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Nationalisms

Critical Works from the proceedings of the 2003 conference at the University of Alberta.

Edited by James Gifford & Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux
Nationalisms

Edited by James Gifford
& Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux
Table of Contents

7 | “When I hear the word ‘culture’”: State Syntax, Cultural Vocabularies, and Violence | L. M. Findlay

25 | “Am I Canadian?”: Hockey as “National” Culture | Patricia Hughes-Fuller

40 | “A New Canadian National Spirit”: Allegorical Miss Canada and the Occult Canadian State | Robyn Fowler

53 | Mutant Mutandis: The X-Men’s Wolverine and the Construction of Canada | Vivian Zenari

68 | Hey Buddy, Wanna Buy a Culture? | Paul Chafe

77 | Montreal: Its Role in the Beginnings of Modernism in Canada | Collett Tracey


93 | The Receptivity of Canadian Readers to Chinese Literature | Gao Wei, David S. Miall, Don Kuiken

102 | The Political Canonization of the Canadian Anglophone Novel: An Examination of Governor General’s Award Winners between 1980 and 2000 | Ruth Martin

112 | Constructing “The Glorious Heritage of India”: Popular Culture and Nationalist Ideology in Indian Biographical Comics | Sailaja Krishnamurti

126 | Culture and the Demise of the Russian Empire | Oleh S. Ilnytskyj

135 | Haunting Heritage and Cultural Politics: Signifying Britain Since the Rise of Thatcher | Ryan S. Trimm

144 | Aping the West: Information Technology and Cultural Imperialism | Paul Cesarini

159 | “Make Way for the Bad Guy”: Understanding Changing Social Anxieties Through the Gangster Film | Amanda Klein

177 | Landscape in Film Noir and Westerns 1940s–1950s | Louise Tyler

189 | Small Nation—Big Screen: Film in Wales during the 1990s | Kate Woodward

198 | Film, Theatre, and TV Drama in Contemporary Wales | Steve Blandford

211 | Welsh and Jewish: Responses to Wales by Jewish Writers | Grahame Davies

224 | Teaching and Introduction to Islamic Literature | William Over

238 | The Concept of Islamic State | Mohd. Nasran Mohamad

250 | Neo-Traditional Media Culture Versus the Nigerian Military State | Femi Adagunodo

266 | The Discourse About the Nation-State and the Third World Future | Mambo T. Masinda
“When I hear the word ‘culture’”: State Syntax, Cultural Vocabularies, and Violence

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When viewed through the filters of culture, which properties or tendencies of the modern, ‘democratic’ state should be flatly rejected, and which should be warily embraced and creatively deployed? By the end of this presentation I will identify much state-sponsored violence with the military sublime and the market sublime, and I will defend a strong preference for the multilateral sublime and the ethical sublime. I will then summarize and energize my remarks by means of the exhortation, “Rhizomes rise up!”

To unfold this broad argument I begin by unpacking the two parts to the title of this presentation in the contexts of German and Italian fascism. There will be loose ends and tenuous connections aplenty in what follows, but enough, I hope to engage you in the collective work of making everything we say and write as intelligible and useful as we can make it. As you will see, I refuse to reduce the theme of “Culture and the State” to “Cultural Studies and the State,” though I feel that a historically grounded and politically engaged Canadian cultural studies is a crucial player in the multilateralism I am promoting.

But before we get to that, so as to shed some light on violence as a state target in both the aspirational and the punitive sense—a target understood as that which you wish to attain, or as that which you wish to harm—I turn first to culture-state relations in Germany in the 1920s as epitomized by the citation in the title to this presentation.

Wenn ich Kultur höre

“When I hear the word ‘Culture’ I reach for my revolver.” I was attracted to this statement several years ago (see Findlay 1995) because it seemed to encapsulate one of culture’s most violent Others, Nazi philistinism. Rummaging in various dictionaries of quotations, the OED, and various commentaries on the cultural politics of the Weimar Republic confirmed that there seemed to be a firm written source for this statement but a number of equally plausible oral sources, including
Herman Goering, Joseph Goebbels, and Alfred Rosenberg. Let us begin with the written source, the relatively stable and readily retrievable text of Hanns Johst’s play whose eponymous hero, Leo Schlageter, was a German patriot executed in 1923 for sabotage directed against French occupation of the Ruhr Valley, an act which violated the already too punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles and helped untie the text of this particular European peace—a peace that established, as it happens, the modern state of Iraq midst much talk, as it happened, of the strategic importance of Basra and the oil resources of Mosul (see Macmillan 352, 454). Johst’s text reads: “Wenn ich Kultur höre... entsichere ich meinen Browning” (27). The first part of this statement may seem more readily translatable into English than the second, though this is so only if one equates “Kultur” with “culture,” and assumes little variation in the properties and practices denoted by this term. A more obviously troubling source of discrepancy is the shift from the more literal, “I undo the safety catch on my Browning,” to the dominant rendering in English, “I reach for my revolver” (see Henigan). What seems to be sought by translators and recyclers of this expression is a quotable, definitive characterization of stimulus and response, of a fascistically conditioned reflex which implies that culture is an important but vulnerable locus of value, complexity, and resistance, while its Nazi enemy is a creature of instinctive and excessive violence without the patience for “debating societies” like the League of Nations and its successor (as pilloried by Death-Row-Dubya-Enron Bush). However, in Johst’s German, an irritant or sign of danger is met by measured menace rather than the lightning draw of a mindless gunslinger. (The only gunfire staged in the play comes from Schlageter’s French firing squad in the final scene.) The ellipsis in the text (which itself is elided in most English citations), indicates an interval between stimulus and response. The response, when it comes, is more rational and principled than manic, suggesting that a mere gesture of readiness for punitive action may be enough to dispel any danger posed by cultured talk or talk of culture. We are here, of course, in the difficult but immensely productive realm of translation as ideological inflection or refraction, and may be prompted to ask ourselves how translatable across boundaries of class, race, gender, generation, as well as language, are not only words for “Culture” but also the often radically divergent practices those words designate. And how do you translate an ellipsis which forms part of a much larger and more lethal history?
Most renderings of the citation under discussion prefer “revolver” (or more rarely “gun” or “pistol”) to Johst’s brandname, “Browning,” and this raises interesting possibilities. Obviously, “Browning” is ambiguous in English, suggesting the uncomfortable possibility of a Nazi as lover of Victorian poetry. But there is a less obviously cultured difficulty too, in that the gun in question was designed by John Moses Browning of Ogden, Utah, but proved unpopular in the United States because of its small calibre (no surprise to Michael Moore) and was manufactured instead at the Fabrique Nationale in Liège, whence it reached more than a million satisfied customers in a space of twelve years (Tarassuk and Blair 376-78). The Browning name would later become synonymous not with successful international munitions production but with the allied war effort against an Axis of demonstrable evil, and with the armaments of British and American aircraft in particular. When, as in Johst’s play, a young proto-Nazi in the recently humiliated Germany is seen to own a Browning pistol, it is a powerful but frequently repressed sign of the international arms trade which continues to make war so disastrous for so many and so lucrative for so few. In Johst’s German, Kultur is set against a specific commodity with a specific name and specific capacities, but these specificities are elided in English so as to separate more thoroughly the evil Hun from Anglo-American war culture and technology, and hence to transform a semi-automatic brandname pistol into a generic revolver. Respect for patents, copyrights, and historical accuracy may discourage Anglophone translators from substituting the thoroughly German Mauser or Luger for Browning, or upgrading and updating the menace into a Berretta, Kaloshnikov, or Uzi, but it seems the semi-automatic performance of the Browning pistol can be ignored in the interests of playing up the completely automatic reactions of its owner. In the interests of pithiness, transcriptions of this particular Nazi Nugget, and spinoffs like “When I Hear the Word Gun I Reach for my Culture,” or “When I hear the word ‘intellectual’ I reach for my gun” (cit. Henigan), remove both culture and violence from the historical specificity of commodity production and marketing, and this is the mother of all erasures currently played out most emphatically in the hermeneutic black hole of 9/11.

Obviously, the form of an utterance helps determine the kind of currency it enjoys. But why did this particular nugget find its way from a German play into such widespread use? Schlager is a drama dominated by young military
veterans distrustful of religion, impatient with education, contemptuous of economics, and yearning to belong to the new community of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. They are “terrorists” on their way to becoming servants of the Nazi state, and all are being produced in the name of peace, a fact retired General Jay Garner, conservative diplomat L. Paul Bremer III, and their American colleagues might well reflect on as they impose “freedom” and “democracy” on Iraq.

The twelve-line speech which these lines conclude is spoken by Friedrich Thiemann, Schlageter’s friend and the restive son of a university professor. This speech begins tritely enough with the idea that every rose has its thorn, but then francophobically scorns Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and throws in Beauty and Honour for good measure. In the midst of this outpouring of resentment Thiemann thinks he hears the word *Kultur* and readies his gun for firing. Later in the play this anti-cultural sentiment will reveal itself less mutedly as anti-semitic too, but here the only hint of that particular connection is the characterisation of the postwar ferment in the Weimar Republic as a *Kram*, that is to say, a retail trade which divides up national unity into ever smaller and more atomistic portions for its own profit. Thiemann’s statement about culture concludes a bout of invective directed at capitalist economics and the contamination of the culture industries and political theory by the presence of Jews. But the lines about culture may recommend themselves not for their climactic force, which depends on giving the more extended context of Thiemann’s speech, but because, taken out of that context, they can be used to incriminate Nazism without questioning capitalism or singling out Jewish people as special targets of Nazi violence. To isolate evil in this way, and in the name of cultural translation, is to deny one’s role in evil’s production.

Clearly we need to attend to the verbal mediations both separating and joining culture and those who wish to study it, and to continue studying cultural policy and production under emergent fascism (then and now) for what it can tell us about the temptations that attend political instability and economic crisis, regime change and the pursuit of retribution and profit in the name of peace. And we need to do so even while recognizing that drawing analogies between emergent fascism then and now cost the executive producer of the new CBS miniseries entitled *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* his job (Ryan R1; cf. William Houston on the firing
of “Baghdad Pete”), and has caused many to censor themselves in the US and elsewhere. Such study reveals shifts from culture as a target of threats and violence to culture as itself the conduit for, or instrument of, violence. And shifts such as this must necessarily implicate state-sponsored custodians of official and high culture like academics. And so, for instance, the precise day of the Schlager anniversary was marked, almost equally notoriously, on 26 May 1933 in Freiburg, where the brand new university Rector, Martin Heidegger, gave a eulogy for this martyred alumnus. Heidegger employed imagery and evocations strongly reminiscent of the final act of the dramatized life of Schlager and dramatic too in its appeal to an audience of thousands filling the university square. The address represents the French only by the rifles they aimed at the heroic, proleptic figure of Schlager, who died the most taxing of deaths (den schwersten Tod) with “a hard heart and a clear will.” The hero died for “the German people and its Reich,” and this sacrifice should inspire Heidegger’s immediate audience to go hence and share his qualities of heart and will with students at other German universities, ever mindful of the fact that they, like Schlager, will live the student life for only a short time before fulfilling their destiny in the wider world. Unlike him, they will not have to act alone but with the citizens of a revitalized Reich, a prospect that has Heidegger urging his audience to raise their hands with him in silent salutation to this precursor who resolutely conjured a proud future for Germany from “darkness, humiliation, and betrayal.” There had been silence at the end of the first performance of Schlager, followed by a ‘spontaneous’ rendition of the first verse of “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” (Ritchie 154). The Freiburg spectacle of high culture saluting a political martyr achieved a theatricality of its own in the silent, mass gesture, followed by the laying of a wreath and the singing of the “Lied vom guten Kameraden.” This academic spectacle also implicitly legitimated analogous public events, while ratifying a chilling militarization of enlightenment, a militarization reprised today as the Pentagon continues to trump the State Department in the world’s only remaining superpower while education becomes “enforcement” (see the essays in Saltman and Gabbard).

Interestingly, Johst’s drama was not canonized. However, Johst himself fared better than the last play he ever wrote, coming from the Kampfbund to serve first as dramaturge of the State Theatre and then as President of the new Reich Literature Chamber from 1935 to 1945. This Chamber was one of seven established
as parts of the *Reichskulturkammer* masterminded by Goebbels on his way to wresting from Goering and Rosenberg control of propaganda, culture, and the media in the new Germany (Steinweis 38ff.). Goebbels used the Chamber, in a terrifying illustration of the dangers of populism, to make a series of neocorporatist and increasingly racist concessions to unionized and professional cultural workers who had endured more than a decade of severe economic hardship, and in so doing he could count on increasing support from workers in the knowledge industries, including academics such as those who had signed on for Hitler in the periodical *German Culture-Watch*; as Alan Steinweis notes in his enormously informative recent book on *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany*, these were "fifty-four university instructors, forty-five of whom were full professors. Many of the signatories were scholars in the fields of ethnography, cultural history, art, music, literature" (25). In other words, in the guise of disciplinarity and intellectual disinterestedness, a throng of embedded academics produced an earlier version of the Clash of Civilizations thesis so popular in some quarters today (but so effectively rebutted by Tariq Ali; see also Findlay 2003).

Not even Steinweis can determine for certain whether Johst was giving verbatim, in a play filled with echoes of *Mein Kampf*, Goebbels’ novel, *Michael Voormann: A Man’s Fate in the Pages of a Diary* (1929; Henigan 17) and so on, the already resonating words of one of the controllers of the Nazi cultural agenda. However, imperfect access to definitive origins does not banish agency or accountability from the scenes of history. Steinweis is right to point to the powerful traditions of post-Burckhardtian Kultur in Germany ("the history of the world in its general conditions" [*die geschichte der Welt in ihren Zustanden*]; cit. Weintraub 138) and to the distinctive overdeterminations of cultural discourses and practices in the 1920s and 1930s. What was desperately needed then was critical, political culturalism; and that is what is needed today, while Hitler’s aestheticism is being debated once again, and Rumsfeld’s Office of Strategic Influence resurfaced before a jumbotron in Doha “Saving Private Lynch” (see Cienski) and in the patriotic sleaze of country musicians (but certainly not the mouthy Dixie Chicks) playing the Pentagon.
State Syntax and Cultural Vocabularies

Now for the second part of my title: “State Syntax and Cultural Vocabularies.” The employment of linguistic terms like syntax and vocabulary might cause some people to fear that this is going to be another reduction of complex social processes to effects of discourse, the absorption of life by language, the retreat from politics into a recessive version of the literary or cultural. This is not my intention at all, as I will try to show via Gramsci’s attempt to establish how syntax and vocabulary can co-operate to produce what Dante called, and Gramsci wishes to reclaim as, an “illustrious vernacular” (vulgare illustre/ volgare illustre, Dante 148-9, Gramsci 168). In this return to another moment in the history of European fascism, I wish to explore relations between language and culture, and language and the state, that have a direct bearing NOW, today, at a historical moment when the political instrumentality of language and culture have revealed themselves to be essential to the righteous yet coercive unilaterism of the world’s leading terrorist and proto-fascist state, the USA under the leadership of George W. Bush and his Republican Guard. If one thinks the “proto-fascist” designation too harsh, one can look for its use not only by radical voices like Tom Burghardt but also by emphatically establishment ones like a former member of the National Security Council under Presidents Johnson and Nixon, Roger Morris.

Syntax and vocabulary need each other. Just as states need culture for their own stability, and just as empire’s look to conceal lust for profit in the cultural lustre of a civilizing mission, so syntax and vocabulary are mutually dependent, exhibiting a power relation but also a culturally productive relation, two kinds of relation that are complex, shifting, impossible to read in advance or indeed to read fully in the present or in retrospect (see, e.g., Harris and Campbell, and Jameson). In the third of the Prison Notebooks, and no thanks to Mussolini or his jailers in Turi, Gramsci brings his political philology to bear on a crucial document in the history of the linguistic nation, namely, Dante’s unfinished 13th-century treatise, De Vulgari Eloquentiae. In this treatise (143ff., Purcell trans. 34ff.) Dante defends literature in the vernacular on the basis of a series of distinctions between natural and acquired, universal and particular, imitative and grammatical, original and thus noble, later, and hence derivative and less exalted. For Dante, the turn to “Italian” from Latin is a turn to national development and away from
imperial fixities via a study of the *segno rationale* (119; Purcell 17) or “rational sign” that makes human communication possible because it is both sensible and rational. In the shift of power that marks the emergence of the sovereign nation from incorporation in empire, chaos can be avoided thanks to syntax and grammar because these communicative and cultural competencies succeed to the immutability of Empire and its privileged access to the linguistic past so as to manage in an orderly way new associations and combinations of words and people. The kind of nation-making language which Dante strives to promote is an elusive standard, a sort of spirit owned by no single citizen or group but informing all. It is the silent tongue rather than the invisible hand of state exchange. However, recognizing the vulnerable vagueness or mysticism of such a formulation, Dante promptly attributes to this vernacular four specific qualities (142-5, Purcell 34-5): it is illustrious, cardinal, courtly, and curial: cardinal because on the vernacular the social flow will continue to hinge (*cardo*); courtly because its existence points to the need for an Italian court where it could be most fitly and inspiring employed; curial because the balancing of difference in the vernacular is an emblem and instrument of Italian justice. And its illustriousness is the double sublime of elevation and exemplification, involving on the one hand discipline and power, and on the other honour and glory: this vernacular “é sublimato da magistero e da potere, é sublima i suoi con onore e con gloria” (144; Purcell 34). This dynamic sublime is intended to galvanize Dante’s readers in making the nation a reality, but he will also reassure them by tying linguistic differentiation to the division of labour, and by his later appeal (205-7, Purcell 45) to syntax as construction-through-regulation of usage, in other words, a principle of linguistic law and order.

Gramsci is never one to scorn or uncritically swallow the lessons of the past, never one to read language and culture as mere froth on the flows of faith and capital. Gramsci is willing to follow Dante in recognizing that the “intellectual hegemony of Florence [in the mid 13th century] unifies the vernacular, [and] creates an illustrious vernacular” (*Quaderni* 1.354; *Selections* 169). But Gramsci will not leave it there, with an admiring allusion to a golden age of high-cultural achievement. With the benefit of hindsight not available to Dante, Gramsci uses his linguistic knowledge to claim further that this hegemonically derived vernacular is
Florentine in its *vocabulary* and phonetically but it is Latin in its syntax [*sintassi*]. Moreover, the victory of the vernacular over Latin was not easy: learned Italians, with the exception of poets and artists in general, wrote for Christian Europe and not for Italy. They were a collection [*concentrazione*] of cosmopolitan, not national, intellectuals. The fall of the communes and the advent of the principate, the creation of a ruling caste removed from the people, crystallizes this vernacular in the same way that literary Latin had been crystallized. (SCW 169; *Quaderni* 1.354; emphasis added)

Note the complicity of the literary with forces sequestered from, and exploitative, of “the people.”

Gramsci then proceeds to spell out the social and class implications of this model, particularly its ability to second intellectuals from below into a hierarchy which allows them individual upward mobility but not the kind of class solidarity that would bring their original cohort along with them to maintain the linkages that mark the organic rather than the traditional intellectual. He elaborates this point as follows:

After a brief interlude (the communal liberties) when there is a flourishing of intellectuals who came from the popular (bourgeois) classes, the intellectual function is reabsorbed [*riassorbimento*] into the traditional caste, where the individual elements come from the people but where the character of the caste prevails over their origins. In other words, it is not a stratum of the population which creates its intellectuals on coming to power (this occurred in the fourteenth century), but a traditionally selected body [*organismo*] which assimilates single individuals into its cadres (the typical example of this is the organization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy). (SCW 169; *Quaderni* 1.355)

There is a lesson here for Gramsci as well as for those—like me and many others of my generation—who were plucked or scrambled from the working class to become
the first ones in their families to attend university and find a career in intellectual work. For Gramsci, the lesson involves the nineteenth century unification movement and what he calls the “national rhetoric... and the prejudices that it embodied” (169), a rhetoric that failed to become a truly illustrious vernacular but retained a residually imperialist syntax while confining popular resistance to the domain of vocabulary. And the Italian academy had a big part to play in this because “historical linguistics is still far from historical” in its refusal to see the state reproducing itself as a reactionary, stratified formation in the name of national independence. For Gramsci, language has to be “understood as an element of culture, and thus of general history, a key manifestation of the ‘nationality’ and ‘popularity’ of the intellectuals, [if linguistic] study is not [to be] pointless and merely erudite” (170). The philosophically trained Marx stuck it to the academic philosophers in the Theses on Feuerbach; the philologically trained Gramsci put the linguists and literary scholars on their mettle, but both Marx and Gramsci realized the power of the desire to pass with elites or to pursue the over-examined life that provides a good living.

Gramsci returns to the theme of Renaissance humanism later in the Notebooks (SCW 222-235; Quaderni 1.640-53). Using Vittorio Rossi’s article (1929) on the Renaissance as his point of departure, he attacks once again the aesthetic historicism that would elide contradiction and resolve conflict in the serene works of faith and imagination. Gramsci asks, “is not the Renaissance characterized by this conflict [between two concepts of the world, ‘a bourgeois-popular one expressing itself in the vernacular and an aristocratic feudal one expressing itself in Latin and harking back to Roman antiquity’],” rather than by the serene creation of a triumphant culture? (226). Rossi is in effect writing a “historical novel” (229, 230) rather than history attentive to socio-political forces. Rossi cannot therefore explain this bilingualism of the intellectuals. He does not want to admit that for the Humanists the vernacular was like a dialect, that is, it did not have a national character, and that as a result the Humanists were the continuators of the universalism of the Middle Ages—in other forms of course—and not a national element. They were a ‘cosmopolitan caste’, for whom Italy represented what the region represents in the modern
nation, but nothing more and better than this. They were apolitical and antinational. (233-4)

He continues,

the most original and promising content of Humanism—was not developed in Italy, where Humanism assumed the aspect of a restoration. Yet, like every restoration, it assimilated and developed, better than the revolutionary class it had politically suffocated, the ideological principles of the defeated class, which had not been able to go beyond its own corporate limits and create the superstructures of an integral society. (234)

What would an illustrious vernacular look like today, in a country like Canada which has no lack of Humanists who are “apolitical and anti-national,” one in which syntax and vocabulary might be alike attuned to cultural difference and to solidarity from below and from the side? Well such a vernacular certainly would not look or sound like the language spoken by Tony Blair or George W. Bush. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that in accepting or snatching the Anglo-imperial mantle from the British, the United States has preserved the imperial state syntax of British (and now American) English and attempted to emulate the range of cultural vocabularies it accommodates. I would want to connect the so-called “coalition of the willing” in fact to the convergence of the Huntingtonian “clash of civilizations” thesis with Cain and Hopkins on “gentlemanly capitalism,” Cannadine on *Ornamentalism*, and now the extraordinary hyping of Niall Ferguson’s version of *Empire*.

And here let me say that I think one of the keys to the current coercive franchising of the ethical and modern state as pseudo-American democracy exists in an insight from Harold Innis in 1948, when he remarked that in the case of Canada “American imperialism has replaced and exploited British imperialism” (272; see also Findlay 2002). Canada has for some time had the experience of a shift Iraq is only now fully experiencing from British to American domination. And does that mean that Canada has therefore solved the problem of an anti- or postcolonial yet illustrious vernacular? I fear it does not, at least in my reading of
liberal democratic Canadian English and of the searching critique of official multiculturalism by scholars such as Smaro Kamboureli and Richard Day. In his recent collection of essays, *Politics in the Vernacular*, Canadian philosopher and theorist of multiculturalism, Will Kymlicka, works hard to defend minority rights in Canada. But his insistence that this defence “requires revising our standard *vocabulary* for discussing these issues” (2; emphasis added) is for me disappointingly tokenist: it leaves state syntax and liberal democratic hegemony intact while it sprinkles the national lexicon with multicultural imports and gives very short shrift to the beleaguered languages of Canada’s First Nations (for which compare Henderson and Borrows). How could an illustrious vernacular be multilingual as well as multi-cultural, proletarian and Aboriginal rather than bourgeois, something fuelled and fashioned in part by organic intellectuals rather than embedded academics and compradors? Since I am still largely stymied by such questions, what I can suggest in the meantime is looking to the multilingual dynamics of the the UN Security Council recently where the unilingual American bully embarrassed itself and failed to win much support for Operation Iraqi Freedom; and we should look too to affirming portions of Aboriginal and immigrant Canadian traditions, and to lessons from the two moments of emergent fascism I discussed, to help stop the violence, at home and internationally today.

**The Military or the Market Sublime**

It is my contention that the military sublime works in tandem with the market sublime in an often obscene symbiosis to direct the fortunes of war and the diversification of violence, including cultural violence. In other words, these two versions of the sublime collaborate in order to entrench and defend capitalist values, including that pre-eminent first-world freedom, the freedom of capital to move unencumbered across the world. This market freedom, by a process of orchestrated rather than free association is then cashed in as the optimum form of political freedom with the minimum of state ‘interference.’ These complementary forms of the sublime function also to entrench the categories and consequences of army surplus and surplus value that equally require a reserve army of the underemployed and unemployed. The (Hilary Clinton) maxim that “security trumps trade,” like the related (Bush) maxim that “human rights trump sovereign
rights” (MacArthur), is a serious over-simplification obsessed with individual episodes of insurgency rather than the master narrative of transnational economic hegemony. It is an oversimplification whose limits are evident in the current trafficking in looted Iraqi artifacts (Conlogue), a traffic which reverses the flow while mimicking the conditions of the illicit arms trade. Ownership determines interests, and capital’s media empires serve the empire that claims the right to incarnate, adjudicate, and enforce “freedom itself.” And at the heart of the Amero-capitalist empire is the corrupt oligarchy and military-industrial complex whose recent criminal activities in the name of liberation will ensure that a relieved Michael Ignatieff can experience due comfort next time he has “a coffee in downtown Baghdad” (as he confided in an interview on CBC Newsworld with Brian Stewart who also interviewed Michael Walzer about the possibilities of just war in general and the war against Iraq in particular).

I choose the sublime as my key concept or category because of its strong associations with terror and obscurity, shock and awe, as ways of “achieving rapid dominance” (the subtitle and core objective of the book edited by Ullman and Wade), and for its essential invasiveness and excessiveness, its ability to intimidate and subordinate beauty to power, representation to conquest. For Edmund Burke, in the section on power added to the 1759 edition of his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, there is “Besides these things which directly suggest the idea of danger, and those which produce a similar effect from a mechanical cause,... nothing sublime which is not some modification of power” (64-5; for unavailing attempts to restrict the meaning of the sublime see Balfour; for a fine new postcolonial exegesis of sublimity see Aravamudam 190ff.). I allude to Burke in part to remind us of the special prominence of the sublime in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a period which just happened to mark the rise of the modern nation state, the ‘discovery’ of nature by the engines and self-absorbed apologists of acquisitive culture, and the rise of economic modernity and what Germaine de Staël, in a telling fusion of market intimidation and market rationality, called “the calculating sublime” (le sublime du calcul; Considérations 526). Burke witnessed the proliferation of nations and the expansion of a singular, endlessly expanding market, a place where national culture was invented and enlisted in the service of oppression at home and possession overseas, a place where the possessive
individualism of tight national entities was moderated and periodically intensified by the ideas of Europe, progress, virtue, the commonalities and differences at work within a broadly inclusive notion of a civilizing mission deriving from the white enlightenment.

It is well to keep in mind the intellectual and institutional origins of the sublime within modernity as we try to understand its uptake by the American state, the world’s only remaining superpower whose current unilateralism, exceptionalism, and coercion of unwilling but desperate ‘allies,’ is threatening to change geopolitical relations so as to undercut at its inception the International Criminal Court, to delegitimize the United Nations, and to install the Bush Binary Doctrine as the clearest derivative from Samuel P. Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis, and thus the way of the world for the foreseeable future. Interestingly, this unilateralism is both denied in the farcical computations of the numbers of the willing and projected onto independent, non-embedded journalists as “unilateralists” (York) who, whether in the al Jazeera building or the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad housing over two hundred journalists, just happened to come under fire on April 8, with lethal results. The fog of war and the awesome “untid[i]ness of freedom” (Rumsfeld, cit. Mackinnon) is invoked to justify the meticulous vindictiveness of this regime as it shot up Baghdad, protecting the Oil Ministry building and reconstruction contracts for the “new carpetbaggers” (Stewart) while laying open museums to professional thieves and a desperate populace convinced their only option was to pillage their own history.

The sui generis nature of the sublime is being absorbed into American (and Israeli) exceptionalism, and ideas of the irrevocable and unspeakable associated with 9/11. And so terror is recycled as shock and awe or a grotesque Aufhebung, with liberation hovering between elevation and cancellation, occupation and obliteration. The burden of the belligerents is understood by them as achieving victory and controlling its meanings (see Shock and Awe 6ff). However, military syntax and embedded illustration is exceeded and resisted by the particular vocabularies of the US-led coalition’s outside and intermittently unruly or unreliable insides.
The Multilateral (Multicultural) Sublime

Is the sublime marked by massive singularity of effect, or can it find expression as multilateralism? If we define the military sublime partly in terms of shock and awe, complete with canonical references to early Chinese warrior-strategist Sun Tzu and to Clausewitz (see, e.g., Shock and Awe xv-xvii, 30, 45), we need also to define it by contrast with what I will call the multilateral and ethical sublime. In this comparative endeavour, the imperious singularity of conquest leads not to multilateralism but to the proliferation of client states more or less directly ingested into the great American ‘democratic’ experiment which will return massive profits to the homeland while reinforcing its monopolies behind the veil of freedom.

Here, the concept of revolution seems to be undergoing another shift, after the one from celestial order to political transformation in the seventeenth century. Indeed, it seems headed now, after technological and consumerist interludes as well, towards denoting a centre of gravity and permutable clusters of satellite states. Multilateralism must be subverted, discredited, prohibited because it marks a possible alternative sublime which diffuses and hence diminishes imperial control. Multilateralism represents a loss of power to the dominant as well as a redefinition of power by the dominated. Inside this collective sublimity—a socio-political analogue of the blue planet or Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth—reside nested, chastened universals, utopian energies, spectacles of world resistance choreographed but creating a countersense of globalization as neither global terror nor global economics, but in fact as consensual, non-violent, and therefore “anti-capitalist” (Callinicos). The collateral is not the multilateral but rather the reason for its mobilization. And, at a time when the expression, “When I hear the word Culture” is followed by, “I reach for my missiles and money to ensure that American culture is meant and consumed,” mobilization has never been more necessary, though with a difference. “Rhizomes rise up!”

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“Am I Canadian?”: Hockey as “National” Culture
Patricia Hughes-Fuller, Athabasca University

Introduction: “Hooked on Hockey…”

One of the traditional roles of the Canadian state has been to nurture and promote something called “national” culture, and images in the media have frequently contributed to this process. My title derives from (in fact inverts) the well-known series of Molson Canadian beer advertisements aired on CBC television’s Hockey Night in Canada. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some viewers find these advertisements amusing and/or take a covert pleasure in watching the “Clark Kentish” Canadians kick American “Super-butt,” while others are offended by what they see as an appeal to a xenophobic brand of national identity—something Canadians, even Canadian hockey fans (with the quasi-ironic exception of Don Cherry), pride themselves in having managed to avoid. Even so, the juxtaposition of Canadian identity with the sport of hockey that the Molson advertisements at once exploit and promote has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. Novelists, journalists, poets, playwrights, film-makers, and television producers have all celebrated the notion that hockey is uniquely Canadian.

Our national identification with hockey has even been sanctioned by officialdom. During the nineties, whenever Prime Minister Chrétien launched trade missions to other countries, he repeatedly referred to the participating politicians and businessmen as “Team Canada,” and this same Prime Minister appointed a retired National Hockey League star, Frank Mahovlich, to the Canadian Senate. A few years ago, the 1972 Canada/Russia hockey series was recognised in a commemorative postage stamp depicting the series-winning goal by Paul Henderson, and, even more recently (2002), “The Pond” was enshrined on the back of the Canadian five dollar bill. These events, while they do seem to indicate an escalating trend, are not without precedent. Decades earlier, during the nineteen forties and fifties, Maurice “the Rocket” Richard achieved celebrity status as the foremost goal-scorer of his day while acting as a flashpoint of tensions
between Quebec and English Canada.\footnote{Rocket Richard’s death in May 2000 was the occasion of a “state” funeral in Notre Dame de Montréal rivaled only by that of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau later the same year.} Later, in the nineteen eighties, Edmonton Oilers prodigy Wayne Gretzky became an even greater celebrity and a metonym of Canadian /American relations during the era of the free trade debate (Jackson 429).

The persistence—even intensification—of this “national obsession” struck me as paradoxical since ice hockey was never an exclusively Canadian game, and rarely has it been less so than it is today. Furthermore, some argue that nationality is, at best, an outdated and irrelevant concept and, at worst, a reactionary and exclusionary one, while others question whether or not “in a postmodern landscape characterized by heterogeneity, multiple and fluid identities, blurred boundaries and the globalization of culture, it is useful even to ask... about specific national configurations” (Bodroghkozy 2). In light of these apparent contradictions and because, with other scholars, I share the premise that “something that absorbs so much of a nation’s physical and emotional energy needs to be confronted and explained” (Jarvie and Walker 8), I decided to embark on a study of how representations of hockey articulate Canadian identity. I wanted to understand the basis of this asserted connection and also find out what kinds of images of “Canadian-ness” these cultural texts were constructing.

“The Pond is where the Heart is”

Often hockey is portrayed as something Canadians are (seemingly) born into, and participate in spontaneously. The NFB documentary film, \textit{Shinny: The Hockey in All of Us}, is premised on the notion that we learn to skate almost before we learn to walk. It is also a visually stunning homage to “grassroots” hockey and The Pond. Considering the beauty of the cinematography it is not surprising that \textit{Shinny} won the Rockie Award in the Sports Program category at the 2002 Banff Film Festival. It has been said that in \textit{Moby Dick}, the sea is a character, and in \textit{Shinny}, the ice (rink ice, lake ice, river ice, pond ice, even the frozen surface of the Arctic Ocean) is the clearly the “star.”
Shinny is structured around the Twelve Rules of Shinny, including Rule Number One, “Make your own rules”:

Wherever and whenever shinny is played there are never any referees; players are always on their own honour and various unwritten codes of conduct prevail. It is left to the players themselves to work out things between them. Maybe this is why hockey players of an earlier era had a greater sense of sportsmanship than young players today... organized shinny is a contradiction in terms. (Beardsley CI 52)

The themes that are reiterated over the duration of the film have to do with the game’s purity, inclusiveness, and (somehow) intrinsic “Canadian-ness”: Other rules include Number Two: “You Always Play for Fun,” and Number Five: “No team is ever really beaten.”

Shinny represents a uniquely Canadian pastime enjoyed by enthusiasts of all ages. Consider the statistics: an average of 16,000 hockey sticks are bought in Canada every day, according to the 1996 Canadian census, and hockey is played by about 1.4 million Canadians. Hey, even Wayne Gretzky plays shinny. (CNW)

The film takes us on a tour of various “shinny venues” throughout the country. We meet the ordinary folk and “everyday guys” who participate in the game—not just the players, but also the parents who build backyard rinks, the “rink rats” who look after small town community arenas, people who scrounge, share, and donate equipment, and others. However, while Shinny is presented as the quintessentially democratic “people’s game” it is in no way insurgent. Cameos by author Roch Carrier, Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien remind us that shinny too has the blessing of Canada’s cultural and political authority figures.

Shinny ends in Nunavut, in the village of Kugluktuk, where the entire community is shown playing on the frozen Arctic Ocean (their “rink” is lit by snowmobile headlights). One of the goalies, an Inuit boy of about ten, is shown proudly wearing hockey equipment donated by a Toronto manufacturer, a kind
“fairy godfather” figure. The background music is not traditional—e.g. throat singing—but rather is the hymn, “Amazing Grace” (although sung in Inuktitut), and one could argue that there is something paternalistic, and even patronising, about the charitable efforts of these well intentioned southerners. However, this is not the point of view the film takes. Hockey (in its “pure” incarnation as shinny) is portrayed as transcending differences in order to build community. The final shot is a near duplicate of the opening one: landscape, snow, and ice.

The manner in which the film Shinny represents hockey has much in common with the works of writers such as Doug Beardsley and Bruce Kidd. Commenting on what they see as a tendency to romanticise and essentialise hockey, Gruneau and Whitson observe that “in our view it is wrong to base the discussion on an idealized, organic conception of hockey as a natural Canadian cultural resource, something that developed almost magically out of an exposure to ice, snow and open spaces” (26). Gruneau and Whitson’s aim is to demystify. They intend to purge us of the fantasies that circulate about “Our Game” (Beardsley), “The Game of Our Lives” (Gzowksi), and the imminent “Death of Hockey” (Kidd & McFarlane). But while they accurately identify certain notions about hockey as romantic and essentialist, and while their criticisms are both temperate and balanced, they do not address the seemingly inexplicable persistence of this tendency to idealise what is, after all, “only a game.”

Technically complex, yet thematically simple, if Shinny is a naïve film it is so deliberately. It partakes of the “conscious fictionality of pastoral” (Blodgett 181) thus assuring its place in what has become a Canadian cultural tradition. According to Northrop Frye,

At the heart of all social mythology lies what may be called, because it usually is called, a pastoral myth, the vision of a social ideal. The pastoral myth in its most common form is associated with childhood, or with some earlier social condition—pioneer life, the small town, the habitant rooted to his land—that can be identified with childhood. The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada. (556)
A “Small-Market Country”

As Canadian media critic Paul Rutherford has noted, it is possible to ascribe the appeal of the pastoral tradition to the fact that it shows how different we are from the Americans (276).2 (Canada is small, rural, innocent and old-fashioned; the U.S. is large, urban, and corrupt) and in most respects Shinny is the antithesis of what is almost certainly the prototypical American hockey movie, Slapshot. Although made in the 1970s, in a blackly comical way the latter anticipates and addresses much of what’s “wrong” with hockey today: gratuitous violence, greedy owners, sleazy managers, and especially the plight of small market franchises. These themes resurface and are explored in the Canadian television series, Power Play. Again, Canadian innocence is contrasted with American experience, but this time the clash of values is explicit rather than implicit. “Made in Canada” by Alliance Atlantis, the series was introduced in the late 1990s, and ran for two seasons on the CTV network before finally being cancelled due to poor ratings in the U.S. Half morality play, half soap opera, Power Play tells the story of the Hamilton Steelheads, a fictional small-market Canadian NHL franchise, and the embattled team’s efforts to survive in the high-priced world of professional hockey.

Power Play is a Canadian product that was obviously created with an eye to the American audience. It makes fun of cultural clichés on both sides of the border and lends credence to the claim that “Canadians’ ‘pragmatic, localized, episodic and fluid’ sense of themselves and their culture needs an ‘absolute, forceful, and mystified [American] Other’ for useful comparison” (Bodroghkozy 7). In the first episode, when the main character, Brett Parker (expatriate Canadian and successful player agent—with headquarters in New York, of course!) tells his American girlfriend he is going home to Hamilton, she insists that Hamilton is in Bermuda. When he argues “No, it’s in Ontario,” she flatly states that she knows perfectly well where it is, since she was there just last week. This is only one of several examples lampooning American arrogance and ignorance about things

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2 Paul Rutherford identifies a similar phenomenon regarding the ways in which Canadians have traditionally “consumed” American culture. Drawing on data from an H.F. Angus survey done in the 1930s, he notes that Canadian audiences saw Americans as “child-like,” “money-mad,” “lawless,” “corrupt,” “boastful,” and “less-cultured” than were the “quieter, slower in tempo, and saner in quality” Canadians.
Canadian. However, with typically “Canadian” self-deprecation *Power Play* includes comments such as the following: “A young ‘hip’ guy named ‘Ashley,’ plays a fiddle, wears a kilt—only in Canada!” (Episode Eight) and the first episode begins with a scene in which marketing “whiz” Parker vetoes a film clip on the grounds that it is “too Canadian.” This brief (two to three minute) vignette pokes fun at stereotypes (this time Canadian ones) while establishing Brett Parker’s persona as an alienated American “wannabe.”

The conflict that drives the series centres on the interactions of three principal characters. The team owner, “Duff” McArdle (played by Gordon Pinsent) is both a businessman (he also owns McArdle Industries) and a lover of hockey. He is torn because he knows that it would make good economic sense to move the franchise to an American city, but his heart is in his hometown, Hamilton. He hires Brett Parker to manage the team, and instructs him that his preordained task is to keep the team from moving. This pits Brett against Colleen Blessed, president of the Steelheads and CEO of McArdle Industries, who has been instructed, (again by “Duff”), to sell the team to the highest bidder.

“Duff,” himself, lives mainly in the past and is constantly reminiscing yet he has problems with his short term memory (implying that recent events are somehow tainted by their proximity to the present, and, as a result, are less meaningful). In the context of the plot structure of individual episodes, he functions as a kind of *deus ex machina*, setting near impossible tasks for Brett and Colleen, then sabotaging their chances of achieving their respective goals. In true soap opera fashion, a love interest develops between the two, both “hometown kids who’ve (more-or-less) made good” and both characters who must be reminded—in Brett’s case at times forcefully—of where they come from. In a pivotal moment, after seeing the house that Brett grew up in, and in which he lives once again, Colleen observes that: “Parker, you’re just like me” (Episode Ten).

It is clear, in *Power Play*, that the fate of a small market team is also tied

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3 Throughout the series, “Duff” keeps up a continuous patter of anecdotes and remarks on Canadian themes and icons. He recalls Canadian swimmer Marilyn Bell, “a pretty little thing when she wasn’t all pruney,” laments the cancellation of *Don Messer’s Jubilee*, refers to someone as “huffin’ and puffin’ like [former CTV news anchor] Harvey Kirk,” etc. In another instance he takes Brett Parker’s American girlfriend on a tour of Hamilton, pointing out and describing the buildings that used to be, as she, puzzled, follows him from parking lot to parking lot.
to national survival (Canada as “small-market” country) and a set of values. “Duff” Mc Ardle embodies old-style paternalistic capitalism displaced by the “new world order” and he remarks, in true Tory fashion, that: “Nobody knows why they do anything any more.... There’s just some things they have to hang on to” (Episode One, emphasis added). Family is represented by Brett’s teenaged daughter Michele whom he abandoned as a child (in favour of his career) but with whom, upon his return to Hamilton, he re-establishes a relationship. However, when he asks her if she wishes to call him “dad,” she demurs, explaining that “‘dad’ is something you earn, like ‘doctor’ or ‘major.’” Later, when confronting a young “cool” American hockey player who wants to date her she challenges his cynical attitude toward the game and asserts Canadian Difference: “Hockey is not just a ‘gig.’ It’s not just ‘show biz,’ not in this country” (Episode Seven, emphasis added).

While Brett and Colleen occupy the slots of protagonist/antagonist, the role of moral exemplar is shared by Brett’s secretary Renata (devout Catholic and daughter of Italian immigrants) and the aptly named “Terminal” Todd Mapletonor the Steelheads’ “enforcer” who is the archetypal Saskatchewan farm boy turned professional hockey player. Both can always be relied on to “do the right thing.” In Renata’s case this includes everything from acting as Brett’s conscience to singing the pre-game national anthem when Ashley McIsaac cancels. Todd tempers justice with “Canadian” deference when, after delivering a bone-crushing hit to an opposing player who had previously body-checked Steelheads’ star Mark Simpson into the boards, he politely remarks: “I’m asking you not to touch Mister Simpson” (Episode One). Later, when a rumour that one of the players is gay threatens to divide the team during their crucial drive to the playoffs, Todd “outs himself,” proclaiming his gayness to a locker room full of astonished Steelheads.\(^4\) In a gesture of solidarity, captain Simpson and several other teammates announce that they too are gay, and harmony is restored. In different ways, both Renata and Todd put the welfare of the Steelheads ahead of their own. These community values are all, in one way or another, opposed to

\(^4\) Todd’s name and title contain allusions to the Terminator films, starring Arnold Schwarzeneggar, hockey film Slapshot’s fear-inducing goon, Ogie Oglethorpe, and, of course, the Maple Leaf (forever).

\(^5\) Although it’s not stated explicitly, the context makes clear that Todd himself is not gay, but rather is protecting the identity of the player who is.
economic rationalism because, as the series makes clear, it actually would make sense (and dollars) to move the team south. McArdle industries is going broke and the money from the hockey franchise might save the business, which in turn would mean saving jobs for local steel mill employees. Even the players could benefit as a result of potentially higher salaries paid by big market franchises.

Canadian and Québécois nationalisms of the 1960s were, in large part, a reaction to perceived dominance of the U.S. over the politics, economics, and cultures of Canada. In the case of the latter (Quebec) there was also the dominance of “English” Canada and, internally, a repressive parochialism (Shek 45). The popularity of Power Play—at home, if not in the USA—suggests these sentiments still have some credibility. What is more, they may well have new life breathed into them by the triumphalist consolidation of American global hegemony “post-9/11” and, closer to home, the after-effects of a decade of NAFTA. The series Power Play is well named, since it is about both play (hockey) and power. It reminds us that:

The subordinate may be disempowered but they are not powerless. There is a power in resisting power, there is a power in maintaining one’s social identity in opposition to that proposed by the dominant ideology, there is a power in asserting one’s own subcultural values against the dominant ones. There is, in short, a power in being different.

(Fiske 19)

The “Empire Skates Back”

When the target audience is international, it is often the distinctively national, as well as class or racial associations that tend to be either de-emphasized or transformed into something that other audiences will relate to and identify with. And so it may be with the “Canadianness” of hockey. At its top levels hockey will most likely become a much less Canadian game. As this occurs, we will simply have to get used to the “loss,” if we want to enjoy the game’s presence in global popular culture. (Gruneau and Whitson 282)
In 1970, Brian Conacher, self-described “journeyman” hockey player, and son of sports legend Lionel Conacher, hung up his skates, stating that he was retiring “from the game I loved, but from the business I had grown to find unbearable” (Conacher 117). Today, many of the changes that Kidd and McFarlane predicted back in the 1970s have come to pass. The NHL continues to cater to “big market” (i.e. American) franchises. High player salaries, combined with fact that “hockey alone among the professional team sports doesn’t have a major revenue-sharing agreement” (Cruise and Griffiths 326), have meant that (with the possible exception of Toronto) Canadian franchises are facing the very real possibility of extinction. Season tickets to watch even small market teams like the Edmonton Oilers are already too expensive for many. These inequities, if not entirely produced, are certainly exacerbated, by economic globalization. There are parallels here with the poor of Brazil, who cannot afford to buy tickets to “the Sambodrom... where the annual carnival parade is now held” and who “have to watch on TV the spectacle that develops only a few feet away from them” (Morley 198). Even that simple, yet symbolic, object, the hockey stick, once hand-made by Mi’kmaq carvers, is now made of graphite and manufactured transnationally (Dowbiggin 4) while the players themselves are walking (or rather skating) billboards, augmenting their already inflated salaries with endorsement money. As one former hockey equipment manufacturer puts it “The world’s become a branded nightmare. It’s a branded nightmare out there” (Dowbiggin 93).

Does all this mean then that “the mystique of Canadian hockey...[will be] reduced—like so much of the heritage industry today—to the marketing of nostalgia”? (Gruneau and Whitson 283). The situation vis-à-vis professional hockey does seem bleak, but perhaps Canadians can take heart in the knowledge that, at the amateur level at least “our” game has proliferated on a global scale. As Dave Bidini’s Tropic of Hockey shows, in the case of hockey the local and global have come together in ways that might well astonish the hockey traditionalist. Bidini’s quest for the game “in unlikely places” was inspired by a sense of loss and the desire to

See hockey as it was before it became complicated by economics,

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*This is doubly ironic when one considers the folk roots and politicised origins of carnival.*
corporate lust, the ravages of progress; before the pro game had betrayed tradition for quick-buck teams and a style that relied more on chalkboard patterns than spontaneous, tongue-wagging river play. Maybe I could find a bunch of kids who’d never heard of Alexei Yashin, who’d never been prompted by a scoreboard [i.e. JumboTron] command. Maybe I could see hockey the way it was once played here: a game of passion, of the people. (Bidini xviii)

Bidini’s pursuit of a version of hockey not tainted by big money and bad management, (not to mention the “left-wing lock” and “the neutral zone trap”) takes him to China, Transylvania,7 and even the United Arab Emirates.8 It also provides him with the opportunity to play on a variety of foreign teams. His journey is successful in that he finds satisfying hockey and a sense of community in “the company of strangers,” and his departure from the UAE is marked by regrets:

During my seven days in Dubai I’d grown as close to the Falcons as any team I’ve played on... Hockey had allowed me a rapport with these strangers, my Arab brothers of the ice. Playing with the Falcons gave me the same feeling I’ve had countless nights while skating with the Morningstars,9 love and acceptance and brotherhood. But with one difference—I would never see the Falcons again. (214)

In Transylvania Bidini finds parallels with the symbolic power invested in hockey by Canadians:

Just as the Ciuc fans encouraged players from their community to fight against the imperialists from Bucharest, there was once a time when the dreams of citizens in Toronto, Montréal, and other Canadian cities were

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7 One of the chapters on hockey in Romania is playfully entitled "Where Spearin Comes From."
8 Some of the UAE teams’ names were derivative, e.g. "The Riyadh Rangers," some not, e.g. "The Dubai Mighty Camels."
9 The name of the team in the Westwood (recreational) Hockey League for which Bidini plays left-wing.
acted out by skaters with whom they shared a heritage, and whose teams wilfully triumphed over rival Americans. (252)

Bidini, however, suggests that this is how Canadian hockey “used to be,” but (perhaps) is no longer. The question then becomes since “true” or “pure” hockey is languishing at home, is its globalized equivalent still “Canadian”? The only reply I can venture takes the form of another question: are Coca-cola, McDonald’s, and baseball perceived as less American simply because these highly visible cultural symbols are now consumed globally? I suspect most of us would agree that they are not.

Bidini’s concern (and nostalgia for the “real” game) is understandable, but there are also encouraging signs on hockey’s “home front.” Gruneau and Whitson appear to take heart from “the extent to which the transformations of hockey at the top levels... have also been accompanied by a resurgence of interest at the recreational and community levels” (282). They add that:

Old-timers hockey and industrial hockey are booming, as are hockey programs for girls, women and special populations. There has also been a remarkable growth in organized ball hockey... and more and more children are playing a... newer version of ball hockey wearing “in-line” skates. At the spectator level, teams like the NHL Old-timers and the Flying Fathers continue to play to large crowds.... As the price of NHL hockey goes up in Edmonton and Vancouver there is increasing talk of bringing back junior hockey. Moreover, with the addition of Charlottetown the American Hockey League has six teams in Maritime cities thereby providing plenty of good quality hockey for a substantial regional Canadian audience. (282-283)

Gruneau and Whitson are speaking from the vantage point of the early nineteen nineties. Since that time women’s hockey in Canada has received an increasing amount of attention, culminating in the Canadian Women’s Team’s gold medal victory in international competition at Salt Lake City, following their disappointment in the previous Winter Olympics at Nagano. Although “women have been playing hockey for over 100 years” (Avery and Stevens 14), it is only
relatively recently that women’s hockey has begun to “come into its own.”

Today, many of those involved in women’s hockey are wondering, since the advent of “Olympics and world championships, what else is there to add to the sport? Maybe a professional league?” (Avery and Stevens 247). The argument has also been made regarding the likelihood of a large and enthusiastic audience for women’s hockey because “women have something more to offer—hockey the way it should be—graceful, precise and fast” (Avery and Stevens 247).

The idea of “hockey the way it should be” and “the way it was” persists in the minds of Canadians, as does the connection/association with national identity. When Canada won “double gold” in Salt Lake City, Canadians responded with passion.11 Television ratings for the Canada vs. U.S. men’s final (held Sunday Feb 24 2002) were the highest in the recorded history of Canadian programming. The following Monday, as returning athletes were met by fans in Canadian airports “the loudest cheers were reserved for the gold-medal winning women’s hockey team” (The Edmonton Journal, Feb 26, 2002, D4). That same day on CBC Radio One, This Morning host Shelagh Rogers summed up the Olympic hockey victories in one word: “Shakespearean.” The Canadian media were virtually unanimous in their enthusiasm, and well aware of what (symbolically) was at stake. As one reporter put it: “no matter how much sovereignty we’ve lost, no matter how little our little loonie is worth, we’re cool!” (The Edmonton Journal, Feb 26, 2002, D/4)

Where hockey is concerned, the NHL has, in a negative sense, functioned as a kind of Master Narrative and my suspicion is that, as hockey singular continues to become more plural, we will likely see greater access to, and enjoyment of, the game itself. The Olympics have confirmed that, in the eyes of many, the most exciting hockey today is not being played in the NHL. There is of course the ever-present threat that—an assuming it isn’t devoured by its own greed—the NHL will persist in “cherry picking” the best amateur players, as it has done for decades (Kidd and McFarlane). Furthermore, the possibility exists that the professional league would refuse to allow the players who “belong” to NHL

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10 Avery and Stevens point out that this is in part the result of “lawsuits in the 1970s and 1980s [which] allowed girls to legally skate alongside the boys” (14).

