a force on each other. The experiences of the past bleed into the present and the happenings of the present warp our perception of the past. Displacements can be “imagined” or “recollected” or “anticipated,” but they will induce one to feel as if he or she is living the wrong life. Yet the physical location of cities is irrelevant to our experiences there - it is the “unlived life” we project onto these cities that shapes our experience.

Cities are “costume[s],” “screen wall[s],” “empty envelope[s].” Aciman’s unconventional figurative comparisons highlight his dilemma. Cities are characteristically unremarkable; it is in the person living in said cities who crafts a unique experience for himself/herself. It is Aciman’s carefully culled diction that allows readers to peer into his mind, his world, his individual experiences.

This brings me back to the questions posed at the start. Is home a city or a mental construct? We often tie our identity to where we’re from, but doesn’t our identity equally shape the place we call home?

I know I left parts of me in Brazil and Punjab. My first language will always be Portuguese, and Brazil will remain the place where I learned how to crawl, walk, and talk. But Punjab will forever stay closest to my heart—it’s my home, it’s the place I associate with my values. Amritsar and Ludhiana, places within Punjab, are lands of my heritage, my cultural legacy.

But then is Punjab really my home? I’ve begun to feel like a foreigner every time I visit, although the physical location of my homeland has remained exactly the same. Friends tell me my Punjabi accent is becoming a little too American, and my family is appalled that I still can’t cook authentic South Asian food. Did I give up being Punjabi when I became an American citizen?

I miss Punjab. I still refer to my time there as time spent back home.

The places we call home are an integral part of the way we see ourselves as well as the way others perceive of us. What place would you call your home? ♦

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Alienation, Agency, the Body and Bracero Identity

Jessica Femenias

The vast majority of human beings enter into their work environment and find themselves reduced to a sort of tool. They perform as a means towards some end they do not have, and cannot even see: their participation is practically compulsory, but they cannot see themselves realized through it. The worker screws a bolt, and then another; puts a handful of change into a cash register; and the resulting commodity appears in their mind only as some fragment of a stranger’s -- their boss’s -- life project. The result is a contracted, frustrated and finally suppressed predisposition for self-realization: in his over-extension the worker cannot realize his own projects.

But sometimes, we erect an image of a thing in our own minds and then realize it with our own hands -- we build because we know that our building will impose itself upon, and then change, our futures. Nations staring down the barrel of American intervention are not permitted such a relationship with their futures. They raise farms with their families and selves in mind, and find their project intercepted: their products are stolen away in service of some foreign future they cannot relate to. And in a grim reversal, invaded people sometimes find themselves desperate to enter into the very nations who have profited from the invasion. They are alienated in layers: first as workers; then as workers whose labor is exported; then as imports; and finally, as imported workers.

This was the story of Bracero farmworkers. The United States initiated the Bracero program to support the war effort of the 1940s -- Mexican agriculturalists signed contracts and were shuffled in droves through “disinfection stations,” where they were doused with DDT and gasoline. Even before beginning their work, they are treated as cargo. Eventually they arrive on US farms, and an under-studied alienation ensues. Alienation, Agency, The Body and Bracero Identity tells the story of that alienation via interviews with Bracero farmworkers.
The vast majority of human beings enter into their work environment and find themselves reduced to that of a tool. A worker’s labor is purchased by a boss for a wage, and workers perform labor as a means towards an end that they have not chosen: the worker screws a bolt; another tosses a handful of change into a cash register. The resulting commodity manifests a stranger’s - their boss’s - life project. Without public social safety nets, a worker’s participation in this cycle of work is compulsory. As a result, workers cannot see themselves realized through labor performed as a productive means for their boss. Labor produces commodities as much as it produces the commodified worker -- in working, the worker makes themselves an object of their boss’s consumption. The result is a contracted, frustrated and finally suppressed disposition for self-realization: in his over-extension the worker cannot realize his own projects. Everywhere in the existing literature on labor under capitalism is an analysis of the alienation of the worker. In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx establishes the parameters for this literature. He writes, “The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation” (emphasis added).

The estrangement of the worker from their labor is something like that of displaced subjects of colonization. The already-alienated labor of colonized people generates commodities that service the power of their oppressor. Labor in these circumstances finds the delivery of its project intercepted by colonial powers, in service of a foreign and impersonal future. Colonization involves mass-exporting potentiality: commodities that might have been used for internal, sovereign development were instead either shipped away, or used to repress said development. If the American worker cannot realize their present self in their estrangement, the colonized workers of Nicaragua, Haiti, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and other subjects of US-occupation find themselves estranged from their nation’s futures. Recall the US home front in the wake of World War II. Americans were invited to conceive industrial, domestic and service work as invoking a reinforced national identity and, eventually, a victorious future. The rallying cry was: work in the service of your country, and involve yourself with the project of achieving a future that you will share with your fellow citizens. Such convictions are logical impossibilities for those physically separated from their homelands because of the demands of their work.

In a grim reversal, invaded people sometimes find themselves desperate to enter into the very nations who have profited from the invasion. They are alienated in layers: first as workers; then as workers whose labor product is exported; then as imports; and finally, as imported workers. This was the story of Bracero farmworkers. The US State Department, Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) initiated the Bracero program to support the war effort of the 1940s. Mexican farmers signed contracts that promised decent living conditions and were promptly shuffled in droves through “disinfection stations" where they were doused with carcinogenic insecticides and gasoline. Eventually they arrived on US farms, quadruple-alienated and subjected to unlivable working conditions. The alienation of Braceros was a prescient aspect of their working experience and is recounted in interviews with Braceros and their families.

Braceros were alienated not only from their families and culture, but also from their whole pasts and, contractually, their futures. Bracero contracts obliged farmworkers to remain in the US for several years; they would lose contact with the world of meaning that would soon become their past, and also with any sense of a buildable, recognizable future. Frequently, the farmworker’s familial role was constitutive of their original identities: indeed, for many interviewees the primary motivation for signing Bracero contracts was a sense that the program would enable farmworkers to better approximate an ideal husband and father. In the US those families, so central to their sense of self, were nowhere. Disarmed of the familiarity of their homes and their place in time - out of contact with the people, places and things that constituted their original identities - Braceros found themselves atomized and emptied of the identities they entered the US with.

This alienation and self-loss concurred with an acute objectification (even before investigating the interviews that guide this paper, we are given a hint here: “Brazo” means “arm”). The objectification of Braceros, manifested in racial stereotypes
and their treatment on the farm and beyond, was reinforced by their legislative deportability. Altogether these circumstances reduced Bracero workers to corporeal productive apparatuses. This objectification also had a material reality: The Bracero sold, for a wage, his bodily individuality to a uniform productive apparatus (the productive apparatus that generated California’s lettuce and grapes). As his bodily individuality is subsumed by the apparatus, it becomes a completely unindividuated means for its perpetuation. In this way, racial scripts and popular stereotypes that reduced Mexican farmworkers to their bodies were realized materially in the farmwork itself. Interviews with Braceros and their associates reveal this reduction and indicate that Braceros frequently internalized it. Having lost their original identities, the interviewed Braceros replaced them with the new identity assigned to them: strictly, exclusively, workers. Because work was identity and the body was its foremost tool, racialized notions of the Mexican body and its relationship to labor induced an alienation from one’s own body.

In a broader sense, the Bracero Program is emblematic of the United States’ historical relationship to Mexican labor. Mexican labor is attractive to U.S. enterprise because it is maximally exploitable: the dire economic situations Mexican workers endure compel them to accept lower pay, while the precariousness of their legal status constrains them to the terms of their employers at the threat of deportation. The potential for deportation results in a job insecurity that makes Mexican workers immediately replaceable by similarly deportable workers: there is, among Mexican workers, a dependable “reserve army of labor” (Marx, Wages). The fact of Mexican deportability creates uniquely profitable opportunities for exploitation, and this has traceable, historical effects on US policies for Mexican workers. For example, in the 1920s US agribusiness lobbied Congress to secure their access to Mexican labor (Molina 2014). This powerful labor incentive overrode lasting racist hesitations to integrate, or even to allow the presence of, Mexicans in the US (Hernández 2010).

The factors contributing to the ‘disposability’ of Mexican workers were known to the Braceros and their employers and informed Bracero identity. It became evident that the original identity Braceros were estranged from could not be replaced with an assimilated American identity. Braceros knew that America’s political landscape was hostile to their integration to American life, and restrictions against Bracero’s free movement further impeded integration. In fact, Bracero transportation was restricted this way for the express purpose of preventing integration (Carrillo 2020). In an interview from the Bracero Oral History Project, Rafael Hernández, a former Bracero worker, said: “América quiere flores, pero no quiere jardineros” (America wants flowers, but they don’t want the gardeners). Hernández senses that “America,” despite its dependence on his work, will not readily accept his presence. America, he feels, was hostile to Braceros themselves - if reaping the benefits of Mexican labor had to involve the presence of Braceros, America would prefer that they be consigned to the fringes where it would not have to see them.

Importantly, participation in the Bracero Program was functionally compulsory for many Mexican workers. Rosa Maria, the daughter of a Bracero and interviewee with the Bracero Oral History Project, describes her father’s participation in the program as compulsory. In translation, she says “It’s unfortunate, but there’s no job prospects in Mexico, so participating in the Bracero program was necessary.” This necessity, together with the discussed disposability, created instability among Mexican laborers. Braceros, then, are forced into a transient, middle position, which is incompatible with the project of constructing an identity. If Braceros were disarmed of their original identities, they could not turn to assimilation in an effort to replace them. Manuel Gamio (1998), who conducted interviews with various Mexicans who migrated to the US, writes that migrants feel disoriented when they arrive, and they struggle to “re-establish” themselves in the United States. The possibility of “re-establishing” was not available to Braceros, who were acquainted with the contractual impossibility of their eventual integration. For Braceros, the discussed disorientation of both losing their existing identity and being unable to find a new one was irresolvable.

This disorientation is a reflection of the issues of identity that are inherent in labor migration. One Bracero, Rafael Hernández, traveled across Mexico and, eventually, to the United States in order to sustain himself and his family. He tells an interviewer: “And I don’t like the walk. I’ve already gone too far. I’ve been around a lot. To come from so far away to a place where you don’t know it or have nothing to do with it is to suffer.” Braceros and
their family members experienced a maximized separation from what is familiar to them, and the evidence of their estrangement from their culture lives in their stories: Mary Guevara, who lived in the United States while her father completed his Bracero contract, recalls being punished in school for speaking Spanish. Rosa Maria, whose father worked as a Bracero, tells an interviewer that her father’s low wage required her to harvest alongside him: her father, who she describes as “macho,” lamented the necessity of her employment and resented her delayed marriage. In Rosa’s case, the Bracero Program violated the expectations of machismo, and her father deplored the cultural loss.[1] Don Stallings recalls that, despite being openly religious, none of the 300 Braceros working on his family farm participated in religious activities on Sundays because they needed to rest after a week of strenuous work on the field.

Alienation from the family is arguably more pressing to the issue of Bracero identity than estrangement from Mexican culture, as every Bracero migrated with the primary purpose of sustaining and supporting their families. Once Braceros arrived on US farms, they found themselves entirely estranged from families whose well-being was central to their sense of purpose. When Rosa Maria’s father failed to send the usual check home to her family, she and her mother worried that he had abandoned them, yet he was actually hospitalized for serious injuries and could not communicate his hospitalization to his family. His supervisor had to inform them independently. When Rosa Maria’s two-year-old sister died, her father’s contract prohibited him from returning to Mexico to say goodbye. Rosa describes sporadic visits to the border fence, where she and her mother would wave to her distant father. For Rosa Maria, the Bracero program forced an irresolvable estrangement between Braceros and their family members.

In addition to this loss of Mexican identity and the creation of familial estrangement, Braceros found that their central mission, to support their family, was abstracted away from them. Family support was reduced to infrequent, and generally insufficient checks, as demonstrated by Rosa Maria’s experience. So central to Braceros’ sense of purpose was the support of their families that their estrangement from them induced a vacuum of Bracero identity. They were disarmed of the substance of their life experiences - all things familiar and important were elsewhere, and they were alienated from them.

