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THINKING ABOUT DISRUPTION

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FOREWARD

Dear Readers,

It has been another turbulent and thought-provoking year. However, thanks to all your support and blessings, for SJPR, it has been a year of growth.

This year, we received a record number of submissions, with fifty being the most we have received since we started. This is attributed to our amazing communications team led by Mariano Errichiello and the Assistant editors Deniz Demirag and Diva Sinha, who liaised with the SOAS communications team to promote the journal on SOAS social media channels and newsletters, which greatly increased the journal's visibility among teachers and postgraduate students. Also, due to the excellent work of our Co-editor of events Emilie Frijns and the Assistant editor Marieke Van Der Maden, we held two successful workshops on "How to get published" to help PhD and master's students with their questions about publications. Moreover, with the tremendous help and support of Professor Lutz Marten, Dr Yenn Lee, and Mr Andres Chavez Ocana from the Doctoral School, we developed long-term strategies and goals for engaging more with the SOAS research community and getting indexed in more academic databases. We also had meetings with other journals hosted by SOAS to take advice regarding the journal's future. Special thanks must be given to Dr Ayman Shihadeh, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Bulletin of SOAS*, for his visionary advice for the journal.

Indeed, this issue has been possible due to the hard work of our review team led by Anna Kensicki and Nina Sun and the Assistant editors Audra Noble, Fatima Rashid, Hannah Elizabeth Louise Campbell, Jane Josee Link, Meiyan Wang, Panggah Ardiyansyah, Ruzbeh Vistasp Hodiwala, Xu Peng, Maya Reus, and Mohamed Taha; thanks are also due to our Co-editor of funding, Julia Stolyar, for making sound plans for our budget and overseeing the process of proofreading and copyediting.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge how much we have benefited from the solid foundation that all the previous editorial teams have built and from the restructuring initiated by the former Editor-in-Chief Federica Gamberini (Issue 13) and her editorial team members Natalia Matveeva, Anna Kensicki, and Yunzi Han. With a more efficient managing structure, a refined review process, and most importantly, a group of people who believe in its value and contribution to the SOAS research community, even with the turbulent "disruption" of the wider environment and SOAS itself during the past two years, the journal is still growing steadily.

Finally, I wanted to save some words for myself. This was my third year on the journal. I started as an Assistant editor during the second year of my PhD and became the Co-editor of review the next year, and then the Editor-in-Chief (outgoing). I have witnessed the journal make remarkable progress during the past three years, from only receiving nine submissions three years ago to fifty this issue. I am very grateful for having been able to walk this journey with the journal. The journal has created such an opportunity for me to learn about academic publishing, running a team, communicating, etc., and it has been a significantly helpful step in preparing me for academic work. I really hope it can continue providing such opportunities for more and more SOAS students.

The next Editor-in-Chief will be Ruzbeh Vistasp Hodiwala. I believe he will bring to the journal a fresh perspective and will lead it to a more exciting direction.

With all my best wishes to the new team and for the future of the journal.

The Editor-in-Chief,
Yunzi Han.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 14 of the *SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research* (SJPR). During the past year, we were still under the effects of the pandemic. This disruption, so overwhelming, casts a shadow that dominates everything else. However, after all, the challenges we are facing are connected, whether from the perspective of subject area, historical period, or geography. This issue focuses on "disruption" of all sorts in the areas of arts, gender, politics, etc.: the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic (Edwards; Saksena and Mohanty); colonialism and the efforts of breaking up with colonial legacies (Sarmet; Oliver; Koo); resistance to cultural assumptions (Nickols); feminist protest under coercion (Krishna); and the dynamics between statism and political religion (Lu).

The issue opens with an introductory note from Professor Adam Habib, the new director of SOAS. He discusses the disruption to the institutional capacities and human capabilities in the Global South due to the mobility of students led by the international higher education in the North. He also points out that this unbalanced distribution of talents between the North and the South could increase the challenges we, as human beings, all face – pandemics, climate change, inequality, social and political polarisation; and he proposes to think about teaching and learning at scale and emphasises the need to disrupt the habitual thinking and formulaic responses based on past experiences and develop custom-made context-based solutions to overcome the challenges of this historic era.

Following up, we have Nico Edwards' piece "*A Commentary on Disruption as a State of Being and (Anti)Practice: Challenging 'Resilience' as the Late-modern Recipe for Happiness*". She gives a sharp reflection on the notion of "resilience" as the popular formula of state-governing ethos nowadays. She points out that the notion of resilience is mobilised to disguise the inherent brittleness of global capitalism and has been recast as a solution to "bounce-back" from the challenges and secure the neoliberal hyper-productivity and omni-

marketisation. She calls for "disruption" as the state of being for both the personal and the systemic, to reflect on the epistemology one has adopted and to re-imagine the templates for human co-existence, especially through the systematic disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Then, we have another piece pondering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an ethnographic project researching epistemological and ontological questions of information – how information, being inherently invisible, is becoming visible through the virus, the restrictions, the risks of infection and even how the community is responding, all have shaped the individual's experiences during the pandemic. In "*Information and Liable Relations of Wellbeing during COVID19*", through observing a group set by a local council of London for volunteers to share pandemic- and wellbeing-related updates, Gitika Saksena and Abhishek Mohanty explore how information came to take the centre stage, either as a measure by the state to build individual responsibility; or through being enmeshed by the group members themselves as community resilience, thus, shaping reciprocity and liable relations amongst them.

After thoughts on the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we turn our attention to the topic of colonialism. Though this occurred in the past, its effects still linger in the current. Gabriela Sarmet's article "*Disrupting the Colonial Subjectivity Imposed by Borders: The Experience of the Guarani People in Brazil*" shows the dynamics between the colonial subjectivities against indigenous peoples constructed by the imposed demarcation of borders by the Brazilian State and the Guarani people's reformulation of their cosmology to disrupt these colonial subjectivities through the forms of migratory movements and the repossession of ancestral territories.

In her article "*Edward Colston, Nostalgia and Resistance: How Does Britain (Mis)remember and (Re)imagine Colonialism?*", Adele Oliver examines one of the defining moments of the Black Lives Matter movement, namely, the toppling of the Edward Colston statue, to explore what the public memory of Edward Colston reveals about Britain's

relationship with colonialism. She also ponders on what counter-memory can do to resist/ disrupt the (mis)remembering and (re)imagining of colonialism.

Then, we have another two articles studying colonialism but in the field of the arts. Lina Shinhwa Koo's article "*Structuring Hierarchies: Archaeological and Museum Projects of the Government-General of Korea and its Colonial Legacy*" addresses a similar issue to that considered in Sarmet's work, that is, looking into the legacy of colonialism and the efforts to disrupt this legacy but in the field of art history. While examining how the cultural projects led by the Government-General of Korea, the chief administrator of the Japanese colonial government, carried out various tenets of global imperialism and coloniality throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the paper also interrogates the nationalist accounts on the colonial legacy in museum practices and proposes an intercultural perspective to look into the issue.

We also have Joe Nickols' article "*The Disrupt Project: Nikki S. Lee and Transcategorical Identities*", which examines Nikki S. Lee's photography series *Projects* (1997-2001). In the series, Lee photographs themself assimilated into multiple American social groups, through which they resist the boundaries of social conventions projected onto bodies due to assumptions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or age. The article considers *Projects* a decolonial work that subverts the global colonial matrix that commands fixed identities.

Then, we switch to the field of gender. We have Koshika Krishna's article "*A Cry for Justice: Reimagining the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through the 2004 Kangla Fort Protest in Manipur*". It centres on the naked protest that was performed by twelve mothers in the state of Manipur in 2004 outside the army headquarters in Assam, India, against the rape and murder of a woman, Thangjam Manorama, by army men. The article focuses on the disruptiveness that this protest brought for resistance movements across India by discussing its unique approach to the traditional concept of political motherhood and political performance.

Lastly, we have Junda Lu's article "*Chinese Roots of Political Religion: Statism in Modern China, 1897-1924*", which examines the dynamics between the evolution of statism in modern China and the concept of political religion. By examining the thoughts of Chinese political thinkers and early Chinese Marxists, Lu argues that the persistent theme of viewing a strong state as the guardian of Chinese civilization and the trailblazer for future humanity has contributed substantially to the popularization of the political religion of Marxism-Leninism in modern China.

The articles in this issue have discussed "disruption" in different historical periods, subject areas, and regions. On one hand, the destabilization that disruptions bring reveals social problems and pushes forward changes; on the other hand, the damages it causes threaten human life or even the existence of all lives on this planet. Most importantly, it provokes thinking. It makes us think about how to cope with the disruptive effects, such as in Sarmet's, Koo's, and Krishna's works. It also inspires us to reflect on the epistemology we are holding when living in and socializing with this world, such as in Edwards', Saksena and Mohanty's, Oliver's, Nickols', and Lu's works. After all, some questions worth pondering: are we moving progressively or retrogressively after the disruptions? How do we judge the differences between the two? What differences do the contexts make?

The Editor-in-Chief,
Yunzi Han.

Disruption, Inclusion and the Politics of International Higher Education

Adam Habib

"Disruption" is the defining word of the Anthropocene epoch. It describes almost all aspects of social life. Humanity's influence on the planet is now so profound that it is threatening its very existence. Technology's effects on humanity are so far reaching that they have fundamentally reoriented the nature of human life. These structural transformations and the political and social challenges and protests that they have spawned have destabilized our historical moment in profound ways. It must be said that these effects are both positive and negative, although this is not how it is often understood in the public discourse and even in the academic literature. It is true that in many instances, the outcomes of disruption are positive and progressive, but this is not always so. The most extreme example of this is, of course, the disruptive effect of human life on the essential functions of our planet.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to think through disruption within the contextual realities of our historical moment and geographic space. What may be positive in one historical moment or geographic space may very well be negative in another. Take, for instance, the widespread use of energy. The easy availability of electricity in one historical moment enabled positive outcomes – growth, inclusion, social services, poverty alleviation, food security. Yet in another historical moment, the over-consumption of fossil fuels has had a disastrous climatic impact and is eroding the very gains of an earlier epoch. Similarly, geographic space makes a difference. The energy transition may require the management of electricity demand in North America and Western Europe, but this same intervention could have very negative social consequences in Africa where so many do not have easy access to

such a resource. Space and time have differential effects, and they therefore require interrogation.

But despite these qualifications, disruption is the defining phenomenon of our times, and its potential needs to be harnessed for positive outcomes. The effects of disruption have created an uncertainty amongst economic and political elites and opened up serious questions about the foundational structures and civic values of our economic, political, and social systems. These systems are structured in a way that results in marginalisation as much as it produces growth. The uncertainty that disruption has provoked has created an opportunity to rethink those foundational elements, to mitigate against marginalisation, and to enable a far more inclusive growth and a shared prosperity. Yet this can only emerge if we approach political and socioeconomic reform – and even resistance – in non-formulaic terms. We cannot simply use past strategies of resistance and reform for the present historical moment. Yes, positive results must be built upon, but formulaic responses in which past strategies and tactics are unthinkingly implemented in fundamentally different socioeconomic and political contexts is untenable, as this could enable outcomes that are destructive to our collective human existence.

Let me take one example that speaks to those of us in the university context. The debate about internationalisation in the UK higher education sector is about its positive or negative effects. Those on the right see international students as a financial burden and a drain on fiscal resources. Liberal and left-of-centre intellectuals see international students as a net positive and so advocate for their continued recruitment. A recent report by London Economics (2021) for the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Universities UK International makes this case by demonstrating that the 496,000 international students benefit the UK to the tune of £28.8 billion (2021). The report also suggests that the positive effects are broadly dispersed at both the local and national level, adding £millions to local economies, including '£290 million a year to Sheffield Central, £181 million to Cardiff Central, and £171 million to Glasgow Central'. This report dovetails neatly with the government's *International Education Strategy* (2021), which aims to increase international student numbers in the UK from 480,000 to 600,000. If implemented, this would be seen as a

positive outcome by both government, who see international students as a revenue stream, and liberal and left-of-centre intellectuals, who see them as having a wider social benefit.

But if you were to take a broader philosophical lens to this, one that is more global than national, you would realise that the debate in the UK is parochial and that the expansion of international students could have a detrimental effect on institutions and societies across the world. This is because all our challenges – pandemics, climate change, inequality, social and political polarisation – are transnational in character and cannot be resolved within the context of a single nation state. We are going to require institutional capacity and human capabilities across the world. We need more social actors, scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs, academics, and students to develop and adapt policies and technologies for their circumstances. For this to happen, we need enabling environments. We need universities and vocational colleges that train, research, and innovate; companies that are inclusive and entrepreneurial; and funding networks that can sponsor these initiatives.

In the South, these capacities are being eroded by the character of our international partnerships. In this era of globalisation, we have had more global partnerships, more scholarships, and more mobility across the world. Yet this has also been the period in which the brain drain has escalated dramatically. This is because these partnerships are defined by the principal of solidarity but structured at the level of individuals. They identify talented human beings, offer them scholarships, and bring them to London, New York, Berlin, and even Beijing. The assumption is, of course, that these students will return home. But the evidence for this is sketchy at best. It is worth noting that when these students come here, life happens. They fall in love, they have families, they get jobs and stay. At a conference on the diaspora which I attended at the African Union in Addis Ababa in 2019, Abdoulaye Gueye (2019) reviewed the history of student mobility in the world and demonstrated that 83% and 90% of students from India and China respectively did not return home. He suggests that this had significant consequences for the quality of their scientific institutions and their human capabilities. This trend may have been reversed in the case of China in recent years as a result of their increased investments in higher education, but it is unlikely to be the case in much of the rest of the developing world with the exception of Singapore.

The net effect of the increase in international students to universities in the UK will be the erosion of institutional capacities and human capabilities in the developing world, through an acceleration of the brain drain, at precisely the moment when we are urgently required to build such capacities and capabilities. And this is not a challenge for only the developing world. We in the North should be as concerned about this outcome, for the weakening of capabilities to address transnational challenges puts us at risk as well. To take one recent example, the global inequality in vaccination rates for Covid-19 has enabled the emergence of variants that compromise all of us. None of us can be safe if all of us cannot be made safe. The increase in international students may therefore be in the short-term financial interest of the UK, but it will come at the cost of the developing world and the long-term sustainability of humanity itself.