11 According to Shaltkin, “the mixing of sport and politics may be regarded as good or bad, but it is a fact that needs to be recognized in order to comprehend the political nature of the Olympics” (11).
teams to compete for their home countries in the Olympics. Also, whether or not hockey traditionalists would consider anything other than NHL hockey to be "world class" is a vexing question.

**Conclusion: Am I Canadian?**

According to John Ralston Saul, "Canada... suffers from a contradiction between its public mythologies and its reality"(1), and certainly the tenacity of the Canadian assertion that "hockey is ours" says something about the power of myths. Roland Barthes defines myths as signs which become signifiers of something beyond themselves, a "second order" of signification (Barthes; Fiske and Hartley), and sometimes that "second order" constructs narratives of collective identity: “Myths are stories that dramatise important themes and tensions in a culture” (Gruneau and Whitson 133). Myths about national identity are also politically loaded; they are “ideological” in the Althusserian sense, i.e. they describe “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” Are imaginary things real? Where questions of culture and consciousness are concerned, I believe they are. Benedict Anderson famously describes nations as “imagined communities,” but since all communities can be understood as being in some sense imagined, I think it would be a mistake to say that either local and national identities have been superseded by global ones. In fact they all exist simultaneously. So, to answer my question “Am I Canadian?” Yes—at least I imagine I am....

Whatever the future may hold in store for hockey, I am reasonably certain that Canadians will not be readily dissuaded from our stubborn insistence that it is "still" our game. In the future, however, our heroes will include Hayley Wickenheiser and Cassie Campbell as well as Howie Morenz, Gordie Howe, Rocket Richard, and the first transnational hockey star, global celebrity Wayne Gretzky. Meanwhile, beyond the confines of organised hockey, on the ground, in the places that Raymond Williams refers to as “rooted settlements” of “lived, worked and placeable social identities” (qtd in Hall S8) we are still making our own rules and celebrating, the stick-and-ice game of shinny. It's worth remembering—lest we forget that our "romantic" connection to ice and snow is
material as well as mystical—that as long as water freezes this will likely remain the case!

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“A New Canadian National Spirit”: Allegorical Miss Canada and the Occult Canadian State

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My paper is situated within debates concerning Canada’s imagined cultural nationhood and the state that is often concealed in cultural forms. I will pay particular attention to a post-World War I cartoon entitled “Evolution,” by A.G. Racey, from the Montreal Star in 1918 (figure #1). Since pre-Confederation, Miss Canada appeared frequently in editorial cartoons as an uncomplicated image meant to allegorize Canada. Newspapers and magazines where she was typically found include Canadian Illustrated News, Montreal Star, Montreal Herald, Grip, Saturday Night, Le Canard, and Quebec Chronicle. She also occasionally appeared in federal government publications, electoral campaign posters and private advertisements for consumer products. Earlier versions from the late nineteenth century depict her as the daughter of Britannia, so she is both an historically generated, Imperial icon and a home-grown allegory. Her roles as daughter of Britannia, mother of the nation, and symbolically of its “native” sons are not especially compatible, in the same way that filial piety and independence from familial constraints foster competing desires. Neither is Miss Canada’s beautiful, pristine, morally sound persona at ease with that which she mythically conceals—the complex and often indecorous workings of the growing nation state. In order to contextualize this image, I touch upon examples of earlier, classically inspired versions of Miss Canada appearing as an Imperial daughter of Britannia, showing how the 1918 cartoon chronicles a newly forged national spirit following Canada’s role in World War I.

As a cultural object signifying the nation, Miss Canada works to legitimize and naturalize the nation-state. As Susan Hayward points out, “[n]ationalist discourses around culture work to forge the link—the hyphen—between nation and state. Nationalist discourses act then to make the practise of the state as ‘natural’ as the concept of nation” (89). In Racey’s cartoon, the nation is proffered while the state is disavowed through allegory and myth. My reading of the cartoon hinges on this disavowal, this ideological move. My aim,
then, is to de-naturalize this version of Miss Canada, and, in so doing, foreground the occult historic Canadian state.

Because this allegory is so suggestive of typical national allegories such as Britannia, Marianne, Columbia, and allegorical ideals of Justice or Peace,¹ it is a singularly empty sign, a shell, or as Theresa Kelley puts it, “an impervious, material cover” (256). It is as if the same image of a voluptuous woman could be filled up with any national significance of choice. Allegory here is crucial to the work that ideology performs because these female historical antecedents are almost interchangeable with this woman, Miss Canada, who naturalizes nationhood through a culturally familiar face and figure. While a national allegory may parade as a “natural” signifier for the nation, it is anything but. Roland Barthes contends that as a second-order signification operating adjacent to language, myth turns history into nature; it “naturalizes” the image, emptying the allegorical signifier of contingency and of history (142). Myth may be described as a way that ideology works within representations, while allegory’s vacuity and interchangeability make it a suitable ideological tool because it empties the sign of particularity and of historical significance. Miss Canada’s accoutrements of shield, cornucopia, and maple leaf provide the only clues as to the location of this nation-space. The cartoon is a highly stylized, idealized depiction of Miss Canada recalling the classical drapery—complete with loose folds, a sweeping train and Empire waistline—of earlier cartoons from the 1870s. Miss Canada emerges from the clouds in a flood of sunshine, with one hand pointing heavenward, while the other arm encircles a cornucopia of the nation’s bounty. She balances a maple leaf shield against her leg. The caption, in the form of a cloth banner, reads: “A New Canadian National Spirit.” The cartoon illustrates great hope and promise following the devastation of World War I. The moniker “National Spirit” indicates a not unprecedented, but certainly unambiguous, invocation to nationhood: Canada has been forged into this shape of an independent, courageous, modern, and, above all, unified nation through its role in the Great War.

The state, occluded by this signification, has not, however, disappeared; it is merely hiding. The slow, violent, and painful process of “coming of age” into nationhood—including divisive, rancorous issues such as French language

¹ See Warner.
restrictions in Ontario schools, known as Regulation 17, and the conscription crisis—is sanitized, etherealized by the broad sweep performed by allegory and myth. These are the theoretical terms through which I will demonstrate the Racey cartoon’s ideological coordinates and show how the state is indeed a palpable presence behind the cultural form. The issues I bring to bear are particularly relevant examples of crisis in French Canada, in light of the fact that “Evolution” appeared in a Montréal English-language newspaper. I cannot bring this absence of the state and historical crisis into presence by examining the cartoon alone, even in relation to other cartoons of Miss Canada, but by an historical analysis that will foreground those moments that Miss Canada conceals.

Barely noticeable at the top of the cartoon is the title, “Evolution,” a word which points to a teleology. Who or what has Miss Canada emerged from, and what might she progress towards from here? I will leave the latter question for the moment, but as for the former, I point to a series of images chosen randomly as to their dates and artists but deliberately for the way that they show both the mother/daughter relationship between Miss Canada and Britannia and the familiar classical styling: drapery, wreath or helmet, shield or banner, sandals or bare feet (figure #s 2-4). Features of classical allegory connect these figures temporally to historical antecedents as far back as Greek mythological figures such as Athena or Nike, lending historical weight and legitimacy to them. Even the contemporary styling of the seated figures of Britannia and Miss Canada in “A Pertinent Question” (figure #2 Diogenes 1869), highlight the familial relationship while they are not fashioned in classical raiment. Although the daughter in these cartoons stands in for Canada, protection, admonishment, or approval offered by her mother, Britannia, registers as strong historical, economic, cultural, and political ties and obligations to Britain, but also as anxiety around identity politics. As an emblem of Dominion in the British Empire, Miss Canada occasionally strains at her yoke in the international arena where her powers are limited. Even in 1918, when Canada became a de facto nation on the killing fields of Europe, she was still a Dominion in a de jure sense until the Balfour Declaration of 1926² and, most especially, the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, when Canada was

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² “Lord Balfour’s proposal for a ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’ linked by no more than sentiment, tradition, and a common monarch” (Morton 212).
granted control of her international affairs. Considering the affirmation of classical styling in “Evolution,” how must we read this allegory of nation? To what does she owe her particular national character? After all, Miss Canada as a mother of nation or a contemporary “regular gal” was quite common in cartoon images, and had been for several decades, so the artist could have chosen a more modern version. Theorists of nation such as Benedict Anderson often assert that nations must be seen to be simultaneously ancient and hoary and new and pristine. This version of Miss Canada is ancient in her classical complements but altogether new in specific ways: her banner reading “A New Canadian National Spirit,” her emergence from the clouds in a flood of sunshine above the detritus of Europe evoking a “new day,” her bold return of the look back to the viewer, and even, to a lesser extent, her pert, contemporary hairstyle, all signify newness, freshness, modernity, progress, and promise. Thus the allegory, like most cultural representations of nation, contains the venerable past while it anticipates the limitless future.

In order to function as ideology and myth, however, certain aspects of the past must be selectively forgotten. These are the irremediable, divisive moments of recent history that are cloaked by myth. From this litany of ignominious and repressive state functions—Ontario’s Regulation 17, the Wartime Elections Act which disenfranchised “aliens” who took the oath of allegiance after 1902, a War Measures Act which enabled the government to “rule by decree” (Sprague 145), the introduction of income tax, and the Military Service Act of 1917 which paved the way for conscription—I have chosen to focus on Regulation 17 and Conscription because they fuelled an already explosive relationship between French and English Canada. Quebec nationalism solidified as a result of these wartime crises.

In spite of its origins in Ontario French language rights, Regulation 17 cannot be considered as separate from the war effort because it followed, helped to explain, and may perhaps have encouraged the drop in French-Canadian voluntarism in recruitment. As French Canadians felt more distant from what was described as a European, Imperialist War, they felt even more alienated by “the Prussians next door” in Ontario. Although separate, Catholic schools were a right guaranteed by the BNA Act, French language schools were not. They developed in Ontario through demographics and custom. In 1910, Bishop of London Michael Fallon complained in a meeting with Ontario M.P.P. W.J. Hanna that children in
these schools were not receiving the same standard of education as in public schools where English was the language of instruction. This report was leaked to the press, an inquiry launched by the department of Education and, in 1915, Regulation 17 was put into effect as an act of the Provincial Parliament. Later, “a Judicial Committee of the Privy Council upheld the law in 1916” (Sprague 144). What this ruling meant was that children had to be taught in English after the first form (grade two or three), and in French not more than an hour a day after that. Of the two inspectors who must visit the schools, one had to be English and the other was not guaranteed to be either French speaking or Catholic.

Reaction to Regulation 17 was swift, irate, and enduring, enlisting the help of articulate Quebeckers like Henri Bourassa and his vehicle, *Le Devoir*, where he argued:

> The whole problem of the French language and of French survival is being raised in Ontario. For Canada, for all in America, it is not on the battlefields of Europe that survival will be maintained or extinguished.... The enemies of the French language, of French Civilization in Canada are not on the beaches or the shores of the Spree; but the English-Canadian anglicizers, the Orange intriguers, or Irish priests. (qtd. in Copp and Tate 23)

In this admittedly persuasive and sweeping rhetoric, one can hear the resounding chords of ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious tensions. Despite appeals to the federal government, it quickly became apparent that the state provided no legal recourse for minority language rights at the provincial level.\(^3\) Short of re-writing the Treaty of Paris, in an impossible clarity of hindsight,\(^4\) politicians, clergics, parents, and sympathizers had only their protests to alleviate their sense of injustice. In *La Vérité*, French language pastors of Ottawa registered their protest:

> We rank it [Regulation 17] among those things which are so odious and

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\(^3\)And, for many French Canadians both inside and outside Quebec, the memory of the Manitoba Schools question, not to mention the Northwest Rebellion and the hanging of Louis Riel, was still keen.

\(^4\) See Senator Belcourt’s speech of 1912 (qtd in Zucchi 61).
disastrous that we could never try them. Who would blame the Belgians and the French for not having assented to testing under protest, the German Invasion? (qtd. in Zucchi 71)

Again the war is invoked as a parallel to the kinds of repressive measures experienced by French Canadians. While this comparison may not have helped their cause, particularly with Anglo-Canadians, it certainly draws attention to the rhetorical parameters commentators were willing to stretch in order to publicize a deep and profound injustice perpetrated by the Ontario provincial government and sanctioned by the Canadian state.

Conscription may have had its detractors, from western farmers to Wilfrid Laurier himself, but it was in Quebec and French-speaking communities outside that province that the idea of conscription was adamantly associated with repressive state functions and with outmoded attendance on Britain’s Imperial causes. Riots in Montréal on May 24th, 1917, followed the mere suggestion made by Prime Minister Robert Borden on May 18th that conscription would be necessary. Unable to convince Laurier to join with him in a Union government to expedite conscription, Borden chose a more devious if politically astute method of gaining public approbation. His Solicitor General, Arthur Meighen, drafted a Military Voters Act relaxing voting regulations for enlisted men and allowing wives, widows, mothers, and sisters of soldiers and other military personnel to vote, thereby expanding the base of support for the cause of conscription.  

6 The passing of the Military Service Bill in 1917 could not have elicited a more discordant response. As Susan Mann Trofimenkoff notes, Bourassa likened the bill to “national suicide for a foreign cause,” while The Globe “referred to conscription as fresh dedication to the cause of liberty” (389). Debate was so acrimonious that talk of Quebec’s secession was broached in that province’s legislature, but protest became more impassioned than even fiery rhetoric in the press could summon: three days of rioting in Quebec city in the Spring of 1918 was the most demonstrable evidence of discontent to date (Trofimenkoff 191). Carl Berger puts

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5 An inadvertent and welcome gain for the suffrage movement, which helped pave the way for further gains in enfranchisement following the war.

6 As described in Sprague 146.
the effects of this crisis most succinctly when he writes: "few events revealed the fragility of Canadian unity so dramatically as the conscription crisis of 1917" (vii).

By calling more attention to the French-Canadian side of this issue, I do not mean to suggest that the War itself was not a crisis, that there were no other dissenting voices against conscription, that not to address falling recruitment in some way would have been deeply disrespectful to those soldiers who had already lost their lives or those facing impending casualty, that Canada was the only country to enact conscription—indeed, Canada’s move followed that of many other nations. What I hope to provide is a sense of the widening crevasse between French and English Canada and an acknowledgement that, no matter how one defined one’s nationalism, a state apparatus and state functioning were proceeding apace. Regulation 17 and Conscription are only two highlights (or lowlights) of how such measures were experienced. Trofimenkoff provides an overview of these kinds of interventions when she states:

Justified by the war and facilitated by the War Measures Act, various controls from rationing to price fixing, from decrees against hoarding to those against loitering, probably overwhelmed the civil service more than anyone else, but they did indicate the state’s willingness to go beyond persuasion to actual coercion in directing the activities of its citizens. (388)

It is perhaps fitting that Racey’s cartoon of Miss Canada appeared so close on the heels of these historical crises, and in an Anglophone Montréal newspaper at that. Against such gaping disunity, she reads like a numinous cipher for a unified, integrated, national embodiment. This is the national identity that is delivered back to the viewer, in celebration of things remembered, in defiance of things forgotten. As a cultural representation, she must answer to those other historical representations coming to us in textual form from the realm of the “absent cause,” to borrow Althusser’s term for history. While allegory and myth can be held to account for the glossing of history and the adumbration of "state" in national cultural representations, the effect of de-naturalizing Miss Canada is to bring the hyphenated space into presence. She may look more freighted, and indeed complicated, than this alluring, ephemeral image at first allows.
As a postscript, I turn to another, idealized version of Miss Canada from the *Quebec Chronicle* in 1920 (figure #5) to show that the cartoon, “Evolution,” is not an isolated representation and to press the point that selective remembering and forgetting about World War I persisted beyond 1918. This allegorical Miss Canada will be recognizable enough in her dress and demeanor, but note the ways that the past has been exonerated and the future glorified: triumphant battles give way to vigorous industry. Again, mythic nature forecloses upon history and the state, paving the way for the forward progress of the nation.

Figures

![Figure 1](image-url)
A PERTINENT QUESTION

MRS. BRITANNIA: Is it possible, my dear, that you have ever given your cousin Jonathan any encouragement?
MISS CANADA: Encouragement! Certainly not, mamma. I have told him we can never be united.
A DECIDED PREFERENCE.

John Bull (as Miss Canada): "Thank you, my dear! Your favour is as welcome as the flowers in May!"

["The immediate point is that Canada has decided to shift her main market from the United States to the United Kingdom."—Times, Monday, April 28.]

Figure 4
Figure 5
Works Cited


Belcourt, Senator N.A. “Extract from a Speech by the Hon. Senator N.A. Belcourt at the Premier Congrès de Parler Français held in Quebec in June 1912.” Zucchi 61-65.


“Canada’s Share in War, Victory and Peace.” *Quebec Chronicle*. Frontispiece. 1920.


Mutant Mutandis: The X-Men’s Wolverine and the Construction of Canada

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Comic-book character Wolverine belongs to a superhero team based in the United States—the X-Men—and reaches the real-world marketplace through an American publisher, Marvel Comics. But like many of his teammates, Wolverine is not American—he is Canadian.¹ When Marvel announced a six-part series called Origin for 2001, advertised as the storyline² that would finally clear up Wolverine’s convoluted past, a coterie of Canadian comic fans worried that Marvel would revoke Wolverine’s Canadian citizenship. The Globe and Mail’s Simon Houpt, for instance, called Wolverine’s rumoured American naturalization “the loss of our greatest symbol of national pride.” Another comic fan warned, “if he’s not Canadian, it’s going to piss off a lot of Canadian fans” (Houpt).

This fear of “losing” Wolverine to the United States signals the fraught status of Canadian and American cultural exchange. After all, principal photography for the two feature films based on X-Men comics (X-Men in 2000 and X2 in 2003) took place in Canada, a fact that indirectly salutes Wolverine’s nationality but also directly exposes the “branch-plant” dependence of the Canadian film industry on the U.S.³ Indeed, Houpt implies that Marvel Comics’ designs on Wolverine’s past is a metaphor for the political and economic interplay between the two countries in general. The title of Houpt’s article, “Next: the Brawn Drain? Holy Softwood Duty! Can Those Wily Americans Really Be Trying to Steal

¹ For example, Nightcrawler is German, Colossus is Russian, Banshee is Irish, and Storm is U.S.-born but Egyptian and Kenyan by upbringing (Giant Size X-Men 1). Since comic serials are not paginated, references will be to comic titles only, unless otherwise specified.
² The terms “storyline,” “plot,” “story” and “narrative” appear in this paper with no attempt at distinguishing them. Usually I intend these terms to function as per Mieke’s Bal’s definition of fabula in Narratology: “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (5).
³ Much of the filming for X-Men took place in the Toronto area, while locations for X2 include Vancouver, Victoria, Alberta’s Kananaskis Country, Winnipeg, and Toronto. Both films, however, are U.S. film productions (www.imdb.com). For background on the economics of Canada’s relationship with the U.S film industry specifically, see Gisher and Manjunath.
Our Canadian-Born Superhero?，“ although in keeping with the article’s tongue-in-cheek tone, alludes to the seriously and frequently articulated perception of a threat to Canadian sovereignty from the United States’ superior standard of living and aggressive trade protectionism. According to this view, Wolverine’s Americanization signals the inevitability of Canada’s Americanization under current economic and political conditions.

And yet the Wolverine comics resist this kind of pat analysis. This resistance stems in large part from the nature of mass-market serial comic books. Because of the way serial comic books are produced, they tend to disrupt the coherence of master narratives, including, for example, the narrative of North American manifest destiny. In the case of Wolverine comics, national boundaries are porous enough for the Canadian superhero to slip across the border without a passport or Green Card, as though by virtue of a kind of super-heroic free trade. But that Wolverine must move across a border at all emphasizes the existence, indeed, the necessity, of borders in his stories. A tension thus exists between the representation of Canada as a controlled space within which Marvel can generate consumable stories, and the freedom that Wolverine stories have from such control.

Both formal and material characteristics of the comic medium bear upon my analysis. Current attempts at defining the term “comics” in North America usually invoke Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics. The definition is motivated by McCloud’s project to distance comics from their North American associations with children’s literature or low-brow escapism. As a result, McCloud’s definition strips content from form and asserts that comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, Understanding 20). This concern with form does not limit McCloud’s approach to simplistic structural analysis, however. In addition to his semiotic and reader-response approaches, McCloud is aware of how economics impacts comic art. His follow-up study, Reinventing Comics, contains a thorough analysis of traditional

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4 Recent Canadian books about Canada-U.S. relations include such titles as Goodbye Canada? Vanishing Borders and The Fifty-First State: Canadian Sovereignty at Risk?

5 For the background on the story of manifest destiny, see Stephanson’s Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right.
comic book distribution and production (56-79). His concern lies mainly with the impact of mass distribution and production on connecting creators and readers. He does, however, briefly mention the impact of serial publication on the stories themselves: the comic’s “short periodical installments... have dutifully adapted an efficient ‘just the facts, Ma’am’ approach to storytelling” in which “the choice of actions has been traditionally based on keeping the plot moving” (McCloud, Reinventing 37).

These two aspects of comic book publishing—mass production and periodicity—work in concert to produce the specific representation of Canada in the Wolverine comics. As is the case with other mass-market comic publishers, Marvel has hundreds of separate comic titles. It needs all these titles to ensure it has enough market saturation to survive (the axiom “publish or perish” rules comic publishers, too). To maintain themselves, comic serials must have reliable content-generating potential, since mass market serial comic titles need a constant supply of stories. In other words, Marvel needs numerous characters, temporal frames, and settings to feed its multiple titles. Unsurprisingly, Marvel claims to have 4700 proprietary characters. As matter of course, a popular character may star in more than one title, regularly guest-star in others, and have parallel appearances in graphic novels or limited series. Wolverine, for example, first appeared in Incredible Hulk 1.180 and 1.181. He then appeared as a regular in X-Men and in 1984 received his own limited series, Wolverine, followed by a regular series in 1988. Wolverine still appears in X-Men series titles (of which there have been several), and has guest appearances in many other serial titles and limited series, as well as separately published graphic novels. Authorship in such a

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4 DC Comics (Superman, Batman) is the other major U.S. comic publisher.
5 Marvel Comics has indeed faced bankruptcy in the past. See Croal's "Marvelous Makeover."
6 This number presumably includes non-X-Men characters, such as those who appear in Spiderman and Hulk titles.
7 Wolverine started its second ongoing series in 2003, called Volume 3, and restarting its issue numbers. The previous ongoing series that began in 1988 calls itself Volume 1. There is, therefore, no official Volume 2. To help avoid confusion, I refer to the 1984 Wolverine limited series explicitly as a limited series.
publishing environment is highly complex. Each comic issue has a creative team of writers, editors, and artists, but that team may frequently change over the title’s run. When multiple serial titles are involved, the “author” of Wolverine’s “story” becomes a very diffuse position indeed. On top of this, comics offer alternative universe storylines, in which characters are projected into possible futures or “what-if” scenarios. Time travel, a significant component in many comic narratives, provides the potential for even more characters, time spans, and settings: thus Wolverine has been in the past and in the future. Marvel has even launched a group of titles called *Ultimate* that revisits older storylines to modernize them for contemporary readers.

To propagate stories that favour sequentiality (cause-and-effect) and visual representation, or, as McCloud maintains, “just the facts” plots, another traditional element of stories must exist: conflict. Conflict in narrative derives from various sources: Mieke Bal itemizes the variety of story elements that constitute conflict—“confrontation,” “implication,” “complication,” even simply “event,” are other words she uses to describe the movement of elements in narrative (182-208). But on a planet in which geography is mapped out by statehood, statehood often participates as the source of the conflict that constitutes these plots (an environment as true in real-world history as in fiction). In a publishing venture such as Marvel’s, nation-based conflict has been a reliable nexus around which comic series stories play out. Nationhood and nationalism must remain stable enough to withstand continuous incursions against their sovereignty, yet they must also allow narrative to use the fact of nationhood to generate stories. For example: if in the first Wolverine comic, the United States peacefully annexed Canada, with no complications, Canada as a geographic space no longer would have served as well as a locus for conflict. To put it another way, if narrative participates in the construction of Otherness, comic serials, in producing narrative stories, must constantly assert the existence of the Other. As postcolonial theorists have taught us, national boundaries, borders that demarcate perceived political, racial, religious, cultural, or historical difference often serve as the ends or means for the construction of Otherness.11 The international nature of X-Men characters

11 Two oft-cited studies of nationalism and Otherness are Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration*. 
shows that Marvel has taken advantage of nationality in its publishing. (So has Wolverine: he has lived in Japan, Australia, and Indonesia as well as Canada.) In a sense, Marvel Comics needs Canada, among other nations, to assist in generating stories. The question I am formulating here, then, is: what kind of Canada results from the demands of narrative, creative production, and the economy of publishing and purchasing?

The character of Wolverine is a point around which this particular brand of nationality, “Canadian-ness,” coalesces.\textsuperscript{12} His civilian name is Logan, though even that is a pseudonym (see Origin). As all superheroes do, Wolverine has superpowers. Like all Marvel X-Men, these powers come from genetic mutations that remained dormant until puberty. His consist of the ability to heal his own wounds and illnesses very quickly. He also has claws on his hands that he can extend and retract at will. In addition, Logan was once experimented on and his skeleton bonded with the metal adamantium, the hardest substance in the human (Marvel) universe. Since his bones are unbreakable, he is very difficult to injure seriously. As Origin confirms, he was born in Canada (probably southern Alberta) at the turn of the twentieth century. (His mutant powers have slowed his aging, so despite being a centenarian he is physically in his thirties.) As an adult he worked for the Canadian government as a secret agent, but also worked for the CIA in the 1960s. At one point he was groomed to lead a new Canadian superhero team called Alpha Flight, but he joined the X-Men instead (Giant Size X-Men 1 and Uncanny X-Men 1.120). The Ultimate X-Men series complicates matters, since its mandate is to rewrite the history of X-Men. For example, the Ultimate X-Men version of Wolverine, unlike the mainline Wolverine, was initially allied with the evil Brotherhood of Mutants; he is also more villainous. Past traumatic experience, and deliberate memory tampering by the CIA and the Canadian government during the “Weapon X” experiments, means that he does not remember much of his distant past, although he at times recovers past memories or uncovers evidence of his past activities. He has a quick temper and can go into berserker-like rages. Logan likes to fight, and because of his superpowers, any fights he gets into are

\textsuperscript{12} Biographies of Wolverine are necessarily incomplete, since his “life” is so diffuse, but two basic sources for biographical information are Sanderson’s Ultimate X-Men and Marvel’s Web site (both the “bio” section and the dotComics edition of Ultimate X-Men at www.dotcomics.marvel.com).
extremely violent. Nevertheless, he is intelligent, loyal, honourable and well-liked by his friends. Paul Jay of Saturday Night magazine describes Wolverine as “a super powered Neil Young, with claws.”

It is easy to be cynical about Wolverine’s Canadianness. Evidence suggests that Marvel Comics had market forces in mind in their decision to keep Wolverine Canadian in Origin. Joe Queseda, editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, reports that the writers and editors were not sure whether or not we were going to make Wolverine a true Canadian or a transplanted one. Eventually, it was agreed that his back-story should stay consistent and that he should be in Canada. It was leaked that he would possibly be American, however, in order to get the fans talking about the book and to stir up some possible controversy. (“Climbing the Hill”)

Early story treatments, several of which appear in the book as appendices, set the first part of Logan’s life in the U.S., with Canada being the site of Logan’s young adulthood. Furthermore, Wolverine’s creators have not been Canadian. The notable exception to this is John Byrne, an Albertan who illustrated and wrote the early Wolverine stories. But since Marvel is a U.S. firm, the imagined Canada of Wolverine is for the most part the imagining of another country. At the level of language, a Canadophile will notice factual errors, such as misspelled place names (“Winnepeg,” “Edmunton,” and “Ottowa” all in Uncanny X-Men 1.139) and incongruous terminology (“Buffalo Woods State Park” instead of Wood Buffalo National Park in Wolverine 1.34) that could be chalked up to a careless copyeditor. At the level of story, however, the cynical Canadian quickly notes that Canada’s representation seems to consist completely of the usual clichés of Canada as an untamed wilderness, in keeping with traditional literary typologies of Canada as outlined, for example, in Northrop Frye’s The Bush Garden. In Wolverine 1.25, Logan describes Canada as “a vast beautiful place, with trees and lakes and mountains covered with snow... and clean, fresh air, and fantastic wild creatures, a place with beauties... and dangers, and all the wonders of nature.” In other words, it’s always winter; wild animals, such as wolves and bears, not to mention monsters like the Wendigo, threaten humans as a matter of routine; and Mounties
make up one-quarter of the population. Even when stories encroach on urban
centres, the communities are portrayed as frontier towns.¹³ In the Alan Davis–Paul
Neary limited series, Bloodlust, Wolverine is in Dawson City; he drinks beer at the
Yukon Mudslide bar, where standard apparel consists of lumberjack shirts,
hunting vests and toques. It’s minus 20 degrees Celsius, and the bar owner and the
lead local roughneck speak English with a broken French accent. Wolverine 1.34
takes place in a northern Alberta more reminiscent of the gold rush era than its
real time period, 1990, complete with a shoot-out at an Edmonton courtroom and a
villain named Athabasca Ike, who speaks English like the Yukoners in Bloodlust.¹⁴

Additional Canadian culture stereotypes do not come as a surprise, in
this context. In Wolverine 1.34, not only does Logan tackle Athabasca Ike, but he
also crosses paths with native mythological creature called Hunter in Darkness
and runs into a Mountie who fought with him in the Battle for Normandy. In
Wolverine 1.35 Wolverine goes fishing with Alpha Flight member, Puck (yes, as in
hockey puck), in Vancouver Harbour in a rowboat, wears his typical Canadian
garb—a plaid shirt and cowboy boots—and drinks Moose Breath beer. In Bloodlust
we see a couple named Jeannette and Nelson, a tribute to Nelson Eddy and
Jeanette MacDonald, stars of MGM’s notorious Mountie musical, Rose-Marie.¹⁵ In
Uncanny X-Men 1.110, Wolverine hits on teammate Jean Grey by asking her:
“Hey, Jeannie, you up fer some nine-ball an’ a round o’brew?” During a mission in
South America, Wolverine runs into a former colleague, Jack Bascomb of the CIA,
who catches Logan’s attention with “Look up, Hoser—You’re by-passin’ a free
beer” (Wolverine 1.19).

Bascomb’s veiled reference to “hoser” Bob and Doug McKenzie of the

¹³ A brief story arc in John Byrne’s era takes place in Calgary, Alberta (Uncanny X-Men 1.120
and 121). Likely due to Byrne’s influence (Byrne studied art in Calgary), Calgary receives
atypical treatment; even then, however, a key scene takes place at the Calgary Stampede
rodeo grounds (more frontier imagery) and it is the dead of winter.
¹⁴ Compare this with Sherrill Grace’s description of the typical plot of CBS’s 1955-58 TV
series Sergeant Preston of the Yukon radio plays: “The stories are fairly predictable: they are
set in the Yukon, of course, usually in or around Dawson City at the height of the Klondike
Gold Rush (1896-98); wicked machinations occur in such immoral spots as the Gold Nugget
Saloon; and the evil geniuses are often French Canadian seductresses, lying, greedy thugs
with names like ‘Pierre Renau,’ and duplicitous half-breeds. The incorruptible Preston,
however, always gets his man, despite fierce blizzards, numbing cold, and howling winds,
with the help of his wonder-dog King” (11-12).
¹⁵ See note 14.
Canadian sitcom *SCTV* seems self-consciously satirical; after all, *SCTV*’s writers invented the beer-guzzling, back bacon-eating McKenzies because Canadian broadcasting officials, for mysterious reasons, thought the program needed more Canadian content, even though it was produced in Canada and written and acted by Canadians (Pevere and Dymond 104-05). The possibility of satire, or at least of self-reflexiveness, in the comic’s depiction of Canada opens up the possibility that more is at work in these comics than hegemonic American capitalism. Indeed, although Canada as a geophysical entity is bound up in pop-cultural stereotypes, the comics also present Canada as a political and politicized state. It has a spatial dimension, for which the winter scenery can serve more or less effectively for most readers; but it also has the machinery of a real nation-state. Wolverine’s Canada, in other words, has, somewhat surprisingly, a government.

The government in Wolverine comics serves two specific functions that relate to the insistence on Canadianness. It protects against encroachments on Canada’s boundaries, and it provides a bureaucracy that administers the boundaries.¹⁶ On the coercive side, Canada has a strong military and paramilitary, contrary to the myth of the Canadian soldier as a peacekeeper, not a warmonger. Canada’s participation in warfare, for example, is made manifest in the fact that Logan is a trained soldier. He fought in the Second World War as a corporal with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion (part of the 6th British Airborne Division) at the invasion of Normandy (*Wolverine* 1.34 and 1.78) and in Greece with a resistance movement (*Wolverine* 1.106). Wolverine was a secret weapon for the Canadian government: as *Uncanny X-Men* 1.140 comments: “To the Canadian secret service, he was a gift from heaven. They turned him loose on all the dirty, brutal, necessary assignments no one else would touch.” When Wolverine quit Canada’s Department H to join X-Men, James Hudson, Weapon Alpha of Alpha Flight, tracks down his former pupil, uttering tough talk such as: “Vacation’s over,

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¹⁶ My distinction between coercive and administrative border control derive from my reading of Walter Benjamin’s “The Critique of Violence,” which posits two forces in the modern state that deal with the rules that govern its citizens—“lawmaking” and “law-preserving” (240-41). Benjamin’s formulation of these forces form part of an argument about state violence that does not enter into my examination of the Canadian government’s representation in *Wolverine*. Nevertheless, the idea that a state must have both normative (bureaucratic) and exceptional (coercive) control over its borders proved to be a useful model to describe the functions of government in these comics.
Wolverine. Control doesn’t know what you’ve been doing in the States, and they really don’t care. They just want you back. And I’ve been sent to get you” (Uncanny X-Men 1.109). Canada even has a “war room” in which then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau instructs James Hudson to fetch Wolverine back to Canada by force (Uncanny X-Men 1.120). One issue of Wolverine (1.9) retells the so-called Canadian Caper, a sub-event of the American embassy hostage-taking in Tehran (4 November 1979-20 January 1981), in which the Canadian ambassador, Ken Taylor, freed six of the American hostages through subterfuge on 28 January 1980. Later it was learned that the CIA was involved in planning the escape (Bodirsky). In the Marvel universe version of events, Iraqi militants hire mercenaries to take hostage the staff of the American embassy in Iraq and demand ransom money. Wolverine was involved in rescuing hostages; as he explains to one of the mercenaries years later, “There were a few Canadians in that American embassy. So when the Yanks opted to send in Delta Force, they contacted the Canadian government. I was government issue at the time. Called ‘Weapon X.’ They sent me along.” Wolverine, in other words, is a superheroic Ken Taylor, with the difference that Wolverine’s diplomacy consists of personally attacking the hostage-takers in Iraq and then on the fifth anniversary of the hostage-taking hunting down the remaining mercenaries and killing them.

Along with its ability to physically coerce agents of other countries, Canada has a government that maintains borders by bureaucracy and politicking. The Weapon X Project is jointly run by the CIA and the Canadian government as a sort of Cold War secret weapons program (“History”); James Hudson recruits Wolverine into Department H, the secret research and development arm of the Canadian Ministry of Defence; Alpha Flight is therefore part of a Canadian federal ministry (“History” and Alpha Flight 1.33). Pierre Trudeau makes it clear that losing Wolverine to the U.S. is not only an issue about sovereignty but also about asset management: “They have Weapon X—I want him back. We spent a lot of money and resources developing and training him. I won’t see it thrown away” (Uncanny X-Men 1.120). As expected, though, the federal budget (and perhaps an upcoming election) causes Trudeau to cancel Alpha Flight: “Times are hard. Money is in short supply. The house felt that super-heroes were a luxury the federal government could no longer afford.” Ever the politician, however, the prime minister offers his sympathy in textbook-perfect bureaucratese: “[W]hatever
happens, I pray you'll keep the welfare of Canada and her people foremost in your thoughts and actions. In time, they will come to respect—and honor—you and Alpha Flight, as I do” (Uncanny X-Men 1.140). Superheroes, after all, get to vote, too.

The depiction of a strong national government counters much of the vagueness caused by Canada's representation as a picturesque wintescape. In fact, upon closer examination, the cliché of Wild Canada serves a real narrative purpose besides as stuffing for the insides of a northern boundary. After the experiments in which his skeleton is melded with adamantium, Logan goes insane from the pain and degradation he suffers; he escapes the experimental complex, loses his memory of his past and wanders through the Alberta landscape (“History and Alpha Flight 1.33). Thus the landscape is connected with the absence of human social conditioning, a forgetting of his connection with human society. But Wolverine himself associates the natural world with his own so-called animal nature, the feral state he often falls into when he undergoes serious trauma or extreme anger. Thus Wolverine calls the Alberta wilds his "home," a "land as stark an' elemental as my soul" (Claremont, Wolverine 5). Whenever Wolverine needs to rest from his superhero duties, he often goes back "home" and lives outdoors. Canada's wilderness, therefore, is a metaphorized space of Wolverine's humanity encountering human cruelty; it is a liminal zone where the psychological stripping down of Logan the super-human reveals a man who has suffered at the hands of the humans who want to use him as a sub-human tool.

Wolverine is not the stereotypical quiet Canadian. But he is typical of the comic fans who express a national pride. In Simonson and Simonson's Havok and Wolverine: Meltdown, Wolverine corrects his Mexican attacker who calls him "Americano": "Ain't Americano, bub." When Havok complains that Wolverine's bar fight might "[set] Mexican-American relations back fifty years" Wolverine shrugs it off: "Not my problem, eh? I'm Canadian." In a World War II flashback, Logan corrects a Nazi who calls him an Amerikaner: "An' for the record, I'm Canadian! An' proud of it!" (Uncanny X-Men 1.268). As a character, Wolverine must have national pride, almost out of structural necessity, in order to justify the Canadianness that coalesces around him. Wolverine, of course, must reassert his connection to the signifier "Canadian" in order to establish the constellation of signifieds required for the maintenance of the serial narratives. Thus his patriotism
might be less than Canadian verisimilitude and more like narrative necessity; or, more like market appeal. And yet, as has happened with other popular culture figures, Wolverine has spontaneously taken on the role of marker of Canadian identity among some of the comics’ readership. Dave Howlett, a Canadian comic store owner, states, “We don’t have a whole lot of superheroes, so it’s nice that he’s popular, he’s revolutionary and he happens to hail from Canada.... Sometimes they call him the old Canucklehead. I’d hate to see that get lost” (Houpt). Even the creators behind Wolverine recognize the character as having significance beyond that of a fictional action hero: Houpt reports that illustrator John Byrne is rueful about the chance that Wolverine will not be Canadian in *Origin*. The point at which consumers might influence the content of the comics is a question that relates to ideas of authority, power, and the economics of material and symbolic circulation and production. But when the creators also associate their pop-cult figures with ideas outside the field of their fictional worlds, the notion of authorship becomes even more diffuse. If Simon Houpt can connect Wolverine comics with US-Canadian trade disputes, then the character’s mythos has extended outside the parameters of simple material production and become a social construct. The presence of fan Web sites, fan fiction, and of newspaper articles reporting annoyance at corporate meddling demonstrate that the authors of Wolverine include all those who engage in the discourse about Wolverine.

The irony of *Origin* is that, despite the title, it does not explain Wolverine’s origin. It opens up more questions, suggests more subplots, creates new characters, and complicates the histories of old ones. Wolverine has been subjected to numerous “origin” storylines—Barry Windsor-Smith’s *Weapon X* is a good example of one limited series that addresses Logan’s memory loss, and *Ultimate X-Men* offers a slightly different version about Logan that is difficult to reconcile with the mainline character. Even individual comics that scrape away at Wolverine’s past participate in this excavation project of Wolverine’s “foundations.” For instance, Wolverine first says he quit Alpha Flight to “get out from under the red tape and rigmarole” of the Canadian government (*Giant Size X-Men* 1). But years later, in *Alpha Flight* 1.33, Logan reveals that he left Department H to get away from James Hudson’s wife (and fellow superhero) Heather Hudson.

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17 *See for example Lewis’ *The Adoring Audience*. 
with whom Logan had fallen in love. This extreme variability in plot and character is possible only when narrative is seen as a loose affiliation of events that can be repeatedly revisited and re-examined.

Linda Hutcheon’s notion of modern parody points to a means to conceptualize the nature of this non-originary origin-hunting. For Hutcheon, parody is “repetition with critical difference, which marks difference rather than similarity” (6). Instead of pointing to a start, parody in Hutcheon’s terms denies the possibility of an originary moment by insisting on the variability inherent in creative imaginings. Serial comics seem to follow traditional modes of narrative, but in fact they call into question the idea of a stable text. Comic serials never end, never have a clear-cut boundary between beginning or end, or between one storyline and another (Frahm 180). The repeated ventures into the origin of Wolverine are perhaps a parody of all attempts at coming to the bottom of things implicit in the human drive to understand the world.

In this way, Canada the nation-state serves not as a immovable space but a constellation of events that ebbs and flows as necessity warrants—whatever that necessity happens to be at the time. Canada indeed is a place of boundary. That is—it exists for the boundary, parergonically, as Jacques Derrida argues, because boundary is both the marker of difference and of belonging. No wonder, then, that border-crossing is a significant event in Wolverine’s Canada-related stories. Wolverine says things about going to the Yukon, “up in the Klondike... where nobody knows... me” (Windsor Smith). In Wolverine 1.48 Wolverine participates in the bust of an American anarchist cell in Windsor, Ontario. On Wolverine’s arrival, a villain complains despairingly to his leader, “You said the pigs couldn’t come across the border, Andre!” Indeed, the American X-Men learn in Wolverine 1.66 that Canada gave Wolverine documents that gave him access to “anywhere.”

Perhaps Wolverine himself has best summarized his situation as Canadian centre. Wolverine says he’s in Canada because “I had this wild longin’ to run through the forests of my yesterdays.” But he says this place is “no hundred acre wood” with “cute lil’ teddy bears.” He calls it “the place where the map ends. Here there be monsters” (Wolverine 1.78). Wolverine is wearing a wolfskin on his back, riding a Harley Davidson motorcycle and wielding a samurai sword, as though defying attempts at locating him in a particular place at the same time that
he insists that the Canadian forests define him. Canada is a netherworld, uncharted, unmarked, slipping boundaries of time and culture.

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Hey Buddy, Wanna Buy a Culture?

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I am a Newfoundlander. I am saying this not as an apology or as a claim to some sort of authority but largely to clarify who the “us” is I will be referring to from time to time.

This paper represents some of my first tentative steps into my Doctoral Thesis on Newfoundland culture. My investigation is primarily focussed upon the literature that has been produced by and about Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders since Confederation with Canada. But I am also “reading” other “texts”—including the tourist industry—which I discuss a little here. My main concern is with the way Newfoundland is being “packaged” for consumption by both Newfoundlanders and non-Newfoundlanders. Two otherwise unrelated instances last week offered interesting examples of this particular packaging. The first event was the complete shutdown of the North Atlantic cod fishery in Newfoundland. The second event was Justin Trudeau’s defence of Wayne Johnston’s The Colony of Unrequited Dreams on CBC Radio’s Canada Reads program. In the discussion and debate surrounding both occurrences, a particular and familiar picture of Newfoundland became evident: Newfoundland is a place of toil and hardship populated by a proud but put upon people whose culture pits happiness and humour against lament and loss. It is the repercussions of the culture of loss that I would like to discuss here today.

Last week, CBC Radio gathered together a panel of writers and celebrities to select the one Canadian text that every Canadian should read. The panellists of this second annual Canada Reads forum, each championing their own selection, eliminated a book a day until only two works remained: Hubert Aquin’s inspired and impenetrable Next Episode, and Wayne Johnston’s epic tale of Newfoundland, The Colony of Unrequited Dreams. Much to the surprise of many listeners, and indeed to the panellists themselves, Aquin’s stream-of-consciousness scramble was selected to be the book prominently displayed just inside the door of every Chapter’s outlet for the next year. More surprising for me however, was my reaction to the announcement as I drove along the St. John’s waterfront so eloquently and romantically described by Johnston in his novel.
Despite the fact that I had visited the Canada Reads website several times to registrar my vote for The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, and despite the fact that Johnston’s work had taken up a large part of my academic life for the past year, I was both excited and relieved to hear that his book would not be the one “Canada Reads.” Assessing my reaction, I realized that my joy at hearing this news did not grow out of some selfish desire for Johnston not to grow any larger in his popularity and somehow remain forever our writer rather than become another Canadian writer. My desire for Colony to lose—well, place second—had nothing to do with Johnston or even the novel itself—it had everything to do with packaging.

Panellist Justin Trudeau, who championed The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, described Johnston’s novel as “a story of barren rock upon which nothing was expected to grow... least of all a people as tragically beautiful and noble as Newfoundlanders” (Canada Reads). According to Trudeau, Johnston’s part-fact, mostly-fiction account of the life of Newfoundland’s first premier, Joseph Smallwood, is a story of “nobility maintained regardless of disappointments,” a tale of “Herculean tasks performed by the smallest of men, usually to little effect.” In essence this novel, and indeed every Newfoundlander, is surrounded by a particular aura of nobility that comes only to those who commit themselves to lost causes—a sort of loveable loser stigma. It could be argued that Trudeau missed the point of Johnston’s novel—that The Colony of Unrequited Dreams is more about dismissing the traditions of lament and loss than it is about promoting a profound sense of inborn island malaise and fortitude. One can hardly fault Trudeau for this romantic though dismal treatment of Newfoundland—we Islanders have been promoting this image for years.

Sociologist James Overton notes how a “promotional pamphlet issued by [Newfoundland’s] Department of Industrial Development” promotes Newfoundlanders as a “hardy, fun-loving race”—“tender, tough, frivolous, fearless, simple, and sophisticated people who keep working regardless of... suffering or hardship” (Overton 7). It is this suffering and hardship that has been the focus of much of the literature of the island since Confederation in 1949. Prominent among these works is Bernice Morgan’s Random Passage. The novel of Irish settlers living, struggling, and dying (always dying) on Newfoundland’s unforgiving North coast was turned into a CBC mini-series last year and is the most recent treatment of a foundational myth which establishes a community and culture based on what
Ernest Renan terms “suffering in common” (Renan 19). As Renan puts it “[w]here national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort” (19). Morgan’s text shares a textual unconsciousness with many other Newfoundland novels that create a tormented, troubled yet ultimately cheery and (marginally) triumphant Newfoundlander. Like the stunted and gnarled trees that cling to the sea-swept cliffs of our island, so too do Newfoundlanders hold tenaciously to life in this bleak land Trudeau claims is full of “bogs and rocks and caribou and emptiness.”

This construction of a culture of defiance and determination is a topic more suited for post-colonial studies, and Homi K. Bhabha offers an explanation for such a creation in Nation and Narration. “Culture [is] a strategy of survival,” Bhabha writes. “Cultural identification” occurs only when a society is “poised on the brink of...the loss of identity or [what] Fanon describes as a profound cultural ‘undecidability’” (Bhabha 304). It is only when people are massed together for the means of identification and absorption into a greater community that “culture” becomes an issue. This “culture” offers a much desired difference and identity to a people on the edge of consumption.

Newfoundland teetered perilously over this abyss of assimilation following Confederation with Canada. In his essay on the subject, Overton regards “Newfoundland culture as a construct” (15) and asserts that this culture only came into being to combat the feelings of alienation and financial desperation that plagued Newfoundland before and after Confederation. This theory is given credence when one considers how Newfoundland culture and identity perpetuate an “imagined community” that offers comfort and belonging to the individual while—thanks to the tourism industry—providing the province with its primary source of income. Newfoundland culture fits adequately into Bhabha’s notion of culture as a combative construct meant to fiercely protect the self against the encroaching other. One need only look at the literature and music that was written around the time of Confederation to witness the clear indication of a pack identity forming in Newfoundland. What follows are a few excerpts from “The Anti-Confederation Song”:

Hurrah for our own native Isle, Newfoundland—
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of her strand;
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf,
Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!

Would you barter the rights that your fathers have won?
No! let them descend from father to son.
For a few thousand dollars Canadian gold
Don’t let it be said that our birthright was sold.

The perceived loss of identity inherent in Confederation with Canada inspired many Newfoundlanders to defend and deify their culture. Yet the source of this culture is uncertain. In his essay, “Looking backwards: the milieu of the old Newfoundland outports,” Newfoundland historian Patrick O’Flaherty claims that culture “is an adjunct of leisure” (O’Flaherty 3), a manifestation of an anxiety presented only to those “with a full belly and the prospect of keeping it full” (3). Leisure and security were unknown to many pre-Confederation Newfoundlanders and therefore Newfoundland “had no culture at all, because in it deflection of the attention away from ‘everyday urgencies’ was almost impossible” (3).

In light of O’Flaherty’s argument, it is necessary to consider the possibility that Newfoundland culture is not a homegrown element but rather an identity that comes from the outside. In his oft-irreverent text, Surviving Confederation, philosopher F.L. Jackson writes: “Newfoundlanders had no idea we were living on a cultural goldmine until the anthropologists came along and told us so” (Jackson 5). In the 1960s, Newfoundland became the focus of intense scientific, anthropological, cultural, and even medical scrutiny. Untampered with since their ancestors left Ireland and England hundreds of years before, the people of Newfoundland were an anomaly of purity possessed of particular customs, speech patterns, and even illnesses that have gone unchanged for centuries. Suddenly folktales and folk songs had to be recorded and preserved. A peculiar form of sleep paralysis, known locally as “the hag” and apparently only experienced by Newfoundlanders, was entered into medical journals. Newfoundlanders even got their own Dictionary of Newfoundland English, a valuable resource (now on-line) to which a non-Newfoundland can turn if they ever need to find the definition of a “sleeeveen.” Value had suddenly been conferred upon Newfoundlanders and the only thing they had to do to attain it
was be themselves! Almost overnight, according to Jackson, St. John’s was overrun with want-to-be fishermen and baymen who eagerly “became experts on a traditional life they barely knew” (8). Newfoundland satirist Ray Guy coined the phrase “Newfcult” to describe this phenomenon in which Newfoundland became regarded as unique and unspoiled—a bastion of folksy humanity on the edge of the technocratic, metropolitan world. Newfoundland became the destination of hippies who wished to “tune out” the modern world of money and industrialization and “turn on” to the Newfoundland world of rural simplicity, a world whose inhabitants were “poor and cute.” This initial interest gave bloom to the tourist industry which, following the collapse of the cod fishery, became the leading source of income for the island.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador website proudly proclaims “[i]n the past five years Newfoundland and Labrador has distinguished itself as Canada’s fastest growing tourism destination with an increase in visitation of 37%.” The website attributes this rise in popularity to the fact that thousands of tourists each year are compelled by what is “unique and different in [Newfoundland] culture” to visit the province and experience its “significant history, distinct culture, and genuine people.” Newfoundland culture and identity have become valuable commodities in recent years and the province and its people are unabashedly peddled on this website as “[t]he Far East of the Western World.” Quaint, different, and marketable, Newfoundland and Labrador is possessed of a particular culture and people that make it “one of the most unique ‘new’ destinations in the world.”

As one browses through this website encountering phrases such as “Far East of the Western World,” “unique people,” and an invitation to “[c]ome to Newfoundland and Labrador, a place that stays the same, but changes you forever” one begins to see a strange form of internalized Orientalism in which Newfoundlander are portrayed much like Edward Said’s Orientals: mysterious, unchanging, and ultimately inferior. As Newfoundlanders embrace their uniqueness and difference, they accept the very labels of otherness and queerness conferred upon them by occidental outsiders who regard Newfoundland as an anthropological aberration, a “neo-primitive white culture” (Overton 10) on the edge of the occidental world.

There is an historical precedent for this Newfoundland Oriental dating
as far back as the first Europeans to settle the island. Patrick O’Flaherty’s *Old Newfoundland: A History to 1843* contains many documents written by the captains of English fishing vessels describing the new inhabitants of the island. According to one captain, “an Englishman transplanted was no longer the same kind of Englishman” (O’Flaherty 54), and there was little left in the unruly Newfoundlander of the noble Englishman from which he was descended. These Newfoundlanders represented a form of Caliban culture—a collection of lesser humans whose labour benefited the Crown but whose conduct out of sight of the British authority was deplorable. O’Flaherty summarizes the British opinion of Newfoundlanders in his text: “The inhabitants [of Newfoundland] were unruly, took up the best places for fishing and debauched the seaman by selling them wine and brandy.... Newfoundland, once the summer ended [and the British authorities departed] was pictured as a cesspool of vice, laziness and drunkenness” (43). This opinion grew until the 1930s when the British Crown commissioned the First Baron Amulree to conduct an investigation into the character and economic well being of Newfoundlanders. The Amulree Commission ruled that the then country of Newfoundland was commercially and morally unfit to rule itself and revoked the island’s independence. The ruling was the ultimate blow for Newfoundlanders and forever placed the character of these island people under a shade. Johnston discusses the repercussions of this ruling in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams:*

A contagion of self-debasement swept the land, as if we had lived in denial of our innate inferiority for centuries and at last we were owning up to it. There was more than a hint of boasting in it, a perverse pride in our ability to do anything, even fail, on so grand a scale. Whether our distinguishing national trait was resourcefulness or laziness, ineptitude or competence, honesty or corruptibility, did not seem to matter as long as we were famous for it, as long as we were acknowledged as being unmatched in the world for something. (338)

Historian Jerry Bannister uses the term “psychic wound” (18) to describe the mark left on Newfoundlanders by this and so many other disappointments. Newfoundlanders adopted a form of ironic tolerance toward their lot as life’s
losers. As a fisherman explains to the representatives of the Amulree Commission in Johnston’s novel, “I don’t know why we acts like that. We’re just low-born I suppose, we don’t know no better” (338). The “Newfie joke” was born shortly after Confederation, the butt of the joke always being a hard-working, fun-loving Newfoundlander whose peculiar and backward way of looking at the world always provided a proper punch line.