This situation, predictably, induced an identity vacuum among Braceros. In her book *Abrazando el Espíritu*, Ana Rosas (2014) recounts her father’s (Manuel Rosas) experience with the Bracero program in which he was rendered “unrecognizably foreign to both himself and his family” by the program. His participation in the program was motivated by necessity, and he was bound absolutely to whatever employment the program could offer him. Manuel Rosas felt an acute inability to pursue and exercise his potential - himself and his ambitions were reduced to the requisite work necessary to feed his family. This reduction is constitutive of an identity vacuum: when Mexican workers arrive in the US and find that they have nothing but their work, they are reduced, in a literal sense, to productive apparatuses. Coterminal to this identity vacuum was Braceros’ estrangement from their own futures. Max Render recalls that one Bracero who he employed wanted to return to Mexico, but eventually “got over it,” an event indicative of a lack of agency over one’s own conditions and of the lack of agency inherent in Bracero contracted labor. Braceros lost ownership of their time, and the threat of deportation kept Braceros from reliably extending their future into either Mexico or the United States. Rafael Hernandez recalls not knowing where he was being transported to during his voyage into the United States. Evidently, his status as a Bracero alienated him from his own future by inhibiting his knowledge of it.

This estranged relationship to one’s own future is exacerbated by Braceros’ inability to actualize their ambitions. Rosa Maria recalls her father wanting her to attend school, and insufficient Bracero wages inhibiting her from doing so. Rosa’s family was chronically malnourished, and her father, who participated in the program in order to sustain his family, could not sustain her disabled brother. Rosa Maria resents that her father spent his youth being exploited on US farms, just to return to Mexico and

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[1] This is not a vindication of machismo culture or patriarchy - it is strictly an additional example of Bracero estrangement from their culture.
struggle indefinitely where he could not afford a proper burial. Rafael Hernandez recalls the necessity and the inevitability of departing from his family for work - his will and agency had no bearing whatsoever on this inevitability. In each of these cases, Braceros working to exercise their agency found that their future belonged to their employers, and that there was no appropriate place for the realization of their will.

Don Stallings, a farm owner who employed Braceros, testifies to Bracero conflation between work and identity. He recalls that the Braceros on his family farms, who made their shoes from tires at the local dumpster, were deeply protective of their farm trucks. The only thing he recalls the Braceros spending money on, with the exclusion of their food, was maintenance for their trucks, whose central purpose was to make them more productive. In the duration of his interview, Rafael Hernandez only expressed a sense of pride when he compared himself to Braceros who were less productive than him. Rosa Maria says explicitly that her father's identity became a derivative of his work: his work was his central source of pride and purpose. Generally, we engage in work in pursuit of some end: it might be our stability, or the sustenance of our families. The ends of any given Bracero were estranged from them, their futures were eclipsed and obscured. Instead of work being purposeful, work became an end in and of itself.

The racial script (Molina 2014) employed against Mexicans in the United States reduced them to their bodies. Before anything else, Mexicans were workers, and their bodies were the apparatus and the site of this work (Carillo 2020). Max Render, a Bracero employer, employs this script when he measures the “value” of Braceros against one another. He says explicitly that a Bracero who could pick 400 pounds of cotton per day was more valuable than one who could pick 200. He doesn't use the term “productive.” He makes a value judgement. He says to an interviewer, “You knew you was getting so many warm bodies. You didn't know anything about them.” In this instance Braceros are reduced, in a literal sense, to bodies. Render recalls that many of the Braceros on his farm suffered swelling injuries to their wrists from over-exertion, and he notes that they always returned to work. In his words, they “got over it.” Here, Render views the Mexican body as a working tool, and the humanity of Mexicans, especially their ability to feel the pain of a swollen wrist, was only a hindrance, or a restraint, imposed upon it.

The essentialization of work for Bracero identity combined with this omnipresent racial script induced an alienation of Braceros from their own bodies. These racial scripts were further internalized by Braceros: Rafael Hernandez reflects on the name “Braceros,” and he implies that Braceros offered nothing other than their arms. That Braceros treated their own bodies as reducible to productive apparatuses is indicative of alienation from those bodies. Rosa Maria recalls that her father and his co-workers were forced to donate their blood for World War II soldiers. Her father was proud of the quantity of blood he could produce by squeezing his arm during the extraction - again, he treats his body as a generative apparatus, and derived pride from its productivity.

In Notes of a Native Son, James Baldwin suggests that “the American Negro has arrived at his identity by virtue of the absoluteness of his estrangement from his past” (2012:178). Bracero estrangement from their pasts, families, and culture emptied them of an original identity, and it is precisely this emptiness, concurring with a general lack of agency, that induced the discussed “work-as-identity” phenomenon. In the face of a set of conditions that made pursuing new goals incoherent, that prohibited the realization of one’s potential, that alienated workers from the very people they set out to provide for and that necessitated the desertion of their culture, Braceros were left only with what was immediate to them: their work on a field that was not theirs, for a country that would not have them. This work, even with its inherent alienations, took the place of their original identity. Racial scripts reduced the Mexican body to a productive apparatus, and, by alienating workers from their own identity, the Bracero Program reduced that identity to a productive apparatus, too. 


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To Develop, or Not to Develop...What Does That Mean, Anyway?

The Urgent Challenges of Implementing Alternative Theories of Development

Sarah MacHarg

In modern global development, the dominant narrative is that economic growth and productivity breed prosperity and progress. Models that challenge this paradigm, such as post-development theory, have not successfully broken into mainstream practice. Given the ecological price tag of continuous economic growth, the climate crisis renders it crucial to understand why non-standard theories have failed to meaningfully disrupt the dominant growth-based model. This paper explores the key tenets of alternative theories of development, particularly those incorporating Latin American indigenous cosmovisions; illuminates the barriers to their implementation; and identifies potential solutions to these challenges. Examining unresolved conflicts over the construction of a highway in Bolivia’s TIPNIS region as a case study, my research supports proactive consultation of local stakeholders and detailed consideration of regional colonial and interethnic/inter-ideological conflicts as key steps in advancing the push for new visions of development. These findings are in line with existing literature on global development, thereby underscoring the urgency of these measures. Finally, I question how a nation can exist within the global capitalist framework while still embracing non-extractivist notions of progress, concluding that any solutions must be developed iteratively through conversations between scholars, government leaders, local community members and NGO representatives.
In central Bolivia, the two segments of National Route 24 reach out from San Ignacio de Moxos and Villa Tunari like arms stretching into a void, grasping for each other but coming short. Though the gap is only 50 miles wide, its impact is enormous; without a direct road, travelers must instead venture far to the east before looping back, using a route that quadruples the distance between the two cities and takes 15 hours by car. It doesn’t take an infrastructure expert to see: this is a logistics nightmare.

When the Bolivian government signed a contract in 2009, their intention was to build a complete highway, not two dead ends. Having neglected to discuss this plan with communities living in the area, the start of construction incited thousands to protest. Twelve years later, the future of the project is still opaque. The challenge to the highway’s completion is a complex conflict over what “improvement” should look like for Bolivia. The highway’s missing section would cut through Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), which is collectively owned by the indigenous communities who inhabit it and is one of Bolivia’s most biodiverse regions. The highway’s impacts—ecological, economic, and cultural—are weighed in disparate ways by indigenous groups, government leaders and an elite colonial class, all of whom have different visions for the future and a stake in the project’s outcome. The conflict between these groups, whose relationships have a long history, is embodied by those 50 miles of untouched forest.

Our society funnels billions of dollars into projects like this highway in the name of “development” and aid. We exhaust our political energy coordinating between international actors, and spend hours innovating scalable solutions to human misery. Given these massive investments, it is crucial that we turn our critical lens towards ourselves and ask: how are we defining human progress? Who decided on that definition? At present, a constant undercurrent pushes for growth, wealth and productivity, but have models of non-industrial development ever been successfully implemented? Is such a thing possible in an already-globalized world? The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were bold attempts at addressing concerns about equity and the environment. But other, more radical visions for development challenge our core Western assumptions of what “modernity” and positive human progress should look like. I begin by reviewing these different conceptions of development, specifically focusing on alternatives that incorporate Latin American indigenous values of environmental justice, coexistence with land, and “living well.” From there, the multi-billion-dollar question is: how do these work in practice? Bolivia has made active efforts to embrace indigenous concepts like suma qamaña, “place/context-specific and culturally embedded ideas about wellbeing,” that have become pan-Latin American unifiers and have served as a focal point for Andean endogenous development (Gonzales and Husain 2016); in fact, it has incorporated these culturally specific visions into the language of its constitution. As such, the TIPNIS highway conflict allows us to better understand if alternate conceptions of development are possible, or if legal frameworks like Bolivia’s fail in practice. What is to be done when the different voices in a community have fundamentally incompatible perspectives? In a capitalist global economy, can values like suma qamaña still thrive?

To chip away at these questions, I will first explore the modern
history of Bolivia, demonstrating that while Bolivia has incorporated indigenous values and collective ownership into its legal rhetoric, it is also host to complex geopolitical and cultural conflicts between indigenous groups and colonial descendants. Then, through the lens of this legal and cultural background, I will explore the backlash to the proposed TIPNIS highway, seeking to identify the specific challenges to embracing differing theories of progress in order to identify how we might adjust our practices as a global community to avoid the failings of Bolivia.

The TIPNIS highway conflict is just one in an anthology of historical incidents demonstrating that any “development” project aiming to embrace alternative notions of progress or genuinely support local wellbeing must consider the voices and complex histories of communities affected by that project from the start—not after plans have been finalized. When local voices are not genuinely sought out throughout a project’s lifespan, the tensions between non-extractivist development theories and the dominant global economic framework that nations must heed to survive are only intensified. Furthermore, creating effective, equitable plans of action to address regional needs requires an intimate understanding of the complexity and evolution of local voices, not a reductive exoticization of the “local” that assumes indigenous peoples or local groups share a monolithic, anti-development mindset.

Given the ecological price tag of continuous economic growth, the climate crisis renders it crucial to understand why non-standard theories have failed to meaningfully disrupt the dominant growth-based model and produce scalable solutions. This research suggests that until we can figure out how to comprehensively and critically incorporate community voices (at all levels of “community”: local, regional, national, global), the tension between conflicting visions for the future will remain unresolved, and projects will continue to fail short or fail.

**Visions for Humanity: Exploring Development Theory**

Kamal Malhotra, former Senior Adviser at the UN Bureau for Development Policy, argues that development has become overly focused on material/economic growth, but growth should be a means, not an end. He claims sustainable development should increase the health, education, and living standard choices available to current and future generations; economic growth without this improvement is not development (Malhotra 2004). He claims the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adhered to this “human development” model, centering people as subjects (not objects) with agency in determining their outcomes. This provides critical context for examining the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and assessing whether the paradigm has shifted towards human development as Malhotra claims.

The UN SDGs proclaim a lofty goal, presenting a vision for global partnerships to allow humans to fulfill their potential, protect the planet, and eradicate violence (“Transforming our world” 2016). While, as Malhotra suggested, this is a shift from purely GDP-based understandings of prosperity, traditional economics still plays a surprisingly large role. The opening paragraph of the preamble reads (in part): “Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development” (“Transforming our world” 2016). In other words, an income-based measurement is still the core of this vision for the global future; despite adopting a more nuanced approach, the UN continues to push for sustained economic growth.