Our policies, strategic interventions, and, dare I say, protest pedagogies require a reinvention in this era. We need to eschew the formulaic responses of the past. In higher education, this does not mean a retreat into autarchy or a closure of national borders. Rather, it will require global partnerships to be structured at an institutional level where individual universities are concerned less about brand and far more about their collective mandate. It will require thinking about teaching and learning at scale. It will require a reinvention of higher education so that co-curriculation, co-teaching, and co-credentialling become the norm. It will require split-site scholarships that will enable students in the South to gain scientific knowledge, develop a global consciousness, have access to new equipment and funding networks, and yet be sufficiently rooted in institutions of the developing world to allow for such knowledge and skills to be deployed within their local contexts. Such a model of global higher education would also allow students from the developed world to have the opportunity to visit the developing world so that they, too, can understand different contextual circumstances and develop knowledge and skills that are more universally applicable. And it would require a reimagining of the current business model of higher education that is excessively and unfairly reliant on international students paying fees that are three times the cost of domestic students, all of which is ironically done in the name of solidarity and building a collective human community. In essence, it will require a greater

appreciation of the tension between our short-term need to build financially sustainable institutions and our long-term desire to be part of a global academy that is capable of responding to the global challenges of our time.

Reimagining higher education is necessary not only because of the developmental outcomes it may portend but also because it will improve the quality of scholarship itself. After all, we need a greater integration of global science technologies with local knowledge and applications. For example, you cannot think through the management of a pandemic without understanding the cultural norms and practices of local communities, however good the clinical interventions that may exist. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2015, the virus was spreading more quickly because of the nature of burial practices in those societies, and the lack of understanding of these cultural beliefs disabled efforts at managing the pandemic. It was only when Red Cross volunteers understood the link between burial practices and transmission of the virus, and enabled modifications to the former, that the virus was brought under control.

Custom-made solutions are thus required to enable positive outcomes in this historical era. This is relevant not only for higher education but also for almost every other sector of human life. Formulaic responses from the past can lead to adverse outcomes that undermine social inclusion, human capabilities, and, ultimately, human survival. Crude ideological and formulaic responses from the past are not an appropriate solution to disruption in the Anthropocene epoch. Yet our political practice, behaviour, and, frankly, thinking is out of step with what is required. We require a deeper and more nuanced conversation than we are currently having.

This is the biggest challenge of our time. There is a desperate need to disrupt the politics of our historical moment. This disruption should apply not only to mainstream politics but also to the politics of resistance, for it is amongst progressives where the righteous belief in the cause has enabled the greatest certainty and the least rethinking and reimagining of strategies and tactics. It is this certainty that needs to be disrupted if we are to

bring about a more inclusive world. Otherwise, we may act now in a manner that destroys our collective future.

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A Commentary on Disruption as a State of Being and (Anti)practice: Challenging 'Resilience' as the Late-modern Recipe for Happiness

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Abstract

In this commentary, I challenge the popular notion of 'resilience' as the 21st century recipe for happiness. I do so through exploring 'disruption' as a political imaginary and practice, by which the narrative of resilience-equals-happiness can be disrupted. I draw on key texts that theorise about practices of 'speculation', 'failure', and 'narration' to situate both the personal (cognitive) ability to disrupt neoliberal subjectification processes and the systemic disruption brought about by Covid-19 as essential channels for rethinking the contemporary. I argue that this is the moment to re-imagine the templates for human co-existence and build on the personal to global experiences of disruption occasioned by global capitalism *and* the coronavirus, as productive, though painful, opportunities for counter-narration.

KEYWORDS *Disruption, Resilience, Happiness, Global capitalism, Covid-19*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nico Edwards is a recent graduate from the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS University of London. She began her SOAS journey in 2016 with a joint BA (Hons) in International Relations and Social Anthropology (First Class), applying a combination of anthropological and International Studies' perspectives on the study of global security politics, peace and conflict studies and (inter)national political economy. In 2021, she completed an MSc degree in International Politics (Distinction) and was awarded the department-wide Best Dissertation Prize for her postgraduate research on the role of the Arms Trade Treaty in promoting war profiteering. Her main interests include international humanitarian law, feminist international relations, arms regulation, liberal militarism and narrative approaches to (in)security and power. Currently, Nico is preparing a PhD project on green militarism.

Introduction

"Forget happiness, you should be aiming for resilience" reads the title to a 2018 World Economic Forum article[1], neatly encapsulating a core problematic of today: closing in on the edges of our planetary capacity, humanity finds no 'happiness' beyond its ability to endure a constant flow of shocks and crises. Within the templates of being that are made available by the contemporary configurations of power and capital, 'well-being' and 'self-realisation' are severed from the personal dreams and ambitions that reach beyond the individual resilience demanded to streamline productivity and ensure the *non-disruption* of global neoliberal social-economic relations.[2] Forced to guard ourselves against perpetual crises and to accept resilience as the 21st century manifestation of happiness to keep disruption at bay, disruption is also recast as a tool for resistance. In this brief reflection, I explore disruption as a political imaginary and practice from two perspectives: the personal and the systemic.

Resilience By Whom and For Whom?

According to Anna Rowley, the psychologist interviewed by the World Economic Forum, "Resilience is the most important skill to cultivate" because of today's "rapid rate of economic and technological growth."[3] As Rowley counsels the executives of leading global corporations, she urges them to forget about the notion of 'happiness' altogether, since "feeling good [is] fleeting" and "pleasure is a relative state" only made perceivable in relation to pain and discomfort. The resilience envisioned here has little to do with the kind found among those most exposed to structural and planetary shocks, in the determination to live a full life in the face of (in)direct violence, poverty, and policing. Rather, this is the resilience of *perpetual preparedness*[4], of the ability of the state and capital to painlessly 'bounce-back'[5] from the challenges launched at the globalised nation-state – a reinvention of happiness birthed in the ivory tower of Big Business, and trumpeted out over the global 'rest' to ensure the political-economic pliancy of the everyday citizen.

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[1] Ephrat Livni, "Forget happiness, you should be aiming for resilience," *World Economic Forum*, (30 May 2018), https://www.weforum.org/resilience-is-the-new-happiness/.

[2] See: Simin Davoudi, "Just Resilience," *City and Community,* 17, no. 1 (Mar 2018): 3-7.

[3] Livni, "Forget happiness."

[4] Mark Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience," *Radical Philosophy* 178, no. 1 (Mar/Apr 2013), http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/resisting-resilience.

[5] Davoudi, "Just Resilience", 3.

As such, resilience has not only co-opted contemporary notions of happiness but enjoys equal 'buzz-wordification' in national security and international development policymaking.[6] The way resilience is mobilised in these contexts is intimately interlinked and always understood through the gendered, racialised, and classed prism of neoliberal hyper-productivity and omni-marketisation which, if left unconstrained, will miraculously lift us out of global underdevelopment and insecurity and make us *happy*. At least, so we are told.[7]

Targeting the emergent truism of resilience's attack on happiness, political theorist Mark Neocleous is one of the few scholars who have embarked on a research agenda to 'resist resilience'.[8] What has made resilience so successful as a defining political category of our time, Neocleous notes, is its ability to reframe a fundamental critique of the contemporary global social order into an outsourceable solution. Instead of recognising that the need for 'resilience' is a direct result of the inherent brittleness of global capitalism, resilience is recast as a solution for bypassing the converse vulnerability of the individual and the planet. "Rather than speak of fragility and its (negative) associations", as the story goes, "we should be speaking of resilience and its (positive) connotations."[9] What, then, is the potential of *disruption*, as narrative and practice, for resisting the resilience-equals-happiness agenda?

Disruption, Counter-Narration and Speculative Being

Challenging the business-takeover of the concept of 'disruption' – as a managerial strategy to 'shake things up' and increase *corporate* resilience[10] – I reclaim disruption as a

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[6] See e.g., DHS, "Resilience," *Department of Homeland Security,* (25 Jan 2021), https://www.dhs.gov/topic/resilience; Tom Staal, "'Resilience' is today's buzzword in international development, but what does it really mean?" *USAID,* (13 Jan 2016), https://medium.com/usaid-frontlines/insights-tom-staal-5a7ab307d818.

[7] For different takes on the gendered, racialised and classed expressions of neoliberalization, development, and security, see: Kathleen Tierney, "Resilience and the Neoliberal Project: Discourses, Critiques, Practices – And Katrina," *American Behavioural Scientist.* 59, 10. (Jun 2015): 1327-1342; Leigh Spanner, "Resilient and entrepreneurial military spouses: neoliberalization meets militarization," *Critical Military Studies*. 10 (Oct 2020): 1-21; Mark Duffield, "The Liberal Way of Development and the Development-Security Impasse: Exploring the Global Life-Chance Divide," *Security Dialogue.* 41, 1. (2010): 53-76.

[8] Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience."

[9] Ibid.

[10] Joshua Gans, *The Disruption Dilemma* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016).

particularly useful *state of being*[11]. A state which, by definition, is not pliant but essentially antithetical to individuals' and communities' economic productivity. Reacting to the stranglehold enjoyed by "capitalist realism"[12] over our imaginaries, I recognise the ability 'to disrupt' as a cognitive exercise that renders the personal into a realm for living the 'what if?' through imagining "the not yet, to hold it open for the yet to come."[13]

Decolonial and queer theory scholars, Aimee Bahng and Judith Halberstam[14], offer such strategies for how to think and act beyond what is anticipated from us. Together, they formulate modes of thought and praxis that can disrupt the expectations of preparedness and productivity jointly held by government and market. Bahng opens our eyes to the role of speculation and 'speculative imaginaries' in the production of 'reality' and how we perceive it, reminding us "how narrative constructions of the future play a significant role in materializing the present."[15] Replacing hegemonic narratives of 'happiness' and 'resilience' with one's own can help us regain a sliver of agency and control, allowing the mind to rest in the act of counter-narration. Consequently, through a counter-narration of who 'productivity' is for and what it can look like, we can embrace *non*-productivity as a way of practising disruption whilst simultaneously recognising the alternative productivity of *failure*[16]: of *not* aspiring to the objectives foretold by neoliberal imaginaries as the one desirable way to be and live, a source of happiness in the singular. Halberstam thus situates 'the art of failing' as a

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[11] Even in academe, 'disruption' is predominantly associated with the utility and implications of 'disruptive innovation' and technologies pertaining to industry and market relations, see e.g.: Erwin Danneels, "Disruptive Technology Reconsidered: A Critique and Research Agenda," *Journal of Product Innovation Management*. 21, 4. (Jul 2004): 246-258. Disruption has also been used elsewhere, such as in relation to policymaking, politics or activism in an era of converging global crises, see: Clarissa Rile Hayward, "Disruption: What Is It Good For?" *The Journal of Politics*. 82, 2. (Apr 2020): 448-459; Kris Hartley, Glen Kuecker and Jun Jie Woo, "Practicing public policy in an age of disruption," *Policy Design and Practice*. 2, 2. (May 2019): 163-181; Marit Hammond, "Democratic deliberation for sustainability transformations: between constructiveness and disruption," *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*. 16, 1. (Oct 2020): 220-230.

[12] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009).

[13] Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 23.

[14] Bahng, *Migrant futures*; Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[15] Bahng, *Migrant Futures*, 1-2.

[16] Halberstam, *The Queer Art*.

creative and cooperative way of "finding alternatives to conventional understandings of success in a heteronormative, capitalist society."[17]

Hidden in both authors' excursions into the arts of speculation, failure, and counter-narration is thus a powerful account of how to disrupt the processes of subjectification that make resilience possible as the existential telos of 21st century (global) society – because we need to understand resilience, and especially its relation to happiness, as just that: an epitomised expression of Foucauldian *self*-governance, contingent upon a recent historical context of globalised (neo)liberal state and market relations.[18] To resist resilience means to resist a quintessential expression of biopolitical logics of government(ality)[19] wherein the interests of power and capital have long been merged and their inequitable tolls on human relations and conditions of existence long felt and lived.[20] Here, disruption is a tool for interrupting the biopolitical narratives of perfection and perseverance, predictability and efficiency associated with resilience, through reclaiming the imperfections, nonlinearity, and ambiguity of being human and engaging in social relations beyond the transactional relationality we have been taught to worship.

Nevertheless, when playing with such notions of counter-narration and non-productivity, it is crucial to discern the positionality behind different starting points from where speculation, failure and disruption as political praxes take place. Refusing to be productive is a very different thing from failing to internalise societal metrics of normativity and assimilability. Both can constitute narrations of utopia as a form of subaltern politics, but the former is most often an alternative bestowed upon already accepted and assimilated citizen subjects with the material and social leeway to refuse capitalist realist pragmatism and

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[17] Ibid, 1.
[18] Massimo De Angelis, "Neoliberal Governance, Reproduction and Accumulation." *The Commoner* 7, (Spring/Summer 2003), http://libcom.org/files/3_07deangelis.pdf; Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France" *Lecture 11*, Picador Press, (17 Mar 2003 [1976]); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

[19] *Govern-mentality* comprises a specific mode of governance that is enacted through the internalisation and self-disciplining of power relations, see: Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality and Critique" *Rethinking Marxism Conference,* University of Massachusetts Amherst, (Sep 2000), http://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/publikationen/Foucault,%20Governmentality,%20and%20Critique%20IV-2.pdf.

[20] See Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience."

still survive.[21] Just as with resilience, we thus have to ask: disruption by whom, and for whom? With what consequences for the global distribution of life and death?

Disruption, Resilience, and Covid-19

It would be foolish in the span of this conversation not to recognise the extent to which we are currently living an example of systemic disruption – and failure – par excellence, as the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the fault-lines now tearing through the myths of both the exemplariness and inevitability associated with global capitalism. The pandemic has left us at a crossroads in that it has proven that the forms of resilience demanded from society and the individual have come about not as *pro*-action but *re*action, to respond to the crises spawned over and over within the contemporary capitalist global[22], where uneven capital accumulation and unimpeded growth is privileged over sustainability and justice, and military(industrial) solutions are prescribed to resolve social challenges. Having been asked with so many defence strategies, fiscal packages, and development policies to brace ourselves against the volatility of our interdependent global existence, the pandemic has brought our utter unpreparedness into sharp relief.