The greatest joke of all seemed to be that Newfoundlanders were fighting a losing battle since the beginning. Past residents of this island, among them the Great Auk and the Beothuk peoples, eventually disappeared from this island and it seemed as if we too would someday exhaust ourselves. The tourist industry “saved” Newfoundland by focussing on its demise. Newfoundland became an anthropologist’s dream for it represented the opportunity to study a culture as it was dying out! Tourists should rush to this island to witness this quasi-primitive culture while in its death throes. The tragic nobility Trudeau speaks of was firmly established by 1997 when Newfoundland celebrated the five hundredth anniversary of its discovery by John Cabot. Everywhere tourists turned they were confronted with reminders of the loss Newfoundlanders had suffered: the extinction of the Beothuk, the loss of almost half of the Newfoundland Regiment at the Battle of the Somme in World War I, the collapse of the fishery and everywhere—everywhere in the songs and stories of these Newfoundlanders—was the lamentable but inevitable loss of a way of life. Everything became heightened during this time: every song became a preservation of culture; every time a bow touched a fiddle an authentic Newfoundland experience was taking place.

A culture of uncertain origins which at times depicts Newfoundlanders as survivors, at other times as Quixotic knights on a fool’s errand, Newfoundland’s culture has become one of performance—the performance of pseudo-events and pseudo-realities based on a “heroic age” long gone and a heroic work no longer practised. The greatest irony and perhaps the best “Newfie joke” is that the actor who represents our culture through his depiction of a fisherman in a pageant or festival has a steady job while the fisherman he is portraying is forced to leave the island and find work elsewhere. Yet the trope of the fisherman remains an immovable part of the Newfoundland psyche. Various other identities and events have been staged and recreated so that Newfoundland may maintain a defined
sense of self and remain marketable in the tourism industry. Every year seems to be the anniversary of some defining moment in the creation of Newfoundland. In 1997 we celebrated the five hundredth anniversary of Cabot’s “discovery” of Newfoundland; in 2000 we celebrated the one thousandth anniversary of the Viking landing on the Northern Peninsula. Not only are the dates and locations of these events highly contestable, it is also probable that neither of them actually happened. Fabrications based on guesstimates and wishful thinking, such pseudo-events draw many tourists to the island but also go a long way in defining Newfoundland for Newfoundlanders.

Newfoundlanders seem desperate to remain unique and have done so through the promotion of their distinct culture. While the preservation of folk songs and the recreation of fishing villages has gone a long way in maintaining what Bannister calls a “shared historical narrative” (4) and has ensured that Newfoundlanders remain a distinct and definite society within Canada, this focus on recapturing the past has also led Newfoundland into a period of stagnation. According to Bannister, the downside of this “shared historical narrative,” is that “[r]ather than triumphing over their history of oppression...Newfoundlanders are haunted by it” (4). Several theorists who have studied the tourism industry, and, in particular, the host community’s maintenance and recreation of a unique culture, have nothing good to say about keeping the past on life support. Mike Robinson, editor of Tourism and Cultural Conflicts cites Classen and Howes Cross Cultural Consumption when he asserts that “[t]he simplistic and traditionalistic imagery of ‘otherness’ used in product promotions and travel advertisements hinders the inhabitants of the countries concerned in asserting an identity as modern, industrially developed or developing peoples with complex lifestyles” (13). John Urry, in The Tourist Gaze writes that “the development of heritage involves the stifling of the culture of the present” (13).

Following the delivery of his paper at last month’s “The Idea of Newfoundland” symposium, Jerry Bannister noted that Newfoundlanders’ obsession with their noble and tragic past may simply stem from the fact that it is easier to study and bemoan our past than it is to deal with our present. Theodor Adorno would agree with him. According to Adorno, “pseudo-activities” such as the retrieval and recreation of the past are “spurious and illusory activities” (168) which provide a distraction for people who have a “dim suspicion of how hard it
would be to throw off the yoke that weighs upon them” (168). Newfoundlanders have distracted themselves with the past to the point that their island has become a museum and each Newfoundlander a curator and a representative of a culture that is not lived so much as it is studied and performed.

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Montreal: Its Role in the Beginnings of Modernism in Canada

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When considering the dynamics and factors that gave birth to modernist writing across Europe and North America, it seems that in each case, a major city—most often a capital—appears to have drawn writers, artists, and musicians who, when mixed together, appear to have fermented a unique and strange dynamic that energized and fuelled creative expression. In France, it was Paris; in Germany, Berlin; in England, it was London; in the States, of course, New York. And here, in Canada, it was Montreal.

Why Montreal? Louis Dudek—himself a major modernist poet, has pondered this question, given that although it is the largest city in Canada, Montreal is not a central metropolis in relation to this country in the way that Paris or London are cultural capitals of their countries. The thin ribbon of Canadian life stretching along the border of the U.S. from Pacific to Atlantic could hardly have a physical centre of any kind. The bow of the ribbon is really in Southern Ontario, and Toronto is the economic knot that keeps it neatly tied. Montreal, moreover, is predominantly French in population, so that poetry in English would hardly be expected to find its natural home here. The English-reading audience for poetry in this city is veritably non-existent, and the newspapers habitually ignore poetry in their review pages. (8)

Yet, despite these facts, almost every major modernist Canadian poet either grew up in, lived in, or spent a considerable amount of time there during his/her formative writing period. From Frank Scott and A.J.M. Smith, to A.M. Klein, P.K. Page, Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood, Alden Nowlan... the list goes on. But we still need to answer the question—why Montreal?

As I began to look more deeply into the issue I came to realize that the
reasons Montreal was the vortex of Canadian modernist poetry were many and multifaceted. Apart from the enormous political, economic, and social demographic shifts that took place in the city during the early part of the century, and the radical shifts in ideology that encompassed all aspects and all levels of Quebec society, the city was also a well-established port, located on a major shipping route, and therefore a highly industrialized and commercial centre. Because it was a port, Montreal welcomed huge numbers of immigrants after the war, who settled where they arrived. As a result, the city became a kaleidoscope of diverse communities and ghettos—the French, the English, the Jews, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Irish, the Greeks, the wealthy, the poor. Each group had its own part of Montreal with streets serving as boundary markers that separated it from the next.

This, in turn, contributed to the city’s unique air of cosmopolitanism, with all the various older European influences being brought to bear on its architecture, streets, markets, and courtyards; its magnificent churches that tower above everything, and its people’s seemingly innate sense of taste and flair.

Another major factor in the rise of modernist poetry in Montreal was *The McGill Fortnightly Review* (McGill University’s newspaper), and *The Canadian Mercury*—two publications that in the 1940s, through the work of Frank Scott and Arthur Smith, established a new literary outlet for poets and writers who were experimenting with new techniques and forms in their writing, and who were unable to find publishers willing to take a chance on them.

In addition to all these things, William Weintraub argues that what set Montreal apart from the rest of the country was that it was a “wide-open town, uniquely sinful in strait-laced Canada” (61) especially with respect to gambling and prostitution. Because of wide-spread and deep-rooted corruption in the Montreal police force and municipal offices, a unique relationship developed between them and the city’s criminals during the thirties and early forties. Weintraub states that “Raids on Montreal’s many illegal gambling houses carried out by the well-bribed police, were an elaborate charade, designed to persuade the public that something was being done to combat rampant vice in the city” (59). Apparently, when police were ordered to shut down a residence in which gambling was going on, they would affix a padlock to a pre-arranged fake door or
cupboard door leaving the front door untouched and seizing an unplugged phone as gambling equipment. During a time in which

virtually all forms of gambling were forbidden [in Canada] where there were no legal casinos or lotteries, Montreal was an oasis in the desert for men and women who wanted to try their luck. The map of the city was studded with establishments that offered horse betting, Sports betting. Roulette, blackjack, chemin de fer, baccarat, craps and, of course, barbotte, the hugely popular dice game unique to Montreal. (Weintraub 61)

Although these activities were illegal, they went on unhindered in Montreal. Consequently, in the mid-1940s, it was estimated that there were, perhaps, nearly two hundred or more major gambling establishments operating in and around the city. Furthermore, each of these contributed, through payoffs and "fines," to a substantial income for the city's treasury. In recompense, targets of raids were always warned before the police arrived, and professional straw men and women, who took legal responsibility for their bosses' criminal activities time and time again, were treated as first-offenders by the police who arrested them. Rather than going to prison, as anyone who broke the law more than twice was supposed to, these men returned to their place of business the next day.

In addition to gambling, Montreal was also well-known for the number and variety of brothels it supported. "Again, in the city there was a long tradition of amiable relations between prostitutes and the police" (Weintraub 63). In fact, a few houses down from No 4 Police Station, stood 312 Ontario, the infamous three-storey brothel in which seventy-five to eighty prostitutes worked around the clock. While more chic establishments existed uptown, the red-light district was made up of bordellos on DeBullion Street (made famous by Irving Layton’s poem), south of Dorchester, and north toward St. Catherine, as well as on all the neighbouring streets in-between.

Many members of the police force were frequently customers at the residence they would pretend to raid; and they provided protection and support to the prostitutes who found themselves up against more aggressive or intoxicated customers. Furthermore, brothel owners, or Madames, who were well-known,
often wealthy, flamboyant figures in the city, were treated with warmth and respect by lawyers, clerks, and judges at the courthouse, as they paid the fines for their girls to be released.

In addition to these more sordid details, prohibition was in place in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s so leading gangsters, such as Al Capone, frequented Montreal. Even though it was illegal to drink alcoholic beverages in public places in Canada, Montreal boasted at least fifteen major nightclubs and twenty-five or more smaller lounges, all of which served liquor along with flamboyant floor shows. Most of these establishments were located on or near Montreal’s main strip, St. Catherine Street, and they included the Venetian Gardens, the Pagoda, the Jardin de Danse, the Palais de Danse, the Brass Rail on Drummond Street, and the Frolics on St. Lawrence Main. During the 1940s new owners replaced the old names with the Latin Quarter, the Esquire, the Maroon Club, the Samovar, the Copacabana, the Top Hat, the Tic Toc, and the Normandie Roof. Big Band and Dixieland Jazz came first to Montreal where it was in full swing by the 1940s, and could be danced to at the Palais d’Or, the Verdun Pavilion, the Black Sheep Room at Ruby Foo’s, the Bellevue Casino, and Dagwood’s. It was at the Chez Maurice Danceland, however, above Dinty Moore’s restaurant on St. Catherine Street, that the great big bands played, including Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Cab Calloway and Stan Kenton. In Westmount, at Victoria Hall, Johnny Holmes and his orchestra played on Saturday nights, attracting large crowds and beginning the careers of such legendary musicians as trumpeter Maynard Ferguson, and pianist and trumpeter Oscar Peterson, who grew up in St. Henri, and attended Montreal High School. The most famous of all the clubs, however, was the El Morocco, which was where Lili St. Cyr most often performed.

Lili St. Cyr was not just a stripper; she was an actress and an artiste. When she arrived in Montreal in 1944 for her first performance, she immediately set about doing things differently. While other girls offered the usual bump and grind routines which, in themselves, were popular enough in Montreal at the time, Lili seduced her audiences. Her performances involved languorous music, complex stories, and exotic costumes and props. And Lili herself was very beautiful. For seven years, until Las Vegas began to beckon as the new entertainment centre, Lili
added an extra spice to Montreal, drawing businessmen and curious fans from across Canada to see her, and, in return, Montreal offered Lili a special haven.

Lili was one famous name among many others at the bars she loved. The frequenterers after her last show were such individuals as hockey player Boom Boom Geoffrion, boxer Rocky Marciano, Eddie Quinn, the famous promoter, as well as wrestler Yvon Robert. Other big-name entertainers included Milton Berle and Dorothy Lamour; Harry Ship, who owned the Chez Paree and brought Frank Sinatra to Montreal. Red Skelton appeared at the Tic Toc, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis performed at the Esquire, and Sammy Davis Jr. worked at the Chez Paree. In addition, Edith Piaf came to Montreal to sing at the Sans Souci, and Charles Aznavour played the Faisan Dore.

Racism was rampant in up-town Montreal, where only white performers were allowed to entertain, but down on St. Antoine Street and Mountain Street, black clubs, like Rockhead’s Paradise and the Café St. Michel, which imported black musicians and entertainers from Harlem, were gaining popularity among white and black audiences alike. And it was at these clubs that a new kind of jazz could be heard. At Café St. Michel, Louis Metcalf, who had played trumpet with Duke Ellington’s orchestra, brought bebop to Montreal.

Added to all these enticements was an unending array of restaurants that could please every palate—from specialties made by French-trained chef, Francois Bouyeux, which catered to the tastes of wealthy epicureans, to corned beef and cabbage served at Dinty Moore’s. Slitkin’s and Slotkin’s offered late-night dining and drinking, as did Ben’s Delicatessen, which was open twenty-three hours a day. On the Decarie strip, numerous restaurants opened that offered all kinds of different types and prices of foods. The most famous of these was probably Ruby Foo’s, which offered fine European food, in addition to a new gourmet-style Asian menu, to its several hundred diners—Ruby Foo’s could seat 700 customers at a time, and it was often filled to capacity.

All around, in the 1940s and 1950s, in every aspect of the city’s life—its economics, its politics, its crime, its music, its nightlife—Montreal pulsed with energy and life. It is no wonder, then, that many of Canada’s finest writers of the period drew inspiration from the place. Gwethalyn Graham published Earth and High Heaven in 1944 to literary acclaim, winning the Governor General’s Award (it is no longer in print). It exposes the deep-rooted anti-semitism that existed in
Montreal and in the country in the 1940s. In 1945, Hugh MacLennan published *Two Solitudes* which, again, explored the streets, sounds and smells of Montreal, in its treatment of the tensions that existed there between the English and French populations. The same year, Gabrielle Roy’s novel, *Bonheur d’Occasion* (which was published in English as *The Tin Flute* (1947) appeared, which describes the conditions of St. Henri, the French working-class district of Montreal.

Then, in the 1950s, Mordecai Richler appeared on the scene. His novels, *Son of a Smaller Hero, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Saint Urbain’s Horseman*, etc. have the streets of Montreal as the backdrop for the lives of the city’s Jewish immigrant population and their westward migration. And writing from an immigrant’s perspective, only after living in Montreal for ten years, did Brian Moore feel comfortable enough to base his third novel, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (no longer in print) there.

Morley Callaghan is another author who used Montreal as the setting for a novel in the 1950s. *The Loved and the Lost* explores the segmentation that existed in the city between the black and white populations and the difficulty of bridging the two. And, of course, an author who wrote both novels and poetry, who swooped onto the Montreal literary scene in the 1950s, was Leonard Cohen. *Let Us Compare Mythologies* appeared in 1956 to enormous critical acclaim.

All these writers had a common setting—Montreal—and a common theme—the divisions and difficulties that existed in the city in the 1940s and 1950s that came from the enormous sociological, ethnic, political, and economic diversity that existed there. Before them all, however, many poets had been doing the same thing: Frank Scott, Arthur Smith, A.M. Klein, P.K. Page, Patrick Anderson, John Sutherland, Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, Miriam Waddington, Kay Smith, etc.

What brought these writers together? A common time and place and a need to record, self-consciously, the curious tensions and dynamics that surrounded them. During the early and middle parts of the century, Montreal was a cosmopolitan, tumultuous place, made up of fragments of various ethnic groups, and fired by enormous political and economic upheaval. It was a place of oppositions and diversity, where the very rich lived in the west and the poor in the east; where the Roman Catholic tradition collided with the Protestant, and where the Jewish community battled for recognition; where the Anglophone minority
dominated the Francophone majority; and where McGill University and later Concordia (then Sir George Williams University) provided a common meeting ground on which these groups might coalesce.

These oppositions fanned the spark of modernism in Canada as the tensions they created etched themselves on the brains of the poets and writers who would later articulate them and drive them forward. As Irving Layton has stated it,

Normal human vileness, philistine materialism, racial prejudice, anti-Semitism, hypocrisy and the relentless pursuit of ass in parliaments, universities, Salvation Army hostels, editorial offices, courthouses, hospitals and morgues—out of this glorious fecund rubbish heap and out of occasional glimpses of beauty, goodness and mercy I have made my poems. I have dipped my broomstick into the life swirling around me and written it into the hearts and speech of men. Yahoos, sex-drained executives, pimps and poestasters, limping critics, graceless sluts and the few, the rare few, who gave me moments of insight or ecstasy: I am crazy enough to think I have given them immortality. They will, I hope, never die. Not anyhow, for as long as style and passion are still valued; or the language which these have sometimes tinged with vitality and distinction... A poet has his images and symbols handed to him very early in life; his later poems are largely explorations he makes into the depths of his unconscious to unravel their meanings. Incontrovertibly my earliest impressions have coloured everything I've ever written. (n.pag.)

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Before I begin, I would first like to present a couple of questions that will indicate the direction of my paper: (1) What are the possibilities for a marginalised group to articulate a proactive politics of space when the boundaries of geographical entities such as Canada and Chinatown are determined by others who possess the power to enact such boundaries? (2) Can literary representations of a marginalised group contribute to these possibilities? These issues will inform my analysis of the possibilities for spatial agency, both geographically and discursively, in the following Chinese Canadian novels: Sky Lee’s Disappearing Moon Café and Paul Yee’s Breakaway. In examining these texts, I will focus on how these writers appropriate the genre’s conventions to create empowering representations of Chinese Canadians from the Exclusion Era (1923-1947). I will first outline some issues pertaining to the novel’s generic functions and its politics, from which I will then specify my own approach and examine these novels more closely.

Lisa Lowe frames the novel as a cultural institution that “determines possible contours and terrains for the narration of history” (97). In doing so, it “legitimates particular forms and subjects of history; it subjugates or erases others” (97). Thus, in its traditional function as “a medium for narrating the development of the individual and its reconciliation to the social order” (Lowe 99), the novel delimits the kinds of knowledge that a writer may express about particular people and regulates it within a coherent narrative form that erases threats to and affirms the status quo. In relation to this point, Mike Marais states that the novel implicates a particular relationship to knowledge that “does not so much mask as deny entirely the existence of alterity” (3). In a class context, then, the novel discursively stabilizes existing structures of power and influence by prescribing discourses of class identity and identification that elide individual differences and privilege particular forms of personal identity and agency. I draw from Lisa Lowe’s discussion of class here to suggest that these forms of identity and agency implicate a “bourgeois individualism” (Lowe 98) as the norm against which other forms are measured and constituted as deviant ones.
But despite its normalizing and hegemonic effects, ethnic minority writers can appropriate the novel as a space of discursive resistance. However, I wish to avoid a potentially reductive approach that considers what these writers resist against and how they do so. As Priscilla Walton suggests in her discussion of marginalised writers, resistance requires “the imposition of a site from which to resist ... yet, in order for resistance to occur, there must also be a recognition and an affirmation of difference—a space in which a subject position and an identity politics can be formulated” (75). Therefore, I conceive of this resistance as a strategic starting point—as a discursive space of possibility—for Chinese Canadian writers to challenge dominant cultural discourses that elide the presence and histories of minority subjects and inscribe identity markers upon these subjects that reinscribe their historical specificity. It is in these two senses that I wish to conceptualize the novel as a space of agency for Sky Lee’s and Paul Yee’s novels, with an emphasis on how the concept of class can inform this agency. Firstly, the form of the novel functions as a discursive space through which these writers trouble and reconfigure epistemological notions of representing and relating to Chinese Canadians’ past experiences. Secondly, these novels’ characters acquire agency through their physical occupation, manipulation, and narration of particular spaces: to use Michel de Certeau’s phrase from his examination of consumption, these characters “make do” with these spaces and use them in imaginative ways that are not necessarily practical but that are important parts of their identities. As a result, these writers create class identities for their characters that do not simply reject hegemonic identities that threaten to elide or erase their racial difference. Instead, these identities implicate dominant ones as a part of their revised significations.

Turning to my first text, Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* offers multiple narrative perspectives from different temporal and spatial locations that challenge our ideas about representing the past for Chinese immigrants and their descendants, the identities that can be constituted in such articulations of the past, and what is or should be constituted as important elements for recuperation and preservation. Her novel unfolds as a non-chronological sequence of narrative segments that connect by experiential and mnemonic association instead of a linear narration that moves towards a conclusive resolution. The whole narrative is framed loosely by the larger narrative frame of Kae, who reflects on her ancestral
past (including the Exclusion Era) from future points in time such as the years 1968 and 1986; the other segments focus on a Chinese character’s everyday experiences from a past era. Thus, the novel’s narrative structure and Kae’s narrative perspective implicate a particular ethics for comprehending and relating to the past. It puts the onus on individuals of the present to discursively “excavate” the past, much like Gwei Chang’s physical excavation of bones from those workers who have perished in the CPR’s construction. They have an ethical and political responsibility to do this that goes beyond personal enlightenment. Instead, their actions are necessary to affirm the communities’ histories, which the official records have excluded and the nationalist discourses have subordinated under the more prominent narrative of national progress.

Besides her reconfiguration of the novel form, Lee also conveys possibilities for spatial agency through her characters. Her representations produce historiographic discourses that privilege the telling of everyday experiences over that of national events. Lee does acknowledge historical events and legislative developments that have affected Chinese Canadian life, such as the Depression, the Second World War, and the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, but she is more interested in portraying the daily lives of Chinese immigrants and their descendants, particularly women, in marginal societal spaces such as Chinatown, the characters’ individual homes, and their places of labour. In doing so, she positions them as speaking subjects and cartographically inscribes their identities onto these physical spaces, such that they are agents instead of victims who simply succumb to their circumstances. However, she avoids giving a reductive or homogenous portrait of the Chinatown community, as her characters’ class-inflected identities are manifest through and defined by more than their paid labour. Instead, the characters’ identities signify differently depending on their unique everyday experiences in which they act out their identities, their current material circumstances, and their feelings about their current class status. These are articulated by their hopes for the future and the ways in which they attempt to raise their class status. This occurs, either in actuality or imaginatively, by their adoption of appropriate markers of behaviour, dress, and attitudes or inscriptions of something positive into their current status. Lee also evokes a variety of emotions such as hope, longing, guilt, and shame to further convey the complexity of a character’s investment in particular class identities at the expense of less
attractive ones, and that one person’s reasons for rejecting a particular class identity would not necessarily be true for another.

For example, Lee acknowledges the hardships of Chinese female immigrants and the constricting class structures that define their lives. Her characterizations speak to the widespread societal discrimination of the exclusion era that forced these immigrants, out of necessity and a lack of choice, into Chinatowns and rural areas that tolerated their presence and to cope with their positions in the class structures that prevailed in those spaces. For example, Fong Mei is one of the Chinese immigrants that appears in Lee’s novel: raised in China and married to Choy Fuk, she is living in Canada during the Exclusion Era, a time when immigration from China was virtually stopped by the Canadian government. Despite this physical exclusion, cultural discourses from China continue to operate in the Chinese immigrants’ daily lives. For instance, the domestic space implicates a gendered class structure that locates Fong Mei within a patriarchal structure of social relations, which designates specific obligations toward her husband and family. These include an acceptance of her subordinate position and deference to male authority figures and her mother-in-law Mui Lan (Lee 57) and an obligation to perpetuate the family line by bearing sons. The extent to which she can fulfill these obligations determines her status within the family (Lee 58). Having a son translates into economic and social capital—money and prestige—for Fong Mei that will elevate her class status in her family and in the larger community. Conversely, an inability to bear children will depreciate her status as well as her family’s respectability among their peers. As she lacks other realistic options for increasing her status, Fong Mei decides to operate within these existing structures.

At the same time, Lee’s novel affirms a positive image of Chinatown as a site of communal safety and resilience that contributes to their collective survival (145-146). It is true that her characters’ actions do not fundamentally alter the prevailing power structures that regulate peoples’ behaviours along class lines in the spaces that they occupy, or the structures that maintain Chinatown’s spatial marginality vis-à-vis the mainstream society. Nevertheless, they derive strength from their common hardships. For example, their monetary struggle to survive daily and even the class discrimination that they experience within the Chinatown community paradoxically provide the basis for their personal identities. The character Ting An derives solace from his service job and his community. His life
is difficult but he asserts a personal identity that signifies out of his own position and the others with whom he inhabits Chinatown. Their daily experiences of work and recognition of their marginal status in Canada's discriminatory climate foster a sense of mutual identification: on Tang Street, a "contract between faces" existed and "[p]eople who had suffered the same hardships understood each other" (115).

Moreover, even though class hierarchies may constrain a character's agency, they do provide stability and the collective agency to resolve problems that threaten their collective survival. For example, after a Scottish nursemaid is murdered under obscure circumstances and the evidence appears to implicate a Chinese man from their community, its residents turn to the Chinese Association for guidance. With a hierarchy that delegates authority and ascribes prestige to select individuals from among the community's elders and businessmen, the association unifies the community's residents under the values of "loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness" (73). This clear delineation of power allows the association leaders to act swiftly before the matter gets out of hand and damages the community's entire reputation.

Paul Yee's novel, Breakaway, presents similar possibilities for spatial agency. Yee's choice of genre is significant because the young adult genre implicates a narrative trajectory that depicts young adult protagonists who struggle with the societal order and their place within it. While it is true that not all young adult stories reinscribe the status quo by having the protagonist conform to a predominant social order (indeed, some escape/subvert it), they usually entail some kind of maturation process whereby the protagonist progresses beyond an initial state of innocence or ignorance. Yee's novel draws upon these conventions as it focuses on a young Chinese boy named Kwok. Focussing on Kwok's point of view, it charts the tensions that arise from his struggles with negative feelings towards his family's marginal class status in relation to the Chinese Canadian community and to Canada as a whole. The novel's resolution could be seen, arguably, as a "reinscription" of the societal status quo for a rebellious young adult who accepts the limitations of his class mobility and his expected role within his family. Yet, I wish to argue that this apparent "re-inscription" actually illustrates Kwok's physical and psychic resistance against hegemonic class significations that impinge upon his personal identity as well as those of his family and the other Chinese immigrants in their community.
Kwok initially encounters contradictory lifestyles, with one that contains immediately foreseeable results in the form of acquired material capital and accompanied prestige, and another that is comparatively unattractive, with a life of daily drudgery and monotonous physical labour that fail to reap tangible markers of value. To stay on the farm reminds him constantly of his family’s lower class identity that he wishes to escape. As Kwok states, “Chinatown people look at us and think the Wongs are low-life. We track farm mud wherever we go. People hold their noses when we come close. They sweep up as soon as we’ve passed. We beggars do anything to feed our pigs for cheap” (9). He looks forward to a university education because it signifies possibilities for acquiring a higher class identity that will dissociate him from the marginal spaces of his family’s farm and Chinatown and their negative significations. For Kwok, one of the key aspects of possessing a higher class identity is to display a state of cleanliness and material wealth on one’s own body and a state of technological modernity in one’s home because these actions both signify a disassociation from a life of physical labour, subsistence, and frugality. Conversely, these actions will evoke a life of material luxury that exceeds one’s basic needs: in turn, Kwok believes that this will alleviate his shame in his family’s lifestyle and garner the social prestige and respect that he desires.

However, the narrative trajectory illustrates his movement from his feelings of disgust with his family’s lives to a respect for them as well as those of his ancestral predecessors. It is true that, on a pragmatic level, Kwok cannot pursue his university ambitions because he could not acquire the funds for doing so; moreover, he suspects that his application was rejected because of the institution’s racial discrimination. But instead of seeing Kwok’s decision to forego his university aspirations as a resignation to a marginalised existence, we should consider how he uses this marginality to reorient his class ambitions to local spaces such as his family’s farm. Instead of asking “Why are they marginal?,” we should ask, “What do they do with their marginality?,” because this offers more productive avenues of inquiry that situate these characters as agents and authorisers of their experiences. This discourages an approach that interprets their actions within pre-existing frameworks of knowledge and, instead, privileges the characters’ own viewpoints as the basis for such interpretations.

Like Kae, Kwok locates himself as an inheritor of Chinese Canadian
history. However, whereas Kae is looking back upon the Exclusion Era from a later time, Kwok actually lives in that period; this allows Yee to articulate a more immediate sense of spatial agency for Kwok. Kwok realizes that if Drysdale acquires his family's farmland, they would not simply lose their immediate means of livelihood, but also the class identities that derive from their land. As Benzi Zhang suggests, to re-claim land is to re-articulate identity in a transnational and transcultural sense because they produce "negotiational strategies... to deal with the tension between the dominant national discourse that is based on a hegemonic cultural and various counter-discourses that preserve rather than efface cultural differences" (137). In this respect, Drysdale's motivations for acquiring their land evoke a class discourse that implicates the erasure of racial difference and narratological multiplicity under a hegemonic, universalizing mode of economic production—capitalist development. Unlike Drysdale, Kwok comes to regard the land for more than its immediate material benefits (like his father): he decides to help his father save the farm and convinces him that they should not sell it to Drysdale. In addition, Kwok positions his personal identity in relation to his family's farmland and affirms a collective narrative of experience and identity for his family, and, more broadly, the Chinese community, that Drysdale's capitalist imperatives threaten to erase (62-63; 37-38). Although the economic system that Drysdale represents still exists at the end of Yee's novel, their retention of the farmland should not be seen in static, passive terms. Instead, these characters make do with what they have; in the process, they retain control over a local space—physically and narratologically—despite financial and social pressures to give it up. His family's use of the space privileges an ethic of subsistence, which differs significantly from Drysdale's visions of improving the land for economic progress and profit. Thus, their farmland represents a physical and discursive inheritance between three generations of Kwok's family that affirms his grandfather's existence—as a farmer who subsisted on the same piece of land—and, more importantly, locates Kwok's identity as a continuation of that genealogical history which his father had inherited from his grandfather. Yee's narrative focus on Kwok also works on another related level: Kwok represents a new generation whose heritage symbolically encompasses cultural discourses from China and Canada, yet he also signifies the possibility for redefining and transgressing these limits that delimit appropriate behaviours and attitudes. For instance, it seems that
Kwok also forfeited his university ambitions for his sister’s sake because he felt that it was unfair for her to marry someone she does not love, even if this would help them survive economically. Kwok’s mother asserts that this cultural practice is not uncommon in China and that it is necessary, given their current circumstances. However, by staying on the farm and helping his parents make ends meet, he indirectly helps his sister resist the role that she is expected to fulfill. This action challenges the limits of the cultural discourse that his family has inherited from China and reconstitutes it in the Canadian context.

Kwok’s desires also go beyond his father’s views because he does not simply want to resist and preserve the inscriptions of their identities upon this land. Instead, he also wants to reconfigure the epistemological limits of Canadian national discourse as it fails to recognize Chinese farmers as legitimate subjects. As he asserts, “Soon no one will know there were ever Chinese farmers” (140) and, later, adds, “Fifty, sixty years of history. It will be as if we never existed. As if Chinese don’t do anything but wash laundry and open restaurants” (143). Following on Lisa Lowe’s comments about the inherent contradictions that occur in the nation’s suppression of the immigrant Other, the containment of the Chinese immigrants in particular spaces and exclusion of them from others provides the conditions for interrogating those very limits. In this case, despite the marginality of his family’s land in relation to the larger society, Kwok’s retention of that land and its local inscriptions creates the conditions for pressuring and reconfiguring the limits of Canada’s historical narratives (and its national inscriptions).

Overall, these two novels articulate spaces of agency through their appropriation of the novel genre and its narrative conventions. My selected Chinese Canadian authors engage in a process of re-visioning these experiences from the Exclusion Era: they acknowledge the reality of their struggles and hardships, but they also represent Chinese Canadians so that they are not merely victims of circumstances and are, instead, active agents with complex and heterogeneous histories and diverse class identities. This concretizes their existence as a group of people whose physical presence and cultural heritage persists into the present and remains in the memories of future generations. By writing within a recognizable genre, these writers not only appeal to a mainstream audience but also insert Chinese Canadian experiences into cultural discourses
about Canada. In doing so, they also propose strategies for relating to and interpreting these experiences that do not foreclose interrogation and, more importantly, depict the Chinese Canadian characters themselves as authorities and articulators of their own experiences rather than as objects to be spoken about.

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The Receptivity of Canadian Readers to Chinese Literature

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Introduction

The study of cultural identity is a timely issue, especially given the rapid spread of English, including in China. In a country with a background of immigration, such as Canada, a totally new environment has been created not only through satellites and the internet but also through the impact of waves of immigrants. Therefore the study of the relation of western and eastern cultures in a cross-cultural context of literary reading should be significant, in order to understand how an ethnic minority negotiates its cultural identity within a new cultural context and how the ethnic majority understands the often-shifting identity of that ethnic minority.

So far the study of readers’ responses to literary texts has hardly touched the question of cultural identity. This seems unfortunate since literary reading is one of the most basic activities in a person’s cultural life; readers often unintentionally reveal their cultural identities during literary reading. The research I will report today was done using a combination of cultural identity questionnaires and readers’ responses to literary reading, specifically, the reading of Chinese literature written in English. So, our empirical study focuses on the responses of Chinese- and Euro-Canadian readers to Chinese literature.

Method

Participants in our research were 60 undergraduate Psychology students drawn from two groups: 30 second generation Chinese-Canadians who were born in Canada, and 30 Euro-Canadians. The participants read two short texts; from each text they selected two passages on which they commented aloud (responses were tape recorded for later analysis) and answered questions about the passages; they
then completed two questionnaires, one designed to assess their orientation toward reading, and a second concerning their cultural identity.

Both of the texts were written in English by a Chinese author—Lin Yutang. One of them, “What is Luck,” was chosen from one of his collections of prose, *The Importance of Living*; the other was chosen from one of his novels, *Moment in Peking*. Each of the participants took up to two hours for the whole process of reading and recording his or her comments on the reading and completing the questionnaires.

**Results**

For the preliminary analyses I am presenting today, only 22 of a total of 60 participants’ were randomly chosen for analysis. I will present the results in two parts: first, the taped responses to the two texts, second, some findings from one of the three questionnaires we used.

**Comments on Reading**

Responses to each text were transcribed and analysed. The main purpose of our study was to examine the degree to which each group of readers showed a receptivity to the culture on which the text depends. To examine this we first coded responses in one of several mutually exclusive ways: whether the response was basically in consonance with the culture of the text, whether it diverged from it in some way, or whether it was in one of three other categories: disagreement, misreading, or demonstrating difficulty in basic understanding. We also noted separately where explicit comments demonstrated a cultural understanding that differed from the text. The frequency of comments in the different categories is shown in Table 1, divided according to text and by cultural origin of the reader. (Note that the possible maximum in any cell is 24, that is, comments by 12 readers on 2 passages.)
Table 1. Frequency of readers’ comments in the different categories

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<td>Euro-C</td>
<td>Chin-C</td>
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<td>Euro-C</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment in Peking</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
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We might expect Chinese-Canadian readers to be better prepared than the Euro-Canadian readers to show resonance with the culture of Lin Yutang’s writings. However, the reverse is the case. Table 1 shows that, compared to Euro-Canadians, the responses of Chinese-Canadians to “What is Luck” contain half as many comments in consonance with the text, markedly more divergent comments, and marginally more explicit comments exhibiting cultural difference; their responses to Moment in Peking provide a similar if less marked profile of consonant and divergent comments, but, again more comments suggesting cultural difference.

Overall we would expect a degree of assimilation of our Chinese-Canadian readers since they were born in Canada and received a North American education. If they have not been influenced by any Chinese cultural elements from their families or relatives, their responses should be the same as those of Euro-Canadians. However, from the figures of Table 1, we can see that the responses of the two groups differ, suggesting that the Chinese-Canadians have been influenced by some Chinese cultural elements, but not in the ways we might expect. To our surprise, they seem less in sympathy with the culture of Lin Yutang’s writings than the Euro-Canadian readers.

The First Reading: “What is Luck”

In “What is Luck,” the author meticulously disseminates Chuangtse’s understanding of Taoism, one of the most complicated philosophical beliefs among the three pillars of traditional Chinese philosophy (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism). The central theme of Taoism may be summed up in a single
word: freedom. Taoists believe in transmigration or reincarnation. In their eyes, people are the authors of their own web of values, created by themselves alone. The central parable in “What is Luck” questions the very existence of good or bad luck: it asks how we can know good luck from bad, since events often work out differently than we expect.

During the reading of “What is Luck,” the responses of most readers were focussed on three points: the theme of the text—the belief of Taoists, the attitude toward success and failure, and the definition of freedom. Generally, the two groups show sharply different responses to the theme and the style of the text.

Among the Euro-Canadian readers we find twelve consonant comments. Clearly, their responses involve particular personal feelings in the generalization of the theme, such as “it was my initial reaction that made it so incredibly evocative because I’m rather interested in different religions of the world and Taoism is one of them.” Such feelings indicate that the philosophy of Taoism and the related story are freshly relevant for these readers. In terms of an abstract idea of freedom, readers can also respond reflectively to their own experiences: “sometimes the happiest people are people that don’t care what other people think... being self centered is sometimes good. And you know, again I think quite often, I think we tend to take ourselves too seriously.”

However, Chinese-Canadian readers express themselves in a calmer way, somewhat lacking explicit feelings, even though they tend to agree with the author. For example, “I wrote down that I agree with this and that’s probably why it was very striking to me because it seems to me these days, that no one is free.” Their quiet responses likely mislead us into thinking that they have known the philosophy of Taoism or the related stories quite well. But actually they know the background of this part of the reading no better than Euro-Canadians. They even show more divergences from the text than the latter do. For example, when commenting on the parable they say “we cannot see our lives as lucky or unlucky, because what happens to us happens for a reason, because of fate.”

In response to freedom, its successes and failures, most of the Chinese-Canadians reveal their attitude by arguing against or diverging from the original intention of the author and his kernel of Taoism, in their determination to survive in this part of the world. To them the Taoist idea of freedom seems strange and impractical. To them, the environment of this world is too attractive to give up. For
example, “I think it’s unrealistic. I don’t think it’s possible in our world now, unless you find some exotic place where no one will get to you.”

**The Second Reading: From Moment in Peking**

In his novel, *Moment in Peking*, Lin Yutang displayed his philosophic thought, which was a mixture of Confucianism and Taoism, and his findings about the fate of human culture in the conflict of values between Chinese and Western cultures. It is also a narration of the flux of the Chinese life from a Taoist point of view.

In the part of the fiction chosen for the second reading, the author tells the story of a short marriage of a young couple in one of the four main families of the novel, set around the end of the Qing Dynasty at the beginning of the twentieth century (from the 1890s to the 1930s). To analyse the responses of readers to *Moment in Peking*, we focus on three points of difference: differences based on the influence of traditional cultural background; the difference of genders; and differences in responding to the style of writing.

All of the responses given by Chinese-Canadians to the marriage of the young couple (the adopted girl of an official family—Mannia and the son of the family) are sensitive to the relationship between the couple, who grew up together as cousins. Some seemed quite disturbed. For example, “the reminder word I used for the first passage was ‘incest,’ because it says that they were cousins but talks about them being together and getting married.” In contrast, Euro-Canadians responded indifferently to this aspect of the story. This does not prove that Euro-Canadians know more about Chinese cultural background than Chinese-Canadians, but it seems to indicate that Euro-Canadians were more tolerant of this couple’s history.

Another interesting finding is that more female readers respond strongly to Mannia’s action in helping her newly married and sick husband at the end of the tragedy. These female responses generally fall into two categories: a positive conclusion and a criticism. For example, “True love is also demonstrated at the second passage. I thought it was very strong and powerful, and... I find it very typical in olden days where that true love would be more common.” Such responses imply that female readers understood the particular and typical action of Mannia much better than male readers did, because these female readers
related themselves closely to the situation of the story. They almost think that they are Mannia. The unusual action of Mannia, “she bent over and literally sucked the lump of mucus out of his mouth,” proves that Mannia’s affection toward her husband was absolutely true in their eyes, since many of them are so sensitive to this action at the same time. For example, “it just caught my eye because it’s kind of gross.” But almost no male readers take account of this point in such a powerful way.

Some of the comments on cultural phenomena reveal that there is no distinction between Chinese-Canadians and Euro-Canadians in misunderstanding some basic Chinese culture in the story. For example, the story tells that in order to save her husband, Mannia “bent over and literally sucked the lump of mucus out of his mouth. If the gods had hearts, they could not have seen such a sight and not have saved him. But the gods were blind or deaf, or on a holiday far away.” Several readers from both groups responded in the same way against such a depiction. For example: “that is very sad because if something bad happens, people do blame the sky, the world, the gods.” Again, we should mention that the story also embodies a Taoist outlook, that is to say: to live or die are transformable. There is transmigration in the world exactly like the relationship between luck and adversity. So the way Lin Yutang mentions “god” is not a kind of blame, but a suggestion of the Taoist doctrine “freedom.” The style here is unusual, somewhat like black humour.

Responses to Questionnaires

Finally, we report some details from one of the questionnaires that cast additional light on the analysis of readers’ comments.

Table 2. Correlations of Literary Response Questionnaire scales with codings of responses to two texts.

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<tr>
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<th>L+</th>
<th>L^</th>
<th>M+</th>
<th>M^</th>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Insight</td>
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<td>.516*</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>-.083</td>
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<td>Nonpersonal Insight</td>
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<td>.570**</td>
<td>.456*</td>
<td>-.169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>-.388+</td>
<td>.575**</td>
<td>.426+</td>
<td>-.120</td>
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<td>Imaginal Vividness</td>
<td>-.236</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>.407+</td>
<td>-.177</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>-.277</td>
<td>+.469*</td>
<td>+.483*</td>
<td>-.074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure-Escape</td>
<td>-.232</td>
<td>+.396+</td>
<td>+.466*</td>
<td>-.162</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author Interest</td>
<td>-.247</td>
<td>+.480*</td>
<td>+.395+</td>
<td>-.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-driven reading</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>+.243</td>
<td>+.050</td>
<td>-.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection of Lit</td>
<td>+.038</td>
<td>-.274</td>
<td>-.491*</td>
<td>+.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+p < .1 *p < .05 **p < .01

Note. L+ consonance with "What is Luck"; L^ divergence; M+ consonance with *Moment in Peking; M^ divergence.

The Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) assesses readers’ preferences for literary reading. In scoring the LRQ, participants are assigned a score on 9 scales that report their overall orientation toward reading: for example, whether they read for personal insight, or to empathize with characters, or read for the story. Readers’ scores were correlated with the frequency of different kinds of comment on the two texts, those in consonance and those that were divergent. The LRQ, in a word, may help to predict the kinds of comments readers make while trying to understand the passages from Lin Yutang. The findings, shown in Table 2, show that a commitment to the value of insight through literary reading worked against a consonant reading of “What is Luck.” Similarly, high scores on the Insight, Empathy, and Interest in Author scales rather strongly predisposed readers to diverge from the meaning of the text. It appears that reading for literary insight is associated with rejection of the Taoist views explicitly stated in “What is Luck.” In terms of cultural contrasts, the Chinese-Canadian readers in our sample were more interested in ‘Story-driven reading’ than the Euro-Canadian readers, t(19) = 2.184, p < .05, a finding that points to their lower effectiveness in reading the essay “What is Luck.”

In contrast, readers high in the same LRQ preferences, and in ‘Leisure-Escape,’ were the most sympathetic readers of *Moment in Peking*—no doubt because this is an extract from a novel rich in literary value. At the same time, being high in ‘Rejection of literary values,’ as we might expect, worked against sympathetic understanding of *Moment in Peking* (but was unrelated to reading “What is Luck”).
Conclusion

The findings we have reported suggest different degrees of receptivity to Chinese literature among our Canadian readers. While the Euro-Canadians were more willing to respond with feeling to the two readings and to participate in the narrative predicaments they contain, the Chinese-Canadians were more restrained, less willing to entertain the philosophical stance proposed by both texts, placing themselves in the position of observers of the events in the texts rather than in the position of participants. The findings point to the Chinese-Canadians’ efforts to negotiate a cultural identity that mingles understanding of their ethnic history with affirmation of non-traditional (non-Taoist) values.

We have presented an empirical study of this issue as we believe that this is the only reliable way of considering whether readers differ in their stance towards texts from other cultures. The results we report are surprising: while we might have expected readers of Chinese descent to be more attuned than Euro-Canadian readers to texts by a Chinese writer, the findings show just the reverse. Our empirical study has thus not only undermined our assumptions; in addition, comments obtained from readers about their reading and about themselves have provided intriguing clues as to why the two populations of readers differ. Given the importance of understanding cultural differences through reading, which often goes to the heart of questions about identity and social values, we believe that more such empirical studies of reading should be undertaken.

A Note on Lin Yutang

Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Chinese writer and philologist, was educated at Saint John’s University in Shanghai, Harvard University, and the University of Leipzig. From 1923 to 1926 he taught English philology at the University of Beijing. After 1928 he lived mainly in the U.S. His many works represent an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between East and West. The first two books, My Country and My People (1935) and The Importance of Living, written in English in a charming and witty style, brought him international fame. Moment in Peking (1940) was a novel of broad canvas. It is his first English novel and the most famous one. In this book he wants to convey things that happened in Chinese society, and the way Chinese
people live, to the western world. It is said that he’s the only one who can write novels in English as freely as in Chinese. In his eighty years, he wrote and translated more than fifty books.

For further information on the reading project, see:
http://www.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/reading/
The Political Canonization of the Canadian Anglophone Novel: An Examination of Governor General’s Award Winners between 1980 and 2000

*Ruth Martin, University of Alberta*

The Governor General’s Literary Award is a tax-based government program that creates a canon of selected texts through its institution. Unlike other privately funded literary prizes, the Governor General’s Award is a political award; it tells the world that these winners are perceived by the Canadian Government as the best of our literary culture. I want to examine the impact of the Governor General’s Literary Awards on authors, publishers, and readers. My research tool (the polysystem theory) was chosen for its “user friendly” survey kind of approach to data. This paper will provide a brief introduction to the methodology, it will present a background to the concept of canonized literature, in English, in Canada; and it will provide some of my preliminary findings collected from survey questions I sent to Governor General’s Fiction winners (1980-2000).

**The Polysystem Theory**

My methodology—the polysystem theory—is based on contemporary sociological approaches. According to Milan V. Dimer, the polysystem was developed initially by Itamar Evr-Zohar in the late 1960s and later expanded by Gideon Toury, Zohar Shavit, Shelly Yahalom, and other colleagues and disciples of the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, at Tel Aviv University, on the basis of previous work by the Russian Formalists, including Jurij Tynjanov, Boris Eijenbaum, and Roman Jakobson. There are also elements of the theory that elaborate upon ideas presented by the Prague School of Structuralism, Jan Mukarovsky and Felix Vodieka, and East European and Soviet comparatists and semioticians, such as Anton Popovic and Mixail Baxtin, and, even more influentially, Jurij Potman. The theory itself and the praxis inspired by it are compatible with, and often parallel to, those contemporary sociological approaches to literature which systematically study “literary life” or “the field of literature” as a partially autonomous institution as practised by Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Dubois, Claude Lafarge, Peter Sima, and
Joseph Melano; both the theory and its application are also open to certain ideas emanating from the approach known as the “Empirical Study of Literature” developed by Siegfried Schmidt and scholars working at Bielefeld and later at Siegen, and to pragmatic reception studies conducted by Karl E. Rosengren and Günter Berger. This theory understands literature as a dynamic, functional, semiotic system that is perceived in the form of an institution. One of the heuristic constructs of the theory is the examination of “canonized” and “non-canonized” texts. Primary activity, which consists of new procedures, usually takes place within “a canon” in order to create new models of reality or to illuminate the canonized information in such a way as to bring about deautomatization (Dimic).

The methodology will, therefore, examine the dominant norms established by the Government’s selection of winners. Such an examination will be possible when all the data (answers to my survey questions) has been received and analysed.

The Canadian Canon of Literature—Background

In his book, Making it Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature (1995), Robert Lecker takes an historical voyage in search of a discovery of Canadian Literature. Lecker divides his book into three broad categories: “Canon and Context;” “Canon-Making;” and “Reading Canonical Criticism.” In the preface to his book, Lecker exhorts critics of Canadian literature to recognize the national bias that informs their work, and to ask whether this bias has extraliterary connections that need to be explored. Lecker writes: “Canon studies are inevitably connected with cultural formations. One of my aims in this book is to understand how the country has been conceived through the study of its literature, what values govern this study, and how these values affect the ability of readers and academics to intervene in a constructive national critique. Another aim is to understand how I have been constructed by a Canadian canon that, in some ways, I helped to invent. Ever since I have been writing about Canadian canons, people have encouraged me to say more about my experiences as a publisher and editor, to comment on my own involvement in Canadian canon-making” (ix-x).

According to Lecker (in 1995), Canadian literature was canonized fewer than twenty years ago. Canonization is defined by Lecker as the number of
Canadian literature courses taught in schools, and the recurring names of certain authors appearing in curriculum-based anthologies, and the creation of the New Canadian Library. Lecker explains that at the end of World War II, Canadian literature was not taught as an independent subject in Canadian schools. There was no institutional canon. In 1957 McClelland and Stewart introduced its mass-market paperback reprint series entitled the New Canadian Library. It allowed teachers to discuss the work of many Canadian authors who had never been the subject of formal academic study. The New Canadian Library was truly “new:” prior to its conception, there was no “library” in use (25).

In 1965 The Literary History of Canada was first published. It took six years to produce and, according to the main editor Carl F. Klinck, it was accomplished by the editors and twenty-nine other scholars who wrote with the support provided by the Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Council—two government-funding agencies that made twenty-two separate short-term grants in aid of research. Not one application was refused. The publisher also received a substantial grant-in-aid for its efforts to promote the “national recognition of our literature.” A national canon of Canadian literature was born, therefore, out of the efforts of the government, academia, and the publishing industry (Lecker 26).

Lecker goes on to explain that since 1965, what is commonly referred to as the “explosion” in Canadian literature has produced all the by-products of canonization run rampant, in particular, the creation of “Canadian Literature” in our English departments. Lecker links this identification of the institution with its texts via the proceeding of a conference on the Canadian novel held at the University of Calgary in 1978. The most important result of this conference was the publication of a list of the 100 “most important” Canadian novels, prepared “as a guide to those interested in the masterworks of our literary tradition.” This guide is the result of a ballot distributed to Canadian teachers and critics who were invited to choose: 1. the most important 100 works of fiction; 2. the most important ten novels; 3. the most important 10 novels of various genres. The ballot was prepared by Malcolm Ross, with the assistance of Jack McClelland, publisher of McClelland and Stewart, publisher of the New Canadian Library. Significantly, most of the important works of fiction were published by Jack McClelland’s company. Lecker says that this coincidence aroused suspicion, but it did nothing
to stop the canonisers from pursuing their incessant desire: to identify Canadian classics at any cost. According to David Stouck, “the Golden Age for Canadian Literature had arrived” (280).

Today, Lecker writes, Canadian literature is taught at virtually every high school, college, and university in Canada. Massive government support through numerous funding agencies, along with the institutional support of academics, accounts for the proliferation of canon objects associated with the Canadian literature industry: reference guides, critical studies, specialized journals, bibliographies, articles, anthologies, films, research grants, awards, medals, and even teacher-oriented crash courses in what has become its own thriving discipline (28).

Among some credible experts, the question arises: does a canon of Canadian literature even exist? According to Davis and Mirabella,

The study of the canon has been one of the most important issues to come out of recent examinations of the institution of literary studies. The political implications of the very existence of a literary canon and what that canon means in terms of gender, race, class, nationality, and ideology are enormous. It is no coincidence that the current public debates over the quality of education and the success or failure of Western civilization hinge on issues stirred up by revising the canon. (125)

Lecker points out that many experts believe that there is a definite existence of a Canadian literary canon. Paul Hjartarson, for example, writes:

The question is not whether a canon exists and, if not, whether we should formulate one. The canon does exist; we have already formulated it. We formulate it every day. The canonical texts are those that figure prominently in our own discourse—they are the texts we teach, we write about, we cite. The classical texts, in short, are those we value. (67)
Background about the Canada Council’s Governor General’s Award

As part of the Canada Council Programme, the Governor General’s Award, as it is now known, did not begin until 1959. Prior to 1959, there are two phases to the Award’s English-Canadian Literary history. The first phase (1936-1944) begins with the establishment of the Governor General’s Award by the Canadian Authors Association in 1936. The Association was responsible for judging until 1944. According to E.D. Blodgett, “no one could be said to form even a potential canon”—in spite of a few exceptions: Laura G. Salverson, Thomas Raddall, and Ringuet (22).