Malhotra and the SDGs demonstrate our current global development priorities. But there are challenges to this framework, both in theory and practice, that should influence our vision of what development could/should be. Anthropologist Jason Hickel brings ideas from the academic sphere, like reducing consumption to an “ethical poverty line” (Edward 2006), into the public eye. Hickel argues that while the SDGs center economic growth, global growth over the last several decades hasn’t led to decreased poverty. Furthermore, neither more growth (orthodox economics) nor wealth redistribution is a viable approach to human progress because our consumption already exceeds Earth’s biocapacity by 50% (Hickel 2015). Citing economist Paul Edward, Hickel argues that we should consider “de-development” and look at lower-consuming countries where people are happy as a model, not as something “backwards” that needs to be changed and Westernized. Hickel highlights many alternatives to the current norm of growth and overconsumption, including the
Latin American indigenous concept of “buen vivir” (living well). In doing so, he contrasts modern development strategies and the UN SDGs with a rich body of discourse on Latin American indigenous visions of wellbeing and development. In the twentieth century, academics were already questioning dominant Western understandings of development, especially within a Latin American context. “Dependency theory” emerged in the mid-1900s to counter the dominant “modernization theory,” and enjoyed a fair amount of attention. While modernization theory posited that all nations can and will develop with external involvement, going through stages that lead to a mass-producing urban society, dependency theory questioned the assumptions of modernization theory in an attempt to explain the seemingly incongruous “persistent levels of under-development in Latin America” (Schmidt 2018). As explained by Vincent Ferraro, politics professor at Mt. Holyoke, dependency theory posits:

[Underdeveloped] countries are not “behind” or “catching up” to the richer countries of the world. They are not poor because they lagged behind the scientific transformations or the Enlightenment values of the European states. They are poor because they were coercively integrated into the European economic system only as producers of raw materials or to serve as repositories of cheap labor, and were denied the opportunity to market their resources in any way that competed with dominant states. (Ferraro 2008)

Underdeveloped countries are not failing to invest in development; rather, their fate is tied to their place within a global system that extracts resources and profit (Ferraro 2008; Schmidt 2018). As such, this theory supports “controlled interactions with the world economy” that benefit the subjugated country, as well as the emphasis of non-GDP measures of growth (Ferraro 2008). These considerations, particularly the latter, are very much in line with modern discussions of development like those seen in the UN MDGs and SDGs. Later, anthropologist Arturo Escobar became a founding thinker in “post-development theory,” which challenges the hierarchical understanding of ways of life in the global North and South. Escobar frames global development as a hegemonic, colonial mechanism, asserting a Western/capitalist understanding of “modernity” in countries where it may not be relevant, productive or welcome. Post-development theory explores conditions outside of the “development” framework, recognizing “alternatives to development, rather than development alternatives, as a concrete possibility,” and “transforming the political economy of truth […] development’s order of expert knowledge and power” (Escobar 2012). Instead of forcing societies into a common mold (the Western industrial growth model), he suggests a “pluriverse,” a heterogeneous planet rather than a homogeneous, economically integrated one, where it is impossible to choose one “single notion of the world, the human, civilization, the future, or even the natural” (Escobar 2012).

Academia and popular media alike have scrutinized and challenged the development mantra that “growth is good,” working from colonial and ecological theoretical frameworks to acknowledge growth (and its twin, consumption) as a double-edged sword, equally capable of wreaking environmental and cultural damage, or spilling into “overdevelopment,” as it is spurring improvements to quality of life. Beyond critique, they have gone on to envision how the norms of development could, or should, evolve. Yet, the fundamentals of global development practice haven’t changed much at all, with “decent work and economic growth” and “industry, innovation and infrastructure” still featuring among the UN’s top development priorities. In order to better understand the obstacles to implementing alternative theories of development at anything more than a micro-scale, we must search for historical attempts. As it turns out, Escobar’s proposals lead us to the perfect place: Bolivia.

**The Pluriverse in Practice: Bolivia, Reformed**

Like Edward and Hickel, Escobar recognizes that the climate crisis may make adopting “alternatives to development” a necessity. As an example, he explains how Bolivia has included the indigenous concepts of *suma qamaña* (“living well together” in Aymara) and sumak kawsay (“good living” in Quechua) in its constitution; these philosophies do not track a linear path from underdeveloped to developed and prioritize ecology and social justice rather than traditional economic ideas of materialism and scarcity (Escobar 2012). Bolivia-based anthropologist and sociologist Gabriela Canedo Vasquez provides a deeper examination of suma qamaña and its implications for Bolivia. In keeping with
Hickel’s generalized argument that growth-centered visions of progress are antithetical to genuinely sustainable development, she argues that suma qamaña—“a view of property use based on complementarity, reciprocity, and respect for nature” (Canedo Vasquez 2018)—and extractivist “development megaprojects” (infrastructure projects, resource mining, etc.) are in direct conflict: “developmentalism will entail the destruction of indigenous modes of survival that are considered culturally rich but backward from a Western perspective” (Canedo Vasquez 2018). As a real political methodology and well-discussed concept, Bolivia’s codification of suma qamaña is a perfect example for understanding how Escobar’s “pluriverse” might play out in practice, and how tensions arise when indigenous-led development tries to operate in an already-globalized world.

The proposal for a highway through Bolivia’s TIPNIS put the pluriverse to the test. As with any ideological clash, the TIPNIS debate is deeply rooted in history; as such, it is important to examine how different texts tell the story of Bolivian history and current affairs as related to TIPNIS. Bolivia or the “Plurinational State of Bolivia,” has a majority-indigenous population. Of that indigenous population, 90% have ancestral roots in the Bolivian Andean highlands, while the others originate from the lowlands (which includes portions of the Amazon) (Reyes-Garcia et al. 2016). President Evo Morales, an indigenous member of the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) party, was elected in 2006 and presided over the drafting of a new Bolivian constitution in 2009. This constitution refounded the nation, codifying concepts of indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, regional autonomy, “plural economy and justice,” and sustainable development based on suma qamaña (Fabricant and Postero 2015; Canedo Vasquez 2018). Article 8, part 1 reads:

The State adopts and promotes the following as ethical, moral principles of the plural society: ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa (do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief), suma qamaña (live well), ñanderekó (live harmoniously), teko kavi (good life), ivi maraei (land without evil) and qhapaj ñan (noble path or life). (“Constitution” 2009)

Furthermore, the constitution explicitly parts with the politics of decades prior, claiming in the Preamble to have established the state in memory of anti-colonial indigenous martyrs, and to have “left the colonial, republican and neo-liberal State in the past” (“Constitution” 2009). This new identity, a communitarian democratic system housing multiple nations and governance systems, gave Bolivia its “plurinational” designation.

The idyllic image the constitution paints contrasts with scholarly depictions of a conflict and contradiction-laden Bolivia. Anthropologists Nicole Fabricant and Nancy Postero situate the TIPNIS debate within a centuries-long history of European colonization and labor exploitation. They explain how “Cruceño” elites, first as colonizers and then as industrialists, have exploited indigenous peoples for slave labor since the 1800s and thrown highlanders and lowlanders into conflict over who would work for less. Historically, TIPNIS has been occupied by lowland indigenous groups, but as coca production expanded to supply the international drug trade in the late twentieth century, highland peasants began taking over the southern region of TIPNIS (“Polygon 7”) to cultivate coca, further amplifying inter-indigenous tensions (Fabricant and Postero 2015). In the twenty-first century, highlander colonization of Polygon 7 is ongoing, Cruceño elites continue to hold power over colonial estates (latifundios), and colonization-induced tensions persevere—the past reverberates clearly into the present. It becomes apparent the TIPNIS highway debate, and any modern conflict of interest between local groups, cannot be understood in a vacuum; interventions must acknowledge and account for these histories and the way they affect the power dynamics between different communities. To do otherwise is to neglect reality.

Despite these tensions, the MAS party unified indigenous and peasant groups, rising to power and implementing its new constitution. Canedo Vasquez argues that this upheaval left Bolivia as a state rife with contradictions, describing it as a “variegated society” of mercantilist peasants and collectivist indigenous groups. The new government, due to Bolivia’s history of internal colonialism (marginalized groups lacking sovereignty or representation among major governing bodies), had made a point of emphasizing autonomy. Yet, Canedo Vasquez asserts, in establishing a unified indigenous identity as the governing body, a contradiction emerged:

The idea of a participatory, multinational, decentralized and autonomous state is inconsistent with
the reality of centrist political practice, which
denies the right of self-government to the very so-
cial movements that support it and confirms that
any kind of hegemonic government is incompati-
ble with autonomous communities or any kind of
autonomy, indigenous included. (Canedo Vasquez
2018)

Canedo Vasquez exposes colonial under-
currents and a new hegemony in modern-day
Bolivia. This, in combination with an understand-
ing of long-term colonial trends, should inform
our analysis of current events, especially projects
involving indigenous-owned land.

Thus, while areas of focus and broader
questions about colonialism, indigenous sover-
eignty and plurinationalism vary between au-
thors, they paint a consistent picture of Bolivia
trying—in theory—to move towards what schol-
ars like Escobar imagined. We are poised to use
the TIPNIS conflict to appraise this vision’s feasi-
bility, asking: is the sense of “unity” that brought
MAS to power truly viable in a plurination? Is it
possible to embrace alternative modes of devel-
opment, or do Bolivia’s legal frameworks fail in
practice?

Trouble in TIPNIS:
A Case Study
The TIPNIS project has acted as the ultimate test
for Bolivia’s new vision of national progress, a test
the nation seems to be failing. Working through
the tangled web of value systems and desires at
the core of this unresolved saga—and the Bolivian gov-
ernment’s botched handling of that complexity—exposes
the key challenges to implementing non-standard theories
of development in a world that demands growth, and the
ways our approach must shift if we are legitimately dedi-
cated to improving the global quality of life. Specifically, it
points to the need for community voices to contribute to
projects from the start, rather than only being sought out
retroactively to check a mandated box. It also highlights
how the region’s complex histories of violence, subjuga-
tion, and diversity of thought are inextricably linked with
local populations’ experiences of development projects that
inherently (try to) shift or disrupt existing ways of life.

Understanding the broad timeline of events is nec-
essary to critically explore the forces that caused them. In
2009, the Bolivian government signed the contracts for the
construction of a highway connecting the Andean
highlands and the Amazonian lowlands as part
of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional
Infrastructure of South America (Reyes-Garcia et al.
2016). The highway would have 3 sections: section
I passing through Polygon 7, the Southern region
of TIPNIS inhabited by highland coca growers
who are generally viewed as colonizers; section II,
passing through the center of TIPNIS; and section
III, passing through another region known as the
Multiethnic Indigenous Territory (TIM) (Reyes-Gar-
cia et al. 2016, see map below). While the highway
would purportedly provide increased market access
to the Southern cocaleros (supporters of the MAS
party) and services to isolated lowland indigenous
communities living within TIPNIS (Achtenberg
2017), it also would cut through an extremely biodiverse region collectively owned by its indigenous inhabitants. The environmental impacts of the highway’s construction would potentially be disastrous: a widely-cited 2011 study by the Digital Journal of Research on Bolivia (Periódico Digital de Investigación sobre Bolivia) predicted that 64% of TIPNIS would be deforested over the next 18 years if the highway were built (Achtenberg 2013). Given the complex political and ecological aspects of this project, one would expect the contract signing to be predicated on extended conversations between stakeholders. Yet, the conversation was not initiated until 2011—two years post-contract—when highway construction began (Achtenberg 2013).

The consequences were, unsurprisingly, significant. While Section I was generally supported, as it would provide economic benefits for the highlander cocaleros in Polygon 7, Section II was highly contested (Reyes-Garcia et al. 2016). The conflict over the proposal broke up the powerful “Unity Pact” that had united indigenous interests under the MAS party and led to Morales’ campaign success. The project ignited rage, and when 1,000 people marched in 2011 to La Paz, traversing almost 400 miles of steep terrain to demonstrate only to be met with police brutality, the protest captured the world’s attention. The ensuing back-and-forth between pro and anti-highway coalitions tested the existing international and national legal frameworks for respecting indigenous interests. The 2011 protesters claimed that President Morales failed to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from the indigenous owners of TIPNIS before signing the contract; FPIC is mandated by both the Bolivian constitution and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Feeling international pressure thanks to the negative publicity of the police brutality, Morales granted TIPNIS “untouchable status.” But this was a mere band-aid on a bullet wound, and quickly revealed itself as such when, later in 2011, a pro-highway march took place. The march pushed the government to make legal rearrangements, committing to consulting with indigenous peoples in TIPNIS before constructing the highway. The next year, in the wake of another anti-highway protest, a “consultation” took place, with the government claiming that 80% of communities in TIPNIS supported the project. Yet an external audit of 35 communities found that 30 of them did not support the project. This shone a very unflattering light on the Bolivian government’s legitimacy and Morales’ approach to the project.