"The first lesson the coronavirus taught us is also the most astounding: we have actually proven that it is possible, in a few weeks, to put [a global] economic system on hold" philosopher Bruno Latour wrote in the early days of the pandemic, "a system that we were told it was impossible to slow down or redirect."[23] This insight is not limited to those hoping to challenge the divinity of global capitalism but applies equally to those wishing to launch an absolute critique of global militarisation, as the pandemic has demonstrated the undeniable helplessness of military security models in protecting either the people or the planet. Ripping through our physical, military, and economic (inter)national fences, the pandemic has highlighted that it is possible to imagine a different form of global govern-*mental* ethos.

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[21] See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique," *Signs.* 38, 4. (2013): 967-991.

[22] Tanaya Majumder, "A Critical Analysis of Capitalism, Capital Accumulation and Crisis Theory in David Harvey." *Arthaniti: Journal of Economic Theory and Practice*, (October 2020), https://doi.org/10.1177/0976747920953009.

[23] Bruno Latour, "What Protective Measures Can You Think of so we Don't Go Back to the Pre-crisis Production Model?" *AOC,* (29 Mar 2020), http://www.bruno-latour.fr/P-202-AOC-ENGLISH_1.pdf.

With its immensely disruptive impacts on individuals, communities, and global social-economic relations, coronavirus has occasioned an exemplary opportunity to practice the arts of speculation and counter-narration in the systemic context. If seized and understood as such, the pandemic thus offers a unique window to disrupt any attempts at recreating the same world – again. Instead, this should be the moment to re-imagine the templates for human co-existence and build on the personal to global experiences of disruption as productive, though painful, possibilities for counter-narration. "It is no longer a matter of a system of production picking up again or being curbed" Latour notes, "but one of getting away from production as the overriding principle of our relationship to the world."[24]

> As we ask these kinds of questions, each of us is onto the task of thinking up protective measures, not just against the virus, but against every element of the mode of production that we *don't* want to see coming back.[25]

Naturally, caution is warranted here – as is the case whenever claiming a moment in time to constitute a novel or true opportunity for change. The disruptive force of the pandemic has been far from equally carried by the world's population. Judith Butler confirms this in her recent comments on the pandemic as "a crisis in itself but also one that exacerbates pre-existing crises of capital, care, race, and climate."[26] However, as is also always the case when daring to have hope, through engaging in discussion and thought on how to seize the post-pandemic moment to build new realities worldwide, we *might* increase the chances of effectuating any such change at all. Yet throughout we need to keep asking: Who is this change for should it happen? Who has the opportunity (and time) even to speculate on alternative futures, and who gets to design and enjoy the fruits of such transformations?

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[24] Latour, "What Protective Measures", 3.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Judith Butler, "Judith Butler: On COVID-19, the Politics of Non-violence, Necropolitics, and Social Inequality," *Verso Books*. (24 Jul 2020): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Bnj7H7M_Ek.

Conclusion

When framed by resilience, disruption becomes a mode of systemic denigration, as much practically as cognitively and affectively. The point of this reflection has been to give theoretical sustenance to a highly subjective experience of how we all, in our own ways, grapple with the expectations of resilience, perseverance, and endless productivity accompanying late-modernity, and to situate the power to disrupt in the imaginaries of the everyday subjects of global capitalism. Disruption must thus be understood equally in the abstract context of speculative modes of personal narration (thinking, feeling, and dreaming). Here, the individual is able to think beyond the subject of neoliberal state desire and so disrupt processes of subjectification, disrupt the myths of resilience as the late-modern form of self-realisation, and disrupt the habit of existing in the name of productivity, to exist – for a moment's repose – only as the object of one's own desire. When using disruption as a state of the mind and the heart, it becomes a little easier to imagine happiness beyond the bounds of simply persevering. Bringing the systemic disruption generated by Covid-19 with us as final proof of the brittleness of global capitalist and military relations into our personal narration of the post-pandemic, we might just stand the chance of speculating a fairer, kinder, and more creative future into being – as long as we take care to speculate in conversation with those who are occupied with simply surviving.

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Information and Liable Relations of Wellbeing During COVID19: An Ethnographic Exploration of Disruption in London

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Abstract

The paper presents a consideration of information as constitutive of the individual experiences of wellbeing, community, and responsibility. Situated in the context of the COVID19 pandemic and its manifestation across the year 2020, the paper traces the multiple and ever-changing epistemological and ontological formations within an online residents' group set up and run by the local council of a borough in London. The authors note the *othering* by the group as a mirroring of inherent structural differences and similarities in contrast to the cohesive and essentialized social unit narrative advanced by the local council. Exhortations regarding wellbeing and responsibility in the pandemic are realised and continue to be realised through evolving assemblages of data, information, and probability on the one hand, and testing, tracing, and vaccination on the other. They are in a relation of *becoming*: manifestly and at once the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus and the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community. In this manner, information constructs liable relations and, consequently, engenders individual responsibility and mutual reciprocity

which shape the understanding and experiences of wellbeing. Finally, the paper argues that while information was a measure by the state to build individual responsibility, it was further enmeshed by the group members themselves as community resilience, thus, shaping reciprocity and liable relations amongst them. As *Homo Reciprocans*, they were (and are) not only the objects but also the subjects of information. This paper is rooted in research which was presented at the 2021 annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA).

KEYWORDS Responsibility, Wellbeing, Information, Community, Relations, Reciprocity

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Introduction

Initially, COVID19 was a distant idea for Londoners, something trumpeted on television, and the stuff of watercooler conversations in offices. However, by the middle of March 2020, as the nation stepped into its first lockdown, in the sense of a "social quarantine"[1], the pandemic had suddenly hit home. The literal invisibility of the virus manifested initially as a material absence: the absence of people on the streets, the absence of traffic, and the absence of toilet paper. When the balance of the supermarket shelves had been restored, the evolving phenomenological realization of an invisible virus spurred a powerful and disruptive sociality: that of information.

The virus and its imaginaries evolved with time and over the multiple lockdowns and tiers of social restrictions which were alternatively imposed, lifted, and imposed again in the United Kingdom over the year 2020. Information and its varied forms came to take centre stage, through their discourses of accuracy, inclusion, and applicability, as well as their continually shifting entanglements with caseloads, testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. We note that such permutations of information and the pandemic were never static or unidirectional. Rather, and thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, they underwent continual configuration and reconfiguration, enmeshed in a process of *becoming*, where "everything is always crossing over into something else, decomposing and recomposing itself".[2] Set against the ensuing "instantaneous zigzag"[3], the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus and the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community were foregrounded. In turn, and as we have endeavoured to demonstrate, this fashioned an engendering of liable relations of wellbeing, in the form of simultaneously individual responsibility and community resilience. As residents of London ourselves over 2020-21, we were both consumers and producers of such forms of information and relations. Indeed, it was the information that shaped our own experiences during the pandemic, making its inherent invisibility visible, be it the virus, the

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 216.

[2] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self From Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 144-145.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 278.

restrictions, the risks of infection, or even how the community was responding. It is the ethnographic exploration of this fluid and recrudescent pandemic, equally as virus-borne as it was (is) socially experienced through and as information, that inspired our research and in which we position our paper.

Field, Methods, and Questions

Over 2020, the pandemic saw various responses from the state apparatus, communities, and individual citizens. In one of the more ethnically diverse boroughs of London (name of the borough withheld to maintain confidentiality), a COVID19 Community Champions group was set up and run by the local council. Residents of the borough could volunteer to become members. The group would meet online every week for the moderators to share pandemic- and wellbeing-related updates. As Community Champions, members were expected to do their part by forwarding the advice they had received to the other networks they were part of. If the Community Champions group was thus a shared "social space"[4] rooted in information and well-being, and at a time when lockdown restrictions meant that meeting physically and in person was neither possible nor permissible, then we borrow from Sahlins to posit that it provided for such coevality and participation as was at once intersubjective and with a "consubstantiality which …[was]… locally defined".[5] As our first research question, then, we asked if the assemblage of humans, virus, and information (such as that provided by the COVID19 Champions Group) determined the perception of wellbeing as an object of knowledge, and accordingly, shaped kinship relations within communities. After all, Sahlins, whilst building on a rich ethnographic legacy, described a "kinship system" (whether natal, post-natal, affinal, or performative) as a "manifold of participations, founded on mutualities of being".[6] Kinspersons, he advanced, "lead common lives, they partake of each other's sufferings and joys, sharing one another's experiences even as they take responsibility for and feel the effects of each other's acts".[7]

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[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 26-27.

[5] Marshall Sahlins, "What Kinship Is (part one)", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (2011): 14.

[6] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 10.

[7] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 14.

Inherent to Sahlins' argument then, was a sense of mutuality or reciprocity. In fact, Sahlins provided a typology of reciprocal relations based on kinship and social distance.[8] Price extended this, arguing for a reconsideration of such a categorization of reciprocity in the light of all idioms used to create or reaffirm interpersonal ties, and not merely the two advanced by Sahlins.[9] And if information was the idiom through which the pandemic was lived in the everyday, then in examining how individuals defined wellbeing, as our second research question, we also sought to understand whom they included in the web of reciprocal relationships.

Our inquiry had to keep pace with the pandemic's dynamic discourse. Situating ourselves as members of the COVID19 Community Champions group, we adopted observant participation as our methodological praxis and carried out our research between October 2020 and January 2021. Our research field was public in the sense that Community Champions were volunteers, as were we. As mentioned earlier, the Champions received regular information and the latest advice from the council and public health authorities. This was done through weekly connect calls (over video-conferencing), email newsletters, and a WhatsApp group. As stated previously, they were, in turn, expected to share this information with their wider networks to thus help the community make informed decisions. Moreover, Champions were provided with a platform to raise questions on the weekly calls, where access to local health experts and decision makers was often provided. These then came to define our research methods as well. We carried out observant participation in the Community Champion forums, which had us "participating in order to observe and understand"[10]. Additionally, we analysed the email newsletters as public culture in the sense of "an arena … in which the emergent cosmopolitan cultural forms… shape each other".[11] And, finally, we reviewed the conversations in the Champions WhatsApp group with an intent to practice in-situ, real-time research, while regarding the group as a social networking site where "the previously dyadic contact with each friend or relative …[is]… co-present in

[8] Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Routledge, 1972).
[9] Sally Price, "Reciprocity and Social Distance: A Reconsideration", *Ethnology* 17, no. 3 (1978): 343.
[10] Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.
[11] Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?", *Public Culture Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1988): 5.

the same space".[12] Of course, our positionality as anthropologists with an interest in the on-the-ground realities of COVID19 was explicitly articulated by us during our orientation call with the council representatives as well during our introductions to the rest of the Community Champions attending the weekly calls.

In his lecture 'The Question Concerning Technology'[13], the German philosopher Martin Heidegger questioned the inevitability of a technology as just an instrument or as a means to an end. He argued that the world always offers manifold potentialities, and by making us choose a technology as a possibility, the world is merely helping us establish our purpose, our raison d'etre. In this manner, the essence of technology goes beyond technology. Understanding this essence is perhaps key to understanding ourselves and what it means to belong to this world as much as what meanings the world presents to us. This essence, which predates the reality or the actuality of the technology as the chalice itself, is indeed what shapes the *chaliceness*. An inquiry into the *chaliceness* can inform our understanding of why the chalice (and not something else) came about. In other words, the *chaliceness* is socially constructed and presents social, political, environmental, and other potential consequences. Borrowing thus from Heidegger, our third research question queried whether the online socialities in which our study was anchored perpetuated the *chaliceness* of existing boundaries within a community, thus, placing the Other out of consideration of the notions of national wellbeing and implied governmentality[14].

As we noted earlier, the pandemic was phenomenologically realized through and in (data and) information. For the Community Champions, this implied weekly calls, email newsletters, and WhatsApp group chats, apart from other digital, online, and televised media, as they might have been able to access. Yet, if we view the Champions as having understood not only the virus but also the community itself in the sense of datafication, our final research question asks who emerged in the process: the *homo economicus* as privileging relations of

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[12] Heather Horst and Daniel Miller, *Digital Anthropology* (New York: Berg, 2012), 149.

[13] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (London: Harper Perennial, 1977).

[14] Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 87-104.

utility and self-interest, or *homo reciprocans* as foregrounding reciprocity and liable relations?[15]

Analytical Units

Information was our first analytical unit. Its construct kept shifting as the pandemic waxed and waned across multiple lockdown phases. Its many formations included public health messages, the data collected through contact tracing, the expedition of testing availability, the restrictions on account of different rules and tiers, as well as the prevalence and form of myths, such as on the vaccines, as vehicles of misinformation and disinformation.

The second unit was the *community*. As relevant for our research, this entailed two facets. First of these was the COVID19 Community Champions themselves as a community of purpose, and their interactions, questions, and debates during the weekly calls and on the WhatsApp group offered the pursuit of distinct lines of inquiry. Who were these Community Champions? What had brought them here? How did they perceive their role? And what elements did they want to understand and clarify? The second facet was the community the Champions represented, or in other words, the residents of the borough and the social, religious, and volunteer organizations or groups they closely engaged with. These two lenses (of defining the community) also yielded important considerations of their "consciousness" and boundaries[16]. On the one hand, the boundary for the Community Champions, while defined in terms of their role as well as the choice to participate in engagements with the local council, often proffered the experience of other lassoed-in meanings, such as the privileging of certain forms of knowledge and evidence, language, access to local volunteering groups, as well as their own ethnicity. On the other hand, the Community which the Champions intended to represent was often defined based on the demographic elements of age and ethnicity as well as through functional units within the community, such as social

[15] Ruy Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", *Boston Review* December 1998/January 1999, (1999).

[16] Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 15 and 21.

housing inhabitants, highly vulnerable groups needing priority access to health services, religious groups practicing communal worship and education, and those dependent on food banks, amongst others. Interestingly, these boundaries did not materialize geographically as one borough versus the other but instead materialized within the borough as one ethnicity versus the other, those getting tested as opposed to those who did not, those wearing the mask properly as against those who negotiated it, those who had the means to remain isolated versus those who did not, and perhaps most importantly, the humans who were not 'able to carry on their daily lives' as pitted against the virus, which carried on mutating.[17]

Our third unit of analysis was *wellbeing*. In the context of the pandemic, we explored the epistemology of wellbeing as an object of knowledge presented by the local council to the Community Champions as well as a flow of emergent meanings finding its *placeness* in the everyday, that is, as embodied and expressed by the Community Champions and the networks they, in turn, represented. As we will show, wellbeing was translated into the semiotics of borough case rates, testing percentages, and infection probabilities. Wellbeing was the individual's responsibility, but 'support from the council' was also continually reiterated as being available.[18]

Chapter 1: An Exploration of Differences and Similarities as *Chaliceness*

The Community Champions call in the week before vaccinations began in the UK witnessed much excitement. The Moderators chose to leverage the understandable enthusiasm to solicit ideas around how different members of the community could be galvanised to support the council's efforts. This was coming against the backdrop of a series of anti-vaccination messages which had been circulated in the borough, over online media as well as through paper flyers slipped under front doors and into mailboxes.