The second phase of the Governor General’s English-Canadian award occurs after 1944 and proceeds until 1958. During this time, Blodgett argues, “more figures of the canon appear” (22). Blodgett argues that, since 1959, the novels that received the Governor General’s Award may be grouped into three broad categories: those that were marked by the notion of sacrifice—especially those whose characters encounter “spiritual quests that lead to epiphanies of self-recognition after having suffered agonies that play off being alive in death and being dead in life”(24) (1959-1967); those marked by technical experiment (1968-1980); and those that indicate a return to modernism (after 1980).

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1 Blodgett cites the following winners from 1944 to 1958: Hugh MacLennan, Morley Callaghan, Adele Wiseman, Germaine Guèvremont, Gabrielle Roy, and Colin McDougall.
2 The first category (1959-1967) reveals the linkage of a narrator who learns, in Rilkean fashion, to live his own death; he must cross many spiritual frontiers. Blodgett writes: this is a central preoccupation of the Anglophone novel, no matter what formal shapes it assumes... it should be noted that in what I perceive as the first period of the Governor General’s Award... the model is almost invariably one that will imply what MacLennan calls, referring to Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace “a whole, coherent world,” (MacLennan 1960, 147) particularly a world as determined by a central character. Each of the texts in this period make characters in search of who they are, who reach some absolute limit of despair—or what appears such—and somehow cross over it to a new understanding. (23)
3 Blodgett writes: “I would suggest the years 1968 to 1980 for a variety of reasons, not the least of which would be that this decade marks the highest density of experimentation with form. It also presents the least number of immigrant writers and the most women” (25).
4 Blodgett writes:
The limits posed and challenged in the Award’s second phase are, curiously, rarely pursued in the third phase, and this may be signaled by Mavis Gallant’s Home Truths... but the return to modernism is the mark of the 1980s for the
Preliminary Data Recently Collected From Fiction Winners

I sent covering letters and survey questions to the winning authors via their publishers, and to a variety of associations such as The Writers Union of Canada, universities, private addresses, and others. Since this paper is a small part of a much larger study in which I wish to examine the entire writing community, letters were sent to winning authors in all categories (fiction, poetry, drama, children’s literature, best translation—French to English only—and non-fiction). Many letters have been returned unopened and stamped “not at this address;” several, unfortunately, were returned with “deceased” stamped on the envelope. I have received dozens of responses so far from winning authors in most categories. As this paper goes to press, I received responses from four winners in the fiction category: Carol Shields, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Rudy Wiebe, and Josef Skvorecky. What follows are the 10 survey questions, and the authors’ exact responses.

Question 1: Did your book sales increase after you won the Governor General’s Award?
Carol Shields wrote, “Yes, sales did increase.”
Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “Yes.”
Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Yes; the books remained on the Can. Bestseller lists for several months longer.”
Josef Skvorecky wrote, “I have no idea; but then, since my livelihood did not depend on book sales, I didn’t pay much attention to this aspect of my writing.”
Question #2: Was your book published by a Canadian, American, or other publisher? (Please provide the name of the publisher).
Carol Shields wrote, “...books have been published all over the world—far too numerous to list.”

Award, and its significant challenge is to be found in the displacements of the immigrant for which Gallant... sets the tone. Whether this privileging of the ethnic can be attributed to federal multicultural policies is difficult to say. The world is made to look other, at least from a sociological, if not narratological perspective. (28)
Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Originally one Canadian, one American in Canada: McClelland and Stewart, Knopf Canada.”

Josef Skvorecky wrote, “My novel was published in English in Canada (Lester Orpen Dennys), in the U.S. (Knopf) and in GB (Chatto & Windus). There were several other translations plus the edition in the original language (Czech) from Sixty-Eight Publishers, Inc. in Toronto. Some other foreign language editions: Sweden (Bromberg), Finland (Otava), Brasil (Distribuido Record de Servicos de Imprensa), Holland (Bert Bekker), Spain (Circe), Portugal (Publicacoes Dom Quixote), Germany (Deuticke), Israel (Hakibbutz Hameuchad) and one or two other translations.”

Question #3: How did you select that publisher?

Carol Shields wrote, “Publishers were selected and arranged through an agent.”

Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “My first book was a collection of short stories. At the start, I sent it to Oberon of Canada which declined to publish it. After that, I turned to Macmillan because they published short story writers I admired such as Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro.”

Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Big Bear: I had already published 3 novels with M & S; there was no selection necessary. A Discovery of Strangers: Knopf made me the best offer, the highest advance and best promise of promotion.”

Josef Skvorecky wrote, “I had contracts with publishers of my previous books, so I could not select a new one.”

Question #4 Were the sales of your book promoted primarily at a Canadian, American, or other market(s)?

Carol Shields wrote, “Books were promoted in all markets.”

Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “After I won the Governor General’s award MAP Descending was published in the USA, Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. Later there was a Canadian French translation. Taking into account that the book is now twenty years old I would say it has been most promoted in the Canadian market.”

Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Primarily Canada.”

Josef Skvorecky wrote, “I think so, for English speaking markets were—at that time—my primary markets.”
Question #5: Where was the sale of your book most successful?
Carol Shields wrote, “Book sales were most successful in the UK.”
Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “Canada.”
Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Canada obviously.”
Josef Skvorecky wrote, “I think in the three English speaking countries plus Germany.”

Question #6: Have new opportunities for publishing your work appeared since you won the Governor General’s Award?
Carol Shields wrote, “Yes, new opportunities have arisen since receipt of the award.”
Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “Yes.”
Rudy Wiebe wrote, “An obvious one was that both books were translated and published in Germany and China, partly because of the award which indicated to publishers that they were recognized as “the best novels in Canada.”
Josef Skvorecky wrote, “See 4). In all contracts there is a clause that the next two books have to be submitted first to the same publisher.”

Question #7: Would you care to describe some of these opportunities?
Carol Shields left this question unanswered.
Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “I believe foreign publishers have been more likely to consider my work because I twice won the award.”
Rudy Wiebe wrote, “Both Chinese and German publishers are now translating other books of mine for publication: they recognize that literary/story quality extends to other novels not necessarily awarded a GG.”
Josef Skvorecky wrote, “See 4) and 5).”

Question #8: What has been the greatest impact on your life after having won the Governor General’s Award?
Carol Shields wrote, “The Greatest impact has been an increased audience and readership.”
Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “The greatest impact on my life has been that the awards have given me more credibility with publishers and perhaps the reading
public. However, the influence with the reading public has likely not been significant.”

Rudy Wiebe wrote, “I’m not sure what you mean by “impact on your life;” in my personal life, in the long, solitary effort of writing long fiction, it was very reassuring to remember that at least a tiny group (three) of very good readers thought I was writing outstanding fiction. And twice at that, twenty years apart. A writer needs all the (continuing) encouragement he can get, especially from readers he respects.”

Joseph Skvorecky wrote, “Well, that had nothing to do with my writing: the End of the Communist Empire.”

Question #9: In your opinion, what did this award do for the Canadian literary institution?

Carol Shields wrote, “The awards have raised the profile of writers.”

Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “For many years, it was the only high profile award for writers of fiction. Recently, other awards such as the Giller have become important in raising the profile of the winning writer.”

Rudy Wiebe wrote, “For a long time it was the only major award to writing in Canada; with the Giller and the Writers Trust awards now, and many others, including regional prizes, that lack has been remedied. The point of awards is not like that of a “Stanley Cup win:” rather it is more what I indicate in #8—a judged recognition by your peers that the artistic work you have laboured over for years is outstanding, and worthy to be read; that, like good literature must, this particular work says something moving and important to the human spirit. Every award winner knows that, had different members been on the jury, his or her book would likely not have won; that qualification lies in the very nature of evaluating artistic awards (ie. all flowers are beautiful in their own way, but any individual person may feel one flower is MORE beautiful than another) and that deeply felt evaluation is what makes receiving a judged artistic award all the more encouraging.”

Joseph Skvorecky wrote, ”It greatly encourages Canadian writers. And every writer badly needs such encouragement. And the money comes in handy.”
Question #10: Do you have any suggestions about the ways in which the administration of the Governor General’s Award might be improved? Carol Shields wrote, “The awards are well administered, and have already improved.”

Guy Vanderhaeghe wrote, “No.” Rudy Wiebe wrote, “They should hold the ceremonies in all parts of the country; if they can stage them in Montréal (as they have; I was at one of them and it was exciting), why can’t they be held, with celebratory readings and other events, in Vancouver or St. John’s? The present Governor General is creating such a superb presence concerning what a GG should really be, that presenting the awards annually in other parts of the country would simply add to their literary effect and also the GG’s office as a powerful unifying force as an expression of Canadian art and culture. Besides it would distinguish itself even more from the high-media Giller or Griffin awards, which are obviously (and there’s nothing per se wrong with that) Toronto centered.”

Josef Skvorecky wrote, “I’m afraid I don’t.”

Works Cited


Constructing “The Glorious Heritage of India”: Popular Culture and Nationalist Ideology in Indian Biographical Comics

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The modern history of India, particularly in the twentieth century, has been characterized by tensions between the majority Hindus and the Muslim minority. In the anti-colonial period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the antagonistic politics of religious communalism led to horrific violence both before and after the partition of India and Pakistan. The political divisions between religious and nationalist groups continue to pervade the scene of politics in India today. Communalism in India is resurrected in the right-wing, Hindu nationalist politics of the ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), and the various Hindu fundamentalist groups associated with it. The BJP’s program of anti-Muslim, antisectional Hindu nationalism is garnering a great deal of support, both in India and among diasporic Indians abroad. This paper is part of a larger work which asks why this nationalist agenda is so appealing, and considers the popular cultural mechanisms through which the ideology of Hindu nationalism circulates among Indians and in the diaspora.

In “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” Karl Marx writes that in times of crisis, people “conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language” (595). In contemporary India, the BJP and other Hindu nationalists are conjuring up the spirits of the earliest moments of the Indian independence movement to the service of their agenda. This conjuring is a process of ideological production, and in this era of mass technology, communication, and reproduction, it can operate in some deceptively innocuous forms of media.

*Amar Chitra Katha* is a series of comic books, produced in India, which anthologize “the glorious heritage of India” in more than 200 volumes of 32 colour illustrated pages.¹ These volumes retell classic and traditional folk tales, religious

¹ The “Glorious Heritage of India” is a key slogan of the series. It appears on the covers of
stories, biographies, and moments in history, and for the most part these are
gleaned from a Hindu cultural, religious, and historical perspective. Marketed to
parents as educational tools, the audience of the series is primarily children of the
English speaking middle class in India and the diaspora. They are, however, also
read and enjoyed by adults. The publishers of *Amar Chitra Katha* deny that they,
or the series, have any explicit political leanings. But, as I intend to show, there is
a deeply embedded system of signification and representation in the series which
conforms to, or is at least complicit with, the ideology, and the iconography, of the
fundamentalist Hindu right.² This system hinges on lacunae and the strategic
abridgement of historical and mythical narratives in order to produce a particular
ideological reading.

*Amar Chitra Katha: History and Context*

*Amar Chitra Katha*, which translates as “Immortal Illustrated Story,” was begun in
1967 by Anant Pai, who is still the editor of the series. Pai has written, edited, or
supervised the production of each issue. The publisher, India Book House, claims
that the series has sold more than fifty million copies worldwide.

Every issue of the series is written originally in English, which continues
to be its best selling language. Some are then translated into Indian languages. The
series began in 1967 with *Krishna* (v. 11/501), and at its height grew to over 500
volumes. At some point in the early 1990s, the series was revamped, and now
carries a whittled down catalogue of about 231 “deluxe” volumes and several
special issues.³ Both new and old incarnations of the series are dominated by

² While images from these comics could not be reproduced here, some of the covers,
including those I discuss here, are reproduced at http://www.exoticindiaart.com/books/Comics/. Unfortunately, previously available on-line
versions of some of the comics have disappeared from the internet. A new site, at
www.amarchitrakatha.com appears to be in development.

³ Throughout this paper, I’ve given both the old volume numbers (11-500+), and the new
numbers (501-731) whenever the comic appears in both new and old series. The new series
is identifiable by the volumes’ laminated covers and brightly coloured borders surrounding
the cover illustration. While these new ‘deluxe’ run of comics are quite widely available,
some libraries and collections may hold older prints identified by the old number. Where
the comic exists in both series, the pages seem to have been directly reproduced, and the
pagination remains the same.
depictions of Hindu myths. There are a few devoted to Sikhism and Christianity, and almost none to Islam.

Though the greatest number of volumes in the series depict religious stories and myths, for the purpose of this paper I’m going to focus on a few of the smaller group of comics based on figures and events in Indian history. I utilize these to illustrate my point that these texts operate at an intersection of history, popular culture, and ideology.

It may seem unusual to think of comic books as lessons in historical education, but their significance as a popular cultural medium is not easily dismissed. In the Indian context, *Amar Chitra Katha* takes its place among other forms of mass culture and entertainment which are significant to the visual culture of religion and nation. Visually, the series’ artwork draws upon styles popularized in Hindu poster art and, I would suggest, Bollywood film.\(^4\) The ease of mass reproduction and the simplicity of the visual and textual narratives in comics also provides the possibility of a homogeneity in representation which is difficult to achieve in a country of one billion people. E.J. Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Walter Benjamin have all commented from differing perspectives about the significance of visual media to the formation of national identity and national politics. Though they differ in their approaches to the ‘nation’ itself, they would agree that print and visual media can powerfully project a singular image of the ‘nation’ onto a heterogeneous people.\(^5\)

Recognizing the educational importance of his series, Pai says that *Amar Chitra Katha* promises parents to “screen each word and picture, as they have a lasting impact on impressionable minds,” and that his company need be “more a vehicle of education than a business,” and it is worth considering this contention in light of some of the editorial choices I’m going to show here

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(Pritchett 104). Why, if the editors truly want to chronicle the “glorious heritage of India,” should they choose mainly Hindu stories and lives, if not as a reflection of a Hindu-centric nationalism? What is the reasoning behind the choice of characters in the series’s account of Indian independence? And, my larger project will ask, what effect might it have on the education and imagination of a young Indian/diasporic readership? The complexity of the editors’ choices reminds us that these distillations and abridgements of myth and history are necessarily ideological and cannot be dismissed simply as pitfalls of the medium. The limitations and challenges posed by the comic medium could facilitate as well as hinder the ambiguous political intentions of the editorial staff.

**Dayananda**

Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) was the founder of the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu group. Historians agree that the Arya Samaji ideology was foundational to the later development of increasingly militaristic, right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh); his contribution has also been recognized by leaders of these groups, like Lala Lajput Rai and VD Savarkar (Masselos 106; Jaffrelot 14). Given this reputation, it is curious to see how *Amar Chitra Katha* has chosen to eulogize him.

The introduction to *Dayananda* (v. 120/624) speaks explicitly to his reformist stance:

> Swami Dayananda was born at a time when our country was under foreign domination. Most of the people were steeped in ignorance and poverty. Hypocrisy and corruption flourished in the name of religion... Prejudices of creed, caste and community had corroded the social cohesion and the wily and the wicked were ruling the roost. (*Dayananda* inside front cover)

Florid alliteration aside, it is interesting that this first paragraph implies a causal relationship between ‘foreign domination’ (it’s unclear if this refers to the British,
or to Muslims—neither group is mentioned) and religious corruption. The introduction goes on to state:

He did not however propagate or establish a new creed or a new sect like many of his contemporaries... his main purpose behind establishing the Arya Samaj was to make people good, to rid the society of its evils and thereby build a free, strong and united nation. In fact, he prepared the psychological and social background for Mahatma Gandhi’s subsequent political programmes. He was, truly speaking, one of the great builders of Modern India. (ibid)

But Dayananda did in fact set forth a new ‘creed’ in advocating “Vedic” values with strategic reforms, and it’s unclear how his position on Hindu superiority over other religions could lead to a ‘United India.’ The Arya links to the Mahasabha and later RSS movements must not be overlooked in this regard. *Amar Chitra Katha* however, appears to consciously position Dayananda, in line with other nationalist heroes, as primarily in opposition to British rule, and implies that his Hindu reformist agenda arises as a response to colonization. This makes it possible for the reader to miss the Hindu-centric effects of the Arya Samaj, and its anti-Muslim sentiment. In fact, the successor organizations to the Arya Samaj were explicit in placing the ‘blame’ for Indian political problems at the feet of Muslims and other religious minorities.

While it is true that the Arya Samaj stance of rights for women and ‘untouchables’ did, in some sense, lay a groundwork for Gandhi’s later projects, the innocuously depoliticised way in which these reforms are depicted is suspicious. In fact, as Radha Kumar, Uma Chakravarti and others have written, reformers of this period who advocated for women in some areas were not necessarily progressive in their political beliefs. In the bottom right frame of page 20, the caption narrates how Dayananda gave the sacred thread to women and Dalits. He also, however, recommended that people marry within their *varna* (caste) group to maintain social order, and was primarily interested in the religious education of young women in order to prepare them to do their “duty” as
“mothers of the nation” (Chakravarti 56-7). These details are absent from the comic’s biographical narrative. On page 21, in the top right frame, Dayananda says, “For women to acquire that place of honour, they must get proper education. Give up Purdah! Give up superstitions.” While statements like this have contributed to the remembrance of Dayananda as a champion of women’s rights, it is important to recognize that he in fact felt that Purdah and “superstitions” were imports from Islamic culture which had sullied the “purity” of Hindu culture.

It is not until page 26 of the 32-page comic that Dayananda establishes the Arya Samaj. Here, Dayananda’s speech bubble reads: “Arya Samaj means the society of virtuous men. We must all unite without distinction of caste or creed. Our objectives are to impart true knowledge, to bring about social justice and to achieve freedom from alien rule” (Dayananda 26). Here, the limitations of text in comic book form are apparent. The word “Arya” is explained in the speech bubble in one context, that of “virtue” or “honour.” But although footnotes are used elsewhere in the text, here there is nothing to explain the meaning of the word further. For Dayananda, Arya(n)s were those ‘original’ Indians, practitioners of the Vedic religion of his ‘Golden Age,’ and the term Arya pointed towards a nationalism based on this (conjectural) linkage between cultural and religious tradition. His program of purification, coupled with his insistence on “disciplined” procreation, borders on a eugenic procedure.

Veer Savarkar

Similar questions arise from an Amar Chitra Katha release titled Veer Savarkar: in the Andamans (v. 309/678). In this case, the limitations of the narrative in the text, coupled with its visual representations, provide an even more perplexing history of a nationalist ‘hero.’ V.D. Savarkar was the author of Hindutva: Who is a

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6 There is a great deal of confusion around the way in which Jati and Varna have been translated variously as caste and race. Jati refers to and endogamous system of social hierarchy which is often referred to as caste. Varna generally refers to the four major ‘caste’ groups: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. ‘Untouchables,’ or Dalits, fall below the lowest group. The word ‘caste’ is frequently translated in both ways, as is ‘race.’ This leads to a great deal of ambiguity among western scholars about the exact meaning of proposals such as Dayananda’s. See Jaffrelot, 14, and S. Sarkar, “Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva.”
Hindutva, a text which continues to be integral to the Hindu nationalist project. As a young anti-colonial revolutionary he was arrested in England and imprisoned in the Andamans for eleven years, before going on to become a leader on the Hindu right. Although in his earlier days he had been associated with socialist and anti-partition activists, after his imprisonment Savarkar increasingly saw communalist Muslim organizations as the ‘enemy,’ and his work with the Mahasabha earned him a position as an increasingly right-wing, anti-Gandhian, anti-Congress leader. He became a vocal proponent of a Hindu-centric state, and supported militaristic defence of ‘Hindu’ interests in response to his perception of an increased Muslim ‘threat.’ His vehement anti-Gandhian speeches (deriding Gandhi as anti-national and anti-Hindu) were a source of inspiration to Nathuram Godse and the group of young militants who orchestrated Gandhi’s assassination.

All this, however, is not apparent in the comic book version of his life. The introduction tells us that the text of the comic, written by Subba Rao, an Amar Chitra Katha staffer, is drawn largely from Savarkar’s own book on his prison experience, My Transportation for Life. In keeping with the issue’s subtitle, the volume devotes most of its panels to Savarkar’s imprisonment in the ‘cellular jail’ in the Andamans. The first few pages set Savarkar up as a strident young revolutionary, documenting his work in acquiring arms and training others in their use. The very first page shows Savarkar giving a concealed handgun to an associate; this brief depiction of his life in England then gives way to the narrative of incarceration. Pages 9-32 of the volume are almost entirely set within the prison, where scenes of torture, abuse, suicide, and insanity abound—something which doesn’t ring quite true with Pai’s desire to protect “impressionable minds” from scenes of violence. On the final page, only the last four frames encapsulate Savarkar’s release. Of his subsequent political life, we are given only the final panel, with this text against a tricolour background: “Savarkar took an active part in the struggle for freedom. He had the satisfaction of witnessing the tricolour

8 One such socialist would be Madame Cama, the Parsi socialist who unfurled the “Free India” flag that Savarkar had designed at the 1907 International Socialist conference in Stuttgart. This event is described on page 2 of the comic.
9 Hawley writes that in Pai’s opinion, “Children should not be exposed to scenes of violence, prejudice, sexual violence, or superstition” (128).
unfurled on August 15, 1947” (Veer Savarkar 32). Nothing is mentioned of his work with the Mahasabha, his writing of Hindutva, his antagonistic relationship with Congress, or his eventual arrest, trial and acquittal on conspiracy charges regarding the assassination of Gandhi.

As with the case of Dayananda, one wonders why Pai and his staff would choose such a complex and controversial character for an Amar Chitra Katha volume, and then leave untouched the most controversial facts of his life. As Pritchett comments:

No doubt this is the most tactful way to treat V.D. Savarkar, if it is necessary to treat him at all. Since other, less communally tainted nationalist leaders are available for the series to depict, why make a point of depicting a communal one—and then trying to airbrush him into blandness? (94)

To report on the lives of communalist leaders as if they were in favour of an unpartitioned and unified India seems like a strange move, unless we consider it as a moment of production of a rather specific kind of ideology—one which serves to disguise the anti-Muslim sentiments of the contemporary Hindutva movement in the garb of anti-colonial nationalism.

**Jawaharlal Nehru**

It is interesting in this light to compare these two to the volume on Nehru, which of the three was published latest, originally in 1991. Though the comic is subtitled The Early Days, there has been no volume of ‘later days’ yet released. The same is true of the volume on Mahatma Gandhi: there are early days, but no ‘later’ ones.

**Nehru** is structurally, visually, and narratively one of Amar Chitra Katha’s strangest contributions to comic book biography. It also, at twenty-nine

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10 It’s interesting to note that Savarkar’s design for the Mahasabha flag, with the Hindu Om symbol, swastika, and sword on a red background, was his favoured choice over the Congress’s tri-colour. In a speech in 1939, he states that he and his followers shall respect whatever flag is chosen freely by his countrymen, as long as it is understood that his flag represents “Hinduom as a whole” (Mathur 84).
pages, has the dubious distinction of being the shortest volume I have come across.\textsuperscript{11} Nehru was, of course, the first Prime Minister of India. His career was not, to put it lightly, without controversy, but he is certainly a significant historical figure.

\textit{Amar Chitra Katha}’s volume on his life does little to describe, or even contextualize, the story of Nehru’s political life. In the comic’s strangely proportioned narrative, Nehru isn’t even born until the fifth page. The next 20 pages are devoted to describing Nehru’s early childhood and college education. Visually, these illustrations are among the most striking of the four volumes I examine here. The volume goes to some lengths to establish the degree to which Motilal’s family was ‘anglicized’: between pages 5-10, there are several images of young Nehru in school boy uniform. In the first, where he poses with a bicycle, the caption reads, “Jawarhalal was brought up in a lavish, westernized lifestyle” (\textit{Jawarhalal Nehru} 5). Other images show young Nehru riding a pony, playing with toy soldiers, and so on. In contrast, in volumes depicting other political figures like Dayananda and Jayaprakash Narayan, the protagonists are often illustrated as studiously learning Hindu scriptures as children. The volume seems to draw out Nehru’s interest in western philosophy and education. In another frame on page 14, Nehru is pictured turning down an invitation from a clearly much darker skinned young boy, in favour of attending a theosophist study group. When the boy asks him to explain, Nehru responds, “Ah! You won’t understand.” This illustration seems to echo the Hindu nationalist perspective of Nehru as class and caste privileged, and as too much engaged with the British.

The last page of the comic, on page 29, shows Nehru in 1920, speaking to villagers outside Allahbad. Again here there is a visual contrast between Nehru and the much more darkly coloured villagers and workers, which seems characteristic to the style of the \textit{Amar Chitra Katha} artwork. The final caption reads: “Thus began his close identification with the masses of India. The man of destiny who later became the architect of India had stepped into the arena of public life.” The narrative halts here at 1920, twenty-seven years before he became India’s first prime minister. It does not go on to describe Nehru’s involvement with

\textsuperscript{11} Given that Nehru was a prolific write and in the public eye for most of his life, it seems unlikely that this length is due to lack of material.
the socialist caucus of Congress, his political problems, his imprisonments, or even his or his descendants’ tenures as Prime Minister. It does not even hint at the allegations of corruption and elitism that surrounded him before and after partition. Instead, the remaining three pages of the volume are filled with advertisements for products of India Book House.

With this materially and narratively foreshortened volume, it appears that *Amar Chitra Katha* endeavours to avoid any details which cast Nehru in a critical light, or perhaps to make him appear as neutral as possible; an interesting contrast to the prowess and stoicism of Savarkar.

**Ideological Construction and Comic Book Narrative Form**

The three major historical figures I’ve looked at thus far provide us with some striking contrasts and provocative questions. The biographical narratives of these comic books perform what Marx calls “tricks” of ideology.\(^{12}\) If we are to take these examples and read them against these tricks, we may begin to answer some of the questions I’ve identified here. Historical narrative by way of biography seems to be an optimal forum in which ideology can be created; the comic book form appears to facilitate that because of the abridgments, omissions, and simplifications required by the medium itself. A review of these tricks should uncover some propositions about *Amar Chitra Katha’s* role in the production of ideology.

Trick one is that “One must separate the ideas of those ruling for empirical reasons, under empirical conditions and as empirical individuals, from these actual rulers and thus recognize the rule of ideas or illusions in history” (Marx 175).

While of the three men I have discussed here, Nehru has the highest national profile, all are significant political leaders. Certainly, in the emerging and often revisionist historiography of Hindu nationalism, these ‘founding fathers’ take on the role of leaders in history. However, though they were all committed to the nationalist project, they had very different ideas of what the ‘nation’ should be. In order to narratively connect them together within the series, these differences are

\(^{12}\) Marx discusses the three tricks of ideological construction in *The German Ideology* (in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed Tucker, 175).
suppressed. Thus, the ideas of Aryan majoritarianism, Hindutva, and Gandhism respectively are extricated to varying degrees from the representations of these lives. Dayananda is a reformer, Savarkar a young man unjustly imprisoned, Nehru a westernized intellectual. But in none of these comics do we really see any reference to these leaders’ political beliefs. Rather, at least in the case of the former two, they are portrayed as heroes of mythic proportions.

Trick two is to find the “mystical connections” between the ideas thus separated from the people who think them. Separated out of the empirical historical context in which their thinkers think them, these varying ideas about the nation’s identity are homogenized through *Amar Chitra Katha*, until their common thread is revealed to be a concern with ‘nationhood.’ Despite the fact that they differ wildly on how such a nationhood should be conceived, it is this point which earns them a place in *Amar Chitra Katha’s* version of India. While the logical, empirical connections, as Marx writes, are already there—these men were part of the same milieu of Indian politics—the kernel at the centre of their ideas, ‘the nation,’ is what binds them together in comic book form.

The third trick, Marx writes, is to remove the mystical appearance of this “self-determining concept” it is changed into a person—“self-consciousness” —or, to appear thoroughly materialistic, into a series of persons, who represent the “concept” in history, into the “thinkers,” the “philosophers,” the ideologists, who again are understood as the manufacturers of history, as the “council of guardians,” as the rulers. (175)

to change the idea back into ‘a person,’ to imbue it with ‘self-consciousness,’ agency, to associate it once again with the ideologues themselves. Here is the place in which *Amar Chitra Katha’s* project is illuminated. The biographical narratives of these comic books perform precisely this third trick: to turn ‘the nation’ into a series of personages, “Makers of Modern India,” or “Indian Revolutionaries,” and, ultimately, part of the larger pantheon of heroes constructed by the series as a whole. Removed of the actual details of their analyses, lives, and work, these figures can become precisely what *Amar Chitra Katha* would like them to be: comic heroes for the children of an independent Indian nation.
But this nation is a rather specific one: the fathers of the nation are largely Hindu; devoid of the specific context of Hindu nationalism, and the communalist violence and hatred associated with it, these men become ‘air-brushed’ heroes of a united India. However, in comic book form, Savarkar certainly seems more exciting and heroic a ‘personage’ than Nehru. The construction of narratives allows for a privileging of some heroes over others.

With these representations, the “real enemy”—the British—is clearly marked, and the history of communalism itself obscured. *Amar Chitra Katha* thus plays a role in the transformation of Hindu nationalist ideology from an anti-Muslim to an anti-British one. While Pai himself has taken pains to be seen as without a political agenda, then, it appears that the series itself cannot help but have one. His choices of strategic abridgment and inclusion point back repeatedly to the larger ideological construction of ‘the nation.’ The series bills itself as representing “the glorious heritage of India.” That India is carefully constructed so that the ugliness of Hindu fundamentalist nationalism is diligently avoided. Thus sanitized, nationalist “pride” becomes ideologically safe and accessible to young people—and this opens a door to the fundamentalism of which we now see such an increase.

But if the crisis of which Marx writes of in “The Eighteenth Brumaire” is made evident by the increasing anti-Muslim hostility of India’s right-wing BJP government, the tension of war between India and Pakistan, the bloodshed at the site of the Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhumi temple, last year’s massacres in Gujarat; then *Amar Chitra Katha* is one popular cultural mechanism among many that can facilitate Hindu nationalists’ “conjuring up” of the history of the independence movement to serve as the ‘comic’ face of an increasingly fundamentalist agenda.

**Works Cited**


This paper is an excerpt from an on-going larger project which is exploring how national cultures—specifically, the Ukrainian and Russian—developed in the Russian Empire. It is a critical interrogation of the authority of discursive traditions (popular as well as scholarly) that tend to conflate all of East Slavic culture under a “Russian” heading.

This conference deals with “Culture and State.” In my case, the “State” is an Empire, specifically the Russian Empire—a designation that for today’s purposes will also encompass the former Soviet Union.

The national modifier that this state bears—Russian—and the frequent treatment of the Soviet Union as simply “Russia” cloaks a host of national cultural issues that, as I will argue, ultimately led to the dissolution and demise of this multiethnic and multicultural polity. I posit the disintegration of the Russian / Soviet Empire as an institutional collapse of an inherently untenable cultural model that lost its power to legitimize social, political and cultural practices of the State. I contend that within an Imperial Public Sphere, two mutually exclusive cultural ideologies—the “Ukrainian” and the “all-Russian”—were competing to articulate a modern identity and culture. This nation building took place through a literary and cultural discourse conducted primarily by the Empire’s multinational imperial intelligentsia. The gradual ideological differentiation within this social group eventually undermined the cultural assumptions that were to have served as the bedrock of the State. My research will show the process of this transformation. It also take into consideration Bourdieu’s ideas of cultural production and how they apply to an imperial setting. I am exploring the consequences this shared

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imperial cultural production had for national canon formation and national attribution/appropriation of cultural capital. Obviously, all of these issues will not come up in this short précis, but they do lurk in the background.

One of the surprising outcomes of the Soviet Union’s (i.e., the Empire’s) collapse is the crisis it revealed in the Russian identity, something about which much as been written by Russians and non-Russians alike. A scramble to recreate a national identity either on the Soviet or pre-Soviet traditions is currently Russia’s preoccupation. I say that this is a surprise because until 1991 popular wisdom held that we were dealing with an allegedly thousand-year old “nation,” whose first state was Kievan Rus’ (Kievan Russia), the same Kiev (i.e., Kyiv in Ukrainian) that today is the capital of Ukraine. And here—emblematically, if not in its entirety—lies the problem. The Russian Empire—where national ideas were not particularly well developed even in the late Soviet period—worked hard to advance a sense of a “Russianness” that was based not on ethnic Russian foundations but on the notion that all three East Slavic peoples were a single triune nationality. “Russianness” was understood to embrace the Belarusians (i.e., the White Russians or Belorussians), “Great” Russians and Ukrainians (the so-called “Little Russians”).

This particular form of nation-construction (often called “all-Russian” since all these people referred to themselves by some form of the name “Rus”’) was Empire-driven and relied heavily on the cooperation of Ukrainians and on references to the Slavic culture and state that first arose on their territory (Russians call Kyiv their “first” state). Unfortunately for the Empire, this model of nation building was challenged in the nineteenth century with a Ukrainian nation-building project that became a direct threat to the triune, “all-Russian” nationality.

Since the second-half of the nineteenth century the state-sponsored all-Russian national identity was embraced by many imperial subjects (Jews, Germans, Ukrainians) and served as the bedrock of the Empire. By the early twentieth century the idea of a triune Russian nation was deeply entrenched among ethnic Russians. The following words of one of the Empire’s most celebrated intellectuals, Peter Struve (1870-1944) can serve as a good illustration of these trends. Struve was an economist, sociologist, and politician of German descent and, in the 1890s, a principle theoretician of Marxism. Speaking of the growing strength of the Ukrainian movement in the Empire, Struve said the following in 1911:
Should the intelligentsia’s “Ukrainian” idea... strike the national soil and set it on fire... [the result will be] a gigantic and unprecedented schism of the Russian nation, which, such is my deepest conviction, will result in a veritable disaster for the state and for the people. All our “borderland” problems will pale into mere bagatelles compared to such a prospect of bifurcation and—should the “Belorussians” follow the “Ukrainians”—the “trifurcation” of Russian culture. (Qtd. in Pipes 211-2)

Struve was of the opinion that “Russian progressive social thought must, without any ambiguity and indulgence, enter energetically into an ideological struggle with ‘Ukrainianness’ [ukrainianness]—a tendency,” he said, designed to “weaken and, to some extent, even to abolish the great achievement of our history, i.e., all-Russian culture” (Obsh 86). Struve viewed this as a struggle against the “huge, indeed, titanic plan of bifurcating... Russian culture over its entire length—from the primer to ‘general pathology’ and ‘crystallography,’ from the folk song to translations of Ovid, Goethe, Verlaine or Verhaeren” (Na 185).

Looking back at these statements, we may be justified in saying that Ukraine’s independence in 1991—the culmination of some two-hundred years of cultural debate in the Empire—was precisely the “veritable disaster” Struve feared. Moreover, judging by what is said by some Russians today, Russia does seem to consider itself bifurcated (even trifurcated)—a casualty of no other than the “Ukrainian idea,” i.e., Ukrainian national culture. It is not by chance that most arguments about the possible reconstitution of Russia along its former imperial lines prominently include Ukraine, which continues to be a key element of Russia’s self-image. The collapse of the Russian Empire—of the Soviet Union—can thus be examined as a failure of a two-centuries-old cultural paradigm by which Russians unsuccessfully tried to transform their Empire into a nation-state on the basis of a triune “all-Russian” nationality. Correspondingly, Ukraine’s independence can also be interpreted as the political triumph of a marginalised culture in the Empire. More and more, it seems, the Ukrainian-Russian relationship of the last two centuries lends itself to being considered a struggle over the control of cultural paradigms and cultural production in the Empire. Understanding this process can yield more than just abstract intellectual
satisfaction; it may serve as a clue for predicting Russia’s future political relations with Ukraine.

As is obvious from Struve’s reference to Ovid, Goethe, etc, the struggle in the Empire was first and foremost about the character and definition of “high” or “elite” culture. The issue came down to the following: Can the educated Russian and Ukrainian elites of the Empire (a relatively small percentage of the population) agree on a common “national” culture? A unified high culture, combining the activities and the legacies of both Russians and Ukrainians, was to ensure not only a great culture but also a great state. A central premise of the all-Russian cultural idea, at least since the 1840s, was that Ukrainian intelligentsia should not pursue a separate “high” culture in the Empire but make its cultural contribution through the imperial/all-Russian institutions. This idea extended to language use as well. In 1841 the celebrated Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky stated: “The literary language of Little Russians [i.e., Ukrainians] must be the language of their educated society, namely the Russian language. Even if a great poet should appear in Little Russia, this could only be subject to the condition of his being a Russian poet” (qtd. in Swoboda 311). Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938), a respected linguist and philosopher, offered an impassioned defence of this approach to nation building as late as 1927. I cite his words in translation:

It is obvious that Ukrainians participated actively and on an equal footing with the Great Russians not only in the genesis but in the development of this all-Russian culture; and they did so as Ukrainians, without abandoning their ethnic identity. (255-256)

This culture lost over time any specific Great Russian or Ukrainian identification and became all-Russian. (251)

It is simply impossible to deny the fact that Russian culture during the post-Petrine era is all-Russian and that it is not foreign to Ukrainians. (255-256)

[However likely it is that a new Ukrainian culture would resolve the problem of conforming the bottom story [i.e., low culture—OSI] of its edifice to its foundations in the people, it will never resolve even partially the other problem: creating a new top story [i.e., high culture] that could satisfy the needs of the intelligentsia more fully than the top]
story of the old all-Russian culture did. A new Ukrainian culture would be in no position to compete successfully with the old culture in meeting these spiritual and intellectual needs. (257)

[A] regional and tribal differentiation of Russian culture should not extend to the very top of the cultural edifice, to cultural assets of a higher order. There must be no tribal or regional boundaries [i.e., Great Russian or Ukrainian] on the top story of Russian culture in the future. (263)

[Any new Ukrainian culture would fail because] talented people... given completely free choice... will quite naturally opt for the culture of the ethnological whole [i.e. all-Russian culture—OSI] and not for the culture of a part of that whole [i.e. Ukrainian culture]. It follows that the only people who could opt for Ukrainian culture are those biassed in some way or limited in their freedom of choice. (258)

Without going into too much detail, it should be mentioned that since the middle of the nineteenth century an increasingly larger segment of the Ukrainian intelligentsia rejected this type of cultural agenda for the Empire. One Ukrainian critic, A. Tovkachevs'kyi, responded to Struve’s apocalyptic fears with this vision:

Struve imagines that culture is a sum of objective values, used in common by Great Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, and hence believes that when Ukrainians walk away from the Great Russians, they will take with them their part of culture, divide it up, the way brothers divide a family inheritance when they want to live separately. But culture cannot be divided; it is in us, not outside us... Therefore the separation of Ukrainians from the Great Russians (if we were to assume that they now compose a single whole) cannot result in the division of culture, cannot in any way do any harm to the Great Russians, it means that Great Russian culture will remain such as it was before. (232:3)

To Struve’s and Trubetzkoj’s assertions that the Ukrainian elite subordinate their cultural activity to the Empire’s, Tovkachevs'kyi had this rejoinder: “We, Ukrainians, wish to be a nation; we want to have everything our own—‘from the
primer to ‘general pathology’ and ‘crystallography,’ from the folk song to translations of Ovid, Goethe, Verlaine or Verhaeren’’ (235).

Although the state’s “all-Russian” program for culture in the Empire clearly slowed a separate national development among Ukrainians (a fact that is evident even today under conditions of independence) it can hardly be called a success from the point of view of the Empire. Ironically, the Empire’s program had its biggest triumph among the ethnic Russian population, who readily adopted the overarching triune cultural identity. There is no question that imperial (i.e., state) processes influenced Russian cultural formation very strongly. A contemporary Russian historian, Aleksei Miller, acknowledges in a book published in 2000 that “the project of a large [all-] Russian nation and its failure, is over, but echoes of these ideas and topics, in new conditions and in new forms, can be clearly discerned even today” (239). The reference to nineteenth century ideas thriving in the twenty-first is an acknowledgement that the imperial sense of “Russianness,” one that depends on the Ukrainian and Belarusan component to recognize itself fully, remains a potent social force in Russia. What makes it an unusual and interesting sociological phenomenon is that by today this particular sense of “Russianness” has lost its connections to the prefix “all-” and has simply become “Russian.” To put it another way, the contemporary notion of “Russianness” is no longer cognizant of the imperial conditions that produced it. For many, this is a Russian national identity par excellence.

In his 1997 book, Russia: People and Empire, Geoffrey Hosking reminded us that Russia’s contemporary identity crisis is not a new development but a persistent characteristic of its complex national life, which for centuries was tied to an Empire. The “building of an Empire,” Hosking states, “impeded the formation of a [Russian] nation” (xi). “For more than three centuries, [the Russian Empire’s] structures had been those of a multi-ethnic service state, not those of an emerging nation” (478). A “fractured and underdeveloped nationhood has been [the Russians’] principle historical burden in the last two centuries or so, continuing through the period of the Soviet Union and persisting beyond its fall”

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There is much truth to this statement but it leaves a number of national and cultural issues unresolved.

If Russia’s nationhood is “underdeveloped” then what, in theory, would constitute a “fully” developed nation? If it is “fractured”—then in relation to what type of national wholeness? What ideal Russian nation did the Empire impede? Hosking suggests that culture played an important role in Russia’s national maturity and definition, ameliorating the effects of Empire. But, curiously, one of his examples of Russian national culture is the Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol. Gogol’s echt Ukrainian tale, Taras Bul’ba, is described by Hosking as “a romantic portrait of the alternative Russian [sic] ethnus [sic], the Cossacks of the Ukrainian frontier, in their unceasing struggle against the Tatars and Poles” (297). Clearly, by equating the Ukrainian historical experience with the Russian, Hosking used the “all-Russian” model of a “Russian ethnus,” but without historicizing or problematizing it. In other words, while his intention seems to be to distinguish the imperial from the (Russian) national, he unconsciously uses an imperial (all-Russian) construction of “Russianness” to illustrate the national. Hosking’s allusion to Russian national cultural underdevelopment would make sense if he spoke about the underdevelopment or underutilisation of ethnic (Great) Russian elements in the Empire, but, as is evident, he is invoking the so-called “all-Russian” culture for Russian national construction, without making conscious its imperial roots. Thus, if we accept that the “building of an Empire” “impeded the formation of a [Russian] nation” we must recognize two things: a) the Empire impeded the development of the ethnic (Great) Russian national elements and b) it did so through the hyper-development of a very special type of nation, a nation that saw itself as the embodiment of all three East Slavic peoples. Most cultural or national descriptions of Russia—and much of Russia’s self-image—remains moored to precisely this national/cultural paradigm, even as Ukraine’s independence—political and cultural—makes it intellectually and emotionally difficult to reconcile.

As we can see from Hosking’s example, the basic problem lies in the failure of historians to adequately theorize the concept of the “national” in Russian imperial history and to differentiate East Slavic societies within the Empire. There is an assumption that all imperial cultural activity and production are “nationally” “Russian” in character if they were “elite” products and expressed through imperial institutions. This is an unwarranted assumption, given the multi-ethnic
make up of the Empire and the generally nascent quality of national identity (Russian included) therein. In general, we have a poor notion of how the Empire and national cultures (especially Russian) interrelate. While national cultures are frequently declared to exist, they seem to do so primordially and autonomously of the Empire, with "Russian national" culture occupying its highest echelons. The highly respected historian Nicholas V. Riasanovsky writes: "Until now [1991] Russia never had a national stage in its history." But he adds, "I repeat, there were national literature, music, architecture, and thinkers, but the government and the state, as well as the bulk of the population, still belonged to the old world, not to modern nationalism" (12 emphasis added).

At first glance this must strike us as a rather incompatible combination of assertions. On the one hand, Russia is acknowledged to be an imperial state without a national history. On the other, we are told that it possesses a national culture. If we accept the last statement as a fact (as we inevitably must), we are struck that there is no explanation of how Russian culture came about in the imperial state—especially if Russians had a poorly developed national consciousness. How did the Empire impact Russian national culture? Riasanovsky's uncomplicated invocation of Russia's national culture begs explanation especially when aligned with what we have seen in Hosking, Struve, and Trubetzkoy—namely the tendency to equate the "all-Russian" with the "Russian," thereby removing from both historical and theoretical consideration a central problem in Russia's construction of its national self.

I would suggest that before we can speak of a Russian national culture, it is necessary to consider "culture" as an imperial category. It is helpful to imagine not only a "political Empire" but also a separate "imperial culture." To recognize the Empire in its own right as a cultural category is to realize that we are not dealing only with national categories (Ukrainian, Russian), but with a third, the imperial, which had an impact on both nations through its "all-Russian" paradigm. In other words, the Empire mediated (for better or for worse) the Ukrainian and Russian national experience, fatefuly exerting its influence on them. The task of the historian is not to embrace the Empire's definition of Russianness as if it were a natural phenomenon, but to understand its unique social and ideological form.

I propose, in short, that the high culture of the Empire cannot be viewed automatically as a "Russian" national product but rather as the creation of an
imperial public sphere where the Ukrainian and Russian cultural elites met, interacted, created shared cultural capital and, finally, parted ways, heading toward their respective national destinations, in the process destroying the cultural foundations on which the integrity of the state rested. The status of the cultural capital left behind by the vanished imperial state (e.g. the works of Gogol and the “Russian” avant-garde—to cite but two examples) is much more “nationally” ambivalent than most historians of literature or art care to admit. This should become obvious the moment historians begin to differentiate among the East Slavs, rather than blindly follow the “all-Russian” imperial model.

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The study of national identity in general, and Englishness in particular, has become something more than a mere cottage industry since 1989. In Britain, this rising output has been further fuelled by political agendas from Thatcher to Blair that have depended on national iconography, agendas ranging from the call to put the "Great’ back in Great Britain” to a drive to “rebrand” the nation. The crablike movement toward European union, the increased visibility of imperial ethnicities, the decline of local governmental structures in favour of an increased federalism, and the devolution of a geographical Britain itself have also put an emphatic stress on the corporate identities of Britishness and Englishness. In exploring the cultural politics of heritage, I am taking Krishan Kumar’s advice “to work from the outside in” to find “English national identity as a kind of residue” of previous engagements and reactions to a wider world (43-4). That is, heritage should be conceived not so much as an internal legacy but one constructed through a “history that happened elsewhere” and one that must encompass the return of this elsewhere to what will be described as a haunted house of heritage. If, as Jacques Derrida suggests in Specters of Marx, inheritance figures the uncanny return of a strange revenant, then it is in relation to the cultural politics of immigration and assimilation that the texts and icons of the past seem most haunting. I will explore this tension by mapping the alterity of the archaic and the heimlichkeit of both the host and the hosted in the contemporary politics of heritage.

I want to examine the role that heritage has played in the cultural imagery of Britain in its signifying role for the social imaginary of the United Kingdom. Indeed, heritage has played a significant role recently in the construction of a social imaginary for the United Kingdom in its use as a form of cultural capital in contemporary Britain in both the Thatcher and the Blair years. As Tom Nairn has so tirelessly reported, Blair’s notion of “rebranding” depends just as much on an idea of inherited national splendour as Thatcher’s call to return the “Great” to Great Britain. Many early critics—labelled the “heritage bashers” by opponents—linked the heritage culture with the contemporaneous explosion of
postmodernists texts. Commentators such as Andrew Higson and Robert Hewison argued that the “nostalgia for the present” located by Fredric Jameson as a prominent symptom of postmodern fiction and film could be similarly identified in such heritage trends as the revived fetishism of the country house and the cinematic revival of the historical costume drama. Higson in particular found heritage to be the ultimate materialization of situationist spectacle:

The commodity on offer is an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at. History, the past, becomes in Frederic Jameson’s phrase, ‘a vast collection of images’ designed to delight the modern-day tourist-historian. In this version of history, a critical perspective is displaced by decoration and display, a fascination with surfaces, ‘an obsessive accumulation of comfortably archival detail’ in which a fascination with style displaces the material dimensions of historical context. The past is reproduced as flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts. The past as referent is effaced, and all that remains is a self-referential intertextuality. (112)

However, such simplified parallels overlook major differences, most particularly in the way that the culture of heritage is linked to a slip between nation, state, and cultural “tradition.”

Margaret Thatcher’s creation of the Department of Heritage in 1983—since relabelled the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport by the Blair administration—is usually seen as the most material manifestation of her version of this “heritage politics,” a program that included the vigorous acquisition of sites such as country houses, the coast, etc. However, this drive to conservation was in fact the flipside of a much more forcefully articulated emphasis on enterprise and innovation, a stress intimately linked to the supply-side economics and industry-friendly policies of the Thatcher years. So marked was the Tory emphasis on transforming what had been the economic status-quo since the end of the war that commentators such as Tom Nairn and Anthony Barnett have argued that Thatcherism in fact instituted a revolution that began a peroistroika of the United Kingdom. The stress on heritage was largely, according to John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, inspired as a response to the loss of Empire and the threat of assimilating
English identity into the EEC; in other words, a generalized “perceived diminution of national identity” (Corner and Harvey 45). Ironically enough, in terms of the way Thatcher’s terms related to one another, it was in fact largely through the modernizing impulse contained in “enterprise” that put “heritage in danger” (to echo the title of one Tory tome). Here the relation between the terms is at a level deeper than that of heritage as an integral part of the tourism enterprise:

it is there at a more general and more strategic level in the way in which remodelled versions of ‘identity’ and ‘belonging’ have been projected by heritage. These have been offered as compensatory in relation to the undertones of destabilization and fragmentation carried by the enterprise imperative, along with its official melodies of opportunity and progress... Nationalist nostalgia might well serve to construct, via sentiments of inheritance, a sense of the National Present perfectly suited for use as a departure point for an 'enterprising' National Future, through, for example, the celebration of nineteenth-century industrial entrepreneurship (Corner and Harvey 46).

As a result, these terms instituted a temporal disruption between the constant innovation and modernity appealed to by “enterprise,” and the appeal to the continuity of tradition in “heritage.” This divide was smoothed over with the passing of National Heritage Acts in 1980 and 1983, and the subsequent ubiquity of the past (or at least a certain notion of it), an inescapability best seen in its increasing presence in the media of popular culture (the heritage film, the retrieval of Victorian styles by Laura Ashley and the Past Times catalogue). The result was an insertion of

‘pastness’ into the popular by narrative representations which have drawn on, and then re-enhanced, the periods, events, characters, costumes, and activities forming heritage’s intertextual grid... behind every use of ‘heritage’... there is necessarily a sense of inheritance which is rhetorically projected as ‘common,’ whilst at the same time it is implicitly or contextually closed down around particular characteristics of, for instance, social class, gender, and ethnicity. (Corner and Harvey 49)
In abreaction to the ahistoricizing rhetoric of “bootstrap” enterprise then, heritage held out the promise of a connection to the past, one that provided the promise of an almost familial relationship. As such, the past became projected as that which was held in common, a shared legacy that seemingly could bind a nation together even as its contemporary “society” was publicly derided as a chimera. It was this that proved to be the flashpoint, for much of the criticism garnered by heritage texts—costume drama films, very retro fashions and design—stemmed from a perceived linkage of heritage properties—especially the country house—with the nation’s heritage. This effective association of national signifiers with the residences of the well-to-do—with private property—offered a chilling echo of Margaret Thatcher’s abjuration of “society” in favour of enterprise. Some critics argued that the notion of heritage was inherently conservative, for it literally sought to conserve this past. If this past was one of class (emphasized by these critics over imperial and gender issues) domination, then the “heritage industry” sought to preserve hierarchical relations.

However, such criticism of heritage—that it takes form as an ahistorical relation to a valorized and fabricated aristocratic tradition—has itself been criticized by Raphael Samuel and his History Workshop as a reductive vision. Samuel’s work focuses on the demotic deployment of heritage in the form of museums that stress the “lived experience” of a past, local history re-enactments, and collections of everyday objects (farm and factory tools, bottles, train schedules, and so forth). Clearly there could be many types of heritage, types that valorized industrial labour and the working class as well as pastorally based aristocracy. Furthermore, Samuel, as well as a number of film critics, pointed out that much of what these “heritage baiters” (who were more or less exclusively male) complained of in the putatively quintessential heritage text, a cinematic adaptation of the Merchant-Ivory ilk, were precisely those elements that connected this cycle with melodrama and the sentimental; in short, with “women’s films”—elements such as a lingering gaze on lavish interiors, little “action,” fetishized period costumes. The seemingly obligatory invocation of Alan Parker’s dismissive snap about “the Laura Ashley school of filmmaking” by heritage critics only further betrayed a glossing over of gender issues. Heritage then is not a simple signifying system, but one with many permutations that are also expressive of other identities. As a result, the heritage question begins to morph from
questions of whether or not it is truly expressive of national identity, of whether or not it is naturally allied with a conservative politics, to the more fraught difficulty of how the imbricated identities in the semiotics of heritage might be mapped.

Such a break might be mapped out in examining the resonances of the inheritances, both literal and figurative, upon which heritage depended. For example, Corner and Harvey note that in the emotional appeal used to position the private property of the country house as an emblem of a public inheritance, a "strategic indivisibility is seen to be at work, subsuming awkward differences within larger continuities. The implication that while the property may, in most cases, remain in private ownership, the values it represents are ‘public,’ is frequently to be found” (51). Indeed, as heritage properties became opened to the public through estate tax deals struck with the literal inheritors, “a sufficient discontinuity with the past permit[ed] increased access to be marked as part of the exciting promise of heritage” (51). Politically, heritage then came to mark the attempt to erase present differences through the extension of a past (and very politicized) inheritance, a manoeuvre ironically conducted through a break with the past that allowed this legacy to be proffered to all. Heritage thus becomes the fulcrum that eases present discontinuities (labour and minority protests, reports of sexual, gender, and racial discrimination, “identity politics,” and so forth) into a position of timeless harmony.