First, the fact that the government, prior to the protests, moved forward with the project without any attempt to consult with TIPNIS inhabitants, and then attempted to falsify the results of a retroactive consultation, demonstrates that codifying indigenous rights in international law, as has been done with UNDRIP, is not enough; if implementation is not regulated through an external audit system, the rights of native voices are not upheld. Second, the unsuccessful scramble to appease a complex range of local interests (let alone to acknowledge and properly address the colonial tensions still at play) demonstrates the value and importance of considering those perspectives from the start. Had the TIPNIS lowlanders and Polygon 7 occupants been consulted before the plans were finalized, rather than adopting the “do first, ask second” approach, perhaps a compromise could have been negotiated that best served the conflicting interests. Two possible solutions that could have been considered are alternative highway routes or the creation of a strict monitoring and penalty system to accompany the highway and prevent an increase in the illicit expansion of coca plantations into TIPNIS territory. Detailed surveys and meaningful conversations with local stakeholders would certainly produce even more viable compromises. Instead of a comprehensive answer to the needs of communities in the region, Bolivia was stuck trying to justify a plan that lacked a fundamental base of support. The result? Route 24, with its arms reaching out into the void with Section II unfinished.

What I propose as an obligation for developers, that they should determine local interests and weigh them through detailed analysis of historical power relations, is a gargantuan task, but not impossible. If we leverage both outside observers and inside voices, perhaps in combination with modern technology, gaining a full picture of the motivations and intentions of interest groups is not such a lofty goal; rather, it feels obtainable enough to become a moral imperative.

**Beyond Pretenses: The Authentic Embrace**

Despite this conflict having so many layers, academics seem to agree on the root cause underlying the TIPNIS debacle and, to a certain
extent, Bolivia’s failure to succeed as a “plurination.” As Canedo Vasquez explains, Bolivia never actually committed to a new way of thinking and doing; the TIPNIS conflict remains one between an extractivist mode of development and principles of indigenous sovereignty and collectivism. The new constitution’s use of suma qamaña is “selective and fetishistic” (Canedo Vasquez 2018)—Bolivia’s self-bestowed label of “plurination” is a pretense, the government’s behavior hypocritical at best. Similarly, Achtenberg has argued that the TIPNIS conflict distracts from the real issue: “broader problems of structural poverty, inequality and the need for a more sustainable, productive economy beyond the limits of the extractivist mode” (Achtenberg 2013). The consensus is clear: Bolivia’s new model did little beyond embracing pleasant rhetoric. The contrast between the indigenous ideologies the government supports on paper and the actual “development megaprojects” being funded underscores the need to identify and rectify these contradictions from a project’s outset. As I have argued, the failure to genuinely consider and respect local voices caused the TIPNIS project to be pummeled by the same problems that have plagued development initiatives for decades.

I have identified proactive consultation of local stakeholders and deep investigation into and meaningful acknowledgement of regional colonial and interethnic/inter-ideological conflicts as key steps in advancing the push for a new form of development. Codifying concrete measures to embrace this local knowledge is also a key step in avoiding the failings of empty rhetoric that Bolivia has encountered. These findings align with existing literature on the future of development, underscoring the fact that this urgent problem remains inadequately addressed. Yet Evo Morales has asked a simple question that cannot be ignored: “What will Bolivia live from?” The TIPNIS conflict has underscored the challenges that come with meeting both economic needs of a nation and the ideological needs of its people, while existing as an actor within an unequal global economic system. In other words, theorizing is a great exercise, but for now, money makes the world go round. We must answer the question: how do you respect collectivist land-holding and non-extractivism while providing necessary services to citizens and functioning as a nation and actor within the global economy?

This is not a question that can be answered by one person or paper, and more importantly, is not a question that should be answered by one person. Rather, further research needs to examine more case studies, identifying success and failures to understand why the successes haven’t been scalable, and why failures persisted despite good intentions. The UNDRIP, for example, already mandates the sort of proactive consulting I have argued for. Yet, exploring the TIPNIS conflict demonstrates the Declaration’s shortcomings: without a framework for accountability and auditing, consultation may not happen. Understanding these failures helps us to shift our policies, and to question where those same lessons can be applied in other situations. In the case of UNDRIP, possibilities immediately spring to mind: what about implementing standards and auditing for local consulting in non-indigenous areas? Global regulations for NGO project expansion? The conversation of how best to discover and balance the complex interests of communities needs to happen between scholars of all backgrounds, local leaders and government officials and NGO representatives. Do we need to be working towards a radical ultra-democracy? Are our efforts best focused on leveraging new technology to gather and weigh public opinions en masse? What I can say with certainty is: a warm and fuzzy resolution to “talk it out” isn’t enough. Given the ecological price tag of continuous economic growth and the mounting pressure of the climate crisis, we need a dramatic shift in our definition of “progress,” and we need that change yesterday. This is not the time for slight changes in the way we word our goals, or empty flaunting of indigenous phrases we have no intention of authentically embracing. We need to gather our greatest minds and our most unheard voices and overhaul the way we understand the relationship between local change and global movements, between human prosperity and the planet that supports us. The perfect solution likely does not exist. But with so much room for change and so many voices to listen to, we absolutely can do better.
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A Must-Visit Destination: The Effect of Tourism on Marginalized Khmers in Cambodia

Vanessa Veak

Cambodia takes pride in its ability to state that its poverty rate according to income has decreased significantly since the last two decades over at least a 26.5% decrease a notable source being from the tourism industry. The second largest economic sector after the garment industry, the tourism industry has provided a substantial amount of jobs to its people and an increase in the country's economic growth, conflicting with the fact that Cambodia remains to be the second poorest country in Southeast Asia based on GDP per capita in the year 2019. By analyzing the effects of the tourism industry through site conservation, job opportunities and accessibility, and gentrification, I illustrate these optimistic statistics ignoring the validity and context of the numbers alone as a fundamental cause of this contradiction leaving rural and indigenous Khmers increasingly vulnerable and as an afterthought.

“If you’re planning to visit Southeast Asia, Cambodia is certainly a ‘Must-visit’ destination”


Introduction
The Cambodian Ministry of Tourism frequently boasts of its beautiful culture and landmarks to attract tourists, where the popular sites Angkor Wat, Preah Vihear, Sihanoukville, Banteay Srei, and Tonlé Sap widely contribute to the country’s annual tourism growth rate among the highest in the world (Chens et al. 2008). Eventually, tourism became Cambodia’s second-largest economic sector, right after the garment industry, as travel and tourism’s direct contribution to Cambodia’s economy represented 24.6 percent of global GDP in 2019, the highest in the Southeast Asia region (WTTC 2020). Cambodia sustained an average growth rate of 8 percent between 1998 and 2018 (The World Bank 2020) and tourism revenue earned an all-time high of US$ 4.919 billion in 2019 (MOT 2019). However, despite being one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, Cambodia remains the second poorest country in Southeast
Asia (measured in GDP per capita according to the International Monetary Fund in 2019) that is still dependent on foreign aid (Chhun et al. 2012). This discrepancy raises the question: where do the funds and tax money flow, and who exactly benefits? Alongside this question it is critical to acknowledge and address the drawbacks that emerge as a result of increased tourism, specifically regarding the issues of job opportunities and gentrification pertaining to the marginalized Khmer population.

The needed balance with site conservation

In the 1990s, once the civil war in Cambodia began to subside, the UN aided the introduction of official tourism to Cambodia; Angkor Wat became the first recognized UNESCO World Heritage Site in Cambodia in 1992. Before the agreement, the Khmer Rouge regime made it a constant challenge to maintain and protect heritage sites like Angkor Wat, as they were close to nearby areas of conflict. Locals and tourists thus avoided them and there was less money available to fund site conservation (Reap 1997). Once peace was restored, the national and historical significance of the site led to efforts to preserve and restore it. While the Ministry of Tourism and UNESCO dedicate some funds to maintain the sites annually, the ever-growing number of tourists wear down these sites faster than they can be restored. Kin Po Thai, an employee of the World Monuments Fund and temple tour guide for a decade, believes the ancient temples are in serious peril. “We have to look at the people going round, stepping on stones and carvings,” he says. ‘They have to respect this as a monument and a religious place. If people who continue to touch all these things then sooner or later it will be gone’” (De Launey 2012). Additionally, “Temple steps are slippery because of the many tourists who have walked them. Bas-reliefs are worn down by the number of tourists who have touched them... During this year’s drought, Angkor Wat’s moat lost more than 10 million liters of water, the equivalent of four Olympic-sized swimming pools. This water loss threatened the temple’s foundations and structural integrity” (Smith 2019). Cambodia’s historic infrastructure is rapidly degrading due the rapidly growing number of tourists each year.

In addition to the erosion of their physical structures, the purpose and meaning of the sites are often forgotten or dismissed. Anecdotes from my family members and other Cambodians note that the temples that they go to, such as Angkor Wat or Preah Vihear, feel very different from the first time they visited, visits which occurred before they immigrated to the United States over three decades ago. My Khmer mother mentioned that visiting these temples felt extremely spiritual the first time she went, but now it is way too crowded and noisy to be able to pray or meditate. At a temple, the proper attire consists of covering shoulders, legs, and chest, yet it is common to find visitors who are not used to Cambodia’s constant hot and humid weather wearing shorts and crop tops that do not provide due respect to the site. There have been multiple cases of lawsuits due to this behavior, such as two women caught snapping nude photos at Angkor Wat in 2015. Media coverage denounced such behavior and, “UNESCO cultural specialist Philippe Delanghe decried the women’s actions, calling them ‘appalling.’ Angkor is still very much a sacred site and people go there to pray every day and this is something that should never occur,” (Taguiam 2015).

While tourism has made it easier to obtain support for site conservation, it has consequentially also made it easier to attract tourists of all kinds, including those of malintent. The entertainment and enjoyment of the tourists is commonly maintained as a positive experience, all at the cost of the site’s quickening decay and local labor.

The widening socioeconomic gap

Cambodia depends on tourism to improve its economy immensely and, “according to the government’s figures, using income as the only indicator, poverty stands at 13.5 percent, a considerable feat given that it was in the realm of 40 percent only two decades ago.” This is quite impressive, but one must note the inaccuracy of using a single indicator for poverty (Hutt 2018). In actuality, “around 4.5 million people remain near-poor, vulnerable to falling back into poverty when exposed to economic and other external shocks” (Olsen 2018). The Cambodian government measures the poverty rate as making less than $1.90 a day; however, poverty is multidimensional and relative. Focusing purely on poverty excludes other relevant information. This measure may consider a family of six earning $3.00 a day and a family of two earning $3.00 a day as both being impoverished; it also...
ignores circumstances such as being severely ill or not having access to education or healthcare. As a result, at the end of September in 2018, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative took into consideration health, education, and living standards and income, which put Cambodia's poverty rate at 35 percent.

“About 7 percent of the capital city’s population are in ‘multidimensional poverty,’ the report found, based on data from a few years ago. In some of the country’s poorest provinces, such as Preah Vihear, poverty rises to nearer the 40 percent mark” indicating that poverty rates have not decreased as considerably over the last two decades (Hutt 2018). The Asian Development Bank estimates that almost 70 percent of Cambodians still live on less than $3.20 a day (Hutt 2019) and it is estimated that the bottom 40 percent are doing less well than before (The World Bank 2019).

The contradiction between the growing revenue from tourism and the growing hardship in the bottom class also results from where these job opportunities are and who receives the money. Cambodia has a high influx of ethnically Chinese Cambodians, Chinese immigrants, and other nearby ethnic groups throughout history, typically in search of work. The observation that, “walking through its streets, even the most casual observer cannot help but be aware that a large part of the [Phnom Penh]'s population is Chinese” reveals that a huge majority of businesses are Chinese-owned, and Chinese occupy higher management and entrepreneurship positions (Willmott 1970). Signs are often in Chinese rather than Khmer, and the Phnom Penh district is composed of Chinese-Cambodian small family-run businesses. There is no need for a Chinatown since most people in Phnom Penh are of Chinese descent, and Chinese-Cambodian business is still Cambodian business (Verver, 2012). As the Chinese-Cambodian population grows, as well as the trend of the merchants and business owners being Chinese, the Khmer continues to be the working class as tuk-tuk drivers, farmers, and the labor force (Willmott 1981).