[17] Field Notes, 2020.
[18] Field Notes, 2020.

Online breakout rooms based on different categories of community members were created, and participants were asked to join a room of their choice. The one we joined aimed to discuss how young people could be involved more. In addition to the two of us, there were nine participants and one Moderator to facilitate conversation. At the beginning, the Moderator outlined a three-fold agenda: agree on what had been going well, what had not worked, and what could be done differently.

One participant chose to get the conversation going by sharing that the very fact that we had a group of Community Champions which met every week was in and of itself an extremely good thing. She did point out though that there were no young people on it and that what we therefore needed to do was to organise youth parliaments, forums, and channels where content which they would find interesting could be shared. Most participants agreed, and ideas such as appointing youth ambassadors and working proactively with youth organisations were tabled.

It was then that Rosie (name changed to maintain confidentiality), an elderly Caucasian lady who always showed up for the Community Champions calls along with her cat and with the television running in the background, said that the young people were the ones who had bought into the vaccine conspiracy theories. She went on to add that they were really not abiding by the rules around social distancing, mixing, and face masks. The Moderator stepped in to ask what we might do as senior members of the community.

'Get the police to break up their groups and get them to adhere to the rules,' affirmed Rosie. 'Tell them that they need to help the vulnerable by doing so. I mean, we can't even go near them!'

William (again, name changed), another participant, joined in: 'As a linguist by profession, I endorse good communication. Messaging is very important. What we have now, what we discuss now… this is not going to interest them. We need to push out our messages on online media.'

‘If we wait for young people to join this group on their own, we will wait forever,’ William continued. ‘There is no direct way to reach them. Instead, we have to reach out to trusted elders in their communities.’

Others started to share their views.

‘Can we do something with gyms? If they go there, then perhaps we can share leaflets. These are the places where they congregate. I don’t really see them sitting down in front of a laptop.’

‘Yes, the places they go to makes sense. Barbershops, for example. We need to share bite-sized snippets, videos, and multilingual communications.’

‘Target ethnic shops. People will see the messages.’

‘Short, simple messages. They have to be spoon fed.’

‘The real issue is not the colour of their skin but the language they speak. When we say multilingual, we often do not cover the minority White population. Think of the Polish, for example.’

‘And this goes for sign language too. There is a big difference in the signs for the same word between the Somali and British sign languages.’

‘People connect on a point of similarity. That is what we need to find.’

The Community Champions versus the Others

Over time, policy and official narratives around the pandemic shifted to focus on vaccines. In preparing for the vaccination drive to commence, the Community Champions turned to how ‘conspiracy theories’ might be addressed. Yet by positioning such narratives alongside and in conjunction with ‘young people’ (as separate and distinct from themselves),

there was a foregrounded articulation of the need to address this 'misinformation' by reaching out to their 'trusted elders' in the 'spaces and places' they frequented, and by using 'their languages' whether online or other than English. There was a focus on what the Community Champions were (language, messages, vulnerable, and embodied advocates of wellbeing), and how this was different from these 'other' categories (which, to different degrees, were antithetical). We are reminded at once then (as Cohen tells us) that a community is defined as much by what it is as by what it is not.[19] Over subsequent calls (and as the vaccination drive picked up in the month of December and into the new year), there were exhortations to co-opt leaders of different faiths in the effort to address narratives which were against the vaccine, seeking to thereby effect a cultural translation of the pandemic.

For the public health authorities of the Council (as realised actors of the state), and by extension, therefore, for the members of the Community Champions (as Latouresque actors)[20], information (along with its discourses, negotiations, and resistance) thus emerged as the idiom through which liable relations of community responsibility and notions of wellbeing were constructed.

We also note that where the council might have sought to organise its efforts around what it regarded as a cohesive social unit (in this case, the borough), the residents of the borough themselves along with the Community Champions outlined notions of wellbeing which were rooted in kinship relations as defined by age, culture, language, and ethnicity. In this exploration of differences and similarities, in this *othering* by the Community Champions, we note a mirroring of Heidegger's concept of the *chaliceness* preceding the chalice itself.[21] Whereas Heidegger advanced that technology serves only to reveal the potential of being, in the sense of what already exists and proffers itself for revelation, we think with him and argue that the technologies of information (around the virus, testing, tracing, and the vaccine), manifestly in the reciprocal relationships they engendered, served only to reveal the inherent community differences, representations, and interactions. In the

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[19] Cohen, "The Symbolic Construction,", 21.
[20] Bruno Latour. *Reassembling The Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[21] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology".

zoom/online breakout rooms, the social rubric was recreated, and kinship rearticulated around familiar understandings of culture, food, language, and spaces and places, using the grammar of wellbeing and 'abiding by the rules around social distancing, mixing, and face masks'.[22]

Chapter 2: Evolving Assemblages of Individual Responsibility

Framing wellbeing over time

In the week that a UK grandmother became the first person in the world to get the COVID19 vaccine, describing it as the 'best early birthday present'[23], the Community Champions call opened with the Moderators playing the song *With a little help from my friends* by The Beatles. While the vaccine rollout itself was celebrated as a 'landmark', there were concerns around the vaccine itself, with various 'myths' being circulated, as well as regarding the timelines of the vaccine programme being planned for the borough on the one hand, and the news of increasing case counts as well as strains on the NHS on the other.[24]

Speakers from the country's public health authority joined the call. Data and statistics were provided to underline the gravity of a resurgent pandemic. The answers that were given to participants' questions were not certain, and dependencies and caveats were tabled. Above all, there was an emphasis on testing facilities being ramped up in the borough and on more focused contact tracing. Wellbeing was translated into the semiotics of borough case rates, testing percentages, and infection probabilities. Emblematic of the fluid ontological entanglements of testing, contact tracing, and now the vaccine, a participant asked, 'Will there be a track and trace on whether the people who have been vaccinated are alright?'[25]

By the next week's Community Champions call, the number of COVID19 cases had risen sharply. On the call, this increase was the first point of discussion, although it was qualified by an acknowledgement of increased testing and better contact tracing efforts. The

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[22] Field Notes, 2020.

[23] "Covid-19 vaccine: First Person Receives Pfizer Jab in UK", *BBC News*, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55227325.

[24] Field Notes, 2020.

[25] Field Notes, 2020.

Moderator introduced a quiz in an attempt to lend a much-needed note of levity to the added apprehension around the new, rapidly spreading mutant virus strain. Whereas the previous week's call had been anchored in celebration on account of the commencement of the UK's vaccination programme, the underlying theme this time around was COVID19 testing, and particularly for school-going children, since the increase in case numbers was projected as being concentrated in the age group of 13-17 years. A parallel, unmoderated conversation played out in the chat window. One participant's question on whether it was okay for him not to be tested if he did not want to be was met with incredulity and demands for soul-searching. And when this thread eventually turned to discuss testing for school-going children (for whom testing was being encouraged), a second participant suggested, 'While it is a choice for children not to be tested, it is helpful if they do. It is a responsibility which parents have, to keep people, friends, and family safe.'[26]

In late October and early November however, just over a month and a half ago, it had looked rather different. The council's messaging through its newsletters on wellbeing during the pandemic carried the twin messages of community resilience (as being built through the Community Champions) and state responsibility (as described by police and council officers ensuring COVID19-compliant business and residential behaviour). Some of these messages are reproduced below.

'With the news that Covid-19 cases are increasing again, the number of champions in the borough is also rising and there are now 301 champs in our network, helping to keep everyone informed and up to date on the latest guidance and keep our community safe.'[27]

'Officers from across the council continue to work with police to ensure residents and businesses are complying with Covid-19 regulations - with around 20 council officers deployed across the borough daily.'[28]

[26] Field Notes, 2020.
[27] Field Notes, 2020.
[28] Field Notes, 2020.

At the same time, these newsletters carried a variety of other articles as well, mirroring what Bonilla and Rosa note about online media, in the manner of its "interdiscursive capacity to lasso accompanying texts and their indexical meanings as part of a frame".[29] In short, and through other content on public consultations for redevelopment, the council's initiatives for preventing Islamophobia, and for supporting mutual aid groups and mental health, as well as providing tips for remaining safe during the upcoming festive season, the twin messages of wellbeing as a resident at the level of both community and the state were immediately normalised in a shared conjunctural understanding.

Yet as the number of cases kept growing, come late November, the council's newsletters sought to highlight not only community but also individual responsibility in the sense of residents being encouraged to share their experiences of having been tested for Covid-19 while adhering to existing protocols. The following two excerpts demonstrate this.

'Please do share any experiences you've had of testing and follow up in the borough – it's important we normalise these programmes as part of our way through the pandemic. There is plenty of testing capacity in the borough and appointments can be made very easily through the national booking system.'[30]

'...hands, face and space along with testing and self-isolation if symptomatic, positive for Covid-19 or having been in contact with someone who goes onto test positive for Covid-19.'[31]

The dos and don'ts of self-isolation, rapid testing being piloted in the borough, spotlight features on some of the Community Champions, as well as maps to show the location of testing sites in and near the borough comprised the attendant text. The newsletters also listed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from Community Champions calls, covering testing, vaccines, and how the council was dealing with those who were 'basically continuing

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[29] Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States", *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 6.

[30] Field Notes, 2020.

[31] Field Notes, 2020.

their lives as usual and not adhering to national lockdown rules'.[32] In short, wellbeing was constructed in and through entanglements of responsibility across the state, the community, and the individual.

Closer to the time when the vaccination programme started in the UK, the newsletters started carrying messages from the mayor, asking that residents continue to exercise caution and abide by current COVID19 protocols. While wellbeing was emphasised as being the individual's responsibility ('Why Wearing a Face Covering Helps: Yours protects them and theirs protects you!'), 'support from the council' was continually reiterated as being easily available.[33] In short, the state was the guardian of wellbeing, with the individual and the community jointly responsible for its realisation.

As the holidays approached, wellbeing began to be defined in a multitude of terms: the Christmas bubble, mental health, loneliness, and wearing face coverings or masks. On the one hand, the responsibility for controlling a mutating virus was being situated in the individual and their kinship circles. There was a simultaneous underlining of both caution and anticipation, manifestly through an urgent translation of wellbeing by the state into liable relations for the individual. This was evidenced from the questions (and statements) posted in the chat window during the last Community Champions call before Christmas, as tabled below.

'Do children count as part of the Christmas bubble or is it only adults?'

'If I am elderly, can relations stay with me over Christmas to look after me?'

'It is vital to remember that despite the Christmas exceptions that the Covid-19 alert level in [...] is now at very high. Everyone must follow the new rules...'

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[32] Field Notes, 2020.

[33] Field Notes, 2020.

'Forming a festive bubble is a personal choice and should be carefully balanced against the increased risk of Covid-19 infection.'

'We are now seeing the number of positive cases rising again, and there are indications that this increase is happening quite quickly'

'The most impactful thing you can do is to avoid any indoor household mixing, beyond the current exemptions, and remember you are safest when you follow hands, face, space.'

'...84 per cent of cases are reached by NHS Test and Trace, and 83 per cent of close contacts – this is higher than previous weeks but is relatively low compared to other London boroughs.'[34]

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF INFORMATION, IN A SOCIAL PANDEMIC

In analysing the Community Champions calls and the council newsletters, we look towards public culture in the sense of 'an arena where other types, forms and domains of culture are encountering, interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways.'[35] Over the months of October, November, and December 2020, we noted a discourse which was continually shifting between testing and tracing, the vaccination programme, increasing case counts, variants, and vaccine efficiency. If earlier in the period, the virus was phenomenologically experienced by those who might not have contracted the disease, in terms of information around testing and contact tracing, as well as lockdown and tier-based restrictions, then over the course of these three months, this information-as-experience also traversed vaccination programmes, a mutant strain, and an array of data and statistics. Here we agree with Desjarlais and Throop and note that "distinctions between subjective and objective aspects of reality, between what is of the mind and of the world, are shaped by the attitude that a social actor takes up toward the world, as well as by the historical and cultural

[34] Field Notes, 2020.

[35] Appadurai, "Why Public Culture?" (1988): 6.

conditions that inform the values, assumptions, ideals, and norms embedded within it".[36] And individual wellbeing, as an epistemological outcome of these discourses, was thus at once an embodiment of these experiences, shifting and morphing with the pandemic as it waxed and waned, where "uncertainty, ambiguity, and indeterminacy are the norm".[37]

Burgess and Horii tell us that responses to health are often socially determined as opposed to merely being biomedical in nature.[38] Thus, we propose that wellbeing (and responsibility thereof) was not only being defined and redefined by the state but also being embodied and re-embodied by the individual as a Deleuzian assemblage of data, probability, and adherence to rules.[39] Extending the ontology of *becoming* by Deleuze and Guattari, we argue that for the individual, there was equally a *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus, alongside a concomitant phenomenological *becoming*-data-and-information by the community (the borough).[40]

Chapter 3: Imagining Community Resilience as the Emerging Ontology of Wellbeing

> "Resilience fits with a social ontology that urges us to turn from a concern with the outside world to a concern with our own subjectivity, our adaptability, our reflexive understanding, our own risk assessments, our knowledge acquisition and, above all else, our responsible decision- making."[41]

> "Individuals, communities, organisations and governance need to show awareness of how to enhance their capacities through networks. Getting this right means taking responsibility for our choices. The resilience approach emphasises how responsibility

[36] Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop, "Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, (2011): 89.

[37] Desjarlais, "Phenomenological Approaches," (2011): 90.

[38] Adam Burgess and Mitsutoshi Horii, "Risk, Ritual and Health Responsibilisation: Japan's 'safety blanket' of surgical face mask-wearing", *Sociology of Health & Illness* 34, no. 8, (2012): 1185-1187.

[39] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 305-306.

[40] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 278.

[41] Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach", *Resilience* 1, no. 1, (2013): 40.