As a result, the rhetoric of heritage begins to encompass a sense of haunting through this transmission of the past through breaks. These breaks at once provide the telegraph poles for the passing down of legacies as well as indicate historical alterity and periodicity, thus signalling that such an inheritance will always appear as unheimlich. Indeed, Derrida reminds us in Specters of Marx that “one never inherits without coming to terms with some specter, and therefore with more than one specter” (21). This multiplicity stems from the strange temporality of the specter, one that signals the anachronism of a residuum of the past in the present, a present that then must encompass that past. Furthermore, Derrida stresses that the specter is in fact oriented most to the future, for this ghostly presence of the non-present “is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back” (39). Because the specter is itself an inseparable knot of temporal strands and connections, there can be no simple singularity in terms of an easy communication of legacy between past and present.
In fact, because of this complex temporality, the specter cannot even in fact be spoken of as reducing simply to the mere receptivity of the present, for such would overlook ways in which the past might belatedly inherit from the present or the future, etc. Specters then help remove the sense of monumental authorization, for they encompass also the shifting and humbling movements of retrospection and anticipation. As a result, because of the overloaded and provisional nature of the specter, Derrida locates in it “a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xix). This political resonance of heritage stems from the fact that

Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task... like all inheritors, we are in mourning... That we are heirs does not mean that we have or that we receive this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the being of what we are is first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not...we can only bear witness to it. To bear witness would be to bear witness to what we are insofar as we inherit... we inherit the very thing that allows us to bear witness to it. (54)

Furthermore, Derrida states that “There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility. An inheritance is always the reaffirmation of a debt” (92). As a result, heritage cannot be conceived of as a simple bequest from past to present, for the inheritance destabilizes all of the terms in that equation. Most significantly perhaps for conversations of national historical legacies is the complex subject position staked out for the inheritors, a complexity signalled by the tripartite divide located there: the inheritors must assume the position of bearing witness to that which they already are, an ontology that in fact is identified as not their own but the actual inheritance itself. As a result, inheritance becomes an open-ended ethical act and not simply a closed system oriented around the invocation of some past. It should be stressed, though, that just as the specter points more toward a future of anticipated retrospection, so too does the affiliated notion of inheritance. The debt assumed by the act of inheritance is not merely one owed to the past, whether in terms of “standing on the shoulders of giants” or obeying some patrilineal injunction or code, but one even more owed to the future. And because the haunting aspect of inheritance stresses a “domesticity,” this haunted heritage then “implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house” (Derrida, Archive
If the ethics of inheritance must be articulated outward, beyond the past to the future, and they must be enacted around a haunted habitation, inheritance becomes directed more to the one to come than to the one before; or, in the figure of the specter, the one before returns as the one to come. As a result, the politics of the specter and the inheritance start to edge into the politics of hospitality, and the figure of the specter becomes that of the immigrant, the one who comes to partake of this hospitality.

I want to conclude by moving outward a bit and anticipate—or gesture toward—how this argument might encompass two very different texts. Julian Barnes’s novel, *England, England*, is the most obvious echo of heritage and enterprise. Here, Sir Jack Pitman creates simulacra of all things English on a heritage theme park on Isle of Wight—now relabelled England, England. The theme park replaces the real thing and secedes, causing old Albion to lapse into a neo-rustic insularity and decline. The other is Hanif Kureishi’s screenplay/Stephen Frears’s direction of *My Beautiful Laundrette*—the story of the son of Pakistani immigrants who rises through hard work, the support of his family, a not always scrupulous enterprising nature, and the love of a good man to proprietorship of a string of laundromats.

In *England, England*, it is precisely the modernizing impulse in the form of enterprise that at once authorizes the construction of heritage and constructs this heritage as a break. Both the theme park and the English rump of Albion in fact trade on heritage by the novel’s end; the difference is in the way those heritages are conceived. The commercial heritage of England, England continues the Thatcherite/Blairite association of modernity with enterprise. This version of heritage does allow some tweaking: Robin Hood’s band is now composed of a motley crew of the socially marginalised; Maid Marian now leads a feminist separatist group. However, though this heritage is concerned with its relations to those whom it entertains, these are valued and incorporated solely as “visitor throughput,” as the clicks on the turnstile and the clanks of cash in the register. There is no possibility of being interwoven into an imagined community, for it is most manifestly a society of paid performers enacting very scripted lines. In contrast, the very unmodern rump of Albion devolves upon a heritage that returns to the closed circle of the pastoral. However, this new naturalism depends on the performative folk improvisations of those who had not been ethnically
coded English, residents who now compose new English traditions wholesale and on the spot. This new folklore also encompasses a postimperial expansion of English culture, perhaps best embodied in the prominence chutneys are given at the folk fair. Paradoxically, these self-consciously invented traditions are very much open and subject to intervention and extension at precisely the same moment that they are presented as a weighty and monumental heritage to visitors. Such an inheritance thus extends a very uncertain hand in greeting.

Kureishi’s screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette* seemingly refuses the whole idea of heritage, at least that of a strictly English one. However, the protagonist, Omar, must claim the mantle of enterprise, a legacy that all of the English presented in the film are estranged from (“there is nothing left for them in this country”). Omar must also navigate with and around a cultural heritage of his own (figured in the prospect of marriage with his cousin Tania and in the character of his aunt Bilquis) that he seems ambivalent about. Indeed, it seems as if the moral of the screenplay is a measured celebration of an enterprising modernity that can hail new and hybridized identities, a celebration picked up in the title of the essay accompanying the script, “The Rainbow Sign.” This title of course comes from the lyric “God gave Noah the rainbow sign,/No more water, the fire next time”—an echo that also invokes James Baldwin’s warning in *The Fire Next Time*. Though this rainbow sign seems to promise a new peaceful and tolerant compact, it seems to blithely disregard the cost of the deluge that is its necessary prerequisite, a deluge that has swept away all that had stood before.

In conclusion, it is striking how much the signification of heritage masks the accompanying signifier of enterprise, a concealment that allows discussions of heritage to go largely unchallenged in regards to the breaks and disruptions that talk of inheritance always invokes. It is important to track the ramifications of this fractured figuration not only to examine the commerce of “inherited” culture, but also to open out the politics of heritage beyond a simple and reductive transmission of the past into a discussion of the extensions of its accompanying hospitality.

**Works Cited**


At what point does information technology become not merely convenient, but indispensable in societies? That is, can countries that have previously been isolated geographically, culturally, and/or economically continue to do so by “opting-out” of the very technologies that are pulling the world together now? Do countries have a right to national isolation, if they choose it? Can they still retain the values and traditions of their culture if they instead opt to modernize and embrace information technologies? Or, will such a convergence of similar technologies gradually force more similarities between societies, potentially resulting in a loss of cultural distinctiveness? These are questions that concern me.

In *Society and Technological Change*, Rudi Volti refers to these issues as being ones of convergence theory. He states that, “Although the world’s nations have different histories and cultural orientations, they are becoming more similar to each other [that is, converging] as they make use of the same technologies” (268). Essentially, he argues that in modern society, convergence theory is often equated with Westernization by default, due to most technologically advanced countries being from the West—with the notable exception of Japan. The problem is that countries view the ongoing invasion of foreign media and technologies as nothing less than an overt threat to their cultures and ways of life. They equate modernization with Westernization with Americanization, and see their own values continually being assimilated into and moulded by the U.S.

This phenomenon is often referred to as “cultural imperialism,” “lipstick imperialism,” or “aping the West.” That is, the assumption is that the U.S. is using a steady, seemingly unavoidable barrage of MTV, consumer technologies, and modern conveniences, rather than tanks, to influence and affect change in societies that are not U.S. territories. Needless to say, whether or not such technological convergence is intentional or unintentional hardly matters. Either way, it presents no shortage of serious questions and problems.

Of course, there are certain benefits associated with this convergence. Diffusion / mass production of most any technology typically leads to lower
prices. Look at cell phones, for example. Just a decade ago, cell phones were tools of the elite: doctors, lawyers, and similar upper-middle class professionals were the only ones who could afford such cumbersome, expensive communication technologies. Now, cell phones are tiny, cheap, and likely in the hands of more teenagers than adults. Why did this happen? The technology itself became successfully diffused in enough societies to the point where it was both pervasive and transparent, leading to lower costs and an even more broadly installed user base. Similarly, shared technologies can act as “connective tissue” for once-disparate countries and cultures, allowing for significantly improved communication, collaboration, and global participation on a range of levels.

Admittedly, while technological convergence is typically one-way, it could be argued that convergence is not exclusively a West-to-East issue. Think about the infusion of Japanese autos into the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s. Even if Hondas and Toyotas were better made and got better mileage than the unreliable Chrysler K cars and similarly unimpressive American autos available at the time, many Americans were against buying foreign autos simply as a matter of national pride.

Of course, now the situation is very much different. My supposedly American car was made in Canada, with parts from Mexico, while our neighbour’s Honda was built in somewhere in the midwest. I admit that finding such East-to-West examples of technological convergence is somewhat like finding Macintosh computer users at COMDEX: they are indeed there, but you have to look for them.

Aside from the benefits associated with such technological convergence, often times the harmful effects of convergence outweigh the more immediate gains. That is, convergence associated with technological change is typically viral in nature: once the genie of information technology is unleashed into a society, it is often difficult to metaphorically put it back into the bottle. As such, the introduction of new technologies into societies—a modernization of a society by way of telecommunications equipment and/or an advanced information architecture—is most often one from Western countries to Eastern countries. As such, it becomes easy to equate modernization with Westernization, and, subsequently, Americanization, which often represents an unacceptable influence on the society where the technology is introduced. This, in turn, begets concerns of cultural assimilation (Votti 269).
To illustrate this point, I suggest looking at recent instances of technological change in societies. Specifically, I believe Internet use and access in Saudi Arabia and China exemplifies such upheaval, as does cell phone use in India, and satellite broadcasts in Bhutan. Additionally, I believe the ongoing migration away from Microsoft Windows-based products in European, Central, and South American countries toward open source solutions such as Linux represents a clear defensive manoeuvre against technological imperialism.

Linux is an alternative operating system initially developed in 1991 by Linus Benedict Torvalds. Linux was based off a derivative of the MINIX operating system, which in turn was a derivative of UNIX (Hasan n.pag.). Linux is currently available for Intel-based systems that would normally run versions of Windows, PowerPC-based systems that would normally run Apple’s Mac OS, and a host of other handheld, cell phone, or so-called “embedded” systems. Linux is based almost exclusively on open source software, graphic user interfaces, and middleware components. While there are commercial Linux distributions available, these distributions mainly just package the freely available operating system with bundled technical support, manuals, and related services. Anyone can still download and install Linux at no cost, providing they need no technical support.

Typical Linux distributions come with open source web browsers, word processors, and related productivity applications (such as those found in OpenOffice.org), and related tools for accessing email, organizing schedules and contacts, etc. Certain Linux distributions are more or less designed for network administrators, system engineers, and similar “power users” somewhat distanced from our students. However, there are several distributions specifically tailored as regular, desktop operating systems, with regular, everyday computer users in mind.

In fact, Linux is already spreading rapidly in numerous capacities, in numerous countries. Linux has “taken hold wherever computer users desire freedom, and wherever there is demand for inexpensive software.” Reports from technology research company IDG indicate that roughly a third of computers in Central and South America run Linux. Several countries, including Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, have all but mandated that state-owned institutions adopt open
source software whenever possible to “give their people the tools and education to compete with the rest of the world” (Hills n.pag.).

Similar efforts are underway in Europe and Asia, particularly Germany and China. In Germany, government officials specifically cited concern over an ongoing reliance on Microsoft products, which in effect creates a technological monoculture. As such, migrating to Linux and similar open source software represents a “step by the German government to put Linux in information technology systems at the national, state and local level” (Shankland n.pag.). Efforts by China are more pragmatic than revolutionary. China is developing its own Linux distribution, dubbed Red Flag Linux, with the intent on phasing-out Windows on all government / institutionally-owned computers. It simply wants to reduce its dependency on foreign software (Berger n.pag.). As such, a Chinese Linux distribution becomes no less a matter of national pride than buying an American car was here in America.

However, while China and other countries may be intentionally adopting certain technologies for pragmatic if not nationalistic reasons, other countries have adopted them only to find out that a certain functionality inherent in these technologies poses concern for their values and traditions. In India, for example, the Short Messaging Service (SMS) commonly used in cell phones presents a problem. SMS enables short messages of “generally no more than 140-160 characters in length to be sent and transmitted from a cell phone” (TechEncyclopedia n.pag.). Yet, despite the utilitarian if not mundane aspect of this feature, even something as seemingly benign as SMS can have deleterious effects on the traditions and values of different cultures. Cultural conservatives in India are railing against it, claiming it breaks down their cultural etiquette and marital traditions, and “encourages dating” among teenagers by allowing them to bypass societal protocols concerning supervised dating (The Register n.pag.). Do these cultural conservatives in India have a legitimate concern about SMS—a foreign technology—being introduced into their society without the potential repercussions first being examined? Or, is the progress of technological change and evolution necessarily a global one that is ultimately beyond the control of individual countries? I believe they do have a very legitimate concern. Is there anything that can be done to alleviate their collective concern, now that the Pandora’s Box of SMS has already been opened in India? Unfortunately, I do not
think there is. Once technological change has already been unleashed into a society, there is often very little that can be done to effectively “put the genie back into the bottle” again.

Then again, maybe it can. Saudi Arabia and China have poured countless resources into filtering and otherwise controlling Internet content, all for the goal of minimizing Western influences on their respective populations. All political arguments aside, their actions may be somewhat successful short-term, with questionable results in the long-term. Why might this be the case? I believe Negroponte summed it up best in Being Digital when he stated “like a force of nature, the digital age cannot be denied or stopped” (229). Technological change, and the implications carried with it into societies, is often inevitable.

The Internet poses unique challenges to the Saudi government. If they do not want to be left behind economically and technologically, they must adapt the Internet for their own ecommerce needs. However, they feel they must also act as censors because “the conservative and religious culture of the Saudi people means they want to be sure that if they log onto the net they will not be offended” (Gardner n.pag.). As such, they engage in a seemingly endless task of blocking access to pornographic or possibly even sexually explicit (by Western standards) sites. Whether or not this would potentially include fan sites for pop idols such as Brittany Spears, for example, is unknown, but certainly within the realm of possibility. In addition to online pornography, the Saudi government also blocks sites that could incite religious hatred, including sites that show how to make bombs. Of course, despite the fact that the Saudi government controls all Internet access by way of a central node, it is still relatively simple for many Saudi citizen to bypass their Internet censors. All that would be required is an international phone call to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) outside of the country.

China takes a similar approach to the Internet, but has devoted far more staff and financial resources toward ensuring the 46 million Chinese Internet users can only go to certain sites. They not only employ legions of censors, but also require many foreign companies with an Internet presence in China to sign “self-discipline” pacts. These pacts put the responsibility of censorship squarely on the shoulders of the individual companies, as a cost for doing business in the Chinese market. Yahoo! China, for example, recently signed such a pact and must now
take great care not to create a platform for groups or individuals to criticize the
Chinese government or “propagate cults” in any way (Stout n.pag.).

Whether or not China or Saudi Arabia will succeed in their efforts to
prescribe use of the Internet and related telecommunication technologies remains
unknown for now. By default, the widespread use of such empowering and
liberating technologies could serve as a catalyst for further societal change in these
countries. Yet, they are not alone in coming to terms with addressing and
assessing this change.

The previously-isolated nation of Bhutan represents a telling example of
such change. Currently, one of the largest threats to Bhutan is not tanks or
missiles from China or India. The largest threat is non-Bhutan TV signals
“sneaking in via satellite, with the ubiquitous MTV capturing the hearts and minds
of young Bhutanese” (Safer n.pag.). Government officials in Bhutan have grown
increasingly concerned over the younger generations “wringing and dancing in the
MTV style,” and yet the Bhutan government has no real way of blocking the
transmission of these foreign signals. The government of Bhutan has publicly
stated their desire to modernize and participate in the global community.
However, doing so is a double-edged sword for their way of life.

Convergence theory and all the baggage that goes along with
technological imperialism is a huge problem. This statement is echoed by Vollet
when he argues that the “inability to understand technology and perceive its
effects on our society and on ourselves is one of the greatest, if most subtle,
problems of an age that has been so influenced by technological change” (3).
While the above-mentioned technologies do illustrate some of the unforeseen
problems associated with incorporating newly-adopted (or, in some cases, newly-
unwanted) information technologies into societies, they are by no means isolated.
In fact, such examples are all too common.

If technological change truly becomes pervasive and transparent in
these and other countries, I believe Westernization is unfortunately inevitable to a
certain extent. However, whether or not such Westernization ultimately becomes
a gradual interlocking of newer technologies with preexisting cultural traditions,
or instead spirals into “aping the West,” is of course unknowable for now. Only a
critical examination of this technological diffusion, done on a case-by-case basis
over time, will tell. As Freire states, “We know that we know, and we human
beings know also that we don’t know. Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, we can then act critically to transform reality” (Shor and Freire 99).

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Writing about the 1995 Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, *Independence Day*, Nick Gillespie charges Richard Ford, its author, with promulgating “the ‘death’ of the American dream, especially in its ‘middle-class’ variation” (53). According to Gillespie, in America the 1990s was a time of economic growth and well being in no way reflected by artistic works demonstrating “a cultural imagination that is severely impoverished” (58). Throughout his article—in which he examines Ford’s novel and also David Beers’ *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of American’s Fall From Grace*, T. Coraghessan Boyle’s *The Tortilla Curtain*, George Hickenlooper’s film, *The Low Life*, and Bruce Springsteen’s album, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*—Gillespie derides what he sees as a discontinuity between cultural products that forecast doom and gloom for the American standard of living and the state of a nation that by the mid-1990s was enjoying considerable prosperity.

It is my aim to complicate Gillespie’s thesis by suggesting that, on the contrary, Ford’s *Independence Day* is a novel in which American decline is not couched, as he sees it, in a misrepresentation of American life in order to thrill readers with a “drama” couched in “desperate, forlorn situations” (57), but rather is a politically partisan account of the failure of the Republican party, and of Republicanism as a philosophy. In this sense, my own argument agrees with that of William G. Chernecky, whose essay, “‘Nostalgia Isn’t What it Used to Be’: Isolation and Alienation in the Frank Bascombe Novels,” argues that Frank Bascombe’s reluctance to endorse continuity is also to lose a sense of history and therefore a viable future (162). However, unlike Chernecky, I argue that it is Bascombe’s willingness to jettison the past as a determining force that allows him agency vis-à-vis the present; the intricacies of this jettisoning, and its success, constitute the lesson he learns in the course of the novel. If, at the beginning, Bascombe is exploiting history’s indeterminacy to exempt himself from community—from participating in any consensual narrative—by the end he sees how freedom from the constraints of a reified history is of value insofar as it permits community. Through the course of the narrative Bascombe comes to
understand the ways in which contingency and indeterminacy inform communities rather than enable individuals to evade personal responsibility; the novel ends with a call for Bascombe to recognize that independence is not isolation from time but mastery of it, is not exemption from the historical moment but engagement with it. The novel thus critiques the mediation of the present either through tradition or a solipsistic authorial privilege. The manifestation of this “lesson” is couched in a partisan politics that promotes the principles—as Ford sees them—of the Democratic party.

In contrast, then, to Cherneycky’s and Gillespie’s dire readings, *Independence Day* has at its heart a joy, not despair, as it recounts the last years of Reaganism and its economic slump from the vantage of Clinton’s economic boom. The success or hopefulness of Clintonism underlies the novel’s political thrust. Ford’s novel is about American renewal, about rediscovering, in the midst of the failures of Reaganism, the promise of the Founding Fathers as embodied in a Clintonesque Democratism (with Ford’s protagonist, Frank Bascombe, emblematising the character and ethos of Clinton’s presidency). Gillespie’s mistake is conflating the historical moment that the novel is speaking about for the historical moment in which the novel was written. In Ford’s novel, the “declinist myth” is used to reinforce the “rightness” of the principles of the Democrats as according with what Ford identifies as the “Independence” implied by the Declaration of Independence: America is not a specific content preserved in tradition, but rather an attitude, a way of doing things, a process; it is an embracing of contingency, or a refusal to mediate the present through adherence to a fixed notion of the past. “Independence” is responsiveness to possibility and the unexpected, and thus always a readiness to depart from set conceptual positions. In short, *Independence Day* aestheticizes American politics to offer us a way out of the stasis Ford attributes to Republican politics and attitudes.

Bascombe’s allegiance to the Democratic Party (the narrative occurs on the eve of the Mondale/Bush presidential race) is no secret. He describes his daughter, Clarissa, in the language of political affiliation: “My daughter, like her old man, is a Democrat of the New Deal bent and considers most Republicans and particularly V.P. Bush barely mentionable dickheads.... She is for the party of no tradition, no influence, no nothing, just like her father” (239). What is “worth mention,” in this novel, the means by which one avoids being “a dickhead,” is to
advocate the sort of renewal present in the New Deal, which for Bascombe also means letting go of “tradition,” “influence,” and other agendas that stifle human adaptability. Ford’s novel therefore locates the source of American renewal and possibility in the progressive or positive nihilism (“no nothing”) of the Democratic Party.

In an editorial, entitled “The Master of Ambiguity,” and published in the October 17, 1996 edition of The New York Times, Ford appraises the then president, Bill Clinton, in a manner that equates him with the character of Bascombe. Writing of Clinton, Ford says, “even though he’s suffered failures and lapses and recognizes that the world isn’t perfect, he doesn’t intend to let that get him down and make him quit trying to be good” (A27); a little further on, Ford cements his representation of Clinton as a man whose value resides in self-reflexive criticism and adaptability by contending that he is “a man whose active understanding of his own character appears savvy enough, even sceptical enough (apparently without giving in to cynicism), to cope with a country embroiled by great insolubles” (A27). Ford suggests that Clinton’s capacity for living with personal and societal impeachability, a willingness to proceed skeptically but not cynically, and for facing “great insolubles,” is what makes him a great president at the present time. In other words, “character” is measured not by steadfastness to abstractions—“tradition” or “influence”—but rather by one’s capacity to recognize and live with one’s inefficacy in the face of phenomena that are not necessarily reducible to, or solved by, a foundationalist ethos. Thus, the ultimate measure of character may be the ability of Clinton, or Bascombe, to remain optimistic in the face of an existence that does not respond to any set of proposed solutions. To live without solutions, closure, or faith in the efficacy of particular programs is the measure of a Democrat, as well as the key to political and social success.

Speaking of the problems being experienced by his pubescent son, Paul, Bascombe articulates the kind of un-cynical skepticism Ford sees in Clinton:

In a way [Paul’s] “problem” is simple: he has become compelled to figure out life and how to live it far too early, long before he’s seen a sufficient number of unfixable crises cruise past him like damaged boats and realized that fixing one in six is a damn good average and the rest you have to let go. (14)
In regard to Paul, then—who, as the novel opens, has recently come into trouble with the law for shoplifting—and in contrast to Anne, Bascombe’s ex-wife, Charley, her present husband, and the doctors, psychiatrists and police—who are all trying to help Paul “overcome” his problems—Bascombe jettisons the attempt to realign his son along some index of what passes for a normal boyhood in Deep River, Connecticut (which is where Paul lives, and which Ford describes as an enclave of Republicanism), but rather “lets go” of problems by recognizing that “fixing” the majority of them is just not possible. Thus, we have Ford’s regard of the great “insolubles.” This is not to say that Bascombe advocates a cynical acceptance of failure or incapacity, but rather that striving to be better is often more efficiently done, not through futile attempts at recovery, or intensive scrutiny of the past, but by addressing the present. As he tells Anne, the help he offers Paul is predicated on the antithesis of the therapy offered by Dr. Stopler, Paul’s psychiatrist; rather than trying to get a fix on Paul’s character through relentless scrutiny of the past, Bascombe proposes the abandoning of set concepts: both in terms of character as a unified mechanism that can be “fixed,” and the past as a necessarily determining influence on the present: “I just think he’s got some problems figuring out a good conception of himself... and I want to offer a better one so he doesn’t get too attached to the one he’s hanging onto now, which doesn’t seem too successful” (249). In other words, then, Bascombe sees Paul’s problem in much the same way as Ford sees the problems of Republicanism: “human and political character emerges in life much as it does in literature from ‘thematics of opposites’... rather than as a result of correct and clear-cut rules correctly and unambiguously applied” (Times A27). Paul’s suffering, then, his emergence into selfhood and character, will not be alleviated by an ethos of “clear-cut rules correctly and unambiguously applied,” but by exploiting the provisionality of all structures, including that of the “self.”

Once again, it is precisely the qualities of ambiguity, conceptual flexibility, and a recognition that things are very rarely “clear cut” that Ford and Bascombe both prize as a means of survival and redemption in an America suffering under Reagan, soon to be suffering under his successor. To fully inhabit one’s life, Ford suggests, one needs to let go of an abstract idealism and realize what he elsewhere in the novel calls the “illusion of permanence” (386), which means to accept the intrinsic constructedness of all forms of “continuity.” It is not
that Ford disparages social constructs but that he sees possibility in the fact of their constructedness: tradition and continuity, because they are not anchored to anything except the will of the people, can therefore be altered, adapted, subordinated to ever-changing contingencies. In accepting the illusory nature of permanence, in appealing to ambiguity, in endorsing "no tradition, no influence, no nothing," Ford raises the possibility of agency in our ability to turn outmoded forms to our advantage, to free ourselves from the tyranny of ideologies that maintain "permanent truths."

In the novel, Ford offers the reader two staunch Republicans as foils to Bascombe: Karl Bemish and Charley O’Dell. Bemish, whom Bascombe describes as "a lifelong Democrat who began voting Republican in the last decade" (136), runs a hot-dog stand that Bascombe has recently purchased. For Bascombe, Bemish embodies the economic failure of Reaganism in a belief in a kind of economic foundationalism: Karl’s failure as a hot-dog vendor, according to Bascombe, lies in his attempt to build upon the "base” of his business enterprise, adding so many frills to his stand that he overextends himself and almost loses it all to bankruptcy (133-34). For Ford, there is no "building upon” because the stability of any foundation is illusory. Bemish, with his emphasis on "facts” and certainties (138), is ultimately a figure for stalled dialogue, a man intent on preserving truths rather than facing the possible transformation of truths as a result of an open exchange of ideas; he is a man for whom "facts” are a hedge against the risk of "speculative, unprogrammed dialogue” (138). Bemish, then, emblematises the stasis that Bascombe is himself doing battle against in much of the novel. Here, Ford again links Republicanism with an attachment to retrograde values that serve the needs of epistemological stability at the expense of an engagement with the present moment. In other words, Republicanism, because of its foundationalism, fails to risk possibility, which, Ford argues, leads to stagnation and stasis. To rely upon fixed ideological models is to attempt to prevent the manifestation of the present.

The harshest critique of Republicanism, however, arrives via Charley O’Dell, who, as we are early on given to understand, is a personal friend of George Bush Sr. (239). O’Dell serves as Ford’s model of illusory stability that often stifles progress and dialogue. While Bascombe believes in the importance of recognizing and predisposing oneself to "contingency and the possibility of imminent change” (284), he describes O’Dell as having “the mind of a true Republican” insofar as he
“believes a good structure implies a good structure” (284). In other words, O’Dell’s mistake is equating the structure he “believes in” not only with a structure that will last, but also, in some way, with the external world, as if the structure were one and the same with the external it “shelters him from.” The rightness of the structure, Ford here suggests, does not reside in its accountability to reality but rather its accountability to itself, the degree to which it conforms to its own rarified idea of what is “good.” Republican structures, then, are tautological: divorced from the real and accountable only to their own implicit embodiments of “goodness.” The structure is “good” if it lives up to its own criteria for a “good” structure. O’Dell’s is a self-enclosed system constituted at a remove from, and at the expense of, daily life. It is not accidental that Ford gave O’Dell the vocation of architect: “This, in Charley’s view, constitutes life and no doubt truth: strict physical moorings. A roof over your head to prove that you have a head” (284). In other words, argues Ford, O’Dell’s foundationalist ethos (“strict... moorings”) is entirely opposed to his own, since it is the system or structure that justifies or proves historical existence (a “roof over your head to prove you have a head”), rather than historical existence (the contingencies of the present) determining the type of structure or system that would provide “shelter” in any given environment. For Bascom the “goodness” of any given “structure” is determined by the way it adjusts to the needs of a people coping with contingency. Any “structure” that sustains itself at the expense of accommodating “contingency and the possibility of imminent change” is a structure whose primary purpose is accommodating itself, guaranteeing its own maintenance, exempting itself from the rigours of history, and thereby falling out of synch with the needs of community. While a structure can maintain itself in a permanent state via inscription, people are never exempt from time; in failing to recognize this the structure risks obsolescence, and alienates the very constituency it is supposed to represent. In other words, the foundationalist “shelter” of Republicanism leaves too many people out in the rain.

In this sense Ford argues that history is not the past removed from the present, but the past dictated by the present, the past as it is required by the present. He suggests that American democracy and hope are not a result of attachment to specific historical determinants, but rather a radical and continuous revising of them, demanding not adherence to transhistorical values, but engagement with the unexpectedness of the present, as signified by the climax of
the novel, in which Paul is hit in the eye with a baseball. To affix oneself to transhistorical values is to be unprepared for contingency. In other words, to cling to one’s exemption from the historical moment (either through a content maintained by a tradition, or solipsism) is a fatal disengagement and a rejection of independence:

“The original framers, you know,” I say, hopefully, but instantly getting the Constitution’s authors muddled up with the signers of the Declaration... “they wanted to be free to make new mistakes, not just keep making the same old ones over and over as separate colonies and without showing much progress.... People who won’t quit making the same mistakes over and over are what we call conservatives. And the conservatives were all against independence, including Benjamin Franklin’s son, who eventually got deported to Connecticut.” (260)

In other words, then, Bascombe’s lesson to Paul, is, as the novel progresses, also the lesson that he learns: namely, that independence is not based upon the laissez faire attitude of a wild capitalism (335), nor upon the notion that “mistakes” will never again happen, but, simply put, a sort of “progress” through a willingness to risk the “new,” even if this means making “new mistakes.” Independence is the reward of an effort to engage possibility without obedience to secure positions. In other words, rather than the smug certainties Ford puts into the mouths of his token Republicans—Bemish and O’Dell—Ford regards the promise of independence in America’s founding to be equivalent to uncertainty, or, rather, the certainty of making “mistakes.” Thus, he does not provide the Democrat position with more security than that of the Republican side; he merely endorses a political stance that risks uncertainty over one that, in the name of traditionalism, secure values, and economic interests, commits itself to reproducing the same effects. Encoded in Bascombe’s speech is the notion of community: that independence is a communal, rather than individual, prospect—rather an ironic notion coming from a protagonist who spends much of the novel denying or thwarting his responsibilities to others. But this, finally, is what Bascombe and the novel move towards: the recognition that solipsism is a subordination of the other to the individual ego, and that independence demands, to as great a degree as possible, a
rejection of the implicit conservatism of egocentricity. The individual ego, too, is a fixed reference point that ultimately debilitating the advent of independence, which is why the novel ends not on Bascombe’s thoughts but on the sensation of the “push, pull, the weave and sway of others” (451).

The novel, then, denies any myth of decline, since Ford’s notion of “progress” marks a trajectory away from anything like the “completeness” of a historical through-line: “Most of these [remnants of the past] you just have to give up on, along with the whole idea of completeness, since after a while you get so fouled up with all you did and surrendered to and failed at and fought and didn’t like, that you can’t make any progress” (95). The urge of “completeness” stands in opposition to Ford’s notion of “progress,” which only comes when one can see the “promise” in “instability” (407), and face up to the fact that we “are anchored only to contingency, like a bottle on a wave” (439). To do this is to temper skepticism with hope, to avoid the pitfalls of tradition and influence, and to step back from an easy cynicism.

Works Cited


“Make Way for the Bad Guy”: Understanding Changing Social Anxieties Through the Gangster Film

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This paper will compare two classics from the canon of American gangster films, an “original” and its “remake,” in order to examine the ever-changing social concern over who is the current “public enemy” of white middle-class American values, and who therefore must be censored or rightfully condemned before the movie-going audience in order to maintain the established social order and privilege of that “public.” The gangster film is an especially useful genre for examining such mutable social concerns since the figure of the gangster, both in society and on-screen, has generally stood for the individuals, namely, the poor, ethnic immigrant, located at the margins of society. These individuals, because they are denied access to the “inside” of the “American Dream,” whether because of economic, social and/or ethnic differences from the “moral middle class,” create their own “inside,” which affords them justice, security, fame, wealth, and power. First I’ll be discussing Howard Hawks’ 1932 classic, Scarface: The Shame of the Nation. I argue that this film’s depiction of the gangster, Tony Camonte, and the film’s consequent censorship, exposes key social anxieties of the 1930s—namely class mobility, urbanization, changing moral values, and most importantly, immigration. Likewise, Brian DePalma’s 1983 remake of the film, simply entitled Scarface, addresses different social fears, such as communism and Reagan’s “war on drugs,” but still focuses on the figure of the uneducated, morally-bereft Other who strives for the “American Dream” despite his status as a Cuban “Excludable.”

The Meaning of the Gangster in American Society

As Robert Warshow explains in his seminal 1948 article, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” the “hero” of the gangster film, while revealing of America’s own xenophobic tendencies, also “speaks for us”1 in that he “is what we want to be and

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1 The “us” and the “we” of Warshow’s article is never defined, though we can assume he is
what we are afraid we may become” (243). In other words, the figure of the gangster is appealing because he challenges the myth of the American (primarily middle class) work ethic, which demands long hours, sacrifice, deferred gratification, and taking orders from superiors in order to achieve financial and social success. In gangster films, this work ethic is mocked and derided as foolish, such as when Tony Montana, of DePalma’s Scarface, after rejecting his job as a dishwasher in favour of working for a drug dealer, explains, “I didn’t come to this country to break my back.” Montana, whose desire for money, power, and success drives him ever higher in the cocaine trade, is “the perverse alter ego if the ambitious, profit-minded American male” (Schatz 85). This discrepancy between ideal and reality was further accentuated in 1929 with the coming of the Great Depression, when a scrupulous work ethic no longer guaranteed a job, a home or even a meal. Hence, it is likely that a disheartened American audience enjoyed watching gangsters breaking the rules and succeeding in the process (Rosow 163-166).

Likewise, Warshow argues, the gangster’s life, and his appeal to audiences, is defined by his desire to “assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies because he is an individual” (244). The gangster’s drive for power and his subsequent success separates him from the rest of the world, and yet it is precisely this separation and/or inability to rely on anyone but himself that always leads to the gangster’s demise. Thus, both Tony Camonte and Tony Montana die alone after killing off or alienating those who loved them and might have prevented and/or protected them from their brutal deaths.

Furthermore, because the gangster transgresses moral and social order and succeeds, we are led to assume that his violent death is inevitable in order to restore and reinforce that order. As Warshow explains, “we gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster’s sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself” (243). Here we see the competing and complex audience reactions to the gangster. He is the hero who defies authority and empowers himself despite the alienating realities of urban existence and, more specifically, the Great Depression. He represents a hopeful alternative to accepting breadlines and unemployment passively. But the gangster also threatens the

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referring to the white, middle class American movie going public of 1948, and more specifically, those individuals who hold steady jobs, obey the law, and raise families—the antithesis of the gangster hero.
comfort of the established order, not just because he breaks the law, but because he threatens the myth of the American success story and those who are entitled to it. As Jonathan Munby, author of *Public Enemies, Private Heroes*, explains: “In their blatant disregard for Prohibition and ironic mimicry of the laissez-faire capitalist ‘road to success,’ ethnic urban gangsters directly confronted key moral and economic precepts associated with an ailing nativist order” (5). Likewise, when the gangster, with his newfound wealth, attempts to mimic the trappings and rituals of “high society (such as when Tony Camonte and his entourage go to see a play in their tuxedos), he erases the sense of entitlement normally associated with such displays of culture and ceremony. He reveals that money can at least buy entrance, though not necessarily acceptance, into “cultured” society. Thus, our understanding of the first gangster film audiences\(^2\) becomes more and more complicated—there are those who saw themselves in the gangster, there are those who saw the gangster as a threat to themselves, and there are those who wavered between these two sentiments.

**The Censored Gangster and the Moral Middle Class**

Of course, the treatment and depiction of the film gangster is not merely a product of audience desire and expectation, but also the product of industry censorship and fear over the effects of such “negative” images on the movie audience. Film historian and critic Lee Grieveson pinpoints the beginnings of film censorship, the growing public concern over the possible corrupting effects of cinema on the masses, and the moral middle class' attempts to regulate morality for all of society with the 1906 Thaw-White scandal and its consequent theatrical and filmic adaptations, such as the film, *The Unwritten Law* (1907). At this time the nickel theatres were seen as, according to one Chicago Tribune editorial, “schools of crime where murders, robberies and holdups are illustrated” (qtd. in Grieveson

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\(^2\) My argument here specifically pertains to those audiences of the first “talking” gangster films (starting with *The Lights of New York* in 1928) because the depiction of immigrants in these films is more complicated and polyvalent than in the almost wholly stigmatizing depictions of immigrants found in silent gangster films: “When the gangster eventually spoke, he relocated the desires of his community in specific body politic and in a particular social space. The talking gangster, as it were, took advantage of one of the few places granted in the culture for the representation of lower-class ethnic American life” (Munby 4-5).
39). However, as Grieveson points out, not only was film content problematic at this time, but the very space in which films were watched were viewed as “dangerous’ spaces of heterosocial leisure” (41). The fear was that the “ill lit” space of the movie theatre could “corrupt” or compromise the morality of women and children and incite the latent criminality of lower-class and immigrant audiences, all of whom who did not have the sufficient strength of character to withstand the polluting effects of the unregulated space. This sentiment was further strengthened by the belief at this time that movies were a largely immigrant or working class pleasure. Implicit in these concerns is the fear that ethnic or lower class audiences might identify with the moral violations portrayed on-screen and aspire to transgress the moral and social order themselves. Therefore, given that film censorship is rooted in the fears of one empowered social class, or classes, about the flow of knowledge and pleasure to another class, it is not surprising that the MPPDA, established in 1927, found gangster films, with their portrayal of the success of the social underdog, to be particularly problematic. Thus, as Jonathan Munby argues, these censorship attempts became a way to enforce a particular definition of is what it is to be American (90).

Thomas Schatz explains that it is for this reason that the gangster film “enjoyed possibly the briefest classical period of any Hollywood genre” (82). The immense popularity of the gangster genre coupled with the public outcries surrounding the genre’s “overt celebration of the gangster hero and their less-than-flattering portrayal of urban life” (82) made it a particular target of the Code. The “public” concerned with these issues included a broad range of groups, mostly “nativist” middle class Americans, concerned about the maintenance of the myth of the moral middle class American ideal. However, the “public” with the loudest voice were religious groups, such as Protestant censorship groups, who were mostly concerned with the gangster’s status as transgressor of social, economic, and racial boundaries, and the emerging Catholic Legion of Decency, who were more preoccupied with the maintenance of Christian moral standards (Munby 90-91).

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3 Generally, those who desired to censor gangster films, were the “Old Immigrants” from western and northern Europe, who had attained “middle-class” status and viewed the increasing wave of “New Immigrants,” from southern and eastern Europe, as a threat to their jobs, their racial character, and their moral and political hegemony. These “nativist” groups were concerned with maintenance of a specific understanding of the American Ideal (Thatcher 1-20).
Though the Production Code, written in 1930, was not enforceable until 1934, with the establishment of the Production Code Administration (Schatz 98), Hawks’ Scarface: The Shame of the Nation bears the marks of the industry’s attempts at self censorship. Some of these marks include: the subtitle, “The Shame of the Nation”; an apologetic prologue/disclaimer which instructs the audience to take action against criminals; the editing out of all on-screen deaths; and several added scenes featuring “pillars of the community,” such as police chiefs, newspaper editors, and middle- to upper-class, white “citizens,” denouncing the gangster and his lifestyle. However, as many critics have pointed out, the addition of these polemical scenes, partly because Hawks refused to direct them, appear to disrupt the narrative. Whereas the uncensored portions of Scarface: The Shame of the Nation make use of what later came to be viewed as the well-established style of the gangster film, such as dramatic chiaroscuro lighting, fast-paced editing, the use of high and low camera angles, and rapid-fire, vernacular dialogue, the added scenes were filmed with bright lighting, static camera angles, and with the slow, measured diction of “authentic” American culture (Munby 59, Rosow 189-203). Thus, ironically, these attempts to censor the film appear as exactly that—a lecture to the audience—and therefore likely failed in their attempts to affect their target audience (Munby 61).

Fear of the Immigrant

Whether “effective” or not, these added scenes, while motivated by the concerns of “nativist” groups, the Catholic Church, and government officials concerned about the glorification of the gangster/criminal (Schatz 92), also appear to be implicitly motivated by the gangster’s overt Italian immigrant identity. When the police chief labels the gangster a “louse” and a “rat,” two kinds of pestilence that propagate and “infect” a city and hence must be eliminated, one cannot help but think of contemporary society’s fears over the “infestation” of America by immigrants. Between 1919 and 1930, the United States saw a resurgence in “nativism,” which was characterized by the fear that the constant influx of immigrants would somehow lead to a diluting or compromising of “pure” American stock. For instance, the thesis of Madison Grant’s popular book, Passing of a Great Race (1916, 1930) is that the entire race is divided into three
“progressively more superior” types—Mediterranean, Alpine, and Nordic—with Nordic being the most “superior.” Other books and popular magazines of the time, such as *Scientific American* and *Saturday Evening Post*, also addressed the threat of an influx of “inassimilable” immigrants. Thus, “[t]he immigrant [in America] in 1930 had reason to feel that Americans generally saw very little value in what he had brought with him as his heritage” (Thatcher 24-42).

Nowhere are these anti-immigrant sentiments more acutely articulated than during an added scene when a group of “concerned citizens,” marked both sartorially and vocally as middle- to upper-class Anglo Americans, complains to the publisher of *The Evening Record* that his newspaper “glorifies” the gangster by putting his exploits on the front page. The publisher’s response is that ignoring the gangster will not end his criminal actions, but rather, it is the duty of the “citizens” to vote for law that “puts the gun in the same class as drugs and white slavery. Put teeth in the Deportation Act. These gangsters don’t belong in this country. Half of them aren’t even citizens.” In this scene, the unwanted immigrant other to the American “citizen” is directly labelled a threat to the safety of the “nation” and its “children.” Deportation, along with gun control, is the solution to America’s crime problems (a sentiment which reappears in DePalma’s *Scarface* with the Mariel boatlift of 1980). Thus, the Code’s early attempts at censorship, personified by the ideological and filmic discontinuities found within *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation*, both reveal and reinforce current social anxieties, such as the multiple concerns over immigration. Later in this scene, a hunched-shouldered, modestly dressed Italian immigrant, who sits apart from the Anglo members of the citizens group,4 complains in a thick, Italian accent that gangsters “[B]ring nothing but shame to my people.” Here, the “acceptable” immigrant, who is working class, humble, concerned about his community, and yet does not expect to mingle with the “cultured,” middle- to upper-class members of his society (emphasized by their separation within the mise en scene), is contrasted with Camonte, who does not know his “place.”

Another contrast to the depiction of “transgressive” immigrants is Tony’s mother. When we first see Mrs. Camonte she is in the kitchen cooking a

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4 Likewise, he does not appear in the scene until the phrase “Half of [the gangsters] aren’t even citizens” is uttered, though he has presumably been sitting in the room throughout the entire scene.
large meal of spaghetti for her son, wearing a generically ethnic peasant skirt, shawl, and bun. The Camonte kitchen, in contrast with the lavish apartments and dance halls of the underworld we see throughout the film, is shabby, humble, and cluttered with the tools of domestic life, such as pots, pans, and dishrags. Here we see the humble beginnings, the tweed suits, the bowls of home-cooked spaghetti and the dank kitchen that Tony aspires to move beyond. And yet, Mrs. Camonte appears satisfied with the life she has created for herself and her children purely through “honest work.” She will not accept Tony’s “dirty money,” nor will she allow her daughter, Cesca, to accept it. However, Cesca’s Anglo diction and stylish clothing (as well as actress Ann Dvorak’s sophisticated performance and mannerisms) belie that at eighteen-years-old she is already enchanted with the corrupting city nightlife of speakeasies, dancing, and men, whether or not Tony finances her tastes. She is pursuing the pleasures and delights of “America,” which in the hands of the immigrant, is depicted as dangerous, and even deadly. Mrs. Camonte also warns Cesca that such an excessive lifestyle, as opposed to the humble world of the Camonte home, will only lead her to “trouble,” a prophecy which is fulfilled when Cesca dies helping Tony fight off the police in the closing scenes of the film. Like the Italian at the concerned citizens’ meeting, Mrs. Camonte represents the humble, moral immigrant who is “thankful” for the opportunity to live in America and only aspires to a quiet, honest, and pious, if plebeian, existence. She may not enjoy the speakeasies or wear pretty dresses like her daughter; then again, she is still alive at the end of the film. Her excessive condemnation of her son’s behaviour (she says “he no belong to me no more. He’s a-no good”), demanded by the censors, further emphasizes the sub-human qualities of the immigrant gangster—even his own mother does not trust him and sees him as a moral contaminant.

Of course, Scarface: The Shame of the Nation’s depiction of the ethnic American as “social pestilent” does not occur solely in the scenes added by the censors. Rather, from the moment we meet him, Tony Camonte’s immigrant status is alternately mocked and criticized as uneducated, barbaric, and animal-like. As Aguinaga, et al. point out, Tony Camonte subverts established moral, social, economic, and ethnic codes, while simultaneously playing into that code’s conception of the immigrant: “[E]ven though he is representing that ‘other,’ he is constructed by the ideological instance and therefore is a stereotypical image of
the Italian gangster as seen from the WASP viewpoint, yet expressed directly by Scarface” (111). Though he is a potential image of immigrant rebellion, Tony’s thick accent, street slang, and inability to command the vocabulary of “legitimate” society (he calls a writ of “habeas corpus” a writ of “hocus pocus”), is often played as a source of amusement to his white, middle class contemporaries, as well as the audience. This gap between Tony’s attempts to mimic the trappings of WASP culture and WASP culture itself is best illustrated in Tony’s relationship with his moll, Poppy, one of the many prizes he plunders along his climb towards success. When the two first meet in the apartment of his boss, Johnny Lovo, Tony is still the bodyguard, wearing rough tweeds and a bow-tie. Throughout this scene, as the two men discuss business, Poppy, blond, fair-skinned, and well-groomed, remains in the far background of the mise en scene, removed from Tony because she is still “too expensive” for him. However, once Tony upgrades his appearance, at one point even wearing the same expensive silk robe that Johnny Lovo dons in the aforementioned scene, Poppy consents to an affair. And yet, despite his outward appearance of WASP success, including a luxurious apartment and the boss’ woman, Tony proves that he can only “imitate,” rather than participate in, the dominant culture. Upon seeing Tony’s new apartment, Poppy comments “Kinda gaudy, isn’t it?” to which Tony replies, without a hint of irony, “Ain’t it though? Glad you like it.” The audience laughs along with Poppy at this comment.

We also see Tony attempt to teach his bumbling, illiterate Italian secretary how to “speak nice” when answering the telephone and taking messages. This scene is comical, not just because the secretary attempts to shoot the telephone in frustration, but because we see Tony, who is destined as a result of ethnic heritage and appearance, to remain “outside” of legitimate society, teaching another immigrant how to become a member of that society. Tony’s project of assimilation is both hopeless and played for laughs. These scenes appear to affirm the belief that is constantly put forward by the film—that “success” is embodied by

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5 Jonathan Munby has argued that these scenes of the gangster’s social mimicry, common in many gangster films of the 1930s, express a more ambivalent message about social, economic, and ethnic boundaries. He cites a scene in Little Caesar (1930) in which Rico holds a formal banquet for all his friends, which eventually disintegrates into a food fight. Munby claims the humour in this scene arises not because we are laughing at Rico for trying to be like the “upper classes,” but because Rico, in his bumbling, reveals the hypocrisy of elitism and its rituals (50-1).
successful assimilation into dominant WASP culture, and that the immigrant can only hope to “ape” this culture, rather than be accepted by it.

The Changing Face of the Gangster

The movie gangster of the 1930s both aroused and placated several different, but related, social anxieties of several different social groups: the need of the disenfranchised to see competing figures of American “success,” a Depression-laden audience’s desire for active, socially transgressive heroes, the middle- to upper-class WASP fear of these depictions upon the aforementioned classes, the “nativist’s” concern over urban crime and immigration, the Catholic Church’s desire to provide films with a moral message, and the reaction of the censors and the film industry to all of these competing concerns. However, after 1933, with the repeal of Prohibition, the beginning of Roosevelt’s New Deal, the establishment of the Production Code Administration in 1934, and Will Hays’ declared “moratorium” on the gangster film in 1935, the gangster film underwent a period of transformation (Munby 83-85; Schatz 98-99). The gangster character was displaced from the role of the “hero” with whom we sympathize, and was replaced with the hardened detective, or “G-Man,” who either stands alone or as a moral foil to the gangster character⁶ (Schatz 98-102). G-Men, though not very different in behaviour or demeanor from gangsters (in fact, the same actors, most famously James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, were often used in these roles), now worked for the side of the “law.” Therefore, the acceptability of the violent and ruthless G-Man, as opposed to the outlaw gangster, clearly reveals that earlier censorship attempts, despite claiming an objection to violence, were more likely concerned with who was committing that violence and for what reason. As long as the G-Man was using violence to restore the moral order, rather than blur class and ethnic lines, he was acceptable. With the G-Man, the lower-class immigrant male’s violence is co-opted and neutralized as a tool for, rather than against, the State.

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⁶ Another variation on this theme is the “middle man” character, who must choose between a moral and a criminal life: “Such a variation takes the supporting character from the classic gangster films (the subordinate partner of the gangster who eventually rejects crime for the values of hearth and home) and recasts him as the central character” (Schatz 102).
DePalma’s Remake: Fear of the Immigrant Revisited

The prologue to Howard Hawks’ Scarface: The Shame of the Nation, yet another addition imposed on the film by censors, begins “This picture is an indictment of gang rule in America and of the callous indifference of the government to this constantly increasing menace to our safety and our liberty. Every incident in this picture is the reproduction of an actual occurrence....” Here, the film’s claim that it is based upon some verifiable truth, such as the exploits of Al Capone, provides the film with a moral justification of its own existence. Violent and immoral deeds will be reenacted as a way to “indict” the violent and immoral deeds currently taking place in America, and to make the public aware of its duty to “act” against these forces. Brian DePalma’s 1983 remake of Hawks’ film, simply titled Scarface, also begins with a prologue with similar claims to represent a historical reality; however, the audience is not invited to view the film as an indictment, or as a catalyst for political action. Instead, we are introduced to a peculiar moment in U.S. Immigration history:

In May 1980, Fidel Castro opened the harbor at Mariel, Cuba with the apparent intention of letting some of his people join their relatives in the United States. Within 72 hours, 3,000 U.S. boats were headed for Cuba. It soon became evident that Castro was forcing the boat owners to carry back with them not only their relatives, but the dregs of his jails. Of the 125,000 refugees that landed in Florida, an estimated 25,000 had criminal records.

This prologue is then followed by black and white documentary footage of Fidel Castro speaking to a cheering crowd about Cubans who are unwilling to “adapt to the spirit of our revolution.” He then shouts to the crowd “We don’t want them! We don’t need them!” Thus, before the plot of the film even begins, the “Marielito” is posited as both unwanted by the United States and unwanted by Cuba. This scene then cuts to colour footage of boats leaving Mariel Harbor and arriving in Florida, a montage not unreminiscent of the now mythic photographs of hopeful but exhausted immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. People wave and
smile from the overcrowded boats, a crying child is comforted when his father points out the American flag, saying “Mira! Mira! [Look! Look!],” and an ailing, old woman is taken away in a stretcher by four fatigue-clad representatives of the U.S. Army. Next we are shown a crane shot of the over-crowded detention centres where Marielitos were made to wait indefinitely for their green cards. However, as much as these images evoke empathy for the Marielitos and their ambiguous position as either “political refugee” or “Excludable,” this empathy is nevertheless coloured by the film’s prologue, Castro’s speech, and our own historical knowledge of the event, so that we ask, with each haunting close-up, “Is this immigrant a criminal?” This shifting perspective of the Cuban immigrant as either hopeful pursuer or criminal exploiter of the “American Dream,” much like Hawks’ often ambivalent portrayal of Tony Camonte, is key to DePalma’s characterization of Tony Montana.