As a result, a large portion of the tourist venues, jobs, businesses, resorts, and hotels are not indigenously Khmer owned or worked, but rather commonly managed by Chinese and Chinese-Cambodian people. Even with job openings within these businesses, “instead of hiring local workers, many Chinese businesses tend to import them from China, fueling resentment among Cambodians. Chinese companies prefer Chinese workers because they find it easier to work with them, as they share the same language and work ethic, say observers” (Tann 2019). This puts a lot of pressure on local Cambodians and especially the marginalized indigenous Khmer groups who are not given the same opportunities due to the systemic oppression of being perceived as uneducated, dirty, lazy, and less desirable, yet the lack of said opportunities allows an excuse for the public to sustain this misconception. The “lack of education and understanding of tourism reinforces feelings of powerlessness that discourage participation,” reinforcing that the Khmer are not receiving these economic benefits (Carter 2015).

This workforce demographic phenomenon is also coupled with the fact that Chinese tourists have consistently been the main source of tourist arrivals since 2017, with 35.7 percent of Cambodia’s tourists arriving from China in 2019 (MOT 2019). Similarly, “although Chinese investments have significantly contributed to Cambodia’s economic growth, the benefits of Chinese money have not been widely shared with the local population. It appears to have benefited only some privileged sections of Cambodian society, who own land or operate businesses that cater to Chinese nationals” predominantly and currently seen in Sihanoukville (Tann 2019). In addition, it is common for tourists to be more well-off and have the means to travel, and as a result, would pay extra to have a more luxurious experience, where “the real benefits generated from the tourism industry are largely distributed among big foreign and local companies such as airline companies, hotels, and restaurants. Local people can obtain only a small share through small businesses (i.e., selling souvenirs), providing services (i.e., moto-taxi and tour guide), and employment at hotels and restaurants” (Chheang 2010). Yet, these small businesses are not faring well with the rise of Chinese tourists as “Chinese tourists who do come generally provide less revenue to Cambodians than tourists from other countries because they visit in large groups that require fewer guides and drivers...They eat meals at Chinese restaurants and then go shop at Chinese stores” (Pheap 2019). In Sihanoukville, large foreign tourism operators outcompete local food vendors, making it more difficult for smaller businesses to survive (Olsen 2018).
One of Sihanoukville’s new casinos funded by Chinese investments. Source: The Guardian

While there is no doubt that the economy has been improving and selective people are increasing their wealth, the socioeconomic gap is widening as a result of tourism, since, “though impressive gains continued to be made, the reduction in poverty during 2013-17 was less than during 2009-13, mainly because economic growth benefited the non-poor more, while urban poverty stagnated compared with the earlier period” in which ethnically Khmer and indigenous groups suffer the most while being a vastly agricultural and rural population (The World Bank 2019) where 90 percent of the poor live in the countryside (Olsen 2018). Moreover, Jayant Menon, Lead Economist for Asian Development Bank, notes that “all the anecdotal evidence suggests that inequality is rising in Cambodia.’ The problem is that a Gini index only measures the difference in income. But in Cambodia, a lot of income is never reported, and the data does not include wealth such as land ownership and other assets” (Olsen 2018). Even though Angkor Wat is the most visited tourist spot in Cambodia, Siem Reap remains one of the poorest provinces in the country with the majority of its land used for agriculture (Carter 2015). Agriculture is one of the largest sectors behind tourism for Cambodia’s economy, yet farmers find it difficult to sell their crops to tourism enterprises (Olsen 2018). “The majority of the people living in the Angkor Park are farmers, construction workers in the Angkor conservation sites or in Siem Reap city, self-employed (selling souvenirs, food and beverages in front of their houses, making products such as palm sugar, nets, baskets, and raising livestock)” (Chheang 2010). It is even common to call indigenous Khmers, Khmer Angkor, as opposed to just Khmer, so it is no coincidence that Siem Reap, the province with majority indigenous Khmer people, is named one of the poorest. Tourism revenue is already required to give a portion of its funds to international businesses as “half of the products are imported from neighboring countries” (Chheang 2010). “In 2008, although only 15% of the touristic infrastructure in Siem Reap was owned by foreigners, 28.3% of the benefits left the country” (Varga 2019) and “according to the Cambodian Prime Minister, Samdech Hun Sen, approximately 30 percent of the revenue from tourism was leaked out through imported products” (Chheang 2010) demonstrating...
that much of the revenue generated from tourism is leaked to private foreign businesses rather than local economies. It is quite concerning that the local and Indigenous people of Cambodia are not receiving benefits on par with foreigners and businesspeople.

**Beautifying Cambodia**

Gentrification has been much more prevalent due to higher exposures and effects of tourism; it is often characterized as beautification in order to create a presentable place for capitalism and tourism revenue. Nonetheless, this intensive urbanization has resulted in increasing numbers of homelessness in Phnom Penh over the last two decades (Springer 2015). From 2000 to 2013, more than 770,000 Cambodians have been affected by land grabs and resulting conflicts over natural resources (ADHOC 2014). Inhabitants are forcibly displaced due to the government and the ministry of tourism’s many development projects that involve the need for central land to make room for gigantic malls, golf courses, resorts, hotels and activities only the upper class can afford.

Outside the city, particularly the location and areas of established tourist sites, those who were living in the Angkor Archaeological Park were claimed to be living “illegally” and over 500 houses in 2017 were destroyed by the police under the APSARA and UNESCO Cambodia’s representative’s order, as well as villages unwillingly giving up their rice fields for resettled communities (Neef 2019). Similarly, “population removal has occurred at the Angkor World Heritage site in Cambodia where revenue generation for the state has taken precedence over concern for the rights of the local people both as a community and as individual citizens with social economic rights’” suggesting indigenous groups having less rights when it can be argued it was theirs in the beginning (Ekern 2015). It is common in Cambodia for the local residents, particularly Indigenous people, to be ignored during the decision-making process in tourism development; therefore, they get little benefit from it, while some fare worse, due to their lack of education regardless of the expanding number of tourism development projects. They now must require proper permission from the authority to construct houses in Angkor Park, they cannot connect electricity in fear of damaging the heritage site, collect firewood due to forest preservation, nor any other activity that may harm the Park (Chheang 2010). This creates almost impossible challenges for these residents to maintain their livelihood, furthermore, to even live on the land as the standard of living increases and land prices in Siem Reap rise due to tourism (Neef 2019).

Among the tourism development projects, many include plans for implementing or improving infrastructure, as part of the tourism revenue and foreign aid significantly fund these projects. Fundamentally, Cambodia possesses an ineffective infrastructure where the WEF Global Competitiveness Report in 2019 ranked the quality of overall infra-

![Srekor village in Stung Treng, Cambodia fully submerged due to the flooding of the Lower Sesan 2 Dam. Source: EarthRights International](image)
es, along with the Srekor village’s homes, land, school, temple, ritual sites, riverbank gardens and fishing grounds, and affecting 72 Srekor groups and 52 Kbal Romeas groups (Khouth 2018). The methods through which the ministries and government implements these infrastructures reveals their priorities of capitalism while ignoring the rights of the marginalized. Cambodia continues to have a serious infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas and would benefit from investments that prioritized finding a balance between centering rural residents and the economic benefits of city improvements.

Discussion

Since 2016, the Royal Government of Cambodia has taken over the management of the entire Angkor Archeological Park, including staff, revenue, and expenses (Naren 2015). While it is understandable that the majority of the tourism revenue returns in the form of development, it is evident what projects the government prioritizes and who is essentially benefiting. In 2014, only $500 million was set aside for the state budget, a small amount compared to the annual tourism revenue, and the report from the Ministry of Economy and Finance showed that income for the state is under $40 million. Son Chhay, senior lawmaker with the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, believes that “no less than $100 million per year has been spent improperly and the government also gets more in informal income,” referring to unofficial payments that commonly occur in the tourism industry. Tourism agencies and organizations are required to give a certain percentage, around 1-10%, as tax, and it is believed that the government uses the extra income from tourism to promote the sector and further increase income. Sok Chanmony, president of the Cambodia Bus Association, has no idea how the money is used or where it goes: “It should be in the government’s budget,” he says (Hong 2014).

Considering that the prime minister, Hun Sen, and his family had “a combined wealth estimated to total between US$ 500 million and US$ 1 billion” in 2016, (Global Witness 2016) this raises concerns over the ethics and priorities of the country’s leadership.

Rather than invest in more infrastructure and education for marginalized groups, more tourist sites such as casinos and resorts are being constructed, which is counterproductive to addressing the widening socioeconomic gap. It begs the question of whether it is justifiable to continue investing more in tourism and to consider its sustainability. A high dependency on tourism for economic development should be carefully considered, particularly if it contributes towards poverty alleviation when the country is still overly dependent on the single tourism site of Angkor Wat (Reimer 2013). Due to the impact of COVID-19, the number of tourists has decreased significantly, and numerous jobs have been lost, halting Cambodia’s economic growth due to dependency on tourism, and causing an unforeseen future for the tourism industry. Ultimately, it is crucial to understand the positionality of a tourist and the privileges of being in a developing country. In spite of their continued marginalization and the significant challenges they face, rural and indigenous Khmer people persist and demonstrate their incredible resilience with or without tourism. These groups are equally deserving of opportunities and rights, but unfortunately are living in a system that does not prioritize them over the capitalist gains of the country and its leaders.
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Imperfect Solutions: How Agrarian Ideals Drive “Ugly Produce” Marketing

Natalie Milan

Both in production methods and perfection standards, our industrialized food system is anything but natural - a drastic departure from traditional farming that has resulted in the romanticism of rurality. Rooted in Agrarian ideology, this widespread longing for the simplicity of farm life is commercialized by food advertisers, who use this anti-industrial rhetoric to market the very products it denounces. While scholars have investigated the deceptive use of “greenwashing” and indigenous appropriation to entice eco-conscious consumers, little research targets food advertising that plays upon our idealized perception of the American farm, a strategy I deem “Agrarian Marketing.” Examining the burgeoning “ugly produce” industry as a case study, I demonstrate how the marketing of these successful start-ups conveys Agrarian values. I provide in-depth analysis of customer reviews and competitor criticism to understand trends in public perception of top-grossing companies like Hungry Harvest, Imperfect Foods, and Misfits Market. I conclude that, like “green” and indigenous marketing, the rhetorical strategies used by imperfect produce companies are a keen example of Agrarian Marketing. I argue that this adoption of anti-factory farming values raises ethical questions, because these companies primarily benefit large-scale farms and urban, affluent consumers as opposed to the rural family-farmers true Agrarianism celebrates.

Beneath a colorful cornucopia of odd-looking fruits and vegetables in swirling cursive font, visitors of the Hungry Harvest website will read the plea, “Want to help us find a home for our rescued produce?” A leader in the burgeoning imperfect foods industry, Hungry Harvest uses personification and the evocative rhetoric of adoption to market blemished produce that would otherwise become food waste. Targeting supporters of the sustainable agriculture movement, Hungry Harvest and its competitors paint their produce as helpless victims of an image-obsessed, wasteful food system, whose greatest challengers are heroic imperfect produce companies and their morally-upstanding customers. A powerful yet often overlooked force behind such unconventional marketing tactics is an American romanticism of untouched nature and traditional farming, perhaps driven by a
deep-seated and universal guilt surrounding humanity's deteriorating relationship with the earth. Intimately tied to a desire to return to simpler and purer times, these pastoral fantasies manifest in an ideology called Agrarianism. As the global pandemic illuminates the systemic flaws of industrialized food production, society is prompted to revisit the principles of Agrarian thought and reevaluate its waning connection to the land. Exploring how values such as purity, rurality, and ecological harmony are exploited via food marketing can provide insight into how Agrarianism has been commercialized in the era of factory farming.