> works through making the right connections. This is a privatised view of the world where the state steps back and allows partnerships to develop between stakeholders and various informed people."[42]

IMAGINARIES OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In early November, the council and the public health authority representatives had facilitated a 'Long Table event' with all Community Champions during a weekly call. This found an elaborate description in the subsequent newsletter. As Champions ourselves, we participated in this session to gain a first-person perspective.

The Champions were asked to share topics beforehand (on e-mail) in the sense of what they wanted to discuss and address 'as if they were at a dinner table'.[43] Of the many ideas which came in, a vote was facilitated during the call, and the Champions chose 'how we can build community resilience in these strange times'.[44] In the subsequent coverage of this event in the council newsletter, it was highlighted that the Champion who had originally submitted the topic had witnessed heightened stress surrounding the disease on account of prevalent conspiracy theories and misinformation. The narrative of 'how we gel as a community so that the right information gets out' entrenched the project of community resilience as one that could bridge the ' information gap between those 'in the know; and those 'not so much'.[45] One Champion translated this narrative in terms of her own lived experience as 'coming to spaces like this [that is, the weekly Champions calls] where you can get nourished so that you can go back out and give as much as before'.[46] Another Champion drew comparisons between flows of food and information, establishing the *placeness* of exchange within the community, saying 'Food is a connection… the supermarket, the farmers market, and the places that are still open and viable are where I'd like to share'.[47]

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[42] Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 43.
[43] Field Notes, 2020.
[44] Field Notes, 2020.
[45] Field Notes, 2020.
[46] Field Notes, 2020.
[47] Field Notes, 2020.

In this manner, the suggestions and ideas that emerged during the Long Table signified the imaginaries of community resilience on the lines of "individual preparedness, making informed decisions, understanding our roles and responsibilities, and showing adaptability to our situation and being able to 'bounce back' should things go wrong".[48]

Information builds resilience

Information, as a measure to build resilience, was represented across distinct forms during the Long Table. This included confusing COVID19 news on different media, shares on local resident WhatsApp groups, weekly summaries of meetings to disseminate across networks, and trainings for Champions to have difficult conversations.[49] Interestingly, the stated enablers as well as barriers to information included aspects such as the appreciation for neighbours' support, the need to share information sufficiently quickly, an inability to understand things that were not perceived as plain English, an overload of information, and a fear of integrating with communities on account of the infection, amongst others.[50] The entrenchment of reciprocity and liable relations within the construct of resilience was evident from the Champions believing that it was their responsibility to 'make young people more confident to help others', 'connect more with elderly residents', 'volunteer for befriending and mentoring', and 'as community navigators, enable a top down approach that will facilitate communication and preparedness'.[51] A lone Champion expressed the precarity of her own wellbeing in the midst of this ideation: 'Many of us feel isolated currently and we all need some support'.[52]

Resilience as responsible wellbeing

Towards the end of the Long Table, the Champions were 'challenged' to take pledges of 'action to contribute to building community resilience', as a cementing of the narratives of responsibility.

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[48] Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 41.
[49] Field Notes, 2020.
[50] Field Notes, 2020.
[51] Field Notes, 2020.
[52] Field Notes, 2020.

The council newsletter which followed the weekly call was titled 'Community Champions on the rise'. It situated the increase in the number of Champions in the context of the rising number of COVID19 cases. Their role (and intersubjectivity[53]) was established as 'helping to keep everyone informed and up to date on the latest guidance and keep our community safe'.[54] Joseph outlines the resilience approach as one where responsibility works "through making the right connections ... between stakeholders and various informed people".[55] The newsletter indeed outlined that the weekly calls for and with the Champions, with up-to-date and detailed information on various aspects of the pandemic including 'NHS Test and Trace, school settings, flu, financial support and local GP testing', had enabled them to address the issues which the Champions had prioritized.[56] The ontology of information explicitly manifested in a *word cloud* inserted in the newsletter placed a spotlight on words such as *WhatsApp*, *Emails*, *Questions*, *Answers*, *Flyers*, *Chat*, *Share*, *Volunteers*, *Neighbours*, *Online*, and *Local* amongst others[57], as well as the quotations from the Long Table event that reiterated aspects such as information, sharing, and training amongst others.

53 Desjarlais, "Phenomenological Approaches," (2011): 88.
54 Field Notes, 2020.
55 Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism," (2013): 43.
56 Field Notes, 2020.
57 Field Notes, 2020.

Conclusion: Information, Liable Relations, and Reciprocity

'And I agree with [name withheld] regarding the fairness of the offer in the UK.'

'At some point the choice for everyone in the UK will be take the vaccine or have your refusal recorded officially and you won't be pestered again.'

'There are only so much time, effort, and resources available to try and persuade people.'

'I agree with [name withheld], as I think that is something that would need looking into… recording choice officially and legally so that any confusion over who has and hasn't been offered would be settled.'

(Excerpt from a chat on the Community Champions WhatsApp Group.)[58]

In his essay titled *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Deleuze quotes Guattari as having "imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighbourhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier" and that "what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position - licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation".[59]

This universal, disruptive modulation of control is anchored in information and enabled by the *homo reciprocans*. The *homo reciprocans* is distinct from the *homo economicus*, with the latter "relentlessly maximizing utility as he or she ambles through life".[60] Instead, and as Bowles and Gintis suggest, the "homo reciprocans is characterized by "strong reciprocity": the willingness to incur personal costs in order to cooperate with others similarly disposed and to punish those who violate group norms".[61] Following this line of

[58] Field Notes, 2021.
[59] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", *October* 59, Winter, (1992): 7.
[60] Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", 1999.
[61] Teixeira, "The Left's Problem", 1999.

thinking, we are reminded of the participant on a Community Champions call whose query about whether he was within his rights to not get himself tested for COVID19 was met with a mix of incredulity and moral grandstanding.[62]

In our research, we first examined how existing kinship relations as defined by age, culture, language, and ethnicity were foregrounded in online spaces and places, and in the sense of the notions of wellbeing that were articulated by the Community Champions in the borough. Reminded in this manner of Sahlins' "mutualities of being"[63] as comprising the lingua franca for kinship relations, we observe that the *othering* by the Community Champions is but a mirroring of the inherent structural differences and similarities in the offline or physical world. Finally, this stands in contrast to the borough being regarded and addressed as a cohesive and essentialized social unit by the local council.

Next, we reflected on the Community Champions' experiences as the pandemic waxed and waned over the months of October, November, and December 2020. Admittedly, our first epistemological port of call was Foucauldian *governmentality*, as "corresponding to a type of society controlled by apparatuses of security".[64] Yet, as our research suggests, the liable relations we were studying were (and are) in fact constructions of information and the consequent engendering of responsibility and reciprocity along the axis of individual wellbeing. Deleuze writes that "in the societies of control, one is never finished with anything".[65] As a note, therefore, we suggest that the exhortations regarding wellbeing and responsibility in the pandemic are realised and continue to be realised through evolving assemblages of data, information, and probability on the one hand, and testing, tracing, and vaccination on the other. Instead of a dialectic, they are in a relation of *becoming*: manifestly and at once the *becoming*-data-and-information by the virus, alongside the *becoming*-data-and-information by the community.[66]

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[62] Field Notes, 2020.
[63] Sahlins, "What Kinship Is," (2011): 10.
[64] Burchell, "The Foucault Effect,", 104.
[65] Deleuze, "Postscript on the," (1992): 5.
[66] Deleuze, "A Thousand Plateaus,", 278.

Finally, as we explored the imaginaries of wellbeing, we noted that while information was a measure to build resilience, resilience in turn came to be advanced by the Champions themselves as the essence of responsible wellbeing. Individual responsibility was enmeshed in the construct of community resilience, and this found resonance in the primacy of reciprocity and liable relations among the Champions. Time and again, they brought forth their responsibility to "make young people more confident to help others", "connect more with elderly residents", "volunteer for befriending and mentoring" and "as community navigators, enable a top down approach that will facilitate communication and preparedness".[67]

We conclude then, that these *homo reciprocans* were (and are) indeed at once the objects and subjects of information.

[67] Field Notes, 2020.

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Disrupting the Colonial Subjectivity Imposed by Borders: The Experience of the Guarani People in Brazil

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Abstract

This paper aims to show how the imposed demarcation of borders by the Brazilian State has contributed to the establishment of other frontiers - not only physical but also epistemic and symbolic ones - against indigenous peoples. This practice has artificially constructed colonial subjectivities, whose representation has been dragged on since the colonial period, having been reinforced amidst the corporate-military dictatorship (1964-1985), and today is materialised in the anti-indigenous government of Jair Bolsonaro. Above all, this research shows how the Guarani cosmology - i.e., world narrative - has been reformulated due to the multiple forms of violence committed against their people. This has resulted in alternative territorialisation strategies that disrupt these colonial subjectivities in the form of migratory movements and the repossession of ancestral territories, their *Tekohas*.

KEYWORDS Borders, Colonial, Subjectivity, Guarani, Brazil

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Gabriela Sarmet is a Brazilian researcher investigating land-related conflicts and their colonial legacies. She holds a BA in International Relations from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and an MSc in Violence, Conflict, and Development from SOAS, University of London. For the last eight years, she has been advocating decoloniality as an alternative political horizon to overcome the colonial matrix of power, particularly in her home country and region, Brazil and Latin America. To challenge years of studies where she was introduced only to white references and references from the Global North, she dedicates herself to learning from and disseminating indigenous references in her writings. Believing that another world is possible, she understands that other world narratives can inspire us to this alternative collective construction.

Introduction

The historical exclusion and repression of indigenous peoples in Brazil can be explained by how these groups were forcibly confined to limited spaces. Territorialisation through territorial demarcation reproduces the Western modern/colonial model of nation-State by the physical application of the law, often through the use of violence. Furthermore, it also materialises epistemological and subjective restrictions that further separate indigenous communities, *Quilombolas,* and other traditional peoples, from other Brazilian nationals.

Through the lens of decolonial and critical border thinking, this paper analyses geographical and epistemic aspects of the demarcation of Brazilian borders[1], understanding them as political projects of power. Borders have been affecting the survival and subjectivities of indigenous peoples since the colonial period. The cosmology of the Guarani people of the Brazil-Paraguay border region is illustrated here as an effort to retell the history of Brazil's border demarcation, now from their perspective. It is important to mention that among the more than 300 indigenous peoples that exist in Brazil today, with approximately 900,000 people, the Guarani are the most numerous ethnic group in the country - numbering around 85,000[2]. It is important to note that the Guarani people are very plural, and in Brazil they are in three large groups: Kaiowá, Ñandeva, and M'byá.

When done without prior consultation with the affected communities, the imposition of border designs, whether physical, cultural, or legislative, ends up substantially limiting the possibility of the physical and cosmological survival of these peoples. Nevertheless, I understand that the Guarani people's migratory movement, in general, has been appropriated as a decisive element of their resistance. By subverting the demarcated borders, either through migration or land repossession, they manage to disturb the colonial subjectivities imposed on them when relating to the land through their own cosmology.

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[1] Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova, "Theorising from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2 (May 2006): 208, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006063333.

[2] International, Survival. "Povos indígenas do Brasil". Accessed 20 June 2021. https://www.survivalbrasil.org/povos/indios-brasileiros.

The determination of colonial subjectivities begins with the "imperial classification of inferiority attributed to all bodies that do not meet the criteria of knowledge established by white, European, Christian and secular men"[3]. By recognising this dichotomous logic of exclusion in the conception and demarcation of borders, it is also possible to identify the coloniality of power[4] present in this formulation. It acts as an element of division, control, and domination by replicating a colonial logic that justifies the exploitation and confinement of wretched bodies[5].

The Guarani in Brazil are no exception. This notion of colonial subjectivity over their bodies and minds since the colonial period was reinforced during the corporate-military regime (1964-1985) and remains rooted to this day in the collective imagination of a considerable portion of the Brazilian population. By understanding migratory movements and land repossession actions as strategies for the territorialisation of the Guarani, this paper argues that these are expressions of community autonomy and resistance that disrupt the notion of colonial subjectivities in which they have been trapped.

Borders as Artificial Colonial, and Imperial Constructs

The colonial matrix of power, or coloniality of power, reflected in the demarcation of borders in today's modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system[6] has its origin in the inter-imperial competition between European Empires. The 'First Occupant' principle was utterly neglected in this race for power when it came to indigenous peoples' prior presence in colonised lands.

When the Portuguese first invaded the region today known as Brazil, sources indicate that the territory already had over 4 million people[7]. In this sense, the story of 'discovery' that dominates all Brazilian textbooks is nothing more than an intentionally framed discourse. In

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[3] Mignolo and Tlostanova, 210.
[4] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America", *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (1 November 2000): 533–80.
[5] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
[6] Ramón Grosfoguel, "Colonial Difference, Geopolitics of Knowledge, and Global Coloniality in the Modern/ Colonial Capitalist World-System", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 25, no. 3 (2002): 203–24.
[7] Leslie Bethell, *História da America Latina* (São Paulo, SP, Brasil; Brasília, Brazil: EDUSP : Imprensa Oficial ; Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 1997), 131.

an epistemological movement, the coloniality of power produces truths with unquestionable validity, attacking the foundations of other epistemologies and sustaining itself in the demarcation of geographical and cognitive boundaries[8].

The demarcation of the territorial limits of *Abya Ayla*[9] - the name by which the American continent was known by the natives before colonisation - began as an imperial power dispute between the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, resulting in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) signed under the Catholic Church's tutelage. From this period onwards, theories emerged questioning indigenous peoples' humanity, doubting whether they had souls, as in the Christian-European colonial conception.

Later, in the Papal Bull *Sublimmis Deus* of 1537, Pope Paul III recognised these peoples' humanity, condemning their slavery and advocating their conversion to Christianity. However, this was done by determining that they had '*nullius*' souls, meaning that "their souls were as empty as the newly discovered lands (...) [and] they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic faith but they very much desire to receive it"[10]. It was a process of emptying indigenous peoples' existence of all meaning and reducing them to colonial subjectivities.

Supported by the rhetoric of salvation, the 'unquestionably desired' European modernity has been exalted and replicated over the years in Brazil by colonial practices of power, such as land dispossession and border demarcation. Such discourse perpetuates the control of subjectivities by determining who can (or cannot) be accepted within these spatial limits.