Prior to the Mariel boatlift, Americans had been primarily sympathetic and receptive towards Cuban immigrants as victims of political oppression, due in part, no doubt, to their perceived alignment with American politics, and the early immigrants’ privileged social status. The first wave of immigrants seeking asylum from Castro’s regime in 1959 were called the “golden exiles” because they were composed of mainly doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, and managers. The second wave, which began in 1962, was composed of individuals with more modest occupations, such as artisans, clerks, shopkeepers, mechanics, and farmers (Soruco 5-9). Therefore, the Mariel boatlift of 1980 marked a shift in the public perception of the Cuban immigrant from empathetic political refugee to that of potential criminal thrust upon the United States by a devious Fidel Castro (Skoug 9-10). In addition, at this time there was a pervading fear that “the influx of refugees was only the most dramatic evidence that the United States was unable to protect its borders or enforce its laws against illegal aliens” (Skoug 9). Much like the “nativist” backlash in America in the 1920s and 1930s, the early 1980s marks a time when anxiety over the immigrant was once again a national topic: “If there was a Cuba-related objective which united all factions in the United States at the outset of the Reagan administration, it was to expel criminals included in the


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7 The title “Excludable” refers to “criminals and mentally ill persons deemed ineligible to remain in the United States” (Skoug 57). In the press and in U.S. discussions with Cuba, the Marielitos whom the U.S. wanted Cuba to repatriate became known as the Excludables.
Mariel influx” (Skoug 10). It took four years for Castro to agree to “take back” the 2,746 Cubans that the United States deemed “excludable.”

Given the association of Marielitos with criminals, it is not surprising that the first time we meet Tony Montana he is sitting in a police station answering questions about his past. With a self-assured grin and large scar across his face, he is already marked as a criminal (which is later confirmed when the police discover a “true” mark of criminality, an “assassin’s tattoo,” on his hand), despite his attempts to convince the police otherwise. In response to the question “Where’d you learn to speak the English, Tony?” he explains, with an ironic smirk, “Uh, in a school. And my father, he was uh, from the United States. Just like you, ya know? He was a Yankee.” Here, Tony attempts to establish his right to live in the United States—just like his interrogators’ fathers, his father was a “Yankee.” Later in the scene, he further asserts this right to the “American way of life” when he declares “I’m Tony Montana, a political prisoner from Cuba. And I want my fuckin’ human rights now! Just like President Carter say!” Throughout the majority of this scene, the camera frames Tony in a mid-shot as he looks up at his interrogators, who we only see from the mid-section down. At times the camera circles around his head, thus emphasizing his entrapment; despite the stories he tells, the police will never believe him because he is viewed as a criminal, a toxic pestilent sent over from Castro. After Tony’s rousing and ostensibly convincing speech about the hardships of living under a communist dictatorship, the police chief, looking both bored and cynical, responds: “I don’t buy his shit... They all sound the same to me. That son of a bitch Castro is shitting all over us.”

Of course, the police chief is right—Tony Montana is a criminal and his “role models” are the stars of American gangster movies. Much as the censors of the 1930s feared, the gangster film has provided the disenfranchised with a method for obtaining wealth and success in America. Tony tells the interrogators, “[My father] used to take me a lot to the movies. I learn. I watch guys like Humphrey Bogart. James Cagney. They, they teach me to talk. I like those guys. I always know one day I’m coming here, United States.” Gangster films have taught Tony that the surest way for an immigrant to gain access to the “American Dream” is through violence and crime. Therefore, it is not surprising that in order to obtain his green card, Tony and his sidekick Manny, must kill a former Castro aid. Tony has no qualms about committing the murder, and like a true capitalist, expresses
his scorn for communism: "I kill communists for fun. For a green card, I'll carve 'em up real nice." In fact, in the hedonistic world of Miami in the 1980s, with its flashy clubs, neon colours, and appetite for cocaine, Tony reveals himself to be the very opposite of a communist. Everything he sees, he wants, and he knows exactly how to get it. For instance, when advising Manny how to pick up American women he says, "In this country you gotta have the money first. When you get the money, then you get the power, when you get the power, you get the woman." Like Tony Camonte, who believed the Cook's Tours advertisement, "The World is Yours," was speaking directly to him, so Tony Montana believes he deserves "The world, chico, and everything in it." In fact, Tony later marks his success by purchasing a large statue for the foyer of his mansion proclaiming "The World is Yours" (he originally sees this message flashing on a blimp).

Hence, for Tony Montana, the "American Dream" is defined by owning—expensive clothing, a mansion, a tiger, and most importantly, his boss' woman. Like her predecessor, Poppy, Elvira alternately sees Tony as a low-class "peasant" or simply "the help." Even after they are married and extremely wealthy, Elvira is critical of Tony's obsession with money and their decadent home. Apparently money has not bought Tony any taste and Elvira tells him, "Nothing exceeds like excess." However, appearing "excessive" or to use Poppy's word, "gaudy" does not concern Montana. Unlike Tony Camonte, who wanted to attend the theatre and "talk nice," Montana never aspires to be assimilated into the WASP world because he does not view it as "superior," morally or culturally. In fact, his fear, and the ultimate irony of his success, is that he is turning into a WASP himself. For Tony, money and success have, in a sense, eroded class and ethnic differences, since, if he lives long enough, he will inevitably become like all the other rich old "mummies" of "legitimate" society. In the first Scarface, Tony Camonte is killed soon after he reaches the pinnacle of his success. However, Tony Montana, since he has more time to "enjoy" his success before he is killed, also has the chance to experience the "after" of the "American Dream" that Tony Camonte never experienced. Tony Montana therefore comes to see that financial success, whether earned by the drug lord or the banker, has boiled down to the mere consumption of food, liquor, sex, and drugs, or as Tony calls it "eating, drinking, fucking, sucking and snorting." And the longer he pursues this lifestyle, the more he becomes like the WASPs around him.
Tony’s cynicism also stems from the fact that everyone he encounters is corrupt—from the upstanding banker who launders Tony’s dirty money (Tony calls him a “fuckin’ WASP whore”) to Mel Bernstein, a detective who has turned bribery into his primary career. In fact, in a reversal of previous gangster film conventions, it is Mel who railroads Tony into paying bribes. Whereas in Scarface: The Shame of the Nation, censors demanded that the police and the State be portrayed as upholders of the moral good to balance the immoral figure of the gangster and to maintain the authority of the State, DePalma’s Scarface portrays the Chief Detective of narcotics as Tony’s complicit double. This doubling is further emphasized in this scene by DePalma’s use of multiple mirrors in the background, which reflect multiple images of Tony’s face around Mel as he speaks (as vice versa). This juxtapositioning of one man’s reflection with another man’s presence eradicates the need for shot reverse shot (which would create a “distance”), and allows the viewer to see how one man is merely the reflection of the other. Mel dons the “legitimate,” socially accepted, “white hat” of a cop, while Tony wears the “black hat” of the criminal, and yet they are same man after the same coke money. Here again, the gangster film parallels and equates the behaviour of criminals, the upper-classes, and the ruling forces of the State, only now this equation can be overt.

Brian DePalma, benefiting from fifty years of gangster films following Scarface: The Shame of the Nation, is aware of the conventions in which he is working and understands that Tony Montana, living in the 1980s, will be a different kind of gangster than his 1930s predecessor. Thus, by comparing Hawks’ film with its 1983 remake, we can see not only how the image and character of the “public enemy” has altered, but also how the line between “legitimate” and “illegitimate,” which censors and moral crusaders had attempted to rigidly define, has become even more blurred. Unlike Tony Camonte, Montana is much more aware of this blurred line and of the hypocrisy of labelling one person’s method of exploitation for profit as legal and another’s as corrupt. He too has seen way too many gangster films. This sentiment becomes apparent when Tony goes out for dinner at an exclusive black tie restaurant and discovers that he is the only “bad

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8 The third “General Principal” of the MPPDA’s Production Code reads “Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation” (Schatz 95).
“guy” and the only non-white in the room (except for Manny and the men in his entourage), which prompts him to make a speech to his dining companions. It’s worth quoting at length:

You all a bunch of fuckin’ assholes. Know why? You don’t have the guts to be what you wanna be. You need people like me so you can point your fuckin’ fingers and say ‘That’s the bad guy.’ So... what that make you? Good? You’re not good. You just know how to hide, how to lie. Me, I don’t have that problem. Me, I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.

Here, Tony exposes the social drive that Hayden White has labelled “self-definition by negation”: “It appears as a kind of reflex action in conflicts between nations, classes, and political parties... If we do not know what we think ‘civilization’ is, we can always find an example of what it is not” (152). Likewise, the only way to know who the “good guy” is, is by pointing a finger at the “bad guy.” In his speech Tony also uncovers the main difference between the gangster and “legitimate society,” a sentiment that had to remain hidden in films like Scarface: The Shame of the Nation. The gangster is “honest” about his life—his money comes from selling drugs and killing people. In contrast, the detective, the banker, and the “yuppie” citizens who appear legitimate and therefore garner respect, lie about their lives.¹ The banker launders money, the detective solicits bribes, and young, hard-working yuppies buy Tony’s coke in secret.

**Conclusion: The Remake and Social History**

In response to why he does not view Scarface as a “remake,” producer Martin Bregman explains, “The underworld, like everything else, has changed radically since the Capone days of speakeasies and bootleggers... There are obscene amounts of money to be made, bringing in drugs from Central and South America, if someone is smart, ruthless and hungry enough. Someone like Tony Montana”

¹This contrast is the subject of a current film, Empire (2002), in which a Latino heroin dealer is swindled by a white investment banker.
(Malta). However, Bregman’s statement only solidifies *Scarface*’s status as a “remake,” or as a new attempt to depict a previously told story. The constraints of Prohibition, and the public’s consequent thirst for liquor, provided a fertile ground for the growth of the gangster. Likewise, Reagan’s futile “War on Drugs” (which continues today), merely makes the drug trade more violent and more lucrative, as crafty dealers devise more dangerous and more expensive methods for transporting drugs to their customers. DePalma is working in a different era than Hawks, but the structures of ethnocentrism and classism, as reflected in the films, are basically the same. In both films, the gangster, as a member of an ethnic and economic underclass, by virtue of genetics or mentality, is doomed to a life of crime. This pattern, which structures many gangster films, exempts those who are not part of this underclass from responsibility for helping those who have been “preordained” to live a life of poverty or crime. This pattern is similar to the ideology behind the war on drugs, a war that assumes that drug sales and drug use are the result of “bad people” with corrupt morals rather than a problem that society as a whole must address. Hence, the war on drugs becomes a war on the inner city, the poor, and the ethnic minority. It becomes a matter of pointing out the “bad guy.”

These two films tell the same story, and that it still works as well in 1983 as it did in 1932 is revealing of the United States’ inability to break down social, economic, and ethnic barriers. The main difference between the two films, and I would argue, these two periods in American history, is who has been deemed the “public enemy” or the “bad guy” and which drug, whether it is bootleg liquor or cocaine, is currently forbidden by the government. These two films are, as I have attempted to argue, an important vehicle for understanding the ever-changing conceptions of “America,” the American Dream, illegal drugs, and the criminal. And given current pro-war concerns over “American pride” and the presence of “threatening” immigrants in the United States, I believe the issues posed in this paper require further investigation and concern. For instance, what films and modes of speech are currently viewed as dangerous and thus require censorship? And what are media images currently telling us about the definition America and who is the current public enemy?
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Landscape in Film Noir and Westerns 1940s-1950s

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The 1940s and 1950s were a time of great chaos both internally and externally for the United States. Having both expectations and memories of a war with Korea, World War II, the Great Depression, the migration of Blacks to Northern cities, Congress of Racial Equality staging its first organized protest, Brown v Board of Education deciding that separate is not equal, passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Congressional Witch Hunt for Communists, the hunt and fear of the Other was prevalent. All this turmoil, whether personally or peripherally experienced, caused an upheaval in the perception of the time one was in and the times that had past; memories became disillusioned. The “good old days” and fear of the present and future became palpable. Cities grew; in reaction to the influx of a different Other within their space, fear, paranoia, and obsession about urban space proliferated. Fear of the urban space renewed the myth of the frontier. As Doug Williams proclaims, “The wilderness is now no longer a place where the devil rules, but is now wholly the promised land” (Williams 101). The devil began taking a whole new form; immigrants, blacks, and women crowding for jobs, overtaking the urban landscape, became that which was to be feared. “The city... can be analysed as existing in the three Lacanian registers of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary... as symbolic, the city is [the] Other” (Lapsley 192-3). Cinema fleshes out the symbolism. In the seamlessness of the cinema the frontier became the mythological land of the Roussean wilderness, while the urban landscape became the Hobessian view of civilization. During the 1940s and 1950s this was never more apparent than in the dichotomy between Westerns and film noir.

This paper analyses the landscapes of Westerns and film noir during the 1940s and 1950s. While people have always experienced chaos in many different ways, it is always mirrored by and viscerally lived through the cinema of the times. Movies not only reflect who we wish to be but also whom we fear and what we fear becoming. “When year after year the same kinds of stories are produced and marketed by an identifiable community of producers... the movie industry—there is a justification for seeing their recurrent themes as mythic which express values and beliefs important to producers and their society” (Slotkin 30). Important to
producers, they then begin to replicate the ‘message,’ images, and iconography into their productions, and important to society, the continual devouring of the product insures the myth and images will be replicated as long as society buys. Westerns, though their production has fluctuated over the years, remain a staple within our culture. Film noir, whose heyday was from 1941-1958, can still claim genealogy to many images in today’s detective stories, caper films, and the so-called resurgence of film noir à la Usual Suspects, Pulp Fiction, and Memento.

The Westerns examined here, although slightly less idyllic because they belong to the so-called Cold War Westerns or noir Westerns, nevertheless mythologize the miles and miles of untamed land interrupted with majestic red mesas or grandiose snow capped mountains, that can bring wealth and prestige to any man who possesses the pioneer qualities (which, of course, are not so much character traits as physical necessities of whiteness). The urban landscape presented in film noir is a “city at night with its darkened skyscrapers and a row of blinking neon lights at the bottom of architectural canyons” (Hirsch 12), punctuated by dark empty streets and ominous shadows. It is not the land of myth or opportunity but one of fear, “an increasingly unsafe place... a landscape strewn with traps ready to spring the slightest misstep, the smallest detour” (Hirsch 12).

While the Western is thought of as expressing an exclusively American ideal, its symbolism permeates globally. This is also true of film noir. Both genres spin and interrogate myths about selfhood and society through the exploration of the principal character in relation to his environment. Westerns are all about the trip; the destination is secondary. Film noir is about the destination, but the destination never exceeds the landscape and the landscape is about death; death is the way out.

Landscape

The celluloid landscape is a terrain clouded with Roussean ideas of wilderness and Hobessian fatalism associated with civilization. From the representation of cowboys and the West of Yale graduate Frederic Remington, to the picturesque panorama of the jutting red mesas and majestic blue sky of Irishman John Ford, the West has become not so much a place as a symbol:
More than anything, in fact, it was Remington’s connection with eastern fantasy of the West, and not a true knowledge of its history and people that his admirers responded to. Remington’s artwork fired the American imagination, and his vision of the West was adopted by the nation.... Remington immortalized the Western experience as one of independence, individualism and stoic heroism... the way Americans wanted to see themselves. He struck a mythic chord in defining our national character. (PBS n.pag.)

Remington’s work was dominated by images of struggles between man and man and between man and nature. These images slowly permeated moving pictures.

The Westerns of John Ford especially owe a debt to Remington. Ford’s landscapes are inescapable. The obtrusive clay red mesas and buttes extending towards the majestic blue sky are trademarks of a Ford Western. Monument Valley and John Ford have become synonymous. “The Grand Canyon and Monument Valley have come to signify... not just the Western, but America itself” (Buscombe 119). “[Monument Valley is] an area with little relation to the conventional geography of the West, a patchwork of natural features lending itself to subjective interpretation” (Baxter 70). And from McBride and Wilmington, “ Monument Valley is more than a real place to Ford. It is a state of mind” (36-7). The man who ‘knows nature,’ knows the lay of the land, is no longer the person to be feared. The noble savage is no longer the Indian but the white Anglo male who can negotiate the terrain, and who thus proves he is a hero. “Western heroes prove their status... their ability to express the best traits of civilization and nature” (Williams 104).

The urban landscape gives rise to a different mythology. From the work of Jowlenisky and the German Expressionist with their addiction to shadows and high contrast between light and dark; to Reginald Marsh and his cities that are alive with temptation; to Fritz Lang and his Metropolis, a studio constructed city, a “faint echo of a real city,” the city has been a site which provokes fear at every corner: “To speak of the urban, to describe the cityscape, immediately brings spatial paradigms and metaphors into discourse” (Mahoney 168). "The city... can be analysed as existing in the three Lacanian registers of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary... as symbolic, the city is [the] Other” (Lapsley 192-3). The discourse of the urban landscape huddles around the steel fortifications of the
skyscrapers, the spatial and architectural projections that instill fear and dread instead of comfort and protection. The urban landscape of film noir acutely taps into this fear:

The noir city where sensation overwhelms sense...dark with something more than night, the noir city is a realm in which all that seemed solid melts into the shadows, and where the traumas and disjunctions experienced by individuals hint at a broader crisis of cultural self figuration engendered by urban America. (Krutnik 99)

The landscape that demands negotiation in film noir consists of desolate wet streets punctuated by ominous shadows, interrupted intermittently by blinking neon lights. It is not a world for the noble savage but indeed a landscape that is “nasty, brutish and unkind.” Landscapes, whether they be wilderness or urban, present more than meets the eye. They are always punctuated with our hopes and our fears; we interpret with the memory of myth and fact intermingled:

Memory is neither fixed nor eternal. It mutates. As a cultural constellation it permits an oblique glance that scans historical time diversely, proposing a redemption in which cultural speech and historical action are rewritten through the introduction of the unstable power of metaphor and modes of language that disrupt as they disseminate discourse. (Chambers 235-6)

**Landscape in Westerns**

Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. –Jean Jacques Rousseau

What is lost when history is translated into myth is the essential premise of history—the distinction of past and present itself. The past is made metaphorically equivalent to the present; and the present appears simply as a repetition of persistently recurring structures identified with the past. (Slotkin 24)
Thus the Frontier, the mythic West, becomes less about an actual geographical place and more symbols, metaphors, and illusions to our character. The snow capped Rocky Mountains and the turbulent Colorado Rapids are less geographical wonders than metaphors, as are the jutting red buttes and mesas of Monument Valley. We know we are “in the West” when we view these grandiose visions on screen, but the idea of “the West” is not a geographical representation that can be shown on a map. Instead, it is a symbol of a character trait that we possess as a divine right. As Doug Williams states, “If one were to ask, ‘What is an American,’ the image that comes to most people’s minds is the frontier, and the self-reliant, masterful figure for whom the unknown holds no terrors” (Williams 93). It is not a geographical location; “the frontier” holds no topographical boundaries, and it is a state of mind, a character trait that is possessed of he who is the embodiment of the Western hero. “The American West was the last frontier of freedom and individualism... thus the West as physical and spiritual frontier was an important symbol for Americans” (Etulain 22). “The pure Western hero...cannot return to civilization” (Williams 97), nor does he want to. Civilization is now the ‘place’ burdened with the savage Other. It is a place where man does not conquer nature, but is overwhelmed by topography. Landscape at the frontier is without bounds. It is not constrained by dark, slick, paved concrete directing one’s actions; it is not reinforced by steel fortifications meant to keep one a prisoner as much as keep undesirables out. The landscape of the Frontier is painted on the canvases of nature, God directed, and, as man shows his ascendancy over nature he moves closer to his status among the gods. The majestic mountains, statuesque trees, the rolling rapids, the openness of the plains are romantic notions, mythical edifices reminding man how far he has come with nowhere to go:

The language of myth is indirect, metaphorical and narrative in structure. It renders ideology in the form of symbol, exemplum and fable, and poetically evokes fantasy, memory and sentiment. The logic of myth is the logic of metaphor and narrative. It depends less upon analytical reason than on an instant and intuitive understanding and acceptance of a given meaning. (Slotkin 22)

The language of the Western is pure myth. Its symbolic reification of land, man,
and deity, is apparent in the renderings of the most famous of Western storytellers, John Ford and Anthony Mann.

“Every director who has constructed a distinctive Western world in his films has made images with which to visualize and particularize the meanings latent in these abstract elements” (Budd 141). No director is more associated with the image of the West than John Ford. His celluloid rendering of Monument Valley is the icon of what is the West. From Stagecoach to The Searchers, from his cavalry trilogy to My Darling Clementine, whatever the subject, John Ford’s visualization of the West remains constant. It is the landscape that conveys the notion of the smallness of man, surrounded by greatness, who is able to survive. From the opening scene in Stagecoach, in which John Wayne’s character is engulfed by the majesty of his surroundings, to the opening of Rio Grande, in which the cavalry rides into the fort completely dwarfed by the largeness of their surroundings, “Ford’s framing of the landscape to exert the maximum contrast between its vast distances and the smallness of the figures that populate it…it is impossible not to register the relative puniness of humanity measured against his towering mesas” (Buscombe 126). Therein lies the myth of the West: man, surrounded by such greatness, is not overcome by the magnitude of his surroundings; he rises to the magnitude of his surroundings. It does not matter where he is going. He is forever surrounded by feats of nature he cannot hope to equal, yet equal them he does.

Landscape in the cinema is never, or never for long, an object merely of contemplation… in the Western… landscape then becomes an obstacle which has to be overcome. Its beauty incidental to its function as a test of the protagonist’s character… the conquest of terrain is emblematic of the achievement of the individual in overcoming personal trials. (Buscombe 127)

The personal trial the Western hero is asked to overcome is to exact from the landscape that which does not belong. The undesirable Other manifests itself mostly in the form of the Indian but can take other forms. In Stagecoach (United Artists 1939), the “Indians are remote, alien figures, projections of white fears of the ‘savage lands’” (Dagle 102). These fears are manifest in the close relation the
Indians have with the terrain. They always appear to be coming from the land, appearing as if sprung from the bowels of the treacherous mountains and cliffs. The landscape and the Indians are projected in binary opposition to the stagecoach and its inhabitants. In *Fort Apache* (RKO 1948), the Indians are again paired with the landscape. As York (John Wayne) ventures inside Apache territory to meet with Cochise, the emphasis is on the landscape itself and the white man’s movement through immense open spaces which represent the unabandoned character of the subject he is tracking. When York finally ventures inside Apache space he is literally contained within the rock structure. He is surrounded not only by Apaches but also by the rocks that enclose and embrace the Indians. Controlled within Cochise’s canyon, the spectator no longer watches from the position of white man, but from the Apache’s viewpoint. Within the mesas we are part of the landscape. When the Apaches leave their reservation we again view the scene from the dominant standpoint. From this point of observation we see a landscape littered with cut telegraph lines, and cluttered with bodies of tortured Calvary troops. A transgression of the subjective has occurred. The Apaches have been off the reservation, leaving their contained space to violate the space of the dominant. As the camera pans we see Diablo’s group of Mescabero Apaches again on top of the cliff, one with the surroundings, seemingly impenetrable, like the stone. In the Ford Western, man is always eclipsed by his surroundings. The manifestation that is ‘man’ is always synonymous with white male, while the Other is part of the surroundings—something to be feared and therefore conquered. In a classic scene from *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (RKO 1949), the camera retreats and we see Major Brittes (John Wayne) standing regally in his cavalry uniform, saber dangling at his side. His foot is propped up against a wooden fence as he seemingly surveys all that surrounds him. We are astounded by the wonder and magnificence of his surroundings. It is momentous. Sagebrush, rocks, and red clay lie in the shadow of the colossal mesas of Monument Valley. Though a slight mist shrouds the mesas, it does not diminish their grandeur. We, as Brittes, stand in awe, but are completely aware of our ability to survive. The landscape of the wilderness is awesome, but its holding of the Other is not completely unconquerable. The Western hero knows this, unlike his partner, the hero of *film noir*. 
Landscape in *Film Noir*

To the time wherein men live without security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal...and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.—Thomas Hobbes

Observe the mighty beast, mankind’s riskiest experiment. A sprawling soaring monster with a steel skeleton and a concrete overcoat. Some brilliant Frankenstein learned how to pump electricity through its arteries; now it lurches and crackles and spews non-stop...when the curtain of night falls, you’d better head for home. Or learn first hand about our truly ingrained trait: the desire to devour. (Muller 4)

The paradox of the landscape of *film noir* consists of the reality that there is no place to go; ‘home’ is as unsafe as the surroundings. Similar to an Expressionist painting gone wrong, everything appears slanted and slightly off kilter. There is no home. There is only the fear and claustrophobia that is synonymous with the urban landscape, “The image of the city as a place of terror and seduction as a modern wasteland, an environment indifferent to people, a carnival edging toward disorder” (Hirsh 83). The visual motifs of *film noir* are captured in its landscapes. Rarely filmed during sunlight most action takes place at night. The nights are always accompanied by bright flashing neon lights that direct you nowhere. The lights usually blue or red signal indecision that is endemic to those who dare to venture through the night. The streets are almost always empty and perpetually wet. The streets are roads, which lead to nowhere and allow no one to enter. The wetness indicates that the trail will always be slippery; there is no sure footing within this landscape. All who come are going to fall off the paths. Shadows illuminate the darkness for there is almost always a light post where a stranger leans for support. And the tall anonymous steel fortresses that house all our fears and anxiety that appear to culminate in human form punctuate each block. “[T]he space of the city is defined by the gaze of the Other” (Lapsley 193). This is never more articulated than in the cinema of *film noir*. The incessant fear of darkness, of shadows, the undulating jazz beats, and the roads and sidewalks that have no
purpose and lead to no destination are paramount to the fear of the unknown. The unknown is a manifestation of the vast migration of Others within the city space. “The city in *film noir* has not so much been taken over by the racial or sexual other because they are never seen” (Clarke 179). It is the non-presence of the Other which makes fear so rampant. In a time when blacks and immigrants were flocking to the cities for work, it is their non-existence that makes them so perilous. *Film noir* masks the Other within the landscape which it finds so dangerous. “It is the Other against whom the urban spectator defines ‘himself’” (Clarke 182). In the films made between 1941-1959, it is this persistent fear of space being taken over by the ‘new’ savage that permeates the cinema which film critics posthumously named *film noir*. There are still good guys—the cowboys easily identifiable by their white skin and manly ways—and there are still savages—equally easily identifiable because of their difference from the hero. The Other is defined in opposition to the hero; the landscape of the urban is defined against the landscape of the wilderness. Open spaces and massive mountains framed against the blue sky appear more inviting to the spectator of the 1940s and 1950s (and today), than the claustrophobia of steel frames against the dark nights, which is what *noir films* offer.

Fritz Lang, perhaps one of the greatest of the *noir* directors, began his illustration of the fearsome urban landscape early. In his silent classic *Metropolis*, and the classic *M*, the mood of the character was reflected by the décor of his surroundings. The studio-built city in *M* is a created environment of buildings, deserted streets, menacing storefront window displays, and a silence that is sporadically disturbed by car horns. The films in the city are just a faint hint of a ‘real city.’ The character in the film is less than ‘human,’ and his surroundings expertly map his being. *The Killers* is another example of *noir* insistence on our fear of the Other. Taken from an Ernest Hemingway short story, the tale is told in flashback. The ‘hero,’ the Swede, is shot to death within the first 15 minutes of the film. He is resigned to death for a transgression he committed ‘a long time ago.’ The remainder of the story consists of an insurance salesman’s attempt to discover why the Swede was shot by eight bullets (overkill) and why he took his fate without a fight. Told in flashbacks from multiple perspectives, we are left with the landscape to discern how, what, and why. The opening shot consists of a car, travelling quickly down a dark road, that illuminates with its headlights a sign that
says “Brentwood.” It is night and two men step into shadows. These are the killers. Their purpose is to kill, and we are informed, as are the inhabitants of the diner, that the killers have come from the urban terrain to Brentwood to kill. This is indicative of the fear of the city. The sheriff announces after the kill that “The killers come from out of town. The way I look at it this killing doesn’t concern Brentwood at all.” Murders are indigenous to Other places—they simply don’t happen in small towns, and, when they do, they simply don’t concern the town. But we, as spectators to the events, know different. We have seen that Brentwood is home to dark empty streets and long apprehensive shadows into and out of which the killers step. We have seen that next to the picket fences and bales of hay lie the possibility of danger and the manifestation of murder. This all happened in Brentwood. The sheriff may be trying to slow time, but Lang tells us that time waits for no man, and eventually the paths of the Other catches up with all, even those who hide in the sleepy little town where “killing isn’t a concern.”

In The Big Heat, noir again reminds us that landscape is the looking glass into our fears. There is no single representation of evil in this film. The landscape is swarming with images that convey the evil that lies within urban modern space. The telephone system “represents interlocking spaces of power” deftly tracing the hierarchies of power. When death happens, phones ring; corruption seems to spread through the city via its phone system, that modern miracle. The landscape dotted with phone lines represents the pervasiveness of evil within the urban landscape. Lang also shows the futility of the ‘50s ideal of suburban bliss. When Bannion’s wife is killed and he empties out his home,

Lang shows this house in the process of being stripped bare, shot from a slightly high angle which captures its stark, almost geometrical emptiness...these images reveal the emptiness that (at least potentially) underlay the tranquillity... Lang uncovers the hollow core of the dream of the suburban home, the center of 50s ideology. (Gunning 422)

As Mae Doyle says in Clash by Night, “Home is where you go when you run out of places.” This is particularly true of the urban landscape as presented in noir. There is no home, unless you count the refuge of death. The hero in noir is in the city but not of the city. The city is inhabited by the unseen Other, and the hero’s job is
to traipse the city with its incessant neon signs and empty dark streets, avoiding
the shadows and the figure of the Other. It is difference that one attempts to
escape in noir. The different is rarely seen and rarely spoken of; this is the fear that
is prevalent in good noir.

Conclusion

Westerns, film noir, and their geographical boundaries are timeless. It is never just
the landscape that one views when viewing good cinema. We take in the
metaphors and symbols that the landscapes stand for. On the one hand, the open
spaces and comforting sight of the red mesas of Monument Valley bring positive
feelings of home. It is a sight that we welcome and view without apprehension. On
the other hand, the dark nights, empty streets, and steel skyscrapers of film noir
all point to the figure about to emerge from the darkness. We sit on the edge of our
seats knowing bad things are going to happen soon. We know this because we
have been coded to fear the urban and embrace the frontier. We have been coded
to fear the symbol of the Other in the form of the urban terrain and love the
signification of the strong white male hero who embodies all that is the frontier.

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Filmography


Small Nation—Big Screen: Film in Wales during the 1990s
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Film, as a part of culture, has a contribution to make towards national culture and national imagination. As Anthony Cohen says, “Culture in this view is the means by which we make meaning and with which we make the world meaningful to ourselves and ourselves meaningful to the world” (196).

Film contributes in its own ways to the construction of a national imaginary. Therefore, if it is a symbolic manifestation of national identity, the situation in Wales would seem intriguing, bearing in mind the comments of Wil Aaron:

Film was never made to feel very welcome in Wales. As a two or three year old infant, stinking slightly of gin and the sweat of the fairground, it ran slap up against Evan Roberts and the [religious] Revival of 1904-5 and was severely mauled. It survives—but remains retarded to this day. (297)

Aaron voiced these thoughts in 1979, but I would argue that there has been a significant change in the depiction of Wales on screen since the seventies that reached a crescendo in the nineties. During the nineties, there was a conscious move among young Welsh directors to realise their desire of putting a ‘new Wales’ on the cinema screens. These young directors flipped, twisted, mauled, satirised, or attempted to completely ignore Welsh themes of the past. But despite this thoroughly conscious drive to split with the past, the influence and significance of Wales’ cinematic past on these films is highly evident.

Ed Thomas, screen writer and director, said in 1997 that “The Old Wales [was] dead”:

The Wales of stereotype, leeks, daffodils, look-you-now-boyo rugby supporters singing Max Boyce songs in three-part harmony while phoning mam to tell her they’ll be home for tea and Welsh cakes has gone. (16)
The pursuit of the wider political, cultural, and social landscape in Wales during the nineties illuminates Thomas' mindset at the time. The nineties saw the Rugby World Cup come to Cardiff; it was the decade of devolution in Wales; a change which, for some, saw the birth of true democracy with the dawn of the Welsh Assembly. The Millennium Stadium was built as confirmation of an old successful rugby heritage, but a failing national team on the cusp of a new millennium. In addition to this, prominent Welsh personalities dominated the London media and entertainment scene once again. It was therefore possible, for the first time, to read and see Wales in the mass media at the turn of the century. Through this exposure on a ‘British’ and international level, the Welsh received external confirmation of their identity; they certainly were not invisible any more. It was felt, in the film world, that this was the chance to bury old stereotypes and prejudices on screen; this was truly the chance to wipe the cinematic slate clean.

The new image of Wales appeared to be dynamic, fresh, and confident. But underneath the fragility of the shiny surface lay a lack of confidence, a navel-gazing nation with an obsession with how others saw it, and how the Welsh saw themselves. The nineties also heralded the arrival of Cool Cymru—a label invented by the London media that was a short-lived, insubstantial gimmick, and yet another testament to the constant need for a seal of approval from the outside. In this context, in the final years of the last century, elements of the artistic community in Wales felt a need to show that the country had moved on in every way, including the way the country was portrayed on screen.

This obsession with the self in relation to others can be attributed to the colonial relationship that has existed historically between Wales and England. Many English and American directors who have attempted to depict Wales have, in fact, created in Edward Said’s words, an ‘Orientalised’ view of Wales. In Said’s Orientalism, he argues that the Western views of the orient are not based on what is observed to exist in Oriental lands, but often result from the West’s dreams, fantasies, and assumptions about what this radically different, contrasting place contains.

Welsh film heritage has, to some degree, been over-simplified. Some films have traditionally been promoted as examples of the filmic heritage in the quest to identify some sort of pattern; thus creating a canon of ‘Welsh’ films. The features that have been traditionally promoted in these films are coal mining,
education, religion, music, rugby, and ‘bad national habits,’ such as alcoholism. Things, of course, weren’t as black and white as the stereotype suggested; nevertheless, it’s not possible to deny that the stereotypes are based on popular images. We see these in films such as John Ford’s *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), the film that spawned a million clichés about terraced streets and black-faced miners singing on their way home from the pit. *Proud Valley* (1940), *Valley of Song* (1953), *The Corn is Green* (1945) and *Only Two Can Play* (1962) have also promoted various Welsh clichés already mentioned. It was these stereotypes, based on popular images, which drove the discussion of change in the nineties.

In the nineties, there were a number of social, linguistic, and research issues that led to changes in films. As previously mentioned, there was confidence and excitement, however superficial, in the wider social and cultural context. Linguistically, there were more Welsh films made in the English language, which resulted in Welsh films being exposed to a wider audience. Post 1993, S4C, the Welsh language broadcaster responsible for many films, (who had been accused of looking to history for inspiration for films) started to look at modern depictions and subject matter. Furthermore, Dave Berry’s archival work, in *Wales and the Cinema*, provided a significant development in the knowledge and understanding of the Welsh cinematic inheritance.

In the midst of these “cultural shifts,” as the cultural Marxist Raymond Williams calls them (qtd. in Williams xxxii), the concepts of ‘Old Wales’ and ‘New Wales’ became apparent and extremely relevant to cinema. There were shifts: from choirs to *Cool Cymru*, from uniformity to power, from servility to confidence, and from the heavy industries of coal mining and steel works to the new technologies of computers and call centres. The shifts happened from the world of *How Green Was My Valley* and *Run For Your Money* (1949), to the world of *Twin Town* (1997) and *House of America* (1997). There was a constant persuading of the self of these shifts, and a constant convincing of the self that this was the chance to break with the past. However, the picture is far more complex than it first appears.

In the Welsh films of the nineties, there is a stronger and broader representation of Welshness. This happened, in part, due to new directors having a better understanding of Wales, essentially, because the directors were themselves Welsh, or had strong Welsh connections. This resulted in the majority
of films being less stereotypical thus giving a more ‘valid’ representation of Wales. Script writers, directors, and producers such as Ed Thomas, Marc Evans, Paul Durton, and Kevin Allen are conscious of the way Wales has been portrayed in the past. They have made a conscious decision to modernize and refashion old themes, by satirization and distortion. Some have taken a conscious decision to avoid old themes, and have introduced new themes in an extremely effective way. Films such as Human Traffic (1999), Diwrnod Hollol Mindblowing (2000), and Streetlife (1995) are all films which have taken this conscious decision to avoid old themes, and, as a result, have taken the shape of less obvious genres, a road movie being one example. They offer a variation that did not exist before the nineties. Having said this, it’s also important not to forget films such as An Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain (1994), House! (2000), and Very Annie Mary (2001) which continue to show a very ‘Orientalised’ version of Wales.

1997 was the year of Twin Town and House of America. Through both these films, what is highlighted is that, contrary to the belief at the time that these films reject and cast off Welsh filmic inheritance, they in fact satirize and distort some of the themes that are considered inherently Welsh. Twin Town is a black crime comedy. It’s loaded with meaning for an audience that is consciously Welsh, and this film would lose impact to that audience if it hadn’t been situated in the city of Swansea. Persistent Welsh themes present have been twisted or flipped for a new generation. Throughout the film there are interesting relationships with themes that have historically been part of Welsh films. Taking rugby, firstly, there is a memorable scene in which Bryn Cartwright, the medallion-wearing chairman of the local rugby club, describes a Phil Bennett try in an infamous rugby match, and a memorable moment which is ingrained in the Welsh psyche. In a clear subversion of the traditionalist values associated with rugby, masculinity, and Welshness, the brothers use a rugby ball to hide their stash of cocaine. In contrast to the imposed tradition of rugby, it is football that is the chosen inspiration and delight of the brothers. The brothers own a dog, whose name is Cantona,¹ and the only other dog that appears in the film is named Fergie.² The director, therefore,

¹ As a tribute to Eric Cantona, a French football player who played for Manchester United football team during the 1990s.
² Named after Alex Ferguson, the manager of the Manchester United football team.
has consciously satirised the rugby theme in Twin Town, twisting and deriding its dominance in Welsh sporting life and culture.

Music, a theme which has historically played a part in Welsh films and Welsh life, also has a prominent role in Twin Town; the traditional male voice choir plays an important role, as it had done in the past in How Green Was My Valley and Proud Valley, but so does modern day karaoke. The sound track has popular Welsh bands such as Catatonia and Super Furry Animals, bizarrely alongside sixties song starlet Petula Clarke.

Twin Town’s opening credits show the conscious drive to break with the past. There is a defiant, rousing but celebratory atmosphere. Following the long pan to establish the importance of the city of Swansea as the heart of the film, the audience is greeted directly by a host of different local people. Firstly, there are children, with a girl running in rollerblades. There is a young boy, running with a rugby ball, but wearing a Welsh football shirt. This carnival atmosphere is sustained with greetings by an old man in a vest, two nurses who provocatively raise their dresses, followed by greetings by a man carrying a can of lager, and a man fixing his motorbike who sticks up two fingers to the viewer. This is evidently a close-knit community, but what the director accentuates is that all these people are individuals, and this is highlighted in the colourfulness of the greetings. An intense individuality is apparent which is a direct response to the imposed uniformity of Welsh stereotypes in films of the past.

House of America is another film that seeks to explode stereotypes and ‘re-imagine Wales.’ Gwyn Thomas in his introduction to his play, The Keep, says: “Some families burst apart like bombs and never again achieve unity. Others grow circular, deep like old ponds” (7). Thomas’ description of two families perfectly illustrates the Lewis family in House of America and the Morgan family in How Green Was My Valley. At the heart of How Green Was My Valley, are the Morgan family with the brothers and father working in the coal mine, and the mother and sister cooking and cleaning. Their lives are dignified. In Marc Evans’ House of America, the dysfunctional family explore suicidal fantasies, creating for themselves, in Gwyn Thomas’ words, “a velvet tomb.” In How Green Was My Valley, the mother is the stereotypical matriarch, and as Huw’s character says in the film, “while my father was the head of the house, my mother was the heart.”

Deidre Beddoe has outlined the icon of the traditional Welsh mam in
“Images of Welsh Women”: “She is hardworking. She is as clean as she is pious: she scrubs her floors and her husband’s coal-black back. She is, of course, a mother, mainly the mother of sons who like her husband are also coalminers” (229). The ‘Mam’ is strong-willed, and would do anything to protect her family. In *House of America*, Sian Phillips’ mother is a fragile, confused, and alienated figure. She is the polar opposite of Beddoe’s description. The three adult children of the Lewis family in *House of America* are locked in an incestuous embrace with their mad mother, unable to function in the world outside, excluded from any assumption of authority in their exclusion from public space of work.

In *How Green Was My Valley*, the U.S. is the land of opportunity; in *House of America’s* “bypassed town in a bypassed country” (Taylor 112), the relationship is much more problematic. It’s a threatening symbol, both mentally, and physically, with Michigan Mining digging dangerously close to the family’s home, and long wide roads, zippers, and Marlboros ubiquitous motifs in the film, while the Michigan Mining sign towers, Hollywood style, above the valley. For the young people in the family, Sid, Gwenny, and Boyo, their community doesn’t offer them anything. All that awaits them is a society empty of spiritual or social empathy, without a strong family unit or a close-knit community. This is the antithesis of the traditional Welsh community. The futility of their existence and their inability to change their situation results in extreme, dangerous behaviour. Between the worlds of *How Green is My Valley* and *House of America*, Wales has been transported from the chapel and its faith, to the club, its drugs and its sexual incestuous experimentation. The filmic inheritance has been used to satirize, to correct, and to modernize, and what appears is a darker, less romantic picture of Wales.

A shift has taken place from the terraced house in the valley to an American ranch, its fragility emphasized by Sid’s constant building of a house of cards. The family unit only exists, like Sid’s final creation, by being glued together by a thin web of lies. Ann-Marie Taylor notes the relationship in *House of America* between the dysfunctional family and wider cultural trauma (112). The Lewis boys receive a brutal and bloody beating from the American workers of Michigan Mining. While Sid deals with his social impotence by enveloping himself in the mythology of Jack Kerouac, Boyo tries to operate in the social world. As a disabled rugby player, the perversion of traditional male stereotype, he’s socially impotent. But on a trip to his local pub, which is, for Boyo, the only place of friendship and
security left, he realises it is spoilt by the invasion of Michigan men. His place of protection is now his place of pain. The future of his decaying community is symbolised by the baby his sister Gwenny carries, the incestuous product of fantasy-filled love-making with Sid.

*House of America* and *Twin Town* were not the first of a new generation of films, but the last of the old. They were engaged in an argument about the past, railing against a Wales that was already beginning to change. Later on, Justin Kerrigan’s *Human Traffic* (1999), though set in Cardiff, could, arguably, be set anywhere. It blazes with style and wit; but it has made a clean break from the ‘Old Wales.’ The only obvious Welshman is the ebullient drug baron Howard Marx, who plays himself. The young people in the film lack an allegiance to anybody or anything: as Jip says “The weekend has landed, all that exists now is clubs, drugs, pubs and parties.” There are only a few references to the fact that they are in Cardiff, and there are no apologies for being there, no sense of trying to discuss the concept of Welsh identity. In the scene where Moff, one of the young group, tries to convince a Welsh taxi driver that he could be “the Travis Bickle of Cardiff,” in one sense we see a reflection of the entire film; it is a film that looks more like an American picture than a ‘British’ one. The influences are Tarantino and Scorsese. Unlike the directors of *Twin Town* and *House of America*, Kerrigan is a director who is forming the type of Wales that Ed Thomas himself imagined.

Kerrigan’s work sets up an interesting discourse; with lack of anything obviously ‘Welsh’ in his film, what does the future hold for Welsh film? It could be argued that the future consists of films that have nothing inherently Welsh about them, that are Welsh in name only. But in *Human Traffic*, what is innately obvious in the film is that the shackles of Wales’ cinematic past have been broken. The future, hopefully, holds films where young directors will be free to explore a kaleidoscope of themes, in which a wide variation of experiences and people will be portrayed. “The fact that you can’t sing, don’t play rugby, don’t consider Harry Secombe a hero or never wore a Tom Jones velvet dicky-bow doesn’t exclude

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3 The biggest handicap to Welsh films during the nineties (especially *Twin Town*), stemmed from unfavourable comparisons with British successes such as *Trainspotting*, and even condemnation from *Straight and Sound* reviewer, B. Thompson, who swiped at the picture’s “eagerness to be to South Wales what *Trainspotting* was to urban Scotland” (qtd in Blandford 17).
anyone from making up an imaginary Welsh landscape that can take you somewhere good” (Thomas 16).

However, with the lack of Welsh films that have been released post-Devolution, the transition to a new kind of filmmaking may not be easy. In this respect, if film in Wales was, as Wil Aaron noted a “two or three year old infant” in 1904-5, the nineties can certainly be looked upon as the teenage years of Welsh film, where directors battled awkwardly against their heritage and struggled to find their own voice. This raw, but necessary transitional period, will hopefully free young future directors to create mature films which show the complexity of Welsh existence in the twenty-first century without having to consciously embrace themes which are considered traditionally Welsh.

“So where does that leave us? Free to make up, re-invent, redefine our own versions of Wales, all three million different definitions if necessary” (Thomas 16). Human Traffic is a signpost for future films that have no arguments with the past, where there is a plurality, universality, and inclusiveness within the Welsh experience, which holds hope for future depictions.

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Film, Theatre, and TV Drama in Contemporary Wales

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Introduction

This paper draws heavily on one that I delivered at a conference entitled Postcolonial Wales, at the University of Glamorgan, in July, 2002. Naturally enough, it is informed by issues in post-colonial theory and their applicability or otherwise to Wales, particularly in the period since the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999.

In the period following the election of a UK Labour government in May 1997, cultural commentators in Scotland as well as in Wales enjoyed a much higher proportion of air-time than at any time since the ill-fated devolution debates in the late seventies. In June of 1997, for example, The Observer asked the ubiquitous Ed Thomas, arguably the most significant figure in drama across all media in contemporary Wales, to discuss the new possibility of devolved government for Wales. His reply runs through the sensibilities of much of the work that I would like to discuss here:

Old Wales is dead. The Wales of stereotype, leeks, daffodils, look-you-now boyo rugby supporters singing Max Boyce songs in three-part harmony while phoning mam to tell her they'll be home for tea and Welsh cakes has gone... So where does it leave us? Free to make up, re-invent, redefine our own versions of Wales, all three million definitions if necessary, because the Wales I know is bilingual, multicultural, pro-European, messed up, screwed up and ludicrously represented in the British press... So old Wales is dead and new Wales is already a possibility, an eclectic self-defined Wales with attitude. (Qtd in Roms n.pag.)

The fact that The Observer asked for the views of a playwright and director, and that Thomas became one of the most frequently interviewed personalities during the referendum campaign, draws attention to the very high profile that dramatic
fictions have enjoyed in ‘defining’ and re-defining Wales. Perhaps not simply drama in a general sense either, but more specifically the idea of performance as Roger Owen and others have suggested:

Some of the most important recent general studies of Welsh history have defined Wales and Welshness in terms which make strong (albeit sometimes implicit) reference to performance. I want to propose that, during the past twenty years, a body of historical and cultural writing has begun to emerge which has characterised Welshness not as a cultural condition but as a cultural act, one that requires invention rather than inhabitation or incantation. (n.pag.)

Owen’s thesis then goes on to make more specific links to ideas about the problematics of post-colonial cultures that seek to mimic the forms of the imperial power in order to aspire to the “elevated condition of the coloniser,” as Homi Bhabha put it (Owen 4). This, I want to argue, is central to debates about the kind of dramatic fictions that have emerged in Wales in recent years.

It is also at the heart of arguments about what a Welsh culture should consist of. For example, whether there should be a mainstream ‘national’ theatre based in Clwyd, whether Welsh film makers can aspire to work with larger budgets and within popular genre and whether attempts should be made in Wales to create television drama that stands any chance of a network presence on either the BBC or ITV 1.

In the following sections on theatre, and film and television drama, I hope to at least touch on the complexities of these dilemmas, their relationship principally to ideas of mimicry and hybridity, and some of the answers that appear to be emerging from the artists working in Wales today.

**Theatre**

Of the three media that I want to consider here it is theatre that has had the most turbulent post-devolutionary history. In this section I hope to explore how both policy makers and artists working in Wales have sought to respond to the challenge of the raised expectation of a distinctively Welsh theatre.
 Appropriately the theatre community in Wales began its post-devolutionary life with a series of impassioned and very public rows over the Arts Council of Wales’s now notorious Drama Strategy which proposed wide ranging and controversial changes to the way that public subsidy of theatre activities should be managed and apportioned within Wales. The response to this document was in many ways extraordinary and at one point included the parading of a coffin through Cardiff as well as questions in the Westminster parliament. To an extent, the protests met with some success. Under pressure from the National Assembly, the Drama Strategy was partially abandoned and, eventually, the Chief Executive of the Arts Council resigned. The clearest signals possible had been given that the Assembly would assert itself in the cultural sphere wherever possible and that it was not afraid of those who criticised direct political influence over the arts.

How, then, has this seemingly robust official concern for the role of drama in post-devolutionary, and perhaps postcolonial, identity impacted upon the actual dramatic fictions being produced for the stage in Wales? The downside is still the strong sense of loss amongst the Welsh theatre community over the virtual demise of what many felt was Welsh theatre’s most distinctive feature, namely the country’s strong concentration of overtly experimental theatre. Mike Pearson is now Professor of Performance at Aberystwyth but was formerly one of the leading figures in Brith Gof, the company that best exemplifies this strain of Welsh theatre. He summed up the aspirations of his own company like this:

The aim of Brith Gof is to develop a new, vibrant and distinctive theatre tradition in Wales, one which is relevant and responsive to the perceptions, experience, aspirations and concerns of a minority culture and a small nation and which is more than just a pale reflection of English theatre convention. (Qtd. in Adams 55)

Brith Gof’s clear understanding of the relationship between form and the politics of identity in Wales is typical not only of their own work, but of a number of other practitioners during the decade immediately preceding devolution. Pearson, in fact, refers to hybridity as a key principle of his company, suggesting a specific link to postcolonial discourse.

However, one way of looking at very recent Welsh theatre history would
be to say that the majority of the significant ‘events’ have moved away from this kind of ‘hybrid’ theatre towards a kind of middle ground that is predominantly text-based and self-consciously ‘youthful.’

In the introduction to the first of two published volumes of *Made in Wales* plays from the late nineties, the ex-artistic director, Jeff Teare, makes his vision of the function of new writing in Wales quite explicit:

> Well, they are Welsh plays and they are concerned with identity but not in the usual Welsh theatrical manner. The cultural identity of *Safar* is somewhere between Pakistani and British Asian, the identity discussed in *Gulp* is sexual, and *Happiness* deals in social and existential self rather than national. Three Welsh plays in one volume not about definitions of Welshness, good grief! (12)

Teare continually snipes at what he saw as the narrowness and parochialism of the theatre establishment in Wales, particularly with regard to questions of racial and sexual identity, and here we have a very interesting set of postcolonial tensions. A director from the London fringe, Teare arrived in Wales seeking to drag what he saw as the fundamentally homogenous nature of Welsh ‘performed’ identity, kicking and screaming, onto stages in Wales and beyond. Predictably the results met with very mixed reactions and many questioned the theatrical as well as intellectual sophistication of much of the work. Arguably the most positive dimension was that, at times, the company could claim to have reached out to new audiences who saw something for the first time in a Welsh play that was part of their experience of living here.

Here, clearly, the linked concepts of hybridity and mimicry come into play. *Made in Wales* critics would argue that it largely produced work that did simply ‘mimic’ that being produced anywhere in the UK whilst the more radical formal possibilities that had been so prevalent in Wales during the 1980s and early 1990s were declining. On the other hand, by implicitly linking the subordinate nature of black and gay communities within Wales to the subordinate nature of Wales to England, the company could be said to have been very much part of a post-colonial spirit to re-define and re-invent.

Like *Made in Wales*, the new bi-lingual company that was selected by
the Arts Council to replace them, Scrip Cymru, has seemed to prioritise the production of new Welsh writing outside Wales, often through imaginative co-productions. This strategy has had some high profile success, particularly with two plays that had extended London fringe runs and consequent press attention. Both were by young writers relatively new to theatre and neither is overtly concerned with Welshness at all, though they clearly contain identifiable Welsh characters and references. The two, Crazy Gary’s Mobile Disco, by Gary Owen, and Art and Guff, by Catherine Tregenna, were, to some extent, presented as a kind of ‘package’ that helped to maximise publicity and create a minor stir around Welsh playwriting getting in on the ‘Cool Cymru’ act. Owen in turn has now had a piece commissioned by the Royal National Theatre, a rare seal of ‘approval,’ one is tempted to say, in the context of this particular discussion.

There have also been prominent theatrical ‘events’ in the last four years that have both sought a much more direct engagement with Welsh identity and reached new audiences. These include Patrick Jones’s Everything Must Go and Helen Griffin’s Flesh and Blood. Most recently of all Dic Edwards’s Franco’s Bastard caused stink bombs to be thrown on to a Cardiff stage. A welcome return for political theatre that has such provocative powers, some would say, though in this context it is ironic that the play was seen by some as a myopic attack on the idea of a separate Welsh identity.