To begin, I explore Agrarianism as a celebration of the agricultural lifestyle throughout American history and the long-standing impacts of this ideology on our nation's policies and collective psyche. Having established this background, I move into examples of these Agrarian ideals in practice, examining the rhetoric of food marketing as a case study. Drawing from the research of scholars in the field of food marketing and its social implications, I investigate the ways in which brands superficially champion eco-friendly values through the use of “green” messages and indigenous iconography. I refer to this tactic as Agrarian Marketing, alluding to the romantic image of rurality these strategies play upon, as opposed to the more general field of agricultural advertising this phrase often describes. I then bring web-based discourse surrounding “imperfect produce” to this on-going discussion of Agrarian Marketing by exploring the proclaimed values, customer experiences, and societal impacts of these companies. Glorifying the unconventionality of nature that is evident in its unique creations, these companies urge consumers to reject the rigid and wasteful standards of commercial agriculture and simply appreciate what the farmland provides. Both a critique of factory farming and a celebration of natural growth, the success of imperfect produce illustrates...
the way Agrarian values continue to drive food choices among so-called ethical consumers.

To analyze the rhetoric surrounding this blooming movement, I rely on exhibits from the websites of the three top-grossing “ugly” produce companies, a Reddit thread of customer reviews, and a critique from a rival food justice organization. My investigation of the marketing tactics that propel this prosperous industry hinges on visual evidence from Imperfect Foods, Hungry Harvest, and Misfits Market websites that illustrate the way these companies appeal to a consumer’s emotions by personifying their product with the language of both adoption and body positivity. I illuminate commonalities and trends across the Reddit reviews and explore the far-too-frequently raised issue of spoilage that undermines this movement’s mission. I then analyze the distinctly anti-establishment rhetoric used by Oakland-based non-profit Phat Beets to discredit imperfect produce companies as nothing more than corporate pseudo-activism, whose commodification of food waste weakens well-established and localized food justice initiatives.

By exploring the rhetoric surrounding imperfect produce from companies, consumers, and competitors, I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which “ugly produce” is advertised, experienced, and critiqued. While company websites exude enthusiasm and ethicality, reviews are mixed and criticism scathing. This imperfect solution to endemic American food waste is marketed with the same Agrarian ideals co-opted by companies who engage in greenwashing and appropriation of indigeneity. These three modern reflections of historic ideology - “green,” indigenous, and imperfect marketing - have similar societal impacts: they give consumers a false sense of advocacy then reinforce the status quo by catering to a predominantly White, wealthy, and urban consumer base. Thus, imperfect produce can be categorized with greenwashing and indigenous iconography as an ingenuine expression of Agrarianism that prioritizes profit margins over the environmental protection and food system reform at the core of this revolutionary ideology.

**An Exploration of Agrarianism: Explanation, Evolution, and Expressions**

Agrarianism is the celebration of rural and agricultur-
ers drawn to these too-often-misleading labels are statistically well-educated and affluent (Woolverton & Dimitri 2010), allowing companies to raise prices for “green” products and make them inaccessible to those who will suffer the harshest consequences of environmental degradation. Thus, the commodification of nature’s purity - divorced from real environmentalist reform - highlights systems of inequality and privilege that keep purchasing power in the hands of upscale, urban, and predominantly White consumers.

Perhaps the most egregious example of greenwashed food marketing is the use of indigenous iconography on specialty items while the individuals tokenized on the packaging disproportionately suffer from malnutrition (Smith 2012). The pervasive stereotype of the “ecological Indian” (Krech 1999) has long been exploited by food companies who use this association of indigeneity with naturalness, purity, and locality to increase sales. The “Indian maiden” on Land O’ Lakes butter, the parka-clad Inuit on Eskimo Pies, and the young Brave on Red Boy mustard are just a few examples (Smith 2012). This imagery normalizes indigenous fetishization and allows customers to simulate support of native peoples globally while ignoring the plight of Native American food insecurity locally. In this way, the appropriation of indigenous iconography in food marketing is a form of structural violence which serves to reinforce a deeply discriminatory status quo.

**Let’s Talk “Ugly Produce:” The Rhetoric of Companies, Consumers, and Competitors**

Apart from extolling “green” values and appropriating indigeneity, there are a plethora of other strategies that fall under the umbrella of Agrarian Marketing. One topic, lacking substantive research until now, is the ways in which imperfect produce companies utilize this rhetoric to romanticize nature, critique factory farming and champion a subculture that shares these values. I will now provide a detailed analysis of key marketing strategies that propel the “ugly produce” movement and their reception by the general public and other food justice organizations. Food activists and farmers alike have identified the “cult of perfection” as a driver of rampant food waste in the United States. Image obsession and unattainable beauty standards are promoted by entertainment, cosmetic, and diet industries who profit from forms of insecurity. Unconfined to body image, this unhealthy fixation on physical appearance is evident even in the isles of American grocery stores. Retailers, restaurants, and consumers demand produce that is unblemished and uniform in size, shape, and color. A staggering of perfectly nutritious fruits and vegetables fail to meet these unrealistic standards, becoming food waste solely based on their appearance (Papapanou 2019). Considering the fact that 1 in 9 households in the “land of plenty” are food insecure (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2019) while food waste single-handedly dominates our landfills (Chandler 2016), the detriment of these unforgiving aesthetic expectations becomes abundantly clear - as does the need for systemic change.

One proposed solution to curbing the American food waste problem is to redistribute cosmetically imperfect produce to individual consumers at a discounted price. Social impact start-ups like Hungry Harvest, Misfits Market, and Imperfect Foods are at the forefront of this “ugly produce” movement. These companies partner with farms to buy their blemished, misshaped, discolored or overproduced goods that would be rejected by commercial vendors. These goods are then delivered to the doorsteps of consumers with a subscription to this service. Cute, customizable, and cost-effective, these boxes have soared in popularity among LOHAS consumers and received

Decorated cardboard boxes of produce and other food staples arrive on subscribers’ doorsteps on a weekly basis. Citation: Imperfect Foods website.
significant media attention. To understand the rhetoric that draws customers to “ugly produce,” I analyzed the marketing that has propelled Imperfect Foods, Misfits Market, Hungry Harvest to domination of the novel imperfect produce sector. With an average annual revenue of $4.8 million and over 2,300 employees combined, these three companies boast higher revenue, more reviews, and a broader reach compared to their competitors (Owler 2020). Determined to figure out why, I turned to these companies’ carefully curated websites. Stunningly similar in both design and content, the websites for Imperfect Foods, Misfits Market, Hungry Harvest seek to educate visitors about their purpose, priorities, programs, and partners and ultimately convince them to subscribe to their service. All three sites feature ambitious and multifaceted mission statements, troubling statistics about US food waste, in-depth FAQ pages, and the option to browse, customize, and order produce boxes. Visually, these three sites resemble one another in terms of colorful infographics, whimsical fonts, sparse and centered text, and aerial shots of aesthetically arranged fruits and veggies. This graphic design creates an interesting tension between the visual appeal of company websites and the de-emphasis of appearance central to the “ugly produce” movement.

Amid appalling statistics and appealing solutions, the three aforementioned retailers use a marketing tactic as unorthodox as the produce they sell: humanizing fruits and vegetables. Defying the “cult of perfection,” these three companies use the language of body positivity and self-acceptance to celebrate the unconventional beauty of their produce. Hungry Harvest describes their produce as “too unique” or having “too many beauty marks” for commercial sale, promising that these imperfections have no adverse effects on taste or nutrition. Redefining blemished produce as beauty-marked encourages consumers to appreciate these natural impurities in the same way that certain facial moles are believed to boost an individual’s attractiveness. Similarly, Misfits Market uses terms applicable to human injury to describe the “scars” and “bruises” that lead supermarkets and restaurants to reject perfectly delicious produce. Perhaps the most direct example of produce personification can be found on the Imperfect Foods website, where particularly funny-looking fruits and vegetables are given googly-eyes to create comical facial expressions. Groups of googly-eyed avocados, beets, and eggplants are photographed together to resemble families, each vegetable seeming to exude a playful personality.

Building upon this personification of fruits and vegetables, imperfect produce companies use the language of adoption to convey a sense of urgency and garner sympathy from potential customers. “Want to help us find a home for our rescued produce?” pleads the Hungry Harvest website, appealing to consumers’ sense of pity. Misfits Market also characterizes their product as “rescued produce,” implying the heroic nature of their organization while subtly villainizing the food industry whose stringent aesthetic standards victimize the poor produce. This phrase encourages customers to feel pride in their compassionate decision to “adopt” fruits and vegetables that so desperately need a home. Unwanted goods are characterized as outsiders, evidenced by the name Misfits Market and the use of secondary colors such as green, orange, and purple in all three company logos and advertising. The choice to use these more subdued shades as opposed to bold primary colors echoes the companies’ mission to bring value to the conventionally overlooked. In this way, these companies appeal to both emotion and ego by characterizing imperfect produce as lovable misfits, rescued from an unjust system by heroic organizations then adopted by compassionate consumers. Yet this idealistic narrative is not representative of all customers’
experiences. In search of unbiased customers ratings, I chose to investigate a Reddit thread instead of cherry-picked evidence presented in the review sections of company websites. The sixth most popular social media site in the US, Reddit is an all-encompassing and informal discussion whose monthly users exceed 430 million and whose anonymity encourages unapologetic honesty (Lin 2020). In 2019, an anonymous Reddit user with the handle Beetlebait12 started a thread on the popular virtual forum by asking fellow users “Has anyone tried the imperfect produce subscription? What was your experience?” This open-ended question generated 21 responses from “ugly produce” subscribers who gave a wide variety of reviews from glowing to merciless. The 80% upvote rate indicates a high level of consensus and relatability surrounding these responses and suggests that this thread can be viewed as a small yet revelatory sample of consumers' experiences with imperfect produce.

With nearly equal numbers of positive, neutral, and negative comments in this thread, the experience of customers is decidedly mixed. Seven individuals expressed that they enjoyed the service - commending the good quality of the produce, the way this facilitates healthier eating, their excitement when opening a new box, and the ability to customize its contents to one's household needs and budget. Another seven described their experience as “ok,” “decent,” or listed a roughly equal amount of pros and cons in their evaluation of the program. Lamenting the high percentage of food spoilage, lack of substantive savings, and consistent issues with small size and poor taste, six individuals described an overall negative experience. Three of these six reported cancelling their subscription and another expressed their desire to do so. The other two negative comments were from non-subscribers who criticized the program's overarching mission, describing it as a “dumb rip-off” that diverts needed resources away from food banks and the low-income communities they serve. The remaining comment, simply stating that aesthetic standards drive food waste, was made in response to one of these criticisms and is therefore not included in the count of positive, neutral, and negative experiences.

A particularly troubling trend is that imperfect produce often becomes food waste at the consumer level - thus contributing to the very problem these companies seek to remedy. One third of comments in this Reddit thread address the issue of spoilage, from receiving moldy fruits and vegetables to “seeing 2-3 imperfect boxes full of rotten produce in the dumpster every week.” Respondents identify a variety of causes for this wastefulness. One reason is that these goods rot significantly quicker than their commercially sold counterparts, becoming waste if they are not eaten almost immediately. Articulated by one fifth of respondents, another driver of spoilage is the fact that without careful customization, boxes contain a consistent surplus of unpopular and infrequently used vegetables such as carrots, onions, and potatoes. Three individuals who enjoy the service describe overcoming this issue by using these ingredients in soup or broth each week, yet leftover produce remains a pervasive and painfully ironic issue.

Echoed in one Reddit user’s assertion that “imperfect produce is just another attempt to ‘transform’ a market that doesn’t need transforming,” companies like Misfits Market, Hungry Harvest, and Imperfect Foods have received unanticipated backlash for attempting to solve a non-existent problem. While there’s no denying the horrifying reality that over 40% food is wasted in the US (Chandler 2016), numerous food banks, local cooperatives, and CSA (community-supported agriculture) enterprises have expressed concerns that imperfect produce companies are simply profiteering off of leftover produce that would otherwise have been donated, not wasted. To explore the adverse effects of imperfect companies on small-scale CSA’s, I read numerous testimonials from these organizations and their employees, concluding with an open-letter put out by Phat Beets that epitomized these sentiments. Phat Beets, an Oakland-based non-profit that links small-scale farmers of color with low-income consumers, has been especially vocal in their opposition of Imperfect Foods and its contemporaries. Written by the Phat Beets Crew in 2018, the article “The Ugly Truth of Ugly Produce” denounces these companies as profit-hungry start-ups under the guise of activism whose commodification of food waste undermines the efforts of localized, grassroots organizations. Working in collaboration with food justice think-tank Food First, the authors present a searing critique of imperfect produce driven by their own experience of losing clients and donations to these companies.