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[8] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "Fabrica Mundi : Producing the World by Drawing Borders", in *Scapegoat: Architecture, Landscape, Political Economy: 04 Currency*, 2013, 11, https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A29808/.

[9] Emilio del Valle Escalante, "Self-Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala", *E-International Relations* (blog), 20 May 2014, https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala/.

[10] Papal Bull *Sublimmis Deus*, 1537

The dispossession of Guarani lands by the colonial power, an example of how the coloniality of power operates, is analysed by the geographer Teresa Itsumi Masuzaki[11]. She states that the invasions resulted in the creation of new territorial logic that limited their space for survival, trapping them in restricted ecological and spatial conditions to reproduce their ancestral subsistence. The forcible reduction of Guarani territories was determined to facilitate the expansion of Jesuit civilising missions over what was considered '*terras nullius*', covering the borders of Argentina, Paraguay, and southern Brazil.

The so-called rationality behind this colonial discourse held to 'civilise' these peoples allowed for their confinement to demarcated areas. According to Guarani Kaiowá sociologist Celuniel Aquino Valiente[12], this was done to facilitate their supervision and control. In this sense, from an early age, border demarcation's violence is a hallmark of the interaction between the Guarani and the Hispanic-Portuguese colonisers.

One example is the Guaranitic War (1750 to 1756), the name given to the violent conflicts that arose after the signing of the Treaty of Madrid (1750) between the colonial powers. This agreement, which was signed only between Portugal and Spain, forced the Guarani to migrate from the north-western portion of the Rio Grande do Sul's state towards the far south, closer to what is now Uruguay.

Tonico Benites' work illustrates another example of this offensive. Benites is a Guarani Kaiowa with a PhD in anthropology (UFRJ), who documented the first massive occupation policy of the Guarani-Kaiowá territories that began immediately after the end of the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870). At that moment, the Brazilian State opened that region to foreign capital through a vast land concession to Cia. Matte Larangeira for settlers to start growing yerba mate and implementing other colonisation strategies for territorial control of the Brazil-Paraguay borderland strip[13].

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11 'Teresa Itsumi Masuzaki, "A luta Dos Povos Guarani No Extremo Oeste Do Paraná", *PEGADA - A Revista da Geografia do Trabalho* 16 (15 May 2015), https://doi.org/10.33026/peg.v16i0.3525.
12 Celuniel Aquino Valiente, "A Construção Da Identidade Guarani No Período Colonial", *Tellus*, 1 September 2017, 167–84, https://doi.org/10.20435/tellus.v17i33.448.
13 Tonico Benites, "Trajetória de Luta Árdua Da Articulação Das Lideranças Guarani E Kaiowá Para Recuperar Os Seus Territórios Tradicionais Tekoha Guasu", *Revista de Antropologia da UFSCar* 4, no. 2 (1 December 2012): 167, https://doi.org/10.52426/rau.v4i2.83.

The Construction of Colonial Subjectivities

The conceptualisation of a Brazilian national identity has always been framed to reproduce modern/colonial thinking. One of the pillars of this particular form of rationality - which has self-determined itself as a reference, as the 'universal measure' - is separability[14]. This reflects the intentional manufacture of colonial subjectivities by stimulating a logic of exclusion and the annihilation of diversity within the country's existing subjectivities.

This separability aims at the divisibility of this plurality of ways of living, thinking, and being for the sake of a homogeneous understanding of the nation. In this sense, those who did not conform to this label of colonial subjectivity were treated as outsiders in Brazilian society, as happened with the Guarani indigenous people.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa challenges the construction of hierarchies that defends universalising principles based on this European rationality while defining all other subjectivities as "irrational"[15]. Suppose there has been a constant in the colonisation process in Brazil until today. In that case, it is that, historically, those present in the territories desired by the coloniser have always been ideologically objectified with the purpose of control and domination over their bodies and lands.

One example was the creation of FUNAI, the National Indian Foundation, a government body developed by the dictatorial regime (Law No. 5371, 5 December 1967) to adjust policies towards indigenous peoples to the State's modernisation doctrine[16]. The then-president of FUNAI followed the dictates of the corporate-military regime by disregarding the existence of indigenous lands within the borderland strip in western Paraná state, which substantially affected the lives of the Guarani people. From this, any territory occupied by

[14] Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt [A Dívida Impagável]* (Sternberg Press, 2019).
[15] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 59.
[16] Clovis Brighetti and Rosângela Daia, "Encobrimento Indígena No Processo De Colonização Do Oeste Do Paraná", *Revista SURES* 1, no. 9 (16 February 2017): 116, https://revistas.unila.edu.br/sures/article/view/650.

these people was to be emptied or invaded to implement border control and surveillance posts, which led to the systematic massacre of the Guarani communities.

Similarly, under the military rule, 'Indigenous Posts' were created. They are administrative units governed by other indigenous communities with whom the government had previously reached an agreement in exchange for political support. Because of this, the Guarani always refused to remain within these confined boundaries, thus facing serious conflicts with government officials, who wanted to transfer the Guarani from the border areas to these spaces known as 'reserves', conceptualised as the places to which indigenous peoples "belonged"[17].

The creation of these spaces reproduced the same colonial logic of confinement and control using territorial fragmentation as a necropolitical practice[18], that is, to determine who could live and who should die. In this sense, to justify the offensives of the Brazilian dictatorial State against indigenous peoples, an imaginary of inferiority was reinforced over them - a notorious expression of the coloniality of power.

By constructing this ontological boundary between indigenous peoples and other Brazilian citizens, the government sought to legitimise these populations' incapacity to enjoy their rights as guaranteed in the Brazilian legal system (Law 6001/73). Segregating measures, such as creating reserves and not recognising lands previously occupied by the Guarani, define "the deserving from the undeserving"[19]. This occurs by feeding a national imaginary based on racist and objectifying notions, such as the idea that indigenous peoples should remain isolated from the rest of the population (for example, without access to national public services) or be integrated into a continuous movement of indigenous cultural annihilation.

In this way, entire communities have been reduced to colonial subjectivities, ontological beings without agency and with little value in society, who are therefore liable to be exterminated. This contempt for the (re)existence of peoples such as the Guarani thereby

[17] Clovis Antonio Brighenti, "Povos Indígenas Em Santa Catarina", *Palotti*, 2012, 37–66.
[18] J.-A. Mbembé, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (25 March 2003): 27.
[19] Li, "After Development", 1254.

reveals the lethal intimacy[20] between the legal apparatuses of the Brazilian State with the economic forces that have historically concentrated land, power, and income in the country at the expense of the death and exploitation of indigenous lands and bodies.

The Guarani Cosmological Resistance

Amid this encounter marked by multiple forms of violence, there was still room to articulate resistance. According to Vicente Cretton Pereira, an anthropologist recognised for his extensive ethnographic work on the Guarani people, these communities ended up incorporating the impacts of colonisation into their ancestral knowledge[21].

Rescuing the solid spiritual component of Guarani cosmology, spiritual leaders encouraged migrations towards what they called the 'Land Without Evil' (*Yvy Marae*, in Guarani). In this promised land, they would finally be free from the oppression of the colonisers who had once taken over their land, finding an ideal place to satisfy all their desires. By the Guarani narrative, this realisation would be achievable through migratory movement eastwards, to overseas, where *Yvy Marae* could be found[22].

Once again, Benites' work here was pivotal in enabling me to delve deeply into Guarani cosmology and grasp its vivid vocabulary. *Tekoha*, in Guarani, means a territorial space with several shared areas that functions as a stage for inter-communal relations where they can carry out their livelihood[23].

As Benites describes, the *Tekoha Guasu* (*guasu* meaning large/vast) is the composition of hundreds of communities interconnected by crossing points and kinship networks that allow a constant movement of people and other flows as exchanges of natural goods between the families occupying the region. In this sense, migration became part of the

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[20] Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt [A Dívida Impagável]*.

[21] Vicente Cretton Pereira, "Tekoa Hae Tetã: Lugar E Modo De Ser Guarani Mbya no Estado do Rio de Janeiro" (Dissertation, Brasil, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 2010), http:/ www.dominiopublico.gov.br/pesquisa/DetalheObraForm.do?select_action=&co_obra=179981.

[22] Eduardo de Almeida Navarro, "Terra Sem Mal, O Paraiso Tupi-Guarani", *Cultura Vozes* 89, no. 2 (1995): 66.

[23] Benites, "Trajetória de Luta Árdua Da Articulação Das Lideranças Guarani E Kaiowá Para Recuperar Os Seus Territórios Tradicionais Tekoha Guasu", 166.

Guarani cosmology expressed by these flows as strategies for territorialisation and occupation of that vast area.

It is important to note that Guarani people are part of the Tupi linguistic family, but they designate themselves differently according to the region. Their ontological belonging[24] is guaranteed by preserving their collective memory around their territory, a vast area that used to integrate parts of Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay.

Usually, the displacement in the direction of *Yvy Marae* is done in small groups of large families, about 30 people, as was the case of a Guarani *Mbya* community that moved from eastern Paraguay and northeastern Argentina, crossing southern Brazilian states until it reached the coast of São Paulo, in the southeastern part of the country[25]. This was the starting point for the spread of the Guarani people throughout Brazil, mainly along the shores of rivers, lagoons, and the coast. However, until the mid-1930s, the largest Guarani families remained autonomously in their *Tekoha*, as some members began to negotiate their permanence in exchange for their labour in the yerba mate fields.

From the 1950s and 1960s, a new and even more violent period of Guarani dispossession began in Brazil. The government started to expand its control over indigenous territories, opening up the regions to create large private ranches. Areas in which the Guarani had a massive presence were recorded on maps of the time as ‘depopulated lands’, with the precise purpose of disseminating "depopulation" information about these areas[26].

Hence, occupation/colonisation policies were implemented to occupy these regions and promote the "nationalisation" of these territories in the name of "development"[27]. As the anthropologist Kimiye Tommasino analysed, all the state policies during this period

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[24] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 4.
[25] Egon Schaden, “Aspectos Fundamentais da Cultura Guaraní”, *Editora Pedagógica e Universitária (EDUSP)*, 1974, 5.
[26]Clovis Brighetti and Rosângela Daia, “Encobrimento indígena no processo de colonização do oeste do Paraná”, *Revista SURES* 1, no. 9 (16 February 2017): 120, https://revistas.unila.edu.br/sures/article/view/650.
[27] Miriam H. Zaar, “A Migração Rural No Oeste Paranaense: A Trajetória Dos Brasiguaios”, 2001, 25, http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/sn-94-88.htm.

suggested that the Guarani population should no longer be considered to have a right to their originally occupied lands. This was justified by the idea that they were 'integrated'; either they were in a final phase of acculturation, or their culture had already disappeared.

No longer considered "obstacles to progress"[28], those who were 'integrated' were actually homogenised as 'national workers' - achieving the government's main objective for indigenous peoples. At no point were the Guarani included in any decision-making process. With the colonial subjectivity imposed upon them, they were seen only as groups with ‘too much land’, land that must be taken and made productive, under the name of modern[/ colonial] capitalist development.

In Clovis Birghetti's historical-ethnographic mapping work on the Guarani, he shows that this one-way discourse of 'progress' and 'modernisation' has denied the Guarani their fundamental rights from the very beginning. However, the doctrine of development reached devastating proportions with the coup d'état that implemented a business-military regime in the country. From the 1970s, the most extensive process of dispossession of the *Tekohas* began in favour of their conversion into private lands. Major development projects also began to occur during this period, such as construction of the Binational Itaipu hydroelectric power plant.

The intention to echo governmental power with giant installations was also done to reaffirm that the Guarani no longer needed their own land but required cultural integration into the 'modern world'. Initiatives such as these denied their physical and cosmological presence with very violent practices that came to be carried out by the National Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), a federal autarchy to manage rural areas formed from a decree (no. 1110, 1970) also under military command:

> They showed up like that, setting fire to the house. And then they didn't want to leave, then they came and said they had to set fire to it

[28] Kimiye Tommasino, “Relatório de Identificação e Delimitação da Terra Indígena Guarani de Araça’í (volume I - laudo antropológico)”, 11, https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-6524.43826.

> (...) No explanation as to why we had to leave, nothing about that. It was only INCRA; there was no police.[29]

As a result, the Guarani unleashed an enormous migratory movement in search of safer spaces. Their routes were many and very similar to those taken in the search for *Yvy Marae*, with people now moving mainly to Paraguay and the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, in central-eastern Brazil.

As stated, land dispossession has a different meaning for indigenous peoples, as their *Tekoha* are spaces of belonging and of recognition of their traditions, values, and practices and thus are the vital basis for their existence[30]. In this sense, the work of Tania Murray Li is very allusive to analyse the movements of the Guarani peoples as territorialisation strategies, as she states that "the dispossessed (...) the marginalised do not simply disappear" but often resort to migration to find better ways to "make their presence felt, exert influence and make demands"[31].

The Guarani's Territorial Strategies For Disruption

Forced displacement from their lands has been the State's modus operandi for dealing with the Guarani, who today demand the demarcation of their *Tekohas* as a strategy to guarantee better living conditions to sustain their ancestral cosmology and livelihoods. This happened due to a paradigm shift promoted in the mid-1980s by spiritual leader D. Maria Tataxi, a resident of the São Vicente community in São Paulo, calling for the urgency of fighting for their ancestral lands:

> It is necessary to be firm, to stay longer, to live years and years in the same place. (...) The white men take over the land as if they owned it. [And we] have to live,

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[29] Interview with Guarani Indigenous Leader João Centurião from Tekoha Ocoy-Jakutinga held in 1990. In: Brighetti and Daia, "Encobrimento Indígena No Processo De Colonização Do Oeste Do Paraná".
[30] Cíntia Pires Inéia, "Conflito, Território E Identidade: O Caso Dos Indígenas Guarani de Guaíra/PR", *VII Congresso Brasileiro de Geógrafos*, 2014, 7.
[31] Tania Murray Li, "After Development: Surplus Population and the Politics of Entitlement", *Development and Change* 48, no. 6 (2017): 1253, https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12344.

> build a community and live in harmony with nature because that is what *Ñhanderu* showed us.[32]

Her powerful speech illustrates how the Guarani began to understand that, to reaffirm and strengthen their cosmology, they would need to renew it so that it could sustain itself throughout the new times. Since then, more than 20 territories have been repossessed by the Guarani-Kaiowá, and their spiritual and political leaders have led all the repossessions[33].