Theatre in the Welsh language has perhaps suffered most from a crisis of confidence in the post-devolutionary period, though now it seems that the proposal to create a strong national company is nearing some kind of reality. What many fear is that it will come close to simply mirroring Clwyd Theatr Cymru’s adoption of a traditional English repertory theatre with a mix of classical translations, the Welsh language theatre ‘canon,’ and the occasional nod to new writing. Currently a provisional budget has been announced and a Steering group established and some considerable debate is now likely over its eventual identity.

In terms of smaller-scale theatre, if Scrip Cymru is to help increase the significance of Welsh language theatre within the whole context of Wales’s post-colonial identity they need to help develop its presence outside its current heartland in the north-west. Here Arad Goch, Theatre Bara Caws, and others continue to produce a significant body of work that is often rooted in their close relationship with their communities, but in the rest of the country, and therefore
for the majority of the population, Welsh language theatre is largely invisible. It will be a vital task of both Sgrït Cymru and the new national company to support the existing small-scale providers in seeking to change this, if Welsh language theatre is to have a clear role in the project of national re-definition.

**Film and Television Drama**

In terms of institutions and public policy, neither Film nor Television in Wales is post-colonial to even the same limited degree as theatre might be said to be. Broadcasting in Wales remains under the direct control of the UK Department of Culture Media and Sport. There has been talk of an Assembly controlled Film Fund for Wales, but, for now, policy making remains in London.

With the economics of the moving image industries, so far very little affected by devolution there cannot be said to be such a thing as a discernible ‘post-colonial response’ on the part of filmmakers in Wales.

To take film first, in the absence of any comparable debate about Wales it is interesting to look for a moment at parallel arguments that have been conducted about the much more buoyant Scottish film sector. Colin McArthur and others have strongly criticised the funding agencies in Scotland for tacitly encouraging filmmakers to adopt commercially driven strategies at the expense of the establishment of a distinct Scottish film identity:

> The emphasis is placed on the creation of a cinema rooted in narrative-based storytelling derived from Hollywood film practice, coupled with an emphasis on market driven production strategies. This not only drives up the costs, but also fails to address the more pressing cultural and social questions to which an indigenous Scottish cinema ought to be committed. (Petrie 163)

As Duncan Petrie goes on to say, McArthur’s arguments raise key questions “about the relationship between culture and economics in the process of the development of cinema in a small country.” McArthur’s ideal is a very ‘pure’ one in a sense and he himself specifically refers to the creation of a ‘poor cinema.’ This idea clearly relates to the post devolutionary identity of film in Wales. Welsh cinema has, for
the most part, had little choice but to be a poor cinema and I want to move to examine some examples that seem to me to illustrate the key issues.

The first of these is *Human Traffic* directed by Justin Kerrigan and first shown in June 1999. Excitingly for Kerrigan and all involved with the picture, the influential Philip French in *The Observer* (among others) hailed *Human Traffic* as a genuine pointer to the future of Welsh cinema,

Just as *Trainspotting* makes a clean break with the traditional Scotland of tartanry and kailyard, of Scott and Barrie, so *Human Traffic* turns its back on the Wales of male voice choirs and the whimsical humour of *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain*... it seems more like an American picture than a British one; the influences working on it are Quentin Tarantino, Woody Allen, Bob Rafelson’s *Head* and early Scorsese. (6 June n.pag.)

So what is the value to a post-colonial Welsh identity of the emergence of a young director who, if French is right, has most in common with American independent cinema (and perhaps with some of their models in Europe)? If the film is so recognisably ‘Welsh’ what can it mean for an emergent culture?

Well to begin with the film is not so much recognisably Welsh as Welsh with a style and wit that it wears very lightly. Set in Cardiff, it justifiably makes its five central characters a diverse bunch on all levels lacking allegiance to any traditional idea of obvious identity. It is essentially a playful film in terms of form, entirely in tune with its subject matter and it looks exactly as though it comes from the kind of Wales that Ed Thomas described in our opening quotation.

If Kerrigan and others such as Sara Sugarman with *Very Annie Mary* represent the possibilities of young Welsh filmmakers both reaching wider audiences and being free to experiment with form and ideas there have also been high profile releases in the last three years that are closer to being conventional, and yet also have a degree of importance in the current context. These would include the Oscar nominated *Solomon and Gaenor*, which very productively uses three languages, Welsh, English and Yiddish in ways that comment obliquely not just on contemporary Wales, but on the lingering xenophobia that surfaces in debates about asylum seekers and the rise of a new European right.
The most commercially ambitious film to emerge from Wales in the
post-devolutionary period was *Rancid Aluminium*, the feature debut of Ed
Thomas. Sadly the film was almost universally disliked by reviewers across the
spectrum and particularly castigated for its perceived attempts to cash in on the
success of British gangster film, *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. As we have
already discussed, what Colin McArthur and others would argue is that it is a
waste of time trying to get into this level of commercial film making from within
Wales. Instead, a post-devolutionary Wales should concentrate on a ‘poor cinema’
that allows the development of voices and images independent of the forms of
either Britain or the USA. What this ignores, however, are questions of confidence
and audience expectation, and in Scotland the *Shallow Graves* and *Trainspottings*
have arguably allowed a strong low-budget culture to emerge alongside them.

There has also been a number of films working innovatively on low
budgets that have been representative of the power of McArthur’s ‘Poor Cinema’ at
its best. For example, *Mindblowing*, directed in 1999 by Euros Lyn with a finance
package that included HTV and Lottery money, is powerfully influenced by the
Danish ‘Dogma’ group. It has elements of a road movie about it and explores
competing north/south and urban/rural identities. It is witty and lyrical and turns
the imperatives of small budgets and resultant hand held improvisation to good
effect. The commercial result? A complete disappearance and the hardest film to
obtain information about of any that I attempted to research for this discussion.

A similar fate, though it got a more prominent small-screen airing on
*S4C*, has befallen *Beautiful Mistake*, made jointly by Chris Forster and *House of
America* director, Marc Evans. It is based around the idea of bringing John Cale
back to Wales and getting him to play with a number of younger Welsh musicians.
Cale himself almost becomes a living embodiment of the hybridity and
freewheeling nature of a possible new Welsh identity. Look, the film seems to say,
one of the Velvet Underground was a Welshman and here he is, playing alongside
James Dean Bradfield and Cerys Matthews. Anything is possible if you can
imagine it.

Most recently, another high profile casualty of exhibition difficulties has
been *Happy Now*, the feature debut of Philippa Collie-Cousins. The film has Ioan
Gruffydd in the lead so has no shortage of marketing potential, and it is in English,
but the film has failed to secure any kind of distribution deal after reasonable reviews at festivals in Edinburgh, London, and Cardiff.

If the mainstream British film industry is obsessed with being acceptable to American markets (with honourable exceptions) and Wales continues to turn out films that are difficult to fit in to these categories, then clearly there is a need to look again at strategies needed to secure exhibition. This means working with exhibitors to build a modest circuit within Wales itself as well as looking beyond England to European markets where the addition of sub-titles is not seen as the kiss of death that it appears to be in England.

The sorriest tale of is that of TV drama, though it must be said immediately that of the main providers there is a widespread view that S4C’s output has shown some signs of development. Dave Berry’s pessimistic view expressed in 2000 still by and large holds good:

The disparity between television opportunities in Welsh and English language drama, with the balance firmly in favour of generally seriously under funded Welsh language work, continues to retard English language writing—and crucially affect confidence and self-esteem in Wales. (128)

As we have already stated, in practical terms broadcasting is outside the Assembly’s remit and unaffected by devolution. In more general post-colonial terms, however, there is little sense of a growing confidence or assertiveness on the part of the broadcasters. As Alan Clayton, himself an ex-HTV drama head put it,

For years, there has been a marked lack of self-belief in Welsh writing and directing talent both in Wales and London. There is a perception within Wales that works deriving from Wales won’t be sexy enough in London. This feeling has led to compromise and apathy. (Qtd. in Berry 137)

Whilst in the same piece, Meic Povey, himself a successful writer of dramas in both languages, turns the same point into a specific issue of a lingering colonial mentality: “there’s far too much looking over one’s shoulder towards London
seeking approval... We would be much better off now bringing on talent, developing skills for domestic consumption in the first place” (qtd. in Berry 137-8).

In limited pockets there have been attempts to realise Meic Povey’s vision. HTV Wales’ Nuts and Bolts combined the production of the Merthyr-based drama series with the setting up of The Nuts and Bolts Experience, a series of drama workshops aimed at local people with the intention of developing local talent that would eventually feed into the casting, writing, and directing of the programme itself. With the ever-increasing concentration of television ownership in the UK. However, HTV is now part of the giant Carlton group and Nuts and Bolts has already been axed. The BBC in turn has produced two respectable drama series, principally for Wales-only consumption: Belonging and The Bench and the occasional high profile single drama such as Care. The latter all too often import talent rather than trusting what is in Wales and overall there is little sense of anything emerging which either takes risks, or has the necessary clout to be shown on the network and raise industry confidence.

Curiously, considering its early reputation, it is to S4C that we have to look for any signs of something new beginning to emerge. Previously there had been a strong body of critical opinion within Wales typified by Katie Gramich’s view that:

It is by no means unusual to find on a particular evening, while Channel 4 is screening, for example, Out, a gay and lesbian magazine programme, that S4C is showing Rasus, ‘a series about trotting,’ that is horse races, presented by farmer Dai Jones... The Welsh language programming on S4C tends to target a middle-aged audience with distinctly low-brow tastes... politically incorrect and culturally undiscriminating. (106)

Perhaps the work that best typifies the beginnings of something new at S4C is the drama series Fondue, Sex and Dinosaurs. One reviewer called it ‘undoubtedly one of the channel’s finest achievements’ whilst others have made comparisons with groundbreaking work such as Twin Peaks, especially in terms of the programme’s playful approach to form and genre restrictions:
The dysfunctionality behind middle-class normality and respectability is dissected in scenes that are by turns farcical, surreal, stylised, naturalistic, deeply touching, excruciatingly painful, and downright hilarious. The list gives a sense of the sheer vitality of *Fondue* as it plays with these modes and moods. (Davies 147)

Whether *Fondue* is as strong and original as the reviewer claims is irrelevant—what is significant is the confidence with both contemporary subjects and with form. The number of UK TV dramas that now have the courage to even nudge at the boundaries of generic formulae is tiny; the fact that one comes from the much criticised S4C is at least encouraging and reflective of a confidence to look beyond the hegemony of the UK network.

It is tempting to make much of the fact that *Fondue*’s writer is a woman, Delyth Jones, and that Angharad Jones, the S4C Head of Drama, has also helped to nurture the careers of a number of other women who write for television, notably Catrin Clarke. If we take this alongside the emergence of a number of Welsh women feature film directors such as Sara Sugarman and Philippa Collie Cousins as well as the high profile of women working in animation such as Joanna Quinn and Tracy Spottiswode, there is something of a trend. Whether or not it is possible to further link this to any definite sense of a post-colonial condition is questionable, though at the very least there is a case for saying that the sense of a ‘new’ space within which to work (i.e. a post-devolution Wales) has created an environment with a greater sense of cultural diversity which a number of women film artists have seized upon.

**Conclusion**

In terms of dramatic fictions, the real prison of a colonial, or quasi-colonial, situation is the sheer narrowness of the range of definitions of ‘being Welsh’ that have been made available. I started with a quotation from Edward Thomas and, despite a feeling in some quarters that he is “at best a committed but hopelessly romantic rent-a-gob” (Adams qtd. in Davies 195), I want to close with him as well. For me he still best personifies both the desire for new fictions that re-imagine Wales, and a practical example of someone working across media, collaborating
freely with rock musicians, novelists, and opera directors in order to find ways of being free of both a colonised mentality and the most obvious, narrow responses to that condition:

I want a Wales at ease with itself and rejoicing in its natural eclecticism. I don’t want to see Wales locked in a debate about Welsh and English. I want a multicultural Wales with a myriad sustainable myths...The new Wales has to be fast, maverick and imaginative, and innovative and inventive in its aim to be a small, interesting country within a European context, a country where the albatross of Britain has finally fallen from its neck. It certainly has fallen from my neck. I like England, but not Britain. (Thomas qtd in Davies 117)

For this to be possible it requires, as a start, the following to come about, all of which I would argue could be seen as genuinely post-colonial developments: Firstly, the Assembly’s interest in culture at all levels must be maintained with parallel arguments for a robust revenue increase across the board. Secondly, a theatre must be encouraged and funded that has the freedom to work outside conventional forms and which has the confidence to reach beyond the English example as well as draw upon it. A theatre, which in Roger Owen’s terms could look to Augusto Boal for inspiration and which therefore “prizes intervention, argument and negotiation and has a firm sense of its oppressor.” Thirdly, a pump-primed infrastructure has to emerge that can genuinely support a film industry—one that aspires to have both a ‘poor cinema’ and the possibility of a small number of intelligent, original, commercial features appearing at regular intervals. And finally, the much-debated English-language TV station for Wales that parallels S4C needs to be established so that writers can be freed from the dead hand of UK network requirements.

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Welsh and Jewish: Responses to Wales by Jewish Writers

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The traditional model of Welsh identity, as popularly perceived, has been somewhat dualistic, involving various gradations of Welsh and English identities. Only 2% of the Welsh population belongs to an ethnic minority, according to the 2001 Census, but that percentage is growing, and dualistic views of identity are becoming more and more inadequate, especially as a newly-devolved Wales develops a civic, as opposed to an ethnically-based, identity. And a binary vision, although conveniently simple, has never really been true of the reality in Wales, a country which has hosted significant minorities for very many years.

As a means of illustrating the true polychromatic nature of Welsh experience, both historically and currently, this paper aims to provide a brief overview of some attitudes towards Wales from within a minority community by looking at the encounter between the Jewish people and the Welsh people, as reflected in the work of Welsh-Jewish creative writers. As minority experiences of Wales are gradually becoming a field of academic study, I intend this paper of my own primarily as a means of indicating the range of material available in the case of the Jewish community, and as a means of illustrating—through the use of some brief extracts—something of the nature of that material.

The Welsh Jewish community has existed since the mid eighteen century, initially as very small urban mercantile communities, and expanding substantially only during the late nineteenth century through immigration from eastern Europe, and reaching its fullest extent of some 5,000 people in 1914. There are only perhaps 1,000 Jews in Wales today. But despite these small numbers the community has produced some important writers.

However, before proceeding to the material, I must mention two important caveats. First, that it is, of course, fallacious to assume that creative writers necessarily represent their community. I believe Welsh-Jewish writers are disproportionately sympathetic to Welsh national aspirations. So we should bear in mind that the data I will present is not based on surveys of opinion or questionnaires, or on analysis of non-literary sources, whether Jewish or
otherwise. It is skewed by the fact that it is based on the attitudes of creative
writers, not the entire population. So I do not want to give the false impression
that all Jewish people empathise with Wales. Until very recently, in the absence of
national democratic institutions to create a neutral civic definition of identity, the
tendency has been to use essentially ethnic indicators—birth, parentage,
language—to define who was, and who was not, Welsh. This will always be
problematic for some Jewish people.

My second caveat is a related one—the evidence of friction between
Jews and Gentiles in Wales. For instance, the sensational Jewess Abduction Case
of 1868 in which a Jewish father successfully sued a Christian minister—a Welsh
Baptist—and his wife for, effectively, forcibly converting his teenaged daughter to
Christianity. Then there are the notorious riots of the Gwent Valleys in 1911 in
which Jewish property was singled out for violence. I could mention also the
mercifully few, but nonetheless significant, examples of anti-semitism by Welsh
authors like Saunders Lewis, O.M. Edwards, and W.J. Gruffudd.

I do not want to collude in some pleasant self-congratulatory fiction that
the Welsh are uniformly enlightened and sympathetic towards minorities. But I'm
cautious also of the need to avoid the opposing fault: of exaggerating Welsh
failings in this regard. I want to try to get the issue in perspective. So, with those
caveats, I will move on to the work of those writers.

Firstly, Bernice Rubens, born in 1927 to a Cardiff Jewish family, has
written many novels, although Wales only figures prominently in a few, most
notably Brothers, published in 1983, which tells the story of Jewish immigrants
fleeing the Russian Empire and landing in Wales. This process was shared by
many of those who swelled the ranks of Welsh Jewry in the late nineteenth and
eyearly twentieth centuries as Wales absorbed a few of the hundreds of thousands
who fled Tsarist persecution. Here the Bindel family are given the address of a
Welsh contact who will help them emigrate: “They read the address without
understanding it. Wales, he had said. A place in England, they surmised, which
was where his train and his boat were taking him. Wales, they said to each other,
laughing at its strange sound.” They decide to leave behind the land where they
have been persecuted: “We shall make our future in England.” she said. ’In Wales,’
Leon laughed” (Brothers 129). Bernice Rubens shows a great sensitivity to the
various layers of Welsh society that she portrays in this novel. However, in terms
of the hierarchy of interests, Wales here really serves the role of location, subordinated to the main Jewish narrative.

That is how coming to Wales might have appeared to Jewish emigrants and refugees in the late nineteenth century. For a first-hand account of life in the communities established by those emigrants a few decades later, we can turn to a writer for whom the relationship between Welshness and Jewishness was crucial, Lily Tobias (1897-1984).

She was born in Ystalyfera in the Swansea Valley and was a novelist, broadcaster, and playwright. She was an aunt of Dannie Abse, whom we'll encounter later.1 Her first book, *The Nationalists*, published in 1921, was a collection of short stories, most published first in the *Zionist Review*. The book’s cover showed a red dragon within a Star of David. It’s fascinating, not so much for its literary merit (which is not great) as for the insight it gives into the experience of a Jew brought up within a Welsh-speaking community and identifying strongly with nascent Welsh national aspirations. It’s a unique literary record of Zionism in Wales before the Balfour Declaration. The introduction by the former editor of the *Zionist Review*, Leon Simon, says the stories’ literary qualities transcend propaganda. In truth, characterisation, dialogue, and narrative are completely subordinated to the requirements of Zionist propaganda. Characters are examined only to the degree to which they conform to the Zionist ideal; dialogue is almost always about the Jewish national question; and narratives undergo alarming leaps of perspective according to the necessities of the Zionist focus.

The stories are almost exclusively set in Wales, in rural villages, mining communities, or cities, and the characters portray a variety of responses to Welshness and Jewishness. Welsh nationalists are invariably portrayed sympathetically, Welsh people who scorn their language and culture less so. As for the Jewish characters, assimilationists are implicitly criticised, while proud Jews, and, even more so, Zionists, are warmly approved.

These stories open a window onto a world hidden from most Gentiles in Wales—a community of Jews, many rooted in Wales and identifying with its people, others more recently arrived carrying the accents and attitudes of the

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1 An account of Lily Tobias’s life and work can be found in *CAJEX*, Volume 8, No 2, June 1958: 50.
ghetto; some poor, others flourishing, some devout, others secular. A world of shabbos meals in mining villages, of the web of patronage and social competition in the Jewish relief societies and the synagogue, of Jewish shopgirls begging the Saturday off work, of uneasy friendships with Goyim, of uncomfortable relations with embarrassing “foreign” relatives, of the tension between assimilation and affirmation. And running through this complex world is the disturbing, inspiring ideal of Zionism, still, in those days, an aspiration, an act of faith. Many stories compare the Welsh and Jews as two small peoples with proud religious and cultural histories, both seeking favourable political settlements. Several Welsh characters, particularly religious figures, are shown to display a greater sensitivity to Jewish identity and to Zionism than some Jews. Welsh evangelical sympathy with Zionism is portrayed here from the receiving end. In the following extract, a young assimilationist Jewish woman meets a Welsh friend’s elderly uncle:

“Merch anwyl,” he exclaimed in his broad, emphatic accents, “and proud I am to meet you, for sure. Why, I do love the Jews, indeed I do. You are the people of the Book, and the Lord will show his wonders through you yet. You have got a big job in front of you, my gell.”

“And what is that, Mr Jones?,” asked Sheba politely as she recovered her breath.

“The return to Zion, my gell,” said the old man solemnly.

“Oh, that I could live to see the day!” (46)

To tell the full story of the Welsh involvement in Zionism would be another lecture entirely, but a few highlights must suffice here. Dr Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, came to Cardiff in 1895 to promote his ideals. And, most significantly, a Welshman, David Lloyd George, was the man who authorised the Balfour Declaration in 1917 creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He claimed his Welsh nonconformist upbringing, steeped in the history of Israel and promises of the Jewish return, had predisposed him to grant the declaration. He certainly backed his words with deeds, aggressively pursuing victory over the Turks in Palestine and using Welsh troops specifically for propaganda purposes. There’s some real work to be done in re-presenting this extraordinary historical episode to the Welsh people, if only to make them realise the crucial role their
nation and its attitudes played in the creation of the current situation in the Middle East, and the responsibilities we should consequently feel.

Those political and military factors in the First World War period created the conditions for what was to become the Jewish state, and for people such as Lily Tobias who emigrated to Palestine in 1936 with her husband Philip Valentine Tobias, whose family founded the Jewish Chronicle. He was killed shortly afterwards by an Arab rioter. She continued to live in Israel, an important representative of Welsh, and indeed British, Jews.

Our next writer, Cardiff-born Joseph Danovitch (1906-1983), was a very ardent and prominent Zionist. Nine years younger than Lily Tobias, he left it until he retired in 1965 to make aliyah "the ascent" to Israel. I'll read an extract from a brief, but I find rather moving, article from CAJEX, the Welsh Jewish community’s journal, two years after his emigration. He's not the most distinguished among the Jewish writers of Wales, but his experience is worth noting. He mentions how many Welsh places have Biblical names, compares the Welsh and the Israeli love of song, and compares Welsh nationalists with Zionists in their preference for an ideal over material considerations.

I still, one day, want to make a sentimental journey and retrace my steps in the Welsh valleys and see again the Welsh people I love and respect. There is too, a hallowed piece of ground forever dear to me, near Roath Park in Cardiff, where lie my dear father and mother. The transition from the Land of my Fathers to the Land of my Father's Fathers is not difficult for a Welsh Jew. (Danovitch 28)

That little passage, the Welsh hiraeth of a Zionist emigrant to Israel, is indicative of the fact that there are hiraeths more complex than many Welsh people would suppose.

The Zionism of Joe Danovitch and Lily Tobias led them to Israel. But the dual allegiance of Welsh-Jewish background was not always resolved that way. What about the hiraeth of the Zionist who stayed in Wales? Let us look at the tension in a poem from Mimi Josephson (1911-1998), published in CAJEX in 1955:
WHICH LITTLE LAND?
Child of Israel—
Child of Wales.
Torn between two loyalties,
Two duties, two demanding loves.
Which one shall I serve—
Which little land?
... Then which one shall I serve—
Since love for each tears at my heart?
For which land sing—
Which little land? (45)

No, it is not great poetry. But it is deep feeling illustrating the painful dilemma facing a Jewish woman from Wales. Like Lily Tobias, Mimi Josephson was born in the Swansea area but she lived most of her life in Cardiff, moving to Cambridge in the 1980s. She wrote poetry and short stories, and also a number of ‘profiles,’ some based on interviews with prominent figures such as Dylan Thomas. She and her husband had only one child. But he was Brian Josephson, a brilliant scientist and the only Nobel prize-winner Wales has produced—so far.

I’m going to touch on some other Jewish Welsh writers before spending a bit more time with Judith Maro and, finally, Dannie Abse, who have done most to explore Jewish-Welsh connections.

Maurice Edelman (1911-1975) was born in Cardiff and educated there and in Cambridge. After a spell as a war reporter, he became a Labour MP for Coventry, in 1945, for thirty years. He wrote eleven novels, nearly all with a Parliamentary background. His Jewish interests can be seen in his final novel, Disraeli in Love (1972), and in his biography of David Ben-Gurion. I’m not going to quote his work, but simply note that Welsh affairs are best seen in his second novel, Who Goes Home (1953), in which the main character is the son of a Welsh statesman, a thinly-disguised David Lloyd George. Edelman does not address the interface between Welshness and Jewishness, and Welshness is not central to his novels as a whole, but his grasp of the currents of Welsh politics and society as evidenced in this novel is nonetheless acute.

Moving on to Kate Bosse-Griffiths (1910-1998), we have a Jewish writer
who was not Welsh-born. She was a refugee from Nazi persecution. Jewish on her mother’s side, she was born and raised in Luther’s town, Wittenberg, where her Lutheran father ran the local hospital. He came to prominence for treating explosion victims and was visited by Hitler in 1935. However, only a year later, the young Kate had to flee to Britain after she was dismissed from her museum job due to her Jewish ancestry. Her family later suffered persecution and her mother died in Ravensbruck. In Britain, as an Egyptologist, she found work in Oxford, met J Gwyn Griffiths, a Rhondda Welshman, married and settled in the Rhondda and later in Swansea where she helped found the Egyptian Museum. Kate Bosse-Griffiths learned Welsh and was active in Welsh literary circles, in Plaid Cymru, and in the Welsh language movement, even being fined for one protest. Although Lutheran by upbringing and choice, she retained a great interest in her Jewish ancestry and in Jewish subjects, although this is little reflected in her work, mainly travel books and short stories in Welsh. She was the mother of a prominent dynasty of nationally-minded writers and activists. However, I shan’t quote from her work, but will simply note her as the Jewish writer who has most aligned herself to Welsh-language culture by the fact of her choice of language, and, of course as a comparatively rare example of a Jewish writer heavily committed to the Welsh nationalist project.

I shall not quote from the next writer either, the artist Josef Herman (1911-2000). He was almost an exact contemporary of Kate Bosse-Griffiths, and was another refugee. Born to a Jewish family in Warsaw, Herman fled Poland in 1938 in anticipation of the Nazi persecution in which his entire family were later to die. Arriving in Britain, he lived first in Glasgow before coming to south Wales in 1944, settling in Welsh-speaking Ystradgynlais for eleven years, during which time his portraits of the mining community of the Valleys earned him widespread recognition. In several extended articles, he portrayed the Welsh very much through artist’s eyes—their demeanour and colouring, the light and shades of their habitat. But he also could discern the cultural currents beneath the surface, the interest in his case being more social than political, but nonetheless highly sympathetic to Welsh cultural aspirations and identity.

Born in London as the grandchild of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, and brought up in a household in which Yiddish was spoken, Stevie Krayer (1947-) moved to west Wales with her Welsh husband in the early 1990s.
She has since devoted herself increasingly to writing, publishing a collection of poems with the University of Salzburg entitled *Voices from a Burning Boat*. Although now a Quaker, Krayer retains a strong interest in Jewish matters, and combines this with a great sensitivity to, and sympathy for, her adopted country, whose language she has learned to speak fluently.

With Judith Maro (1927-), we come to the penultimate writer in this talk, and one of the authors who has done most to explore the relationship between Wales and the Jews. Judith Maro has swum against the tide of Jewish settlement in relation to Wales. She was born and brought up in Jerusalem, where, as a young woman, she fought in the *Haganah* insurrection against British rule. In 1947, she married Jonah Jones, a soldier with the British forces. In 1949 they settled in Wales where Maro immersed herself in the culture, learning Welsh and using it as the language of publication for most of her literary work, comprising autobiography, a novel about the establishment of Israel, *Y Porth nid a’n Anghof*, (translated as *The Remembered Gate*), and political and cultural essays. Much of her work deals with the deep identification she found between her homeland and her adopted country.

Here, in an extract from *Hen Wlad Newydd* (1974), she reflects on the fondness of the Welsh for Biblical nomenclature for their landscape:

> Where else in the world could I reach Carmel, Nazareth, Tabor, Cesarea, Hebron, Rehoboth, Moriah, Seion, Bethel and Talpiot in a day’s journey. Places corresponding to all these exist and have their precious Biblical derivation in Israel. I left them behind me—only to rediscover them being affectionately commemorated by a people as devout as my people were at one time. Is there anything that could touch more deeply an Israeli in a sudden exile? (Trans. from *Hen Wlad Newydd* n.pag.)

In the article, “Living in Wales,” she mentions the biblical names of villages near her home in Cwm Pennant, and remarks of her reaction: “I was home—almost.” Almost.

Crossing cultural borders is never as easy as one might like. She talks of the common possession of the Welsh language as being a great leveller, and the sense of equality it promotes among its speakers. And she says that as a foreigner
with English as a second language she found herself more accepted in Wales than she believed an English person would have been, and she felt a greater affinity with Wales than she could have felt for England. But there are limits. She tells of a visit to the home of a friend in north Wales, whose garden, with its view of the mountains, reminds her of Israel: “That night in the garden, I felt that my memories had come full circle. Does this mean I have completely settled in “this strange Celtic fringe of Europe” (as I referred to Wales once in my diary) by now? Perhaps” (trans. from *Hen Wlad Newydd* n.pag.).

That’s a telling word, that “perhaps.” We’re used to the Welsh feeling *hiraeth* in a foreign land. We’re less used to people feeling *hiraeth* within Wales itself. But that was Judith Maro’s experience. It is yet another form of *hiraeth*. Maro expresses what many other Welsh Jews must have felt, that Wales itself, for all its welcome, can, for some people, be the land of exile. This final extract from Maro’s work is taken from the translation of *Haganah Memories*. She describes exile as “a physical pain.”

I am writing about a HOME.... To me, Israel is a HOME, the only home I ever had, perhaps. I have lived in Wales for many years now, for more than half my life, to tell the truth. And it is true that Wales is very dear in my sight; the welcoming and warmhearted affectionate land which accepted me with open arms. Despite all this, even if I live to a good old age (which may God forbid) I will still feel that I was a visitor here—a visitor who got a heartfelt welcome, it’s true, but only a visitor all the same. (Trans. from *Atgofion Haganah* n.pag.)

At a time when the issue of “asylum seekers” is high on our domestic agenda in the UK, it is useful, I think, for Welsh people, so long attuned to their own histories of emigration, to realise they have no monopoly on *hiraeth*, and that their own homeland can be somebody else’s land of exile.

Finally, let me move on to Dannie Abse (1923—). Even if Dannie Abse was Wales’s only Jewish writer, the quality and range of his work would still make him a one-man genre. A poet, playwright, editor, essayist, and autobiographer, he is one of three distinguished brothers of a Cardiff family. His brother Leo, mentioned earlier, was MP for Pontypool, and is also a provocative author,
although *his* work is mainly political, which is why I have not featured it here. Lily Tobias was their maternal aunt. Dannie Abse became a doctor, working in London, although retaining close links with Wales. He travels every fortnight to watch Cardiff City’s home games—patriotic dedication indeed! His poetry, capable of humour, humanity, and profundity, and gifted with an assured lyricism, has made him one of the leading English-language Welsh poets of the century. His 1998 book, *Welsh Retrospective*, collects most of his poems about Wales. The following extracts from his work are a small selection concentrating mainly on the encounter between Welshness and Jewishness, something he can evoke with few words, as here from his early autobiography, *Ash on a Young Man’s Sleeve*:

> It was Friday night and we were Jewish. The two candles burning symbolized for me holiness and family unity. My mother could speak Welsh and Yiddish and English, and Dad knew swear words as well. One of my big brothers would say the prayer and we would eat. My brothers’ names were Wilfred and Leo. The meat was kosher. (13)

He says he experienced “a vague, minimal otherness” at his primary school, but says anti-semitism was virtually unknown, and even in secondary school, his Jewishness was not a big issue: “I was a Jew but that hardly seemed to matter very much. I did not wake up in the morning screaming, ‘I am a five feet eight and a half inches Welsh Jew’” (22).

I had but the vaguest conception of the difference between Christian and Jew. As a child, I knew there was something different in the way Christian and Jew worshipped. They prayed on their knees. We stood up. They took their hats off. We kept them on. It was all rather baffling. ‘Who’s Jesus Price, mama?’ I asked. ‘Not Price, son,’ my mother said. Once again she explained to me that, as far as Jews were concerned, Jesus was not the son of God. ‘A good man,’ my mother insisted, as if she knew him personally, ‘but not divine, not the son of God. Do you understand?’ My mother knew many things. She could speak Welsh as well as English, Yiddish as well as Welsh. Some of the ‘wise’ sayings from Welsh and Yiddish she loosely translated into English. I know
them still—but I am not quite sure, even now which proverbs are Welsh, which Yiddish:

If a man stares in the mirror too long, he will see the devil.

Love lasts as long as there are two people.

If the rich could hire the poor to die for them, what a living the poor could make.

When you visit a restaurant take a seat next to the waiter.

My guess is that the first two ‘philosophical’ sayings are Welsh and the latter two, wry practical remarks, are from the Yiddish. (A Poet 15)

Nonetheless, despite this harmonious upbringing, in Dannie Abse we see another variation on the range of roles which I have tried to display in this brief overview of the encounter of Welshness and Jewishness. In Abse’s case, he finds that to be Welsh and Jewish is to belong to a double minority:

Case History

‘Most Welshmen are worthless, an inferior breed, doctor.’

He did not know I was Welsh.

Then he praised the architects of the German death-camps—
did not know I was a Jew. (Selected 173)

A later anecdote has him being confronted by an aggressive English drunk while visiting a German Jewish café in London. Challenged by the drunk to say where he comes from, he replies “Wales,” which puzzles the drunk so much that he leaves quietly. After the drunk goes, Abse is approached by one of the café’s habitues:

‘So, you’re Welsh,’ he said.

I felt constrained to say that I was a Welsh Jew. He did not seem to know, until that moment, Welsh Jews existed. This information, of course, did not embarrass him. On the contrary, I became suddenly, an exotic. I was introduced all round: ‘He’s a Welsh Jew.’ (A Poet 81)
I hope this quick review has given some insight into the variety of Jewish experiences of Wales. As I said at the beginning, along with other minority experiences, it’s a subject only now attracting extensive academic inquiry, and there is a great deal of material to be explored.

So, to try to address the overarching theme of this conference, what are the implications of this initial study for the emergent Welsh state? Well, as Wales embarks on its own tentative exercise in nation-building and self-determination, there is certainly inspiration to be drawn from the Jewish people’s tenacious retention of their heritage within the diaspora, and from their revival of their language. There are also important lessons about the need for inclusivity and tolerance to be drawn from the less edifying episodes of Wales’s dealings with its oldest minority. And most of all, I hope a study such as this helps illustrate the point that the essential debate about identity in Wales cannot be confined to a monochrome Welsh-English definition. It has to be wider, deeper, more textured, more nuanced. That, I believe, is truer to the historical reality of Wales, truer to the reality of life in Wales today, and truer to what must be our best hope for the Welsh state that is coming into being.

Works Cited


Teaching and Introduction to Islamic Literature

William Over, St. John’s University, Jamaica

Faith and Vision: The Campus Population

The use of the Muslim legal code, the Shari‘ah, as well as secular perspectives, is common among Muslim students at St. John’s University, where they hold a wide spectrum of presuppositions, running from traditional and literalistic approaches of Koranic interpretation to more progressive and even secular positions. One problem seems to be that at present there is a limited number of community options for thoughtful Islamic students within cultures of hybridity. As one of my male students lamented in a private conversation, “Islam just gives you two choices—follow the will of God or stay in the secular world. It’s very authoritarian.” The same student explores the internet’s vast list of web sites on Islam and other religions, torn between, on the one hand, traditional Islamic preachments about the vividness of heaven and hell and the desire of God to be obeyed, and, on the other, the attractions of the consumerist culture of New York City, a locus where he, as a young male, could blend in quite easily. He leans towards a more tolerant, interfaith approach to spirituality, but also expresses the loss of aspects of the strong community that Islam can provide against a wider, seemingly hedonistic, heterogeneous, and self-centered society. His ecumenical feelings may derive in part from the tradition within Islam of tolerance towards other faiths, and in part from the relativism and pluralism apparent in the formations of U.S. cultural life, in which multicultural tolerance overlaps consumerist values and free-market ideologies. A young female student confided that she argues about gender roles with the older men of the Muslim communities around the tri-state area, but she does not find a community where she, as an uncovered woman, can feel comfortable and supported.

In arguments among Islamic students between traditional viewpoints that affirm absolutist configurations of Koranic thought, and more pluralistic understandings that allow alternative theologies and praxis, postmodern forms of relativism can appear on both sides. Pluralistic, cooperative approaches, found in such works as Western Civilization, Islam and Muslims (1969), by Muhammad el-
Bahy, Egyptian scholar and former Director of Cultural Affairs at al-Azhar University, have been held up as accommodationist and defeatist. El-Bahy’s acknowledgement of an historical/critical approach to theological hermeneutics and scriptural exegesis is influenced in part by modern biblical criticism and studies in comparative religions developed over the last two centuries in the West. His prescriptive remarks remain controversial within Islam among many of my students and worldwide:

Progress and change is the immutable law of existence from which it is not possible to run away. Muslims must apply this evolutionary, dynamic concept to their Islam also so that they can keep abreast of the modern Western world and rescue themselves from the cess-pool of chaos, lethargy and stupor. What is needed is to bring Islam deliberately under the working of this law by taking steps towards its revision and reformation in the light of contemporary realities. (178)

Reformation, however, is not seen as necessary for many of my students, who posit more essentialist, universalizing approaches to divine revelation. They regard El-Bahy’s historical relativism as misguided and may suspect a trespass serving Western (Christian) triumphalist thought. Some students find the polemics of Maryam Jameelah, Western convert to Islam, a strong voice against such historical relativism. Recognizing El-Bahy’s own essentialization of “progress and change,” Jameelah (1990) attacks his position as arrogant and exclusivist:

these views are not set forth as the mere personal opinion of the author but as indisputable fact—nay, the law of Nature itself—which nobody dare question. So extreme is their arrogance and conceit that they reserve for themselves the right to dictate to Muslims how they should reform their religion! (165-166)

However, Jameelan’s own position is typically supported by unqualified absolute statements and either/or positions. Those in disagreement with an unchanging orthodox tradition of revelation she terms “orientalists,” and their position “orientalism,” an allusion to the common perception within the contemporary
Islamic world that scholars like el-Bahy have become willing instruments of Western propaganda. Her absolute dismissal precludes the possibility of objective approaches to intercultural issues, sincere disagreement, and critical methods in general. Quite often her statements seem inappropriately reductive:

Orientalism is not a dispassionate, objective study of Islam and its culture by the erudite faithful to the best traditions of scholarship to create profound, original research, but nothing but an organized conspiracy to incite our youth to revolt against their faith, and scorn the entire legacy of Islamic history an culture as obsolete. (166)

By absolutizing one faith tradition, accepting only an unchanging, trans-historical perspective for Islamic law and theology, Jameelah creates a form of relativism herself, a Muslim exceptionalism that regards the scriptural tradition set down by Mohammed fourteen centuries ago as inerrant and perfectionist. Accompanying this perspective is an exclusively binary view of good and evil manifest in the world, evident, for example, in Jameelah’s warning in an open letter to her parents that warns of the torments of eternal punishment for not accepting Islam:

If your decision is negative, I very much fear that your secure, comfortable and pleasant life will very shortly come to an end. As soon as the Inevitable occurs, it is too late for remorse and regrets. The punishment will be terrible from which there is no refuge and no escape. The tortures and torments, both physical and mental without respite, will last forever. You will be permanently separated from all those you love and be forced to dwell with monsters like Hitler, Lenin and Stalin for your companions! (Invitation to Islam 8)

While Jameelah’s many books are distributed widely in the West to potential converts and the faithful, hers is not the most common religious perspective among my Islamic students. Most of my students express a more complex, nuanced, and open view of both intra- and interfaith concerns, seldom Jameelah’s Manichean view of good and evil. Although lacking the absolute certainty Jameelah’s prose conveys, they respond more directly to the realities of historical
and cultural change evident around them, appreciating contextual understandings of revelation and the difference between “culture” and “religion,” the two terms they commonly use to describe the difference between the essential ideals of Islam and secular praxis.

Class Survey

Based on a written classroom survey that included both open-ended and specific option questions, students in my Islamic Literature course expressed an overwhelming interest in developing more interfaith contact on campus. Made up predominantly of students from Muslim backgrounds, and a few non-Muslim students with affinity for Muslim traditions and concerns, the class responded affirmatively without exception to the question, “Do you feel there should be more or less interfaith contact in the future?” To the open-ended question asking for forms of contact, responses generally included discussion and “dialogue” clarifying misconceptions and elements of faith hitherto obscured by the mainstream Western media. Many students expressed an interest in emphasizing the connectivity of the three so-called “religions of the book,” Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A few students expressed a confrontational approach to such meetings, e.g., “Islam vs. Judaism, Islam vs. Christianity,” while the majority sought a lecture/discussion format that dispelled misunderstandings and stressed the commonality of parallel religious traditions. Throughout the semester, class discussions generally identified the three religions of the book, usually confirming existent outreach literature published by Muslim organizations in the United States, which stress the association of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Very few comments included other “Eastern” religious or philosophical traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, despite the world-religions status of these three examples. Students found an identification with Christianity through Judaism and the tradition of Jesus as a prophet of God. However, they seemed to be unaware, until pointed out to them that Christianity, unlike Islam and Judaism, can be associated with Hinduism and Buddhism through its incarnational theology. Generally mention of Hinduism or other religions besides the three “Western” traditions was rare.

To the question, “In what ways should Islam make its message and
practice clear to other faiths and peoples of the world today?,” answers were extremely varied, perhaps indicating the pragmatic nature of the question but also a diversity of opinion. Also, answers to this question may remain in the process of formation among the wider community of Islam, both in the West and in the traditional Islamic nations. Responses ranged from the directly practical—“hand out pamphlets”—to the strictly ethical—“They should not try any new methods, just keep doing the right thing.” Contrary to the confrontational image of Islam in the mainstream Western media, most students in the survey, as well as in classroom discussions, were not interested in triumphalist conversion. Rather, they tended to express connectivity with other religions of the book, a general tolerance toward religious belief and peoples in general (without naming “Eastern” religions specifically), and an emphasis on the priority of “equality” in Islamic ethics and law. An emphasis on egalitarian harmony through the discouragement of class divisionism and other separatist notions—racial, ethnic, linguistic—was generally assumed for interfaith contact and dialogue. While an egalitarian approach to conflict resolution within specific cultures, intra-faith matters, and issues of global hegemony were assumed by my students in most discussions of classroom reading assignments and in the survey, occasionally, individual students with Muslim backgrounds expressed prevailing (mainstream) notions of what may be categorized as a Western (Protestant!) work ethic and a form of atomistic individualism. For example, to the classroom question, “What does Islam say about social equality and a ‘preferential option for the poor?,” one student replied, “Everyone should get a job and work hard.” Most students, however, were uneasy with commonly expressed U.S. media notions of individual self-aggrandizement and negative rights theory.

A major concern of my Muslim students throughout the semester was the image of Islam maintained by the mainstream media. Slightly over half of the survey respondents marked “very inaccurate” to the question, “How accurate is Islam’s image in the rest of the world?” The next most numerous category was “somewhat inaccurate,” while only one respondent checked “accurate.” This concern at times reached into the immediate reading assignment discussions, influencing the interpretation of individual Muslim writers. For example, several students seemed to conflate the treatment of incidents and characters in Naguib Mahfouz’s novel, The Harafish (1977), with unfair Western reportage of Islamic
social practices. Assuming that Mahfouz was writing for a Western readership, some students did not distinguish between the depiction of working-class life in Cairo, which the novelist uses as a metaphor for the follies of humankind in general, and the deliberate undermining of Muslim values. Convinced that the writer was unfairly characterizing Muslim social practice and spiritual endeavours, these students were unable to appreciate Mahfouz’s penetrating exploration of human folly and positive achievement. Some students only saw negative representations of character and incident and ignored the writer’s careful unfolding of the Islamic ideal of compassion and social consensus.

A similar response followed classroom discussion of Fatimah Mernissi’s memoir, Dreams of Trespass (1994), which for some students seemed to privilege unfairly the Westernization of women’s clothing and habits. Sensing, to some extent correctly, the packaging of the memoir for popular Western readership, they remained wary of the writer’s “frontier” crossings, as she explores ever-widening dimensions of Moroccan cultural life. Mernissi’s observations of social life in Fez and the surrounding countryside, and her explications of the attitudes that prevent the full mobility and self-expression of women in an upper middle-class household just before World War II are generally insightful and balanced. Still, the U.S. publisher includes reviewers’ quotations on the front and back covers that suggest a traditional Western preoccupation with exoticism in its perception of Middle East culture. Epithets such as “wonderful,” “enchanting,” and “a necklace of tales as delightful as Scheherazade’s,” associate with Western notions of the other that have harmed positive constructions of Muslim culture in the West (see Said, 1993; 1994). Moreover, soft-focus photographs by Ruth V. Ward have been added to the U.S. publication of Mernissi’s book, images that connote exoticism through long-shots of human figures in colourful caftans and chadors walking through an interplay of light from lattice work of boorish architecture. In fact similar quotations perpetuate common stereotypes on the U.S. publisher’s front cover of Mahfouz’s The Harafish—“[a] whirling dervish of a good yarn”—while the quotes of more insightful reviewers appear only on the back. Such publishing decisions to an extent undermine the universality of Mahfouz’s theme and the complex hybridity of Mernissi’s rich childhood.

Evidence of negative or tendentious constructions of Muslim culture appeared unexpectedly during our class field trip. While my classroom students
appreciated the Islamic Art section of the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan, they also remarked negatively on the examples of oriental exoticism directly down the hall at the European Paintings section. One such painting, Jean Leon Gerome’s *Prayer in a Mosque*, depicts a colourfully dressed man with several guns worn on his traditional clothing as he begins prayer in a mosque. Students found the image atypical and associated—perhaps with some truth—the guns with Western stereotypes of a Muslim penchant for violence. Although most of my students at first sight of the painting expressed critical amusement rather than outrage or disdain, the contrast with the art of the Islamic section was striking and substantiated my students’ common wariness of intercultural communication.

**Ecumenical Views, Appeal to Uniqueness**

To the survey question, “Do you feel Islamic organizations such as the Muslim Students Association should develop a more extensive outreach program to other students on campus?,” all students with one exception answered positively. The one negative in fact argued in the open-ended follow-up question that Muslims should first have a dialogue among their own sects before attempting dialogue with other faiths. Most students expressed the need to clarify and explicate their faith to others. Beyond that goal, some respondents sought only consciousness raising and clarification, while others, a small minority, also urged or implied the possibility of conversion—“so that you can make other students more aware of the Islamic religion, and what it can do for them.” Most were interested in “interfaith programs” rather than intentional conversion, perhaps indicating a willingness to engage in more cross-cultural activities within a controlled situation and also a need to overcome an “ignorance breeds contempt” situation.

In class, most students showed a reluctance to raise particular political issues, especially more controversial ones, such as the Palestinian question and the crisis situation in Pakistan. Discussion of such issues followed only after particular students gave oral reports on those topics. Perhaps this tentativeness followed from a general defensiveness towards the Islamic image in the West. For their oral and written reports, students commonly showed particular interest in intra-faith issues, such as women’s rights under the Taliban government and the mutual distrust of traditional groups within the faith.
Ideologies of Islamic exceptionalism, often referenced by mainstream news media when characterizing the behaviour of Muslim groups worldwide, were stated or implied by students both in classroom discussion and in the survey (though not in the oral or written reports). Although absolutist language was often used in such formulations, the type of triumphalist or supersessionist statements common to some Christian denominations today were rejected in favour of a relativism congruent with notions of “oneness,” “equality in Islam,” “tolerance,” and an acknowledged affinity with other “monotheistic religions.” However, beliefs in the “timeless” nature of Islam and also the Koran, which “cannot be revised,” was used in the survey to support concepts of the “living nature” of the faith, expressed not through “hierarchies” but through something like the Protestant idea of “the priesthood of all believers.”

My classroom students and the speakers at the weekly meetings of the university’s Muslim Student Association, rely upon an historical perception of the unchanging nature of heteronomous revelation beginning before Islam with the Hebrew prophets, judges, and kings through Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Like the Protestant reformers, my students convey in place of direct conversion the need to return to an originative message of revelation beginning with Abraham, incorporating the mythology of Adam and Eve as well. As Ibrahim Negm, Imam at the Muslim Cultural Center in Valley Stream, New York, explained to my class, “Christ needed to remind people to soften their hearts, but Christianity became corrupted by pagan practices and ideas when it became identified with the Roman Empire.” This notion of falling away from a prior message of revelation applies also to rabbinic Judaism, which, according to Negm, forgot the simplicity of earlier revelation. Still, statements of faith and conduct found in the Koran and the life of Mohammed need to be understood, “in context,” not interpreted literalistically. Negm’s allowance for historical exegesis opens the door for a modern hermeneutic of relativism—similar to the “soft relativism” urged by many human rights advocates today (Adedeji; Cheah). Of course to what extent this relativism would affect the interpretation of particular cultural practices—Negm’s or anyone’s—would depend upon individual perceptions, affinities, and sensibilities. However, the emphasis on scriptural interpretation in context becomes a window to more rather than less tolerance and connectivity. In explaining the allowance for up to four wives in Islam, one speaker at the MSA
meeting used historical context to urge only one wife—“How many of you men could support even one wife today emotionally as well as financially?” His rhetoric intended some humour, but his presupposition was historical relativism and adaptability.

What Islamic outreach discourse guards against is the kind of “hard relativism” expressed by many postmodern and to some extent postcolonial critics, who posit what Alvin Kernan (1999) and Gertrude Himmelfarb call “radical skepticism”—“relativism, and subjectivism that denies not this or that truth about any subject, but the very idea of truth—that denies even the ideal of truth, truth as something to aspire to even if it can never be fully attained” (273). Guarding against this is Islam’s universalized concern for human rights issues, buttressed in part by its notion of the single source of all humanity. Muslim outreach advocates are aware that they must make a case for these tolerant views in the face of Western skepticism. Their apologetic often uses respected Western sources. For example, Siraj Wahhaj (1999), featured speaker at a MSA evening event entitled “Islam: The Misunderstood Religion,” cited Arnold Toynbee’s observation that “the extinction of race consciousness among Muslims is noteworthy.” Speaking in my Muslim Literature course, Ibrahim Negm expressed a nuanced view of universalizing notions, avoiding monolithic essentialist dogmas by distinguishing between two types of commands from the Koran and Hadeeth, “directions,” which are not changeable and therefore cannot be altered, and “general guidelines,” which are subject to interpretation. The latter type include commands that engage particular social and political situations but are expressed in more abstract terms, such as “be just” and “respect women.” Probed by the class for a possible interpretation of the Koranic command, “obey the prophet and those in authority,” when it becomes a question of a higher good—for example, when the authority is immoral, Negm paraphrased the passage that qualifies this command: “don’t obey anyone who does not obey God.” Negm further qualifies Islam’s general guidelines by stressing contextual perspectives. Thus Chapter 4 of the Koran, which deals with women, must be approached “in a holistic manner” and not “read out of context.” Both the Koran and the Shari’ah must be read “for the whole picture” and not “out of context.” By recognizing the ability to interpret for today—applying an historically relative hermeneutics beyond mere textual exegesis—Muslim
outreach discourse relies on a body of traditional methodology that accommodates varying contemporary cultural experience.

**Non-Violence as Historical Tradition**

While Islamic discourse opens the possibility for pluralistic approaches to human rights and social justice issues, and its outreach speakers commonly refer to Islamic history for examples of tolerance towards the other, towards the opponent in war, and within domestic society, it nonetheless continues to stress such essentialist concepts as oneness, universality, the originative nature of the faith, and its timelessness (its transhistorical provenance and positionality). Islam’s essentialist language can and does become subject to exclusionary interpretation. Nonetheless, the need for universal language has long been recognized by human rights advocates and theorists, both secular and theological. Writing on behalf of a new, more democratically based foreign policy, Kai Bird (2000) comments, “Whatever the cultural context, civil society is defined by certain universal principles common to every human community.... Certain truths are indeed self-evident” (12). Speaking from within Islam, the political activist, journalist, and novelist Tariq Ali (2000) also posits a strong universal standard for human rights advocacy. In response to the intolerance associated with what he terms the “Pax Talibana,” the aim to spread fundamentalist factions in Pakistan and Afghanistan throughout the Persian Gulf, he urges a return to traditional Islamic mandates for tolerance and non-violent approaches to problem solving.

The significance of Muslim nonviolence and peace with justice is commonly stressed in outreach programs within the U.S. Writing on non-violence within North American society, M. J. Zaman (1999) quotes the Koranic injunction against murder (5:32). He also associates violence with the general permissiveness of contemporary Western society—alcohol, drugs, gambling, Western music—but also with envy, lust, arrogance, and racism. Arguments that rebut the perceived propensity of Muslims for violent solutions and general intolerance may utilize scriptural injunctions. In the same St. John’s MSA newsletter is an explication of the term “jihad,” which is intended to correct Western misconceptions. Instead of “holy war,” jihad means any form of struggle under God’s command. For Fatimah Beig (1999), “Jihad can be something as little as pleasing my parents.... Jihad is the
hijab I wear knowing I may be faced with ridicule for wearing it. Jihad is going to work to support your family, and yes, Jihad can also be going out and fighting against oppressive rulers.” In fact, the struggle of jihad can be within oneself—“The Mujahid (one who carries out jihad) is [one] who strives against himself for the sake of Allah” (1). Such outreach articles seem as much about correcting negative misconceptions of the religion in general as they are about witnessing the faith, homiletic discourse for moral encouragement, and scriptural exegesis. During Muslim Awareness Month at the university, speakers explained the revelatory connection between Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. By stressing the affinity of these prophets, the speakers, Ibrahim Negm and Mahan Mirza (1999), intended both to inspire ecumenical unity, but perhaps also to assuage threatening perceptions in the West of the otherness of Islam.