The crew begins by describing the vital work of Phat Beets and...
their initially promising interactions with Imperfect Foods, establishing both their credibility and impartiality. Phat Beets emphasizes their long-standing commitment to community health and a plethora of partnerships that illustrate their integral role in the social fabric of Oakland food activism. They take pride in sharing a home and a vision with the Black Panthers, stating that their free breakfast program lies at the root of the US food justice movement. This intimate connection to the community they serve sets Phat Beets apart from ever-expanding imperfect produce companies whose success they attribute to nothing more than a “glitzy marketing campaign and venture-capital funding.” The emphasis the authors place on locality builds their ethos while painting competitors as unwanted outside infiltrators, “edging into community centers [Phat Beets] had operated at for years.”

Portraying Imperfect Foods as an embodiment of the evils of capitalism is central to Phat Beets’ critique of this burgeoning industry. The authors even go so far as to say that this company “gentrifies food waste.” This is a loaded and proactive phrase, as urban displacement in the Bay Area threatens the communities of color that Phat Beets prioritizes while benefiting the affluent, predominantly White consumers who patronize Imperfect Produce. These authors assert that the “free market, investors, and higher income consumers” are the sole beneficiaries of such “corporate-supported agriculture” and as a result, “small-farmers and poor communities lose out in the process.” Dealing exclusively with small-scale local farmers, Phat Beets cites a statement made by Imperfect Foods co-founder Ben Simon proving that these companies are “only able to make a profit by working with the larger global agribusinesses, not the picturesque small and mid-sized farms they project in their marketing campaign.” By characterizing Imperfect Foods and

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The Kuner Feedlot in Kersey, Colorado reveals the harsh reality of modern industrialized agriculture and its stark deviations from romantic Agrarian ideals. Photo by Jim Rydbom, published in The Fence Post.
In Review: The Fruits Aren’t the Only Things Flawed

I began this investigation of Agrarian Marketing tactics by defining Agrarianism: the celebration of agriculture’s contribution to society and an ideology that romanticizes rural life as the antithesis of the noisy, crowded, and immoral urban landscape. Having illustrated the theoretical, social, and political evolution of this concept since its rise in the early twentieth century, I brought in existing scholarship about “green” marketing and indigenous iconography as current examples of Agrarianism in action. The blooming imperfect produce industry is built upon criticism of factory farming and romanticism of the outcasts of this system: perfectly nutritious fruit and vegetables that fall short of commercial cosmetic standards. Until now, any discussion of imperfect produce has been excluded from literature on the topic of Agrarianism despite it being an ideal case study.

To bring the online rhetoric surrounding this “ugly produce” movement into academic discourse, I analyzed three exhibits. First, I presented the websites of Hungry Harvest, Misfits Market, and Imperfect Produce, then a Reddit thread of anonymized, candid reviews and finally, a critique of the industry from a food justice non-profit called Phat Beets. I concluded that the primary strategy used to market imperfect foods is to humanize the fruits and vegetables, as evidenced by the use of personifying adjectives, the language of adoption, and googly eyes on the three stunningly similar company websites. While the companies narrate their work as a valiant rescue mission to save adorably unique fruits and veggies and fight the abhorrent levels of food waste in the US, consumers and competitors tell a different story. Based on my analysis of a highly up-voted Reddit thread, outcomes of an imperfect produce subscription are mixed. Reviews are split roughly evenly between positive, neutral, and negative and 1/3 of reviewers cite problems with spoilage - the very issue these companies are combating. The drawback of imperfect produce going to waste seems trivial when we consider the fact that this produce may not even be landfill-bound to begin with as huge amounts of rejected produce are donated to food banks. In “The Ugly Truth About Ugly Produce,” employees of Oakland-based Phat Beets speak of CSAs whose donations, customers, and ability to serve their community have plummeted with the rise of subscription boxes. They paint the “ugly produce” movement as the embodiment of capitalist evils, claiming that these start-ups are “gentrifying” food waste in a way that hurts the small-scale farmers of color and low-income food-bank patrons that Phat Beets serve and advocate for. Adding a perfect example of Agrarian appeals to the body of literature about eco-conscious food marketing, these exhibits provide a novel and comprehensive understanding of the rhetoric used to market, review, and critique imperfect produce.

By analyzing the evocative rhetoric of imperfect foods and the online discourse surrounding this movement, we can understand the pivotal role of Agrarian values in eco-conscious food marketing. At once glorifying the unpredictability of nature and condemning the wastefulness of factory farming, this “ugly produce” movement epitomizes modern Agrarianism and reveals it to be an effective marketing strategy as opposed to simply a philosophical critique of society. Like “green” and indigenous marketing, these imperfect produce companies appear to champion the values of a growing food justice crowd culture and boast their activism against the ills of industrialized farming. All three of these examples are marketed for a similar LOHAS consumer base that is statistically wealthy, urban, and White. It becomes clear that exuding Agrarian values, while an effective marketing tactic, is largely superficial. It has little benefit for the environment and reinforces the status quo instead of questioning and dismantling it as this type of anti-modern ideology necessitates. Profit-driven and performative, Agrarian Marketing is at best an inauthentic expression and at worst a co-optation of these values, betraying the revolutionary spirit of this ideology and simulating food activism while preserving the fundamentally flawed factory farming system. ✤
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Music, poetry, and dance are integral spaces of expression in Panjabi communities; they tell stories through generations, spin the webs of cultural pride, and celebrate joy and victory. However, expressions like giddha, can exist in functions beyond that and integrate thoughts of isolation, emotions of despair and anger, and voice aspirations to become an effective idiom of distress and method of healing. This paper argues that giddha is deeply embedded within the circuits of care in the communities of Panjabi women as an idiom of distress. As an expression that communicates and works through emotional experiences through a social experience of singing and dancing, giddha can be understood as healing in and of itself. Giddha integrate music, poetry, and dance in order to form a community of women that can come together to listen to one another's thoughts and emotions while functioning as a space for healing.

The months of the kisan morcha[1] throughout the state of India and seated on the outskirts of Delhi have been a fierce demonstration of resistance and conviction. From within the depths of the struggle, the arts, especially folk music, have surfaced as a means to mobilize, rally, and protest. Women especially have been at the frontlines of the resistance, leading the protest through demonstrations, through meals, and through music. Young women of the resistance sing in the streets of the Shambhu border:

“firdey desh vechan nu dalley, phadkey lainey ghodiyan thale tharan thikheyan karkey rakhiiyan ne kundi talwar deeyan jawaani jaadan pattan nu kali hai zaalim sarkar diyan” [2] (Sangha 2020)

Bibiyan[3] sit collectively preparing meals for the congregation as they revive jaago boliyan[4] to express the celebration of protest


[2] translation: The sell-outs are out to sell the country. We are going to quash them. We have gotten our swords sharpened. The youth are ready to wipe out the unjust government.
[5] translation: The jaago has come, hooray now the jaggo has come. The farmer's jaggo has come, India's jaago has come. Hit the stick forcefully on Amit Shah's head, now the jaggo has come.
seen throughout the protest are two centralities in the efforts of change and processes of resistance. The first are women, who have throughout this protest been a catalytic force, recognized on a national and international stage as key farmers in the agricultural processes of Panjab (Bhowmick 2021). The second is the use of folk tradition, especially that of singing, to create a movement, to instigate change, and power a revolution. This paper looks at the use of folk traditions by women within Panjabi culture. While in the protests, folk tradition has been a space for political resistance, this essay discusses it through the lens of expressions of distress and frustration along with a form of healing. This paper moves to discuss giddha, a particular folk form of art through music and dance, as an idiom of distress that not only exists as a communication of emotion, but also as a medium through which healing is performed.

Background

Panjab is a collection of two states in South Asia, spread across the border of India and Pakistan. Derived from Persian roots, the united Panjab - (land of) five rivers, spreads across the rivers Jhelum, Chenab, Beas, Ravi, and Sutlej. The separation of the two states of Panjab in the Partition of 1947, and subsequent divisions into Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, have left East Panjab, the space discussed here, partially across the Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas Rivers. Panjabi histories of anguish and dispossession include a mention of three major ghallughare, one of which exists in very recent memory for many Panjabis alive nationally and transnationally (Singh 2016). Post the dispossession from land in Partition of 1947, the pain of Operation Blue Star in June 1984, the violence in the decade surrounding it, and the current pain resulting from an agricultural crisis post-green revolution have been key in formulating memories of distress in Panjabi communities (Singh 2000). These histories have been recorded and processed through a tradition of arts within Panjab. Panjabi traditions have long been engrossed within poetic and artistic traditions, ranging from the devotional music of the rabab to the inspirational vaars and kavishris of battle. The arts have been a constant presence within the various Panjabi communities - both in the state and in the diaspora (Pande 1999). This paper details one such art that involves both the celebration of joy and expression of distress and frustration in unique musical and performative ways – the art practice of giddha.

The Artistic Expression of Giddha

Giddha is a collaborative feminist dance form performed by women that allows for the release of emotion through both physical and verbal efforts. This paper argues that it functions as an idiom of distress, allowing Panjabi women to detail their mental experiences in a therapeutic format and express thoughts of joy and celebration, process emotions of frustration and distress, and engage in activism and protest. The practice of giddha is present within the many communities of Panjabis – those of diasporic roots and those within the state itself, those on the rising side of the Radcliffe line and those on the setting side of it, those that find themselves living a rural life and those in within the rapidly urbanizing cities, all find connections with the practice of giddha through festivals like teej or celebrations like weddings (Fox 1990). Artistic expressions of dances like giddha, many musical forms, poetry, and visual arts span across Panjabi cultures as a salient and inherent feature of the communities that inhabit the land of five rivers and those that have migrated away. While the salient features and everyday experiences of being Panjabi can be as distinct as day and night within many communities, for the purposes of this paper, the ‘Panjabi culture’ discussed is the simplified amalgamation of experiences of women with Panjabi heritage. While this paper acknowledges the vast differences in experience within Panjabi culture, to explore giddha as an idiom of distress it looks at Panjabi womanhood as a culture within itself. Being a Panjabi woman has also by no means been a static experience, and its exploration, as an evolving experience enhances the discussion of how giddha has been recognized within the community as an idiom of distress and transformed into a form of therapeutic expression over time.

[7] The rabab is a musical instrument that has been used especially in spiritual music throughout Sikh history. Vaars are ballads that recount martial and religious history.
Giddha as an Idiom of Distress

As an idiom of distress, giddha emerges because of the sets of experiences created by certain norms set within salient historical features of the culture of being a Panjabi woman. Norms and features that have historically colored the experience of Panjabi women are a disapproval of overt expression of emotion, a dispossession of women from a home, and the availability and acceptability of outlets of music, poetry, and dance. Emotional expression through confrontation and overt communication is generally frowned upon and considered to be a sign of disrespect, especially by younger women in the community. From a younger age, as a sign of respect, women are taught to repress (di)stressful emotions, especially those directed at elders. Such kept-in emotional distresses bleed into the dispossession of women as being categorized as being paraya dhan: ‘another’s-wealth’ (Sangari 2012). Often considered not of the homes that they were born into, as they are only transient in that space, and considered not fully of the homes of their in-laws, as they were not born there - Panjabi women express a feeling of dispossession from a home. Centuries of folk music and poetry express such dispossession in lines like “दीने सुंदरी ने रेहनाम गिरानी” (“diyan hundiyan ne dauatan begaaneyan” daughters are the wealth of another) (Singh n.d.). With such dispossession from a home, sisterhood becomes a central part of women’s lives with festivals like teej, where women can get together and grieve and rejoice and become central to the passage of time. The dispossession from the home is perpetuated by the elders and men, but it forges a need for bonds between women. Giddha is a central way to forge such a bond. Music, poetry, and dance have been a mode of expression within the heritage of Panjab with forms such as bhangra, sammi, jhoomar originating from the land itself. The popular format of bolis[9], which are musical stories accompanied by instruments, and dance already exists, and giddha as an outlet of expression seems to be appropriate and accessible. Bolis and giddha and inextricably linked as they lay the foundation of the dance, by conveying the beat and stories to which the movements are tied.