In doing so, they are also concerned with drafting documents and petitions to the government and the federal courts demanding further demarcation of their *Tekohas* that were once taken from them. With this, they have developed an effective strategy to pressure the federal government, calling for federal hearings in Brasilia, the country's capital. In this way, it was possible to share their cosmology with other Brazilian citizens, explaining their spiritual connection to the lands and their indispensability for maintaining the Guarani communities and their future generations.

However, current development initiatives led by the Brazilian State since 2019 have intentionally imposed physical, cognitive, and symbolic borders by reproducing notions of colonial subjectivities about indigenous peoples. Added to their labelling as incapable, the Brazilian government has increasingly reinforced the dictatorial legacy of authoritarian practices of confinement outside the lands claimed by these groups and/or practices of extermination.

Since his election campaign, Brazil's current president, Jair Bolsonaro, had promoted an anti-indigenous discourse. He declared several times that under his government, not even one centimetre of indigenous lands would be demarcated - directly contradicting their constitutional rights guaranteed in the 1988 Constitution. In reaction to this, a Guarani

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[32] Vicente Cretton Pereira, "Tekoa Hae Tetã: Lugar E Modo De Ser Guarani Mbya no Estado do Rio de Janeiro", 2010, 31.
[33] Tonico Benites, "Trajetória de Luta Árdua Da Articulação Das Lideranças Guarani e Kaiowá Para Recuperar Os Seus Territórios Tradicionais Tekoha Guasu", *Revista de Antropologia da UFSCar* 4, no. 2 (1 December 2012): 172, https://doi.org/10.52426/rau.v4i2.83.

Indigenous Commission was formed, and they managed to represent a motion against Provisional Measure (MP) No. 886/2019 at the Federal Public Ministry.

That MP, signed on Bolsonaro's first day in office, transferred the responsibility for demarcating indigenous lands from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Agriculture, the latter led by the agribusiness lobby. Despite this attempt to transfer that control to the hands of those who historically supported its dispossession and exploitation, the Guarani Indigenous Commission (with the support of other indigenous groups) managed to reverse this retrograde step, returning the discretionary power of demarcation to the Ministry of Justice.

In this sense, the current government has been the perfect manifestation of the colonial and dictatorial legacies reproducing and imposing colonial subjectivities on indigenous peoples. Despite that, the Guarani resistance strategies, both in migratory movements and in the repossession of territories, contribute significantly to disrupting these legacies embedded to this day in Brazilian politics.

As a way of demanding and liberating their *Tekohas* from exploitative greed, these direct actions challenge private property, and the intimate relations of the Capital with the State materialised in the artificial design of borders. Thus, the Guarani people transgress these limits imposed by modern/colonial logic by "re-elaborating alternative subaltern territorialities"[34]. Therefore, the proliferation of repossession camps, occupations, and ethnopolitical mobilisations of national reach are practices of liberation and disruption of colonial subjectivities and their multiple forms of violence.

Final Considerations

After facing years of violent attacks since the colonial period, the Guarani today have strengthened their movements to return to and take back their *Tekohas*. This act symbolises a

[34] Marcos Mondardo, "Territórios de Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais: Estado de Exceção, Governo Bio/Necropolítico e Retomadas de Tekoha"', *Horizontes* 37 (20 June 2019): 17, https://doi.org/10.24933/horizontes.v37i0.769.

cosmological re-adaptation that is nothing more than resistance practices against the destructive logic of so-called 'development'.

For centuries, Guarani communities have been forced to migrate to escape attacks by the State and large landowners interested in profiting from exploiting their bodies and lands. Today, it is estimated that there are at least 40 Guarani indigenous camps in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul alone, illustrating their strategy and concrete practice of territorial struggle for the return to their *Tekohas*. These communities are mainly established on the edges of railway tracks or in isolated areas.

Since 1980, hundreds of indigenous leaders have suffered threats to their lives, and dozens have been assassinated trying to defend their *Tekohas*. However, they continue in this movement of struggle and return to reconnect with their lands. With this, it can be said that the promised 'progress' has been re-signified by the Guarani in the reformulation of their own cosmology, based on a harmony that comes not from economic wealth but from the ancestral spiritual connection with their *Tekohas*.

With this article, I aimed to illustrate how demarcations of physical, epistemic, or legislative boundaries in Brazil are historically normalised and operationalised by the modern/colonial racist notion of the coloniality of power. Furthermore, this research also portrays the Guarani resistance movements as alternative strategies of territorialisation and disruption, resulting in disruption of the colonial subjectivities imposed on these peoples.

This other way of relating to the land, outside the logic of separability based on the extermination of the 'other' and contempt for diversity, has increasingly gained political strength as an authentic practice of resistance. When we understand territoriality from the perspective of other cosmologies that no longer reproduce modern/colonial thinking, it opens up space for the realisation of another possible world that is already under construction.

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Edward Colston, Nostalgia and Resistance: How Does Britain (Mis)remember and (Re)imagine Colonialism?

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Abstract

The toppling of the Edward Colston statue by Black Lives Matter protestors in Bristol became one of the defining moments of the British summer of 2020. The removal of the statue reignited conversations around how Britain conceptualises colonialism and empire today. This paper seeks to evaluate and contextualise these conversations and argues that the toppling of the statue was an act of anti-colonial theatricality that disrupted Britain's official narratives of post-colonial bliss. Using a critical, postcolonial framework, this paper seeks to explore what public memory of Edward Colston reveals about Britain's relationship with colonialism, and what counter-memory can do to resist (mis)remembrance and (re)imagining of colonialism, past and present.

KEYWORDS Edward Colston, Bristol, postcolonialism, resistance, counter-memory, statues, public memory

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Introduction

In the centre of Bristol on 7 June 2020, Black Lives Matter protestors pulled down a statue of Edward Colston, an active participant in the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century.[1] The incident was covered widely in popular media, with dramatic footage of the statue being toppled and thrown into the Pero harbour circulating worldwide. It was far from the first collective cry for the removal of a statue commemorating a colonial figure;[2] however, the toppling of Colston somewhat eclipsed the reach of campaigns such as the student-led 'Rhodes Must Fall'[3] movement, in part because of the theatricality and poetic justice of the statue being tossed into a "watery grave" in Marenka Thompson-Odlum's words,[4] as was the fate of many Africans during the perilous transatlantic journeys to which Colston actively contributed.[5] In Britain, the toppling and its aftermath reignited national discourse about public memory of empire and colonialism. References to a colonial 'legacy' and 'past' abounded in discussions after the incident,[6] revealing a national proclivity for placing colonialism and its realities firmly in a time long-since past. This grammar of legacy is informed by a spatial delineation between metropole and colony that dominated understanding of colonialism throughout the lifespan of the British Empire[7]—a line of thinking that has

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[1] Mark Steeds and Roger Ball, *From Wulfstan to Colston: Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol* (Bristol Radical History Group, 2020); Kenneth Morgan, "Edward Colston and Bristol", 1999, The Bristol Branch of the Historical Association Local History Pamphlets.

[2] Johannes Schulz, "Must Rhodes Fall? The Significance of Commemoration in the Struggle for Relations of Respect", *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2019): 166–86; Nick Pinto, "In Dishonor of Columbus Day, Protesters Shroud Obscenely Racist Statue at AMNH", *The Village Voice*, 2016; Timothy Kubal, *Cultural Movements and Collective Memory: Christopher Columbus and the Rewriting of the National Origin Myth* (Springer, 2008).

[3] Brian Kwoba, Roseanne Chantiluke, and Athinangamso Nkopo, *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire* (Zed Books Ltd., 2018).

[4] "What Do We Do with the UK's Symbols of Slavery?", *BBC News* (UK, 11 June 2020), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-52995528.

[5] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 34–38.

[6] "Racism and Statues: How the Toxic Legacy of Empire Still Affects Us", *BBC News*, 6 July 2020, UK, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-53305729.

[7] Keith Robbins, "Core and Periphery in Modern British History", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 70, 1985, 275–97; Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire 1", *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 124–41.

since been extensively problematised.[8] The reality, of course, was and is much more complex. The "imagined communities"[9] of the (neo-)metropoles,[10] to borrow Joe Turner's phrase, are entangled in an often invisible web of power and subjection that has only become more complex in the global, cosmopolitan, capitalist system.[11] Modern Britain is no exception. This paper argues that the felling of the Edward Colston statue exposed and disrupted the romanticised public memory of empire and colonialism in Bristol, reinforcing and reviving Bristolian resistance to official narratives of postcolonial bliss. Two key questions structure the argument of this paper: 'What does the Edward Colston statue reveal about British imagination of empire and colonialism?' and 'Why is the felling of the Colston statue so significant?' To answer the first, the paper begins with a brief theoretical survey of the ways in which official historiographies and narratives are constituted by power relations and reified through state-sanctioned objects, institutions, and activities. The focus then shifts to Bristol and Edward Colston. I discuss Bristolian public memory, colonial nostalgia, and haunting after the "post-colonial cut"[12] in (neo-)metropolitan Britain. This lays the theoretical and contextual foundation for a postcolonial analysis of the felling of the Colston statue. Applying the thinking of Tiffany Lethabo King, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault, this paper argues that the public vandalism and removal of the Edward Colston statue was an example of "anti-colonial theatricality",[13] "counter-memory",[14] and "collective

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[8] Michael Steed, "The Core—Periphery Dimension of British Politics", *Political Geography Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1986): S91–103; E. Spencer Wellhofer, "Core and Periphery: Territorial Dimensions in Politics", *Urban Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989): 340–55; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 1st ed., Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (University of California Press, 1997), 1–56.

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso books, 2006).

[10] Joe Turner, "Internal Colonisation: The Intimate Circulations of Empire, Race and Liberal Government", *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 4 (1 December 2018): 765–90.

[11] Stoler and Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", 19–20; Barnor Hesse, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (Zed Books, 2000).

[12] James Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain* (Pluto Press, 2020), 1.

[13] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 41.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95.

catharsis",[15] an act of resistance against the officially denied "living present"[16] of colonialism and conquest. This analysis thinks with the wider literature relating to contemporary postcolonial resistance and offers a yet unexplored analysis of the significance of the felling of the Colston statue.[17]

What does the Edward Colston statue reveal about British imagination of empire and colonialism?

What and how societies officially remember, imagine, and reimagine the past is steeped in and constituted by power relations.[18] These official historiographies and narratives are entangled in a power-knowledge nexus and are permeated through state-sanctioned institutions and social activities, such as the heritage industry,[19] education,[20] and science.[21] In the Foucauldian power-knowledge nexus, the ways in which history is understood, taught, and produced is constituted by pervasive meta-power, which sets the parameters for acceptable forms of knowledge and defines what is 'true'.[22] Collective recollection of this 'truth' is also often physically embodied in what Lesley Lekko calls

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[15] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (Pluto Press, 2008), 112.

[16] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[17] Ann Mumford, "Edward Colston And the Coronavirus: A Reflection on Narratives of Taxation in Taxing Times", *King's Law Journal* 32, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 157–67; Saima Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston: Histories of Slavery, Memory, and Black Globality", *Women's History Review* 29, no. 7 (9 November 2020): 1218–25; Lara Choksey, "Colston Falling", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24 November 2020; Christine Yeats, "Should They Stay or Should They Go?", *Public History Review* 28 (22 June 2021): 152–56.

[18] Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory", *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (1 April 2016): 125–42.

[19] Lesley Lekko, "African Space Magicians", in *...And Other Such Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 66–67.

[20] Bruce Van Sledright, "Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge, and School History Education", *Review of Research in Education* 32 (2008): 109–46.

[21] Ieva Zake, "The Construction of National(Ist) Subject: Applying the Ideas of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault to Nationalism", *Social Thought & Research* 25, no. 1/2 (2002): 240–41.

[22] Jonathan Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: An Overview of Theories of Power since Lukes and Their Application to Development* (Brighton: Participation Group, Institute of Development Studies, 2003), 1–3.

"conventional architectural expressions of remembrance",[23] such as statues. These expressions, however, are as much a question of forgetting and reimagining as they are of remembrance and commemoration. In *The Empire at Home,* James Trafford explores how, after the end of formal empire, Britain embraced the title of a "post-colonial nation" through a "spatio-temporal cut from Empire, which disavowed the violence in the world that it had terraformed".[24] For this "post-colonial cut" to be embraced as a national truth, it is important to make visual this spatial and temporal separation from empire, colonialism, and various projects of conquest. Statues and monuments are crucial here.

The Edward Colston statue, one of many architectural nods to the Bristolian,[25] was erected in 1895 during the 'Pax Britannica' period. This period was the height of British global hegemony,[26] but importantly, it occurred after the abolition of chattel slavery from which Colston acquired the bulk of his wealth. British patriotism and supremacy was the order of the day in the late 19th century, but the statue remained in place until 2020, long after the mass migration of British colonial subjects from (sometimes former) colonies to fill labour shortages in the mid-20th century.[27] During this time, the 'colony' began to be reproduced at 'home' through projects of exclusion, domestic neocolonialism,[28] and internal colonisation.[29] As Ambalavaner Sivanandan points out, the capitalistic, colonial tenet of "labour without overheads"[30] from

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[23] Lekko, "African Space Magicians", 63.

[24] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 1.

[25] Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston", 1219.

[26] Douglas Johnston and W. Michael Reisman, *The Historical Foundations of World Order: The Tower and the Arena* (BRILL, 2007), 508–10; William Roger Louis, Alaine M. Low, and Andrew Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 332.

[27] Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

[28] Ambalavaner Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", *Race & Class* 17, no. 4 (1976): 347–68.

[29] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*.

[30] Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", 350.

fungible,[31] colonised bodies was reproduced in the metropole through "the forced concentration of immigrants in the deprived and decaying areas of the big cities";[32] nationality laws that necessarily distinguished the alien immigrant from the White, British citizen[33]; and the institutionalisation of discrimination through laws such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act.[34] In 2020, several generations after this mass migration, resistance to these projects of internal colonisation, to which the Colston statue contributes, is still very present.

The statue bears the inscription, "erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city".[35] Using the epithets "virtuous" and "wise" to describe Colston is in direct contrast to the lived realities of subaltern subjects who were affected by the brutality of the Royal African Company (RAC), of which Colston was a shareholder and eventually Deputy Governor.[36] This kind of romanticist and revisionist description is a hallmark of the official narrative of the "post-colonial cut", an idealisation of a public memory and nostalgia for a "Bristol that never was"[37] and, on a larger scale, a 'Great' Britain that never was. Bristolian resistance to this official narrative of the city has been documented for over a century.[38] In 1920, clergyman Henry Wilkins condemned the "cult of Colston" and noted his links with the

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[31] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1997); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81.