Missing from these outreach programs were particular political topics, such as the Palestinian rights movement, the Taliban practices in Afghanistan, and the nuclear competition between Pakistan and India. On this point, many of my students expressed dissatisfaction with any talk of “politics” at their Muslim Cultural Centres, preferring instead “non-political” approaches to sermonizing and faith witnessing. While such attitudes are also widespread among mainstream (Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox) worshippers, the avoidance of particular and timely political events at the outreach programs and meetings may reflect an interest in sustaining Islam’s image as a self-proclaimed “simple,” and therefore irenic and tolerant faith in the face of Western negative images. That controversies occupy the formal and informal discourse of North American Muslims is evident in the themes for my open-topic class paper, which included two essays on Shia-Sunni differences, several on the position of women, and one on the Taliban social policies. Other papers were more generally ethical and avoided specific issues, although few were prescriptive or dogmatic. Nearly all the students, including the three non-Muslims, took a tolerant, inclusive view of world-religions issues and cultural differences in general, although some expressed a certain unease and even anguish over the uncertainties of U.S. culture, with its highly commodified attitudes. Such anxieties, of course, are also not uncommon among U.S. churchgoers, mainstream and evangelical alike.

Outreach endeavours often take a dialectical, even confrontational approach. “From Around the World: Muslim Women Artists,” an exhibit
sponsored by the MSA and Habibeh Rahim, a university faculty member, presented several artists from various cultures within Islam. The women show particular concern for the victims of war, allowing their art to function as protest against the inhumanity of world divisionism and group hatred. The Malaysian artist Sharifah Zuriah Aljeddri uses Arabic calligraphy and Chinese brush technique “to express the pain, anger, shock and indignation over the atrocities committed around the world” in the hope that all can live in “harmonious coexistence” (From Around the World 5). Riffat Alvi from Pakistan seeks to “assimilate my cultural heritage with the influences of the other cultures which I encounter” (8). Naziha Rashid of Iraq, celebrates the uniqueness of Islamic cultures, but takes an inclusive approach to human dignity and aspiration: “I have concluded that the cares, dreams, and hopes of mankind are similar everywhere, but that the world today is undergoing a state of crises, anxiety, and terror” (25).

These artists often challenge the dominant discourse of the mainstream media through their art, which often presents uncompromising images of human suffering and degradation.

**Paradox over Contradiction: Models for the Future**

Current North American Islamic outreach discourse reveals the variety and depth of Muslim viewpoints, but tends to stress inclusiveness, non-violence, and tolerance to sustain pluralistic and multicultural agendas. Certain contradictions remain. The views of students, artists, writers, and theologians often uncover ambivalence where dichotomies of inclusiveness / exclusiveness, commonality / uniqueness, evolving / unchanging practice, and original / final revelation compete with each other for meaning and priority. While the line between contradiction and paradox has often been difficult to distinguish in religious thought, binary oppositions are salient in Muslim outreach discourse, creating a dialectic within the tradition. Few of my students and the other proponents mentioned in this study seem to take their own words lightly. Their tradition remains a wellspring from which flow many currents, but few of their perspectives would fit Vincent Crapanzano’s description of contemporary religious literalism: “a reassertion of traditional values that have lost the force of ideals they may once have had and have become a set of imperatives, biblical and legal, that demand
discipline rather than aspiration, repetition rather than creation” (351). Despite or because of this vitality, the opposition between Eurocentric and Islamocentric views tends to dominate outreach dialogue; the latter viewpoint is usually defensively positioned while the former seems almost as omnipresent as it was in 1914, when European colonialism occupied 85 percent of the habitable globe.

Islam has strong affinity with the simplicity and austerity of the desert, which associates a continuum of belief grounded in moral virtue and community identity. But no matter how simply Muslims viewed their faith, for Ibn Khaldun (1958), human living involves complexity and demands malleability. In a strikingly modern formulation, he observed, “a man is the child of the customs and the things he has become used to. He is not a product of his natural dispositions and temperament” (Vol. 1 258). Current Islamic outreach discourse seeks to create a “third space” for its hybridity, an undertaking reflecting the complexities of Khaldun’s historical circumstances. Certainly the belief in Islam’s unchanging nature will be tempered by its strong sense of human inclusiveness and by the increasing cultural hybridity of its youth. The sorts of multivalence evident in the tensions between assimilation and dissimulation, evolving faith and static faith, and universal and contextual interpretations can enrich Muslim outreach thought as it struggles for cultural integrity in a globalized future. In this respect, Islam’s malleable notion of revelation complicates its often essentialist language of theological pronunciation. Whether an outward-looking, open, and affirming Islam will replace a defensive and inward-looking fundamentalism will depend upon the resourcefulness of its adherents and the capacity of the faith to remember its historical flexibility and inclusiveness.

Works Cited


Neo-Traditional Media Culture Versus the Nigerian Military State

Femi Adagunodo, Newsbreak Newspaper, Nigeria

Permit me to begin this paper with its conclusion: It is believed that there exists presently in Nigeria a liberal democratic state, thankfully entrenched in the wake of the demise of a protracted and stagnating military state. However, the end of the military state was itself quickened by the resilience of a media with a strong culture of resistance, and an aroused civil society. Following the fall of the military state, the democratic world applauded Nigeria's media organizations for their roles in the reformation of the Nigerian state. However, little or no recognition has been accorded the other aspects of the media in Nigeria: neo-traditional or native media, which have existed for ages, were also deployed as a part of a culture of resistance put up in modern society to fight tyranny.

To advance this position, I have adopted the experience of the Yoruba people of Nigeria as a test case. This race speaks the Yoruba language, and is located in the South-Western part of Nigeria, of which this author is native. This paper is an attempt to establish how native cultures have influenced the African experiment of statehood, their sustenance, and their demise. My paper also examines the bargaining role of the native media, within the larger culture of resistance, as exhibited by Nigerian media during the military regime. Furthermore, I try to establish that the cultural heritage of the Nigerian people contributed as much as did the modern day print and electronic media in mobilizing the needed resistance against military dictatorship among ordinary Nigerians. It was interesting to discover that the culture of resistance, exhibited by Nigeria's neo-traditional media, during the years of iron-fisted rule, was a direct throw-back from the modern society to the pre-colonial era, when despotic kings ruled much of the African society.

In the context of the struggle against the hegemony of the protracted military state, native media, with its power of criticism and the legendary resistance to tyranny dramatically inherent in its apparently entertaining outlook, has proven to be quite as potent as any institutionalized media form in the modern days. I have premised the native media alongside other mass media organs to
exist, not as a subordinate, but an alternative, to the conventional print and electronic media forms. Neo-traditional or native media includes forms of mass communication that evolved with the African natives. These media include folk music, poetry, drumbeats, symbolic messages, and taboos.

The military arrived to meet a generation of musicians that had been raised with a culture and skill of folk music, oration, and poetry, and versed in protest epistemology. Examples of these were local musicians versed in the use of Ewi, Rara, Ijala, and other forms of popular culture native, for ages, to the Yoruba tradition. Some of the native musicians who found renewed exercise in rendering critical analysis of developments under the military regimes were poets like Elewele and Ogundare Foyanmu; folk musician, Odolaye Aremu, and versatile talking-drummer, Ayanyemi Ayinla. One of their important instruments is the African talking-drum; it is called Gangan or Iya Ilu. Originally, these musicians and their instruments were the custodians of the communal entertainment, and they have evolved through many generations in the history of social relations in the Yoruba society. In pre-Colonial times, any drummer versatile in the use of these drums could be compared with a journalist with the skill of analysis and criticism. In modern times, however, they have found political, even military, functions.

The talking drums are both instructional and musical instruments, depending on the occasion for which they are employed. In ancient times, they have seen warriors into battle and welcomed heroes home. They form the bedrock of the heavy percussions that laced many African musical sounds. Also, the African talking-drum is legendary as an instrument of secret communication between the rulers and the ruled. During the struggle to bring the military to grips with the effect of its administrative recklessness, talking drummers like Ayanyami Ayinla waxed entire albums using the sounds effects of the talking drum to send coded messages to the people who understood the “voice” of the drums. Of these arrays of musicians, Olanrewaju Adepoju, Olatunbosun Oladapo, Opeyemi Fajemilehin, and Gbenga Adewusi were exceptional personalities behind the traditional media struggle. They were the Akeuti, poets who became fighters.

The struggle to liberate the Nigerian masses unveiled different particulars in terms of the influence of the media on the people. Given the experience that was described by a senior Nigerian journalist, Lade Bonuola, as
the “calamitous political gamble of the military in power in 1993,” in his foreword to the book entitled *Beyond Abacha*, written by Akin Osuntokun in 2001, coupled with a social situation where major media organizations were owned, and consequently influenced by the state, a resort to the alternative media available in the native forms became inevitable, or at least, attractive. Obviously, this alternative media was primarily helped to achieve a formidable effect because it employed the people’s vernacular languages or local dialects to pass across its messages. This media, nevertheless, did not fail, when it fell on it to run the gauntlet.

In halting the progress of the oppressive military state, the traditional media complemented the roles performed by the media institutions that refused to be gagged, particularly during the perilous regime of media repression that characterized the military era. Chased underground by the agents of state, they cultivated a culture of defiance, unprecedented in the annals of state-media relation. During the heat of the struggle, the native media found itself fighting from the underground, while the personalities behind them were forced to employ guerrilla tactics for survival. Besides strengthening the conventional media, the criticisms of the alternative media were to achieve such effect that the personalities behind its operations were hunted, harassed, and arrested by the agents of the military state. Such were the events that established the neo-traditional as a potent medium. At the height of the struggle, the arrest and victimizations of local musicians, poets, and folklore artists by the state became an unwritten, official policy. This act, strange as it was new, stood out as an indicting example of the extent to which an unpopular regime could go in its quest to forcefully legitimize.

In 1996, a self-perpetuation scheme coupled, for instance, with the waning popularity of the regime of General Sani Abacha, reduced the state-media relationship to its lowest ebb. This forced the state into adopting a strategy which the former Editorial Board Chairman of the *Daily Times* newspaper, Ayo Olukotun, described as “an inevitable rendezvous of dictatorship,” in his book published in 2002, entitled *State Repression, Crisis of Democratization and Media Resistance in Nigeria* (1988-1999). Olukotun, currently a lecturer in Political Science at the University of Lagos, said the development compelled him to begin to “examine contestations between the military state and an aroused civil society, at the level of popular culture. Given the limited reach of the print and electronic media in Nigeria and much of Africa, the terrain of music, theater and oration was
especially important in the conflict between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic value.

The regime, studying the handwriting on the wall, began to devise strategies to augment its waning popularity. These moves by the regime demonstrated what Olukotun also meant, when he wrote “on the one hand, the state employs this arena to build up its legitimacy by hooking up to popular traditional motifs and by getting pro-government musicians to cut celebratory records. The alternative media was this hand.”

The amount of attention given to the illegitimacy problem by the Yoruba native media should have foreseen by an intelligent regime. The Yoruba area of Nigeria has the largest concentration of educated people. That most of the resistance emanated from among the Yoruba indigenes was not unexpected given that they are noted for their quick minds and ranging curiosity.

As early as 1984, during the early years of the third advent of military dictatorship in Nigeria, musicians versatile in the use of poetry, like Olanrewaju Adepoju and Olatunbosun Oladapo, who are based in the Yoruba language speaking area of South-Western Nigeria, had become noted as mouth pieces for the airing of mass grievances and popular discontent. Their criticism soon reached a crescendo. One morning in October, 1986, during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, the founding editor of Newswatch magazine, Dele Giwa, received an envelope at breakfast. A bomb was concealed in the envelope. It exploded in his face. He died instantly. The struggle had assumed a grave dimension. As a part of the public outrage that followed the incident, Adepoju waxed a critical album to query the state’s human rights record. In the album, which he titled Eto Omoniyan, meaning “Human Rights,” Olanrewaju sang:

\[\text{Nkan nbe nile yi kekere ko} \]
\[\text{Oniruru ohun toju n’ri laye, bi’ntin l’enu le so} \]
\[\text{Oju ti ’regbin ko kuku fo, oja riya o gbon’ya nu.} \]
\[\text{Awon ohun to n sele ’lorile ede yi, taa ba to won po, won to’ le nla} \]
\[\text{B’ojju n dudu si ni, b’ojju si nla si ni, eje ka biraa wa.} \]
\[\text{E je ka maa beere lowo ara wa, nje reti nbe fun mekunnnu.} \]

In this song, which observed the living conditions and the many woes of the
Nigerian society, Olanrewaju also wondered whether the ordinary Nigerian had any hope:

*Awa gannan la nke t’aye n gbatiwo wa wipe oyinbo nre dudu je n’i gusu ile eniyan dudu.*

*Ohun awa fi n seraa wa lorile ede yi nko? Se a gbodo p’alayo funfun lo fi n senti?*

*Ka fi ko’rin ewi s’etii soja ko tete gbo, o le je pe won ko tii mo.*

These last lines were a direct indictment of the regime on the issue of human rights. Paradoxically, this air of disappointment arose out of a background of an earlier mood of high expectations. Furthermore, the musician waxed other albums to specifically protest the trend introduced by the death of Dela Giwa and the strange letter bomb phenomenon. In an album in the same year, entitled *Arojinle,* meaning “Deep Thoughts,” Olanrewaju querrated:

*Ikuu Dele Giwa ba wa lojjii o baraye ninuwe Baba dara bi won se pa Dele Giwa Oba ti n dake dajo nbe lalakeji. Oba yaarabi o beere oro Opolopo abami ise le lo n waye, ki loyu o tii riri! Asiko kan lasiko ti won ndana sunle lorile ede yibi.*

*Won ba kowo ke. Nibga ti astiri ba fee tu. Ibi oro nlo lorile ede yi tani ko deruba Ilu to jagbon bombu ti won fi n fara won Dabo gbogbo eeyan pata, lowo Oba loke loku si.*

*Keni to ba sun o ma sasun nara ewa nla nbe.*

*Ifokanbale, iwon lo mo l’orile ede yi ki kaluku o gbade adura.*

*Olowa Oba gba wa o. Ilu to n fiku sinu apo iwe, to n ba je lomii lowo.*

*Taa loni kosi n kan eje a man funra. Nkan ti dorile ede yi, ka gba leta kotun doran.*

The song on this particular album further fuelled popular fury. The lines, in which Olanrewaju exhorted Nigerians to plead with God for their own protection, rather than depend on the capacity of the regime to provide adequate security, was especially irritable to the regime. This kind of lyric led to the frequent arrests of Olanrewaju Adepoju.
Back in 1983, when the military made another of its frequent incursions into the Nigerian polity through the ouster of the democratically elected government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the General Muhamadu Buhari led regime was welcomed by a populace which had been pressed to witness change, in any form. They craved a reprieve from a state of civil unrest, politics of bitterness among rival political parties, and massive corruption at the top echelon of government. The military had then been looked upon to restore fiscal discipline and peace. Moreover, the regime had promised that its stay would be short. Consequently, at the time, the regime received an unsolicited support from the neo-traditional media.

The release of these songs in 1986, however, barely two years into the Babangida regime, began to cause the regime to wane in popularity. Not surprisingly, the critical stance of a large section of the print, electronic, and the native media, brought them under persecution. The media was to be repeatedly visited with the frustration of the Babangida regime over its waning popularity, which constantly reminded it of its illegitimacy problem. Dele Giwa’s death is still believed to have been the first wave of violence from the state.

Soon after it came to power, the military may be said to have taken a passing notice of the influence of the native media over the masses. Apparently, its hidden capacity as an avenue for mass mobilization was soon pronounced. But what the regime may perhaps not have bargained for was the level of energy and vehemence with which the once friendly media advanced negative mass agitations against it.

In 1985, the military hatched another of its plans for an extensive hold on power. General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew the iron-fisted Buhari government in a coup plot. The events that followed in the wake of Babangida’s assumption of power began to whip up a lot of anti-military expressions both among the populace and the media generally. One of the acts that appeared to irk the masses the most, besides the assassination of Dele Giwa, was the massacre of protesting students of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University).

Generally, this particular experience reemphasized the ideas expressed by Marie Jehoda and Stuart W. Cook in their contribution to the book entitled *Totalitarianism*. The book was developed by Carl J. Friedrich, after a conference on the phenomenon of totalitarianism, in Boston in 1953. The two authors
maintained that "one of the most frightening aspects of totalitarian regimes is their apparent power to elicit wide-spread compliance with the ideologies they advocate" (203).

It is important to note, however, that the struggle assumed this dimension also because the embattled regime, having sufficiently disappointed the masses on their earlier promises to restore better governance, resorted to using strong-arm tactics and coercion to enforce its eroding authority. Earlier, the musicians, especially those of the fuji music genre, waxed albums that reflected the enthusiasm of the Nigerian populace, who were only expressing their relief and thankfulness at the intervention of a regime change. Prior to this, the nation had witnessed a breakdown in law and orders. Mass restiveness came on the heels of the 1983 general election, which returned the then incumbent president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, into office. For example, Fuji musician Sikiru Ayinde Barrister greeted the 1983 seizure of power by the General Buhari junta with an album entitled Military. On the album, Barrister emphasized the military presence with these lines: "A n'so fun won pe military lo ni’joba, E je ka fi ye won w'ipe Soja lo n’ijoba," meaning, "We are telling them the soldiers (Soja), own power. Let them know soldiers own power."

Emphasizing the people’s disappointment with the recklessness of the political class during the Shagari regime, another local musician, Kollington Ayinla, reflected the prevailing mood in 1983 when he sang in his album: "A wi fun won to o ,awon n’on o gba o. Koro naa to baje o awon n’on o gba o," meaning, "We warned them, they never listened. Until things got worse, they never listened." Other musicians, including the leading act in the Nigerian Waka music brand, Lady Salawa Abeni, added her voice.

By 1997, after the military had annulled the 1993 presidential election, and sustained the incarceration of the presumed winner of the election, Chief Moshood Abiola, most of these musicians had become disillusioned enough to change their songs. The musician, Barrister, in his album titled The Truth, warned the soldiers to perform or get out. Obviously, the military, which hardly recovered from the euphoria of the support it received when it seized power in 1993, and must have banked on continued popular support must have been disappointed at the turn of events.

It is crucial to note that in Yorubaland, drama, poetry, and orature had
assumed these confrontational outlooks long before Nigeria’s independence from Britain, her colonial master in 1960. For instance, in 1950, a playwright and pioneer figure in the Nigerian theatre industry, Chief Hubert Ogunde, got into trouble with the government when his play entitled *Strike Hunger*, which criticized state reaction to the 1945 strike by the colony’s workers, and another, *Bread and Bullet*, were banned from the public stage. Here was remarkable evidence that, whether as a democratically governed state or a nation under the siege of any kind of dictatorship, the various platforms within the native media have always retained their distinctive power of resistance.

Examples abound of state discouragement of the arts. For one, the military regime never gave any tangible support to the development of culture in Nigeria. This was evidenced by the decay of infrastructure at The National Arts Theatre, the nation’s most foremost center of culture, located in the old capital, Lagos. The Theatre existed in a state of gradual disintegration throughout the regime of the military. The structure was constructed in 1977 to host the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). By 1999, when the military government was at last replaced by a democratically elected regime, most of the halls in the theatre were in an advanced state of dilapidation and neglect.

The closest to which the state came to recognizing the works of the musicians was an occasion when the then president, General Ibrahim Babangida, attended the 1994 edition of the Nigerian Music awards, organized by the Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria, PMAN. The fragile relationship between the military and the native musicians was to deteriorate altogether at the end of the regime of General Sani Abacha. In 1997, the state invited some of the musicians to perform a concert in support of the ambition of president Abacha to perpetuate his rule by transforming into a life president. The musicians that honored the call returned with the disrepute of collaborating with a perceived oppressive government. This created a division among the musicians. The development pitched the militant and very sensitive neo-traditional musicians against those of the popular culture, especially the *Fuji, Juju*, and young Afro-pop.

Olabubuson Oladapo, another popular poet based in the ancient city of Ibadan, was another popular *Ewi* musician victimized by the Babangida regime because of the content of his albums. Oladapo, a professed isolationist who had served the state media corporation for many years as a broadcaster, used his
oratorical talent as a presenter at the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Services (WNBS). By the third return of the military in 1983, Oladapo had resigned from WNBC. He set himself up as a musician, waxing records, using the media of Ewi in which he was exceptionally gifted, to checkmate government policies regarded as oppressive by the people. However, Oladapo adopted the poetic license of idioms, proverbs, folk-tales, and other styles to pass his message across. In his music, sarcasm and analogies couched in proverbs to point out the character of military misrule did not escape state censorship. His albums, with titles like Igba kan o l'aye gbo, meaning “no era lasts for a lifetime,” Oba Mewa Igba mewa, meaning “Ten rulers, Ten eras,” and “Africa Nibo la n'ere,” meaning “Africa where are we going?,” were found to be antagonistic to the aspirations of the regime. Last January, Oladapo gave an account of his experience in an interview with this author. Presented here are excerpts of the interview, published in January by NewsBreak newspaper in Nigeria:

When the past military government came to power what albums did you produce?
We did Igba kan o l’aye gbo, Oba Mewa igba Mewa, Africa nibo la n’ere, Arojinle Yoruba, and others.

What were the effects of these records on the events of that period?
There were some other musical poets who preferred to address government with the use of direct abuse and insulting comments. But whenever they found that government was hunting them, they would praise government a bit. But in one of my albums titled Oba Mewa Igba Mewa, I adopted philosophy for my analysis. Somewhere I said: “A fina soko, inan joni laso, nilee Nigeria, a fi ojo sale, ale n pani bi otutu, atun fi oye se onitiju, oye tun n kaniko bi eyan akika. Afi koluwa o gbawa lowo ibi taa de duro ni Nigeria,” which means, in Nigeria, because of its heat, we made fire our husband, but we got burnt, we made rain our mistress, but we caught cold. Then we chose the cold as a confidant, but it bent us like a roasted rabbit. Only God can deliver us from the point we found ourselves in Nigeria. All these were to remind us how past regimes, in which we had put our trust, have disappointed us. I
prefer this style.

Did the messages in your poetry ever lead you into confrontation with government at this period?

At a period, the Babangida government went round picking up whomever it wanted and detaining them. I was picked up and dropped. Incidentally, any time the state security operatives were asked to go and pick up Ewi poets in Ibadan, the impression was more always like Tunbosun Oladapo and Olanrewaju Adepoju were the only poets in town. At the time I was arrested, somebody released an Ewi album and the two of us were picked up. We both met each other at the place we were taken. When they checked my works and found nothing directly incriminating or offensive in the content of my songs, I was allowed to go the same day.

Tell us how the incidents of arrests and detention really affected your music?

You see, there is hardly a way you can run your flesh across or on the face of a sharp razor blade that it will not cut you one way or another. Those events affected my business. Though it could have been worse but nobody could pin anything on me because I neither use my music to praise or criticize if you know how to use it. But there was the effect of those arrests in terms of what you could call economic depression. Our books and cassettes suffered so many lull in patronage since only those who already had something to eat could afford to purchase our musical materials. Some of our fast selling albums like Orin Igbeayawo and others could not be produced. Also, there was serious attention paid to monitoring what we said in our albums and whom we associated with.

How was it on the day you were arrested?

I was at home. There was nobody, my family was out. They came and surrounded my house. Someone came to tell me that there were some people looking for me outside. But before I could come out, the security agents just came with their guns into the house. They put me in their vehicle and took me to their office. When we got there, I met the other another Ewi music poet, Olanrewaju Adepoju. They said there was a
record that released that was the trouble.
That year was this?
That was 1993. That was during the June 12, 1993 election
annulment crisis.
What album did you release at that time?
The title of the album was Hope 93. (5)

The struggle by forces who were pursuing state hegemony on a national platform
and the perpetuation of the regime became more ferocious when, on March 3,
1998, General Sani Abacha, who was bent on continuing to rule the nation as a life
president, deployed state resources to back a youth rally tagged 2 Million Man
March in the national capital of Abuja. One of the banners of fakery that
surrounded the staging of the event was the misrepresentation of the Nigerian
youths. The event was erroneously advertised as being at the instance of the
Nigerian youths. Actually the rally was widely known to be inspired by some
shadow political groups that went by the name Youths Earnestly Asks for Abacha
(YEAA) and the National Council of Youth Association of Nigeria (NCYA). The
rally was coordinated by one Daniel Kanu and Alhaji Iliya Ibrahim.

Curiously enough, strategists of the state hegemony enlisted the rich,
persuasive medium of the traditional and vernacular media and musicians. Among
the notable Nigerian musicians employed to sing the praises of the Abacha regime
were Sir, Shina Peters, Wasiu Alabi Pasuma, and others. This corroborated
Olukotun’s analysis that “In the aftermath of the annulment of the June 1993
election by General Babangida, neo-traditional media became a veritable vehicle of
subversive messages directed at the military authorities especially in the Yoruba
speaking area” (165).

This license to employ protest motifs in the form of songs, poetry,
critical lyrics, and coded drumbeats to censure high-handed leadership, or raise
rebellion against unpopular state forms, had been grounded within the Yoruba
culture at a time predating the colonial era.

In ancient Yoruba civilization, native musicians, jesters, poets, and
drummers were permanent figures around the courts of the rulers. They indirectly
influenced matters of state by psyching-up the kings, manipulating their moods to
negative or positive effects, depending on the circumstances involved. In this way,
these media operatives were at liberty to exercise their poetic license in the reprimand of erring royalty. They pride themselves in their poetic license with such lines as “Ng o wi, Oba kii Pokorin,” meaning, “I shall sing; the king does not slay a musician.”

Symbolic communication was another medium of criticism inherent in the Yoruba culture. Symbolic messages of protest were not left out and were frequently deployed in the struggle to circumvent state strategies calculated to prolong the military rule. An example was that of Fela Anikulapo Kuti whose house was burned down by the military in 1977 over the release of his popular album entitled Zombie. After soldiers demolished the property, the musician’s aged mother, Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, reportedly sustained serious injury when she was thrown out the window of the building. The woman died shortly after the incident. Fela himself was also arrested and later released with a broken leg. In anger, the musician carried and trekked with the coffin that he used to bury his mother almost twenty kilometers, the distance between his house and the state house. He deposited the coffin at the gate of the (Doddan Barracks) government house in Lagos. By depositing a coffin in the state house premises, Fela was sending the symbolic message that the regime should consider itself dead. Another spectacle was the June 12 election annulment protest march organized by the women of the ancient town of Abeokuta in 1993. That year, the Babangida regime annulled a presidential election that was considered the freest and fairest in the nation’s history. Chief MKO Abiola was presumed to have won the election. Protests of different persuasions followed on the heels of the election annulment. A strange spectacle was, however, created in Abeokuta, when protesting women marched naked in the market places, in broad daylight. To force home their angst, the women also conducted a mock burial of Babangida and the regime. They performed various ancient rites, which were known to be taboos. Some of the rites included the baking of bean-cakes, and dancing around the town with a coffin. This was meant to symbolize the corpse of Babangida and the remains of his regime.

The background of symbolic protest can be substantiated by the story of Alaafin Jayin, a king of the ancient Oyo Empire. In his popular book titled History of the Yorubas, the author, Samuel Johnson, wrote that Alaafin Jayin was an arrogant ruler who killed his subjects without provocation (170-2). On one
occasion, he had his son murdered due to the latter’s growing popularity. This development angered the people of Oyo Kingdom, who decided to dethrone the king by activating a taboo called *lumi*. The *lumi* was a special kind of traditional rite and sacrifice that would prove fatal for the king to see. To observe it would certainly result in the death of that king. To punish Oba Jayin for his tyranny, the chiefs and people of Oyo kingdom conducted the *lumi* in the direction of king Jayin’s palace. Before the taboo could reach the palace, the king saved his face by committing suicide. This incident created a popular song that has also become a legend throughout Yorubaland. It says, “*O ku dede ka gbe gbe’wi d’akesan, Oba Jayin teri gbaso,*” meaning, “Just before the taboo could reach the palace, King Jayin committed suicide.”

The strength of the messages in the native media is located in their pattern of presentation. Most reprimanding songs are coined in allegories, veiled hints, sarcasm, talking-drum sounds, and poetry. The staging of dramas during popular festivals was also another effective means of keeping an erring state on its toes. Nigeria’s experience during its pre-independence days attests to this. A drama often conveys ridiculous messages for the state and its officials. Major gatherings where locals staged drama were known to have been boycotted by not only the old kings and their chiefs, but the modern state leaders also. In Nigeria for instance, what passes today for a film industry actually developed from the *Alarinto* theatre concept of entertainment and media. The *Alarinos* are a group of musicians who travel across the country sides, villages, and big settlements entertaining the natives with lyrics, acrobatic dance styles, and sarcastic, proverb-laden songs and folklore.

In the early years before Nigeria’s independence, the *Alarinto* evolved into theatre groups. Notable groups such as Duro Ladipo theatre group, Ayinla Olumegbon, Osumare theatre, Awada Kerikerie, and Ogunde theatre have gained outstanding recognition touring Europe and the Americas since Nigerian independence. These breakthroughs overseas, however, cannot be divorced from the influence that such groups have achieved back on the home front. And such influence did not come without a fight. An instance of such a face-off between the theatre and the state took place in 1965 when Hubert Ogunde staged his popular play entitled *Yoruba Ronu*. The play was considered offensive by the government
of the then Western Region of Nigeria, headed by Chief S.L Akintola. The play was banned, along with the Ogunde theatre ensemble.

The Yoruba communities of modern days still retain much evidence of the genres of protest media culture that have prevailed since pre-Colonial years. For instance, one medium which was deeply entrenched in Yoruba culture, and which had been popularly deployed in struggles against successive state powers, was the “Egungun” masquerades, which is celebrated as a yearly festival.

There is, however, a religious dimension to this, but it is a factor that has made the tradition strong and helped it to last. In Yoruba traditional religion, the masquerades are regarded as the reincarnation of dead ancestors who were returning to visit their people. They are respected, their words revered, even by kings. This reverence, which automatically transforms into an unchallengeable power of reprimand over both the people and their rulers has always been a thorn in the flesh of despotic African rulers.

Under such a situation, the Egungun masquerades, which also entertain, had very extensive latitude to air public grievances when entertaining the royalties with their original purpose of acrobatic dance styles and “Esa” songs. Forever the Egungun have enjoyed public protection, while they are immune from reprimand by any offended high figure. The myth around the Egungun it forbade any form of disrespect. The Yoruba’s belief in these representatives of dead ancestors, who visited on yearly basis with good tidings, resulted in the commonly used idiom: “A kit si aso loju Egungun,” meaning, “No one unveils a masquerade.” And hence, the Egunguns are accorded the greetings “Ara orun kinkin,” meaning, “The revered ones from heaven.”

During the period when the institutions of royalty still retained much power over the local populace, many kings governed their subjects with iron fists. Naturally, the people sought to free themselves from the shackles of despotism. To drive home the roles and impacts of the neo-traditional, or native media among the many factors responsible for the eventual fall of the military state in Nigeria, Olukotun quoted an appraisal of the native media, in the book entitled Literature in the Time of Tyranny, by Professor Adebayo Williams of the School of Art and Design, University of Savannah, Georgia, USA. Williams wrote of the local musicians and poets that
they fuelled the climate of popular outrage which led to the precipitate and unceremonious departure of General Babangida following the infamous annulment of the presidential election. Two of these artistes, Lanrewaju Adepoju and Gbenga Adewusi, much lionized as Yoruba Ewi poets were so daring in their personal attacks, so liberal with savage excoriations that between them, they probably cost the Babangida regime its remaining authority and legitimacy in Yorubaland. (76)

As recently as 1997, after General Abdulsalami Abubakar became head of state at the sudden death of General Abacha in office, the Ewi poets returned to their critical best. This was precipitated by the speed and volume of spending in the forced transition to democracy program, being hurriedly run by the Abubakar regime. After the news media had announced that the regime was recovering some of the money allegedly looted by the Abacha family, while spending whopping amounts on the transition process. Fearing a fresh round of looting under the guise of financing the transition process, the poet called *Elewele* vehemently queried the regime’s fiscal character. Hear him:

_Ogagon Abubakar, o n gbowo kan jo, lowo awon to j’owo orile ede taa wa yi gbe. Gbogbo araa lu won lawon o mohun to fi se. b’asa ba ghee taa gbaa le, iru oowo bee ko si tun ye ko wa ’lowo awodi._

_Gbogbo eeyan ilu, won l’ominu nko awon lori oro re. Owo tee gba lowo molebe Abacha ati Gwarzo. Ateyi ’tawn Ani naa ji gbe, oti to gbogbo sise orile ede yii pin. Ibi e ba base de lori oro ohun, a fe kee fihan f’araye. A fe ki gbogbo omo Nigeria o mo’gun to goes n’igbimo agba._

_Abiola nikan ko lo lo s’atimole, gbogbo omo Nigeria la jo sewon po. Ise p’olukurumushu mopó awan eniyan lowo latari owo wa tawon oshi’rombo jigbe. Eyun tee loore ofe ati gbaa, ko si ye kee da’ru owo bee sapo._

_Ewu l’abuku, ko seni ti o lee woo. Gbogbo eyin ajerulamo, oko taa oso lu yin, gbogbo re la ti sa sile._

In this song, *Elewele* kept the Abdulsalami regime on its toes by reminding it that, in Nigeria, no erring regime was beyond disgrace.
Just as they have welcomed and seen off various state forms, the array of native media in Nigeria has been a constant institution. Today, the musicians of the native popular culture are thriving as part of the Nigerian entertainment industry. Since the arrival of democracy, native protest media appears to have hidden its fangs, and has returned to its traditional role of providing entertainment in films and music to the people. But it has always retained its bite. It symbolizes the proverb in Yoruba land that "the dog bites her puppies with the same teeth it uses in playing with them."

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The Discourse About the Nation-State and the Third World Future

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Introduction

If culture is a combination of accumulated values, attitudes, knowledge, institutions, etc. shared by a group of people, it may be crucial to ask promptly who fundamentally invents and imposes culture upon others? I postulate in this paper that the so-called “global culture” is the culture of strong states for the purpose of dominating weak states. I argue, contrary to the presumptions of the global culture, that state remains a critical determinant of socio-economic development in the global world. The assumption is that in third world countries, the state has to be strengthened so that it reaches some capabilities necessary to respond to citizens’ needs. As stated by Boutros Boutros Ghali, the foundation-stone of peace building, implying that socio-economic development and respect for human rights is, and must remain, the State (Ghali).

Indeed, it is not surprising to recall that in colonial times, the control of land and cultural domination of non-white people was justified by the expansion of civilization—science, technology, religion, and institutions. The state was central in coordinating the capital domination and was supported by non-state actors such as churches. In the ideological rivalry between communism and capitalism, the discourses of both ideologies never minimize the critical role of the state. The discourse shifted from non-white people to be colonized to equal people to be protected against “wrong ideology of communism or capitalism.” All social groups that were organized with the idea of promoting social justice were labeled activists in favour of communism and were subdued. In this context, the state had to be strong and protected against domestic and international ideological threats.

Nowadays, capitalism has no ideological counterpart, as the communist system has collapsed. Capitalism occupies the whole space without being questioned. It pretends to deliver universal values by promoting liberal democracy, social justice, and common concern about global threats such as
environment destruction, AIDS etc. By the same token, it pretends to be the one real truth. Its culture is totalistic.

This brings me to the important shift in addressing the role of the state as a tool for dealing with citizens’ demands. That shift is a confusing one. On the one hand, globalization discourse stipulates that state sovereignty doesn’t mean anything anymore. On the other hand, it advocates for the critical importance of local and national “social capital” as a key component of socio-economic development. In magnifying the importance of national social capital, global discourse’s objective is to tell people in third world countries that they are responsible for their developmental failure and that global structural injustices among nations shouldn’t be blamed. I strongly believe that social national and local intermediations are critical in determining developmental direction but it would be naïve to ignore that “globalization disarticulates by progressively weakening the ability of national, regional and local decision-makers to determine how and for what purpose the resources at their command will be used” (Goulet 2).

This paper is divided into parts: first, it presents the theoretical debate on the modern state and its crisis. It then presents the discourse of the global culture on the state’s relevance before it concludes by suggesting that state remains an important actor in third world countries.

**What Are Global Culture and State’s Roles?**

This is not the place for debating about the inception of “global culture.” However, it may be assumed that even though the concept of global culture is new in our vocabulary, philosophers and essayists have been thinking about the arrival of a planetary government that would bring peace and order and that would reduce human misery. This has occurred in forms of religious and secular thinking. Of interest here are the cultural shifts that occurred from colonial, third world post-independence, and global eras.

Indeed, during colonial times, the dominant culture justified their actions under the premise of civilizing primitive people. The economic interests of strong states prevailed over weak states and were supported by religious and moral discourses. At the end of the colonial period, people around the world ceased to be labelled uncivilized within the framework of the UN Universal
Declaration of Human Rights. As an alternative, they were labelled either communists or capitalists to continue justifying repression against them. Economic fights between East and West for market control in third world countries were made in the name of containing rival principles. In this time of globalization, the discourse is confusing as it talks about two opposite things: the universality of capitalist values that are necessary conditions to institute social justice and democracy, on one hand, and the local or national social capital relevance that is necessary to mediate daily challenges, on the other hand.

**Global Culture Definition**

It is important to understand what culture is with respect to the question of how strong states dominate third world countries. For many scholars, culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, religion, roles, etc. that give meaning to people’s lives and structure their thinking and actions. Therefore, more broadly, culture is to some extent a collective way of acting embedded in institutions defined as human constraints that structure political, economic, and social interactions (North).

Equally critical is to know who generates and spreads cultures around the world? It can be said straightaway that strong capitalist states are the ones that generate global culture through powerful financial and research institutions such as the World Bank. Indeed, they imposed their view in colonial time, decided which state was wrong or right during the Cold War, and have decided how to deal with the end of rival ideologies. Generated, controlled, and manipulated by strong states, the global culture is defined here as the strong states’ confidence that every citizen, all over the world, benefits from competition in free markets for goods, services and capital, and very limited government intervention in a context of very limited state action.

We must bear in mind that culture is about power the assumption being that the more power a state or group of states have, the more likely it is that they will influence cultural trends in the world. As a matter of fact, scholars postulate that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself as a cultural dominance and as an intellectual leadership. The implication is that the strong states’ discourse shapes and sustains relations of power between them and weak states. The latter
become international subjects disposed from being able to reflect, act, and imagine their future (Mohan; Gadner).

Different strategies are used to make sure third world countries absorb the dominant message. One should remember that empirical studies demonstrate that a dominant group—to impose its beliefs, ideology, and objectives—tends to convince subordinate groups that its rule serves not only its own interests but also those of the subordinate groups. The convincing process takes place in a combination of

1) believing that the system of rule created by the dominant group brings material and other benefits to all or most of participants, and that the feasible alternatives are worse, and 2) that the processes, and procedures of the dominant system of rule are fair, and will be enforce on the dominant group as well on the subordinate group. (Wade n.pag.)

This echoes Liah Greenfield’s analysis in which she states that

Much of what is regarded as economic globalization, ostensibly an objective secular trend, required by the state of development of world economic forces and independent of particular interests and cultural values, is in fact a function of the normal functioning of particular and national economies, guided by their particular—often national interests and reflecting particular cultural traditions. (21)

Which states are the advocates of global culture? To make it short, it’s the G7, and the U.S. at the core of it. I will only summarize the World Bank’s power to illustrate a place from whence the global culture is spreading all over the world.

Why the World Bank? It is a financial organization mostly controlled by the U.S. and it is the number one money lending institution to the third world countries. Third world countries and NGOs survive with its financial support.

What makes the World Bank’s “knowledge” so powerful? I would like to argue with Robert Wade and Michael Goldman that in a world policy obsessed with the belief that only “global expertise” is valuable, the World Bank has no real rival. They critically contend that the regional development banks and UN
agencies fall over themselves to cooperate with the World Bank, anxious to get a piece of the action from the large loans that may follow. It has conferred upon itself, they point out, a status similar to that of the Vatican in terms of infallibility (Wade). In Robert Wade’s terms, the World Bank is a source of funds to be offered to U.S. friends. The U.S. chooses the president of the World Bank and has the largest share of votes (17 percent as compared to number 2 Japan’s 6 percent). As the U.S. is the centre of capitalist culture, only states that embrace the U.S. way will get financial support from the World Bank. Ultimately, as every state tries to survive, all states tend to abide by the rules of capitalist culture to get loans (Robbins).

Roles of the State

There have always been states in human histories. It also must be clearly indicated that the modern state is an integral part of the European history that may be traced from the Westphalia Treaty in 1648. Three characteristics originate the modern state: non-intervention, sovereignty and the legal equality of states with the characteristics of centralized power, homogeneity, and fairness.

Sovereignty means the right of every state to decide by itself its destiny. This right may stay an abstract construction, which does not match with any reality considering the power imbalance among nations. Only strong states can enjoy this right. For example, the U.S. refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol because it has the means of acting so against other strong states. The U.S., moreover, refused to adhere to the International Court of Justice. They recently went to war despite the UN refusal to sign a second resolution to oblige Iraq to comply with the international request for total disarmament. Non-intervention means that states cannot intervene in another state’s matters without its permission. Concretely, what we do observe is that strong states intervene constantly in the destiny of weak states. For example, Uganda and Rwanda unilaterally invaded the Democratic Republic of Congo for economic reasons and refused to conform the Security Council resolutions that asked them to leave the country.

Concentrating the power in a few policy-making centres of is a characteristic of the modern state’s adaptation to the global world. Indeed, the modern state carries the idea that by concentrating power in a single centre, the
state would efficiently achieve self-sufficiency in a world characterized by hostility based on each state’s interests. Nation-states rely on cultural homogeneity, meaning that every state must be culturally convergent to facilitate state work. These foundations continue to be the foundations behind arguments advanced by advocates of globalization. The G7 is the central political place of organized ideas (global policy makers) that must lead the world economy and the World Bank, the financial institution implementing this passion. On the same tone, the homogenous culture must have the same understanding of the rules of capital flow among nations. For the most part, global culture pushes the world into a homogeneous culture centered on capitalist thinking.

To make sure that citizens accept this culture, the strategy is based on fairness, a critical characteristic of the modern state. Indeed, as the welfare state development was taking place, the state was involved in developing socio-economic infrastructures like schools, roads, etc. The same applies to the global culture that pretends to be fair with poor countries while globalization spreads democracy, good governance, and social justice by supporting civil society to gain more control on their governments. Ironically, one may ask how strong states make others believe they empower civil society in third world countries while implementing economic policies that negatively affect women and young people?

**Global Culture And The Third World Countries’ States**

**Arguments Of The New Religion**

I would like to state that knowledge and money are the power used by strong states to impose their culture on the rest of the world. The way scholars living in G7 countries criticize the state’s role and the way the World Bank approaches the direction of business management constitute the core ideology of a new secular religion called “globalization.”

It is evident that radical capitalist thinkers tend to devote attention to the erosion of state sovereignty. From their perspective, they bring in empirical evidence showing that weak states lack the capacity to respond to societal demands. They also contend that state has lost its capacity in managing major problems that require solutions transcending national boundaries and capabilities, such as the environmental crisis and AIDS. As a result, they conclude that states
have lost their ability to maintain the loyalty of their citizens who become more receptive to foreign ideas coming mostly from democratic countries and lending organizations such as the World Bank. They are right and their arguments stand until someone starts to realize that they forgot to tell the real story about how strong states contribute massively to the destruction of third world countries’ states’ capabilities.

Radical critics also pretend that a multitude of non-state actors has destroyed the ability of nations to act in sovereignty (Kenichi). What they forgot to tell us, as Stephen Krasner argues, is that “the Westphalian” sovereignty—the right to non-intervention—has always been something of a myth because powerful states have always intervened in other states when it has been in their (material) interests to do so (Krasner). What is new is that globalization is weakening states without being able to establish a substitute organization that will play the traditional roles of the state.

Furthermore, non-state actors use the same tools proposed by the global culture. Indeed, they preach global culture principles invented faraway from the people they are serving. They unconsciously participate in implementing, as did religious groups during colonial times, the ideology of the strong states against the weak ones. People do make real change in their lives if they are part of the process of empowerment in identifying their problems and solutions. What is happening is that NGOs are secular pillars consolidating the global culture, the pretended universal truth.

The global culture, as the culture of the dominant group, is presented to the weak as the only alternative for survival. For example, analysing the effect of globalization on inequality and poverty, David Dollar and Aart Kraay postulate that post-1980 globalizers have seen large increases in trade. They continue arguing that the post-1980 globalizers are catching up to the rich countries while the rest of the developing world is falling farther behind. They conclude that the increase in growth rates that accompanies expanded trade leads to proportionate increases in incomes of the poor, supporting the view that globalization leads to faster growth and poverty reduction in poor countries (Dollar). Arguing in the same line, William Grieder supports the notion that contemporary globalization has reduced inequality between rich and poor nations. For him, globalization is shifting the opportunities for wealth and incomes from richer societies to the
poorer ones, opening up a great window for equality on a global scale (Grieder). In sum, for radical critics, globalization has brought a lot to humanity and this was possible in a context of less state.

**Contradictions In New Religion**

Other scholars have demonstrated that the global process has plenty of negative impacts on the daily life of ordinary people around the world, on one hand, and proved that social capital is crucial in mediating challenges, implying that local/national cultures remain critical in socio-economic development. The latter statement ultimately implies that state is, and will remain, a critical component in advocating for its citizens.

As a matter of fact, critical economists, and social theorists as well, contradict the new religion as they look at the negative impacts of globalization. Just to pick up some negative implications of globalization, I will start by pointing out the social marginalization of poor people. Indeed, the beginning of the 80s was the end of the welfare state when a set of right parties took over political leadership in the United States (Ronald Reagan), Canada (Brian Mulroney), and England (Margaret Thatcher). The ideas of structural adjustment from the IMF and the World Bank were implemented everywhere in third world countries focussing on trade liberalization, privatization, and tax reform. As we all know, it was the vulnerable who paid for these economic measures as cuts targeted health, education, and all kind of social infrastructures.

This is in obvious contradiction with untrue globalization philosophy that pretends to seek to enhance human capacities and social justice (Midgley). In reality, structural adjustment prescribed cut backs to social benefits so that the economies would be attractive to foreign investors. Environmental and social standards were reduced or removed, opening up a huge price war of commodities from different countries; the prices of raw material from the poorer regions became even cheaper, favouring consumers in the West. Governments were asked to spend less on social expenditures like education and health. Government
decreased labour and salaries leaving social protests and demonstration as the only way for ordinary people to effect change.\footnote{For some comments on structural adjustment, see <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/SAP.asp>.

Research from NGOs also demonstrated that every year, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, around four million people were displaced from their homes because of hydroelectric dam schemes and other development projects. These schemes usually created huge reservoirs that flooded homes, forests, and fertile land. Since the electricity generated by dams was intended to power factories and houses in urban areas, few of the rural poor benefited from such schemes (Madeley).

The gap between the richest and the poorest countries has progressively widened—doubling between the top 20 and bottom 20 countries over the past 40 years—as a significant number of countries are falling further behind, compared not only to industrial countries but to other developing countries. The income distribution between countries has consequently worsened (World Bank). For example, the developing world now spends $13 on debt repayment for every $1 it receives in grants. Of all human rights failures today, those in economic and social areas affect by far the larger number and are the most widespread across the world’s nations and large numbers of people.\footnote{For more details go to <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp>.

The World Bank and the G7 global culture-oriented institutions sermonize about good governance, fighting corruption, and poverty reduction. But the reality is that approximately 1.2 billion people suffer from hunger (deficiency of calories and protein). Some 2 to 3.5 billion people have micronutrient deficiency (deficiency of vitamins and minerals). Yet, some 1.2 billion suffer from obesity (excess of fats and salt, often accompanied by deficiency of vitamins and minerals). World wide, the distance between the rich and the poor is growing from 3 to 1 in 1820; 11 to 1 in 1913; 35 to 1 in 1950; 44 to 1 in 1973; and 72 to 1 in 1992.

Globally, the number of wars has more than doubled between 1995 and 1999, from a total number of 95 to 250. The number of low intensity conflicts has doubled and tripled for violent political conflict. Fortunately, the number of armed conflicts with higher intensity has increased more slowly than the others. When we look at the geographic distribution of armed conflicts in 1997, Africa has 35% of
the world conflicts and Asia has 38%. There is an indication that Africa is the most affected considering the high number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and, 13 countries are at war, compared to 10 in Asia, 1 in Europe, 2 in the Americas, and 6 in the Middle East (CSIS).

The ideology of globalization pretends to promote good governance centered on combatting corruption, empowering civil society, and building up institutional capacities (Yergin). Someone should question all these values as they are imposed by external actors. Does global governance include a mandate to support dictators like Mobutu and monarchies such as in Saudi Arabia? Is it ethical when strong states allow corporations to finance war for the simple purpose of the illegal, lucrative exploitation of natural resources such as oil in Sudan and Angola; gold, coltan, and diamonds in the DR of Congo? Is it empowering civil society by providing it ways of thinking that may not match with its human understanding? Is it building institutional capabilities when the materials they build with, the thinking, and construction plans are not constituted by local ingredients? These questions are important, as we know that local/national social capital is important in socio-economic development (Stiglitz).

In fact, the idea of social capital implies that local/national culture plays a central role in nations’ destinies. To some extent, social capital denies the premises of the global ideology of “one universal truth” in dealing with human lives. Ironically, I borrow the following definition of social capital from the World Bank discourse. Social capital, the World Bank says, refers to the norms and networks that enable national/local collective action. Increasing evidence demonstrates that social capital is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development (Coleman). Social capital is the major feature in explaining poverty, mismanagement, and the success or the failure of funded projects. In short, national culture or institutions count. I will confirm with Mikko Kuisma that it is wrong to think that globalization has homogenized the world. The truth is that the world still consists of a variety of mutually exclusive cultures (Kuisma).

Responding to the question “what derives the wealth of nations?” David S. Landes postulated that national institutional environment makes all the difference. J. Zysman also went on in the same direction stressing that national social institutions account for technological development. Plenty of studies
support the idea that national institutional characteristics of governance have huge impacts on economic performance in East Asia and Latin America (campos and Nugent).

In addition, there is cumulative evidence showing that differences in technological development between societies have their roots in the social structure of the state. Sociologists emphasize that government regulations and the structure of society determine the direction of technological innovation (Rothwell and Walter). They argue that barriers to innovation are the social and political forces that influence the overall economy. Clearly, one can conclude that because of the way third world states act, the organization of their economies is done according to the ways proposed by the global culture, and the failure of the former is determined by the latter. Along this line, it may be said that the only way to evaluate the domestic success of third world countries is to let them find their own tools that open up their imaginations and help them identify problems and propose their own solutions.

At this point, social capital as a local/national-centered approach stresses the centrality of states in fighting for its citizens’ interests. It is under this perspective that even globalization advocates came to the rediscovery of the geography in the process of technological innovation (Storper and Allen). As a matter of fact, geography is “back in” the economic process, evoking the critical role of local and national cultures in understanding technological development. The wealth of regions has been extensively documented emphasizing the growing role of local cultures as the mediators of the global economy demonstrating that local circumstances determine very much the changes needed for social survival (Becattini). This situation is pushing states to intervene in favour of decentralization and of helping local communities to become agents of technical change (Malecki). Considering all of the above arguments, there is no point in considering the state’s role obsolete.

**Conclusion**

States have lost many of their capabilities. They have failed in the sense that they are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested by warring factions (Rotberg). Yes. But why? The response is that strong states act purposely so that
weak ones will fail, as a strategy of gaining control over their resources. I argued that globalization is an ideology used by strong states to justify the spread of the capitalist system. I also postulated that it is pretentious to imagine that the state is no longer an important guarantor of the socio-economic demands for its citizens, as socio-economic development is strongly embedded in local/national social capital.

I demonstrated that it is important to know that the globalization ideology is in deep contradiction with the values it pretends to promote with reference to the growing suffering of large number of the population around the world. Realistically, the international system is the perfect arena of chaos because international laws are only respected if they fit with states’ interests. Only strong states have a say, opening up rooms for strong states’ selectivity in strengthening or alleviating human suffering in states they want. In this context, global culture crystallizes as imperialist (Shaw).

I also mentioned that global culture as a new prophecy of making the world better has been criticized, and protests around the world are good examples of the refutation of this simplistic view of the world (Wallerstein). The new religion must be ready to hear and acknowledge other imaginations to fully integrate national social capital in socio-economic development. I suggested that failed states need to get restored in their capacities of dealing with citizens’ demands. At this point, armed forces are a critical area of support, as they will play an important role to curve domestic instability, inter-ethnic violence, and international mafia.

Works Cited


CULTURE + THE STATE

In 1989 some proclaimed the imminent universal triumph of a particular state form—the modern liberal state. Since then, others proclaim the imminent demise of the modern nation state under advancing globalization. Yet modern states continue to be formed—from the former Yugoslavia to the new East Timor.

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CRC Humanities Studio, University of Alberta, Publishers


$34.85 in Canada / $29.95 in the USA