Giddha is an idiom of distress that uses both verbal and physical modes of artistic expression to show distress. A survey conducted in Gujar Khan, one rural part of Panjab, showed a 66% rate of anxiety and depressive symptoms in women and a 25% rate in men (Mumford 1997). While such survey models have utilized inventory methods (Bradford Somatic Inventory) based upon Western frameworks, if used as a starting point, this may give insight into what is a rather unstudied context. If such high rates of distress are present, Panjabi women have used giddha as a means to combat cultural norms which frown upon allowing them to express their emotions overtly and dispossess them. They have also utilized giddha as a means to create a network of sisterhood that they return to in order to both grieve and rejoice about their lives. As Nichter discusses, idioms of distress are expressed through culturally available means, which is music and dance, and they will relate closely to “core values and norms” (Nichter 1981). For the Havik Brahmin women, in response to their distress, they used their available means of purification of foods and rituals to express distress. Panjabi women use music and dance to express similar emotions of distress and pain in culturally appropriate ways. The verbal expression of distress that is done through the bolis are musical performances of poetry. They express despair about the ending of days at the maternal home and with childhood friends, annoyance with the man one is married to, disturbance in the marital household, especially with the mother-in-law, and pain about societal changes (Dhillon 2014). While many bolis express distress, many also express an abundance of joy, and like two sides of a coin, they meld together to create an atmosphere to share both the joyous and grievous moments of a Panjabi woman’s life.

The physical nature of the dance of giddha is a social experience where women form a semi-circle and clap their hands vigorously to form the initial beat of the boli and hit their heels into the floor with the same beat. As the story of the boli comes to the

[9]Teej is a festival celebrated by women in their maternal homes.

[9]Boli (pl. boliyan) are sung by all the women while dancing in giddha. They are often short poems, in the form of couplets and triplets, that tell stories to a beat governed by clapping your hands. See Appendix A.
main point, the clapping becomes more vigorous and the beat of the feet picks up to signal the end of that boli. With each singular story a few women to the middle of the circle to expressively act out the boli itself, sometimes playing the parts of the husband or the mother-in-law. Throughout the process, the women confront each of the people in their lives through a sort of proxy in the dance, and while speaking the despair on their minds physically releases the tensions of their body through the sheer vigor of their movements (Hundal 2019). Here *giddha* is acting as an idiom of distress that is recognized by the community and is helping the individual “work through” what are the realities of their life at home (Nichter 1981). Through verbal and physical formulation, *giddha* is a somatic form of therapy that allows Panjabi women to detail their mental distress.

**Giddha as a Therapeutic Form**

While *giddha* acts as an idiom of distress, however, it does not necessarily motivate *help*, rather it functions as the *help* itself. Performed and engaged with at various points in one’s life, especially during festivals like teej, in which there is a return of a woman to the maternal home, it has allowed Panjabi women to share their griefs and joys with the sisterhood. Such a sharing of emotions can be thought of as a therapeutic and reflective processing session before the inevitable return to life as regular. Throughout the practice of *giddha*, it is not publicly acknowledged to be a treatment or something related to one’s mental health, but without necessitating that language it can be understood as such within Panjabi culture. Additionally, as the culture and experience of being a Panjabi woman changes, the use of *giddha*, and its messages are also evolving. The norms and salient features of these messy cultures are not static, and as they evolve, so do these idioms of distress. Giddha is today still performed by many older women as an idiom of distress, but simultaneously utilized by younger artists as an effort of activism and resistance. For example, filmmaker Kiran Rai created a piece with boliyan to raise awareness around female infanticide and Panjabi womanhood in the modern era. Her efforts offer a reclamation of *giddha* in the diasporic space and while expressing lament about societal ills, her art serves as a space for discussion and reform (Rai 2018). This utilization is not a novel idea as women have continuously used the art of *giddha* for their needs and as culture evolve the novelty is found in the ways that *giddha* continues to be used.

**Conclusion**

Giddha is an idiom of distress that is also a form of therapeutic release, and as culture and the experience of being a Panjabi woman evolves, *giddha* has continued to be utilized as reflective art, an outlet for activism, and a form of resistance. As a collaborative dance, *giddha* promotes a sisterhood as its strength and uses verbal and physical measures to express a story about the everyday experience. Where the overt expression of emotion has not had a dominant space in the culture and dispossession has often colored women’s experiences, dance and music has become a form of release that was culturally approved and accepted to express distress and resistance. In this way, *giddha* becomes an idiom of distress that Panjabi women have used to detail their mental experiences and an art of activism and resistance that the women of Panjab have utilized to heal and create a stronger voice, like that which is seen in the kisaan protests. ♦
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APPENDIX A

Bolis & Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bolis &amp; Translation</th>
<th>Bolis &amp; Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teri maa barri kappati</td>
<td>Your mother is very rude-mannered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainu paon na dendi jutti</td>
<td>She doesn’t allow me to wear a sandal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mein vi jutti paani hai</td>
<td>I even wish to wear sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mundiya tu raazi reh ya gusse</td>
<td>Whether you like it or not,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teri maa kharrkaani hai.</td>
<td>I am going to fight (physically) your mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je mundeya ve meinu naal le-jaana,</td>
<td>If you want to take me along with you boy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maa da dar tu chak mundeya,</td>
<td>then leave the fear of your mother,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ve meinu reshmi rumaal wangu rakh mundeya ...</td>
<td>treat me like a silk scarf (well).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni main chadey jedh ne kutti meri wang tut gi</td>
<td>I was beaten by my bachelor older brother-in-law,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni main naven shair tu javan</td>
<td>and my bracelet broke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni main wangan kada ke le avan</td>
<td>To go to the new city, to bracelets forged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reejh aithey tut gayee</td>
<td>My dreams were broken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni main chadey jedh ne kutti meri wang tut gi</td>
<td>I was beaten by my bachelor older brother-in-law,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pebeyan de ghar majha barthevirian</td>
<td>and my bracelet broke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saureyn de ghar ik hti vi na</td>
<td>In my maternal home there were many cows, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mere vargi mere vargi koi jatti vi na</td>
<td>in my marital home there is not even one. There</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paaran layee soneyan panjeekan kadh vaah de</td>
<td>is no girl like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghorree veechee layee wanga chadd va de</td>
<td>Get me anklets forged for my feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu fhir kas to karda hain</td>
<td>Put bracelets on my fair wrists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main raunak pari lah dun gi</td>
<td>Why do you worry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giddha de vich dhola main sara pind nacha don gi</td>
<td>I will light up the entire party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will get the entire village to dance in the giddha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kheli Atluru is in her second year at Stanford University. She is a Symbolic Systems major and is very passionate about reproductive justice. Specifically, she has volunteered a lot of her time trying to further equitable access to health and sex education. In her free time, she enjoys binging TV and catching up on the latest Marvel fan theories.

Angie Lopez is a current 2nd-year undergraduate majoring in Art History and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. They are particularly interested in researching and writing about the influences of queer disidentification within mainstream visual culture. Outside of research, they enjoy writing poetry, visiting museums and playing with their dog.

Ella Varney is a rising Junior studying Anthropology and Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, with a concentration in Environmental Justice. Her academic study, community work, and activism focus on the many intersections between climate justice, decolonization, gender equity, and migration. For the past two years, she has worked as a student-staff member at the Women's Community Center on campus and will return next year as the center's Environmental Justice coordinator.

Cameron Lange (’24) is a freshman hailing from Los Angeles, California. At Stanford, she is studying both Political Science and Philosophy so she can tackle big questions about how responsive governance and policy can build a better world, and what “better” even means. In her spare time, Cameron can be found sipping iced coffee, fanatically curating Spotify playlists, and dreaming of going to the movie theater post-COVID.

Sehajleen Kaur is a sophomore majoring in Science, Technology, and Society and concentrating in Innovation and Organization. Sehaj is fascinated by the complexity of people and is interested in exploring the implications of technology on society, especially in regards to changing norms. After Stanford, she hopes for a career in law or in social entrepreneurship. She’s obsessed with languages and adores spending time in nature, especially around bodies of water.

Jessica Femenias is a sophomore studying philosophy and history. She is interested in the Americas, cultural and intellectual histories, phenomenology, and social philosophy. Jessica is interested in alienation and social movements -- especially the alienation and movements of workers, displaced people, and of colonized people.
Sarah MacHarg is a current sophomore interested in international relations, mathematics, and computer science. Outside of academics, she dances with Stanford Bhangra, sings with Stanford O-Tone, works with the Stanford Public Interest Technology (PIT) Lab, and researches with the Stanford Existential Risks Initiative. She is currently working to address accessibility inequities in tech as a Code for Equity Fellow, and enjoys dancing, playing piano, and studying foreign languages in her free time.

Vanessa Veak is a third-year undergraduate student from Fairfield, Ohio, studying sociology with a double minor in human rights and education at Stanford University. She is a 2020 recipient of the Chappell Lougee Scholarship to implement her co-owned project by the name of Coloring Cambodia, an archive about colorism in the Cambodian community from the Khmer women experience. Her passions primarily include advocating for indigenous rights in Southeast Asia, the LGBTQ+ community, and education equity for marginalized communities. Vanessa’s experience as a teacher assistant for Self & Society: Introduction to Social Psychology has led her interest in pursuing a master’s degree in sociology, if she is not preoccupied with rock climbing and eating all types of fruits.

Natalie Milan (‘24) is a Human Biology major committed to reducing global disparities in reproductive healthcare and fighting for education and food systems reform. Pursuing a career as an OB/GYN, she hopes to utilize her medical and Spanish skills to provide culturally-conscious care to survivors of human trafficking in Latin America. Natalie is currently taking a gap year to support the “food as medicine” movement by grant-writing for a medically-tailored meal service and a community garden as well as volunteering at a sustainable coffee farm in Costa Rica.

Harleen Kaur (‘22) is a third-year undergraduate in the Department of Anthropology. She has interests in understanding circuits of care and intergenerational trauma within Panjabi communities and exploring the biosocial components of substance abuse, alcoholism, and recovery. At Stanford, Harleen has been a volunteer in SHARED at the Stanford Emergency Department, a research assistant in the Intimate Partner Violence Lab with Dr. Jennifer Newberry, and involved in leadership and dance in various South Asian cultural spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, on a leave of absence, she has been spending her time as the Director of Research and Design at the South Asian Winter Camp, as a community researcher for ASRA: The Panjabi Alcohol Resource, and a volunteer at the community vaccine clinic. Harleen hopes to continue exploring health and wellbeing, art and activism, and community and solidarity personally and academically through her senior year and beyond.
MEET THE ARTIST

Lilith Frakes is a senior majoring in Anthropology and Comparative Literature, studying primate behavior, anthropogeny, ritual, decolonization, and psychoanalysis.

MEET THE EDITORS

Mercedes “Sadie” Blancaflor is a junior studying political anthropology and a 2021 Truman Scholar. She is interested in climate displacement and developing solutions to the partisan divide on climate. Outside of her work with the Stanford anthropology department, she currently co-directs Baole (www.bao-le.org), an organization tackling sustainable food adoption from a cultural lens. In her other hats, she serves as board chair for Power Shift Network, the national reinvestment chair for the College Climate Coalition, and in an official advisory role to Earth Echo International.

Minha Kha is a fourth-year undergraduate student of Sociology and Education. Her areas of interest surround educational inequities- both inside and outside the classroom. Minha's publications have explored the differences in educational access and opportunity across multiple variables, including language, gender, and socio-economic background. In her free time, she can be found drinking tea, trying to figure out how the world works or, most importantly, having conversations. You can contact Minha at: minha.khan@outlook.com