[32] Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", 350.

[33] Ibid., 353.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Nasar, 1219–21.

[36] Ibid., 1219; Steeds and Ball, *From Wulfstan to Colston: Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol*.

[37] Samuel J. Richards, "Historical Revision in Church: Re-Examining the "Bristol Saint" Edward Colston", *Anglican and Episcopal History* 89, no. 3 (2020): 243.

[38] Bristol Radical History Group, "Edward Colston: A Century of Dissent and Protest", Bristol Radical History Group, 2 June 2021, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-a-century-of-dissent-and-protest/; Timothy Ryback, "Black Lives Matter: Toppling Colston - Vandalism or Vindication?", International Bar Association, 24 June 2020, https://www.ibanet.org/article/BD33E13D-A4D8-4F57-A7F6-026D6AF54130.

RAC.[39] Similarly, published in 1973, Derek Robinson's *A Shocking History of Bristol* brought Colston's chequered past into the public eye, reigniting debates about his celebrity status.[40] 'Slave Trader' was scrawled onto the statue in 1998, resulting in national news coverage,[41] and the name of the city's most famous concert venue (formerly called 'Colston Hall') has been protested for decades.[42] Though the venue had been in the process of being renamed since 2017, it was only after the felling of the statue that its name was officially changed.[43]

Colston's officially celebrated posthumous identity is spatially bound to Bristol as a metropolitan city—he has been called the "Bristol Saint"[44] and a son of the city. However, his escapades, and certainly those of the RAC, were rooted in Africa and the Americas, a fact which is not acknowledged on the monument. This spatial and conceptual separation of the colony and the metropole, which constitutes a nationalist imagining of the British Empire, was the precursor to a transition from direct rule to neo-colonialism, commonwealth, and internal colonialism, optimistically and neatly contained within the phrase 'post-colonialism'.[45] It is important to recognise the debates around the distinction between postcolonialism as a theoretical approach and post-colonialism as a temporal phenomenon, predicated on the binary division between the time of colonialism and the time after colonialism. Anne McClintock perhaps most famously criticised the overoptimistic, abstract, and ahistorical uses of 'post-

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[39] Henry J. Wilkins, *Edward Colston (1636-1721 A.D.): A Chronological Account of His Life and Work Together with an Account of the Colston Societies and Memorials in Bristol* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1920).

[40] Derek Robinson, *A Shocking History of Bristol* (London: Abson Books, 1973).

[41] Emma Wilkins, "Graffiti Attack Revives Bristol Slavery Row", *The Times*, 29 January 1998.

[42] Steven Morris, "Bristol's Colston Hall Renamed after Decades of Protests", *the Guardian*, 23 September 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/bristols-colston-hall-renamed-in-wake-of-black-lives-matter-protests.

[43] Steven Morris, "Bristol's Colston Hall to Drop Name of Slave Trader after Protests", *the Guardian*, 26 April 2017, http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/26/bristol-colston-hall-to-drop-name-of-slave-trader-after-protests.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 59–106.

colonialism' to denote a common past and condition.[46] In this paper, I follow the lead of Ashcroft et al.[47] in acknowledging the heterogenous and nuanced applications of the term. I use the hyphenated form 'post-colonialism' to denote an idea of posteriority and progress and 'postcolonialism' to reference a more nuanced, resistance-centred theoretical approach.

The way that Colston is (mis)remembered in official narratives is a part of Britain's 'public memory'. Bodnar defines public memory as "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and, by implication, its future", stressing that public memory is fundamentally a question of "the structure of power in society".[48] This idea of shaping understanding of the future and the contemporary relevance of public memory of colonialism in Britain was highlighted during the 2016 Brexit referendum.[49] Trafford notes that during the 'Vote Leave' campaign, Britain's "'post-colonial melancholia' for its lost colonies"[50] was brought to a head. The nationalist Brexit discourse, exemplified by the slogan 'Vote leave, take back control',[51] showed that despite concerted attempts to cultivate a culture of nostalgic romanticism, "Britain is necessarily stuck within the stuttering time-loops of the post-colonial cut".[52] Brexit stoked an old but smouldering fire. The felling of the Colston statue, which happened towards the end of the turbulent Brexit process, reignited post-colonial anxieties and discomfiture within the British imagination. This notion of taking back control which has been lost relates to a deep longing for the 'good

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[46] Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 84–98.

[47] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2013), 168–73.

[48] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 15.

[49] Kerem Nisancioglu, "Racial Sovereignty", *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. S1 (1 September 2020): 55–58.

[50] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 8.

[51] Susan K Schmidt, "An Institutional Mismatch: Why 'Taking Back Control' Proved so Appealing", *LSE BREXIT* (blog), 7 May 2020, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/05/07/an-institutional-mismatch-why-taking-back-control-proved-so-appealing/.

[52] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 184.

old days', or what Paul Gilroy calls "fantasies of return to the imaginary homogeneity of past whiteness and the restoration of Britain's imperial status".[53] That is to say, British public memory constantly tries to recapture and reimagine a "past not yet past",[54] a past of imagined simplicity that haunts the present. This imagined simplicity is often conceptualised as a time of cultural and ethnic homogeneity[55] when the public was not accosted with 'wokeness', BLM, athletes taking the knee, and 'political correctness gone mad'. In using 'haunt' here, I evoke the engagement of Black studies scholars with Jacques Derrida's 'hauntology'—the ghost-like return of the past in the present [56]. As Diana Taylor puts it, pervasive narratives of conquest and control "haunt the present" and produce publicly acceptable memories. Taylor refers specifically to the Americas here; however, this idea of haunting certainly applies to the British context generally and to Bristol specifically. While the looming figure of Colston haunted some, it quietly comforted others.

Why is the felling of the Colston statue so significant?

In *The Black Shoals,* Tiffany Lethabo King problematises the official narratives and public memory of settler colonialism in the United States. Through an analysis of a Christopher Columbus statue, defaced and tagged by protestors in Boston, she conceptualises conquest as a "living present"[57] that is constantly repeated, realised, and resisted. She extends Patrick Wolfe's assertation that conquest and invasion is "a structure not an event"[58], stating that conquest and settler colonial violence is "a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to

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[53] Paul Gilroy, "A London Sumting Dis...", *AA Files*, no. 49 (2003): 7.

[54] Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 13.

[55] Gilroy, "A London Sumting Dis...", 7.

[56] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 1994).

[57] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[58] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388.

moment."[59] I believe the same can be said of the various other projects of the British Empire. King calls the defacing of the Columbus statue "anti-colonial theatricality"[60], a performance that violently, if momentarily, interrupts narratives that "disavow and 'unknow' the ongoing violence of conquest".[61] I contend that the collective performance of removing the Colston statue and throwing it into the harbour where slave ships once moored[62] constitutes anti-colonial theatricality that resists British romanticism and colonial nostalgia. Those who removed the Edward Colston statue showed that Bristol, a city whose wealth is directly linked to the transatlantic slave trade[63], can be a site of resistance rather than quiet complicity.

In Foucauldian terms, this anti-colonial theatricality of vandalising and removing the Colston statue is a kind of 'counter-memory',[64] which "looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives" and "forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past".[65] When it comes to colonialism, imperialism, and conquest, the dominant narrative in Bristol, and Britain as a whole, is cloaked in romanticism and revisionism, a narrative that has stubbornly persisted in the face of decades of criticism. The felling did not come out of the blue, nor is it the first anti-colonial theatrical performance in Bristol, but it was one of the loudest rebuttals yet to the drone of colonial romanticism. As a theatrical performance, the removal and vandalism of the statue literally forces this public memory into view and into question. The importance and power of performance in counter-memory and

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[59] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[60] Ibid., 41.

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston", 1218.

[63] Christine Chivallon, "Bristol and the Eruption of Memory: Making the Slave-Trading Past Visible", *Social & Cultural Geography* 2, no. 3 (2001): 347–63; Madge Dresser, "Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol", *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 223–46.

[64] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Cornell University Press, 1980).

[65] George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 213.

identity construction has previously been discussed.[66] However, Buffington and Waldner[67] have cautioned that the physical removal of monuments can ironically lead to a form of harmful counter-revisionism that ultimately produces an equally ahistorical and romanticised counter-narrative. This has also been argued in the British press after a sculpture of Black Lives Matter protestor Jen Reid was erected (and quickly removed) in place of the Colston statue.[68] However, I argue that in this case, the physicality of the vandalism and toppling was a direct and much-needed refusal of the spatio-temporal cut narrative that pervades in British post-colonialism. I contend that anti-colonial theatricality is not the same as romanticism. Statues are not "merely symbolic" and nor is the act of tearing them down; indeed, as Rahul Rao notes, the felling of statues has been "emblematic of liberation" for Anglo-American imperialism as well as postcolonial resistance.[69] In direct response to what the Home Office calls "widespread upset about the damage and desecration of memorials with a recent spate over the summer of 2020",[70] a new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill was introduced. Section 46 in particular,[71] which has increased the maximum penalty for criminal damage of less than £5,000 to a memorial from 3 months' to 10 years' imprisonment, highlights the tangible value that statues and monuments have in the eyes of the carceral British state.

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[66] Zane Radzobe, "Performance as Counter-Memory: Latvian Theatre Makers' Reflections on National History", *Nordic Theatre Studies* 31, no. 1 (2019): 92–107.

[67] Melanie L Buffington and Erin Waldner, "Human Rights, Collective Memory, and Counter Memory: Unpacking the Meaning of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia", *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*, 2011, 92–108.

[68] "Edward Colston Statue Replaced by Sculpture of Black Lives Matter Protester Jen Reid", *the Guardian*, 15 July 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/15/edward-colston-statue-replaced-by-sculpture-of-black-lives-matter-protester.

[69] Rahul Rao, "On Statues", *The Disorder Of Things* (blog), 2 April 2016, https://thedisorderofthings.com/2016/04/02/on-statues/.

[70] Home Office, "Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Criminal Damage to Memorials Factsheet", Home Office Website, 13 May 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-criminal-damage-to-memorials-factsheet.

[71] Home Office, "Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Criminal Damage to Memorials", Pub. L. No. 268, § 46 (2021).

It is also important to note the collectivity of the removal of the statue. Such collaboration is a way of reclaiming power through "collective catharsis", which Fanon describes as "a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the forms of aggression can be released."[72] For Fanon, such catharsis or cleansing cannot happen without violence—indeed, he contends that violence is a "cleansing force"[73] insofar as it allows the native to reclaim and restore their identity. Of course, neo-metropolitan Bristol is very different to Algeria under violent colonial rule, where Fanon writes from. The violence that Fanon describes is also not the same as the violence enacted by the Black Lives Matters protestors (though it is important to note that the vandalism did have direct carceral consequences, as four people were charged with criminal damage under the new Crime Bill).[74] However, the principal of "collective catharsis" is still useful when thinking about responses and resistance to a system that is "always changing and in flux".[75] Of course, removing a statue in and of itself is not decolonial. However, as Bristol City Poet Vanessa Kisuule has noted, the "blissful catharsis"[76] of the removal of a statue whose presence has been questioned for decades should not be quickly dismissed. In this new phase of hegemonic rule, there is a parallel to be drawn between the necessity of violence for decolonisation as Fanon describes it and also for anti-colonial resistance as King sees it. Whether in colonial Algeria, the settler colonial United States, or neocolonial Britain, resistance to colonialism and its many effects must involve collaboration and disruption.

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[72] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 145.

[73] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 94.

[74] "Edward Colston Statue: Four Charged with Criminal Damage", *BBC News*, 9 December 2020, Bristol, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-55248263.

[75] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 49.

[76] Vanessa Kisuule, "Bristol City Poet Vanessa Kisuule: 'Edward Colston Does Not Represent Us'", Blog, *NME* (blog), 12 June 2020, https://www.nme.com/features/vanessa-kisuule-edward-colston-statue-bristol-2686256.

Conclusion

The dominant narrative of a spatio-temporal cut at the end of formal empire has led to a public reimagining of the violent realities of colonialism and its effects in Britain today. With the felling of the Colston statue, official narratives of (mis)remembrance have been countered and resisted. This resistance is not new, but it has taken on a new life with the violent disruption of the city's most potent symbol of historical revisionism. Applying the thinking of King, I have argued that the toppling of the statue, similar to the vandalism of a Christopher Columbus statue in Boston, was an example of anti-colonial theatricality that disrupts the dominant narratives of colonial pastness. The performance constructed a counter-memory through collective catharsis. As Foucault shows,[77] the relationship between knowledge and power is one of entanglement and inseparability: what we 'know' about the past is bound to structures of power. The Black Lives Matter protestors in Bristol momentarily interrupted the dominant narrative upheld by structures of power in Britain by showing that colonialism is indeed a "living present". The visceral carceral reaction of the government to the felling of the Colston statue confirms that symbols of public memory are much more than decorative or commemorative. New laws introduced by Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick in January 2021 seek to safeguard "historic monuments at risk of removal" and "protect England's cultural and historic heritage"[78] from "woke militants who want to censor the past".[79] In this time of renewed neocolonial fervour, critical scholarship that engages with acts of resistance such as this is imperative. This essay is a small contribution to this important work.

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[77] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I.*

[78] Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Oliver Dowden, and Robert Jenrick, "New Legal Protection for England's Heritage", Press Release, GOV.UK, 17 January 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-legal-protection-for-england-s-heritage.

[79] Robert Jenrick, "We Will Save Britain's Statues from the Woke Militants Who Want to Censor Our Past", *The Telegraph*, 16 January 2021, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/01/16/will-save-britains-statues-woke-militants-want-censor-past/.

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Structuring Hierarchies: Archaeological and Museum Projects of the Government-General of Korea and its Colonial Legacy

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Abstract

Imperial Japan planned and executed a series of archaeological surveys, excavation projects and museum displays in Korea throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The cultural projects led by the Government-General of Korea, the chief administrator of the Japanese colonial government, carried out various tenets of global imperialism and coloniality. For instance, the colonial government used particular display methods to structure the hierarchical order of 'inferior' and 'superior' cultures and turned historical objects to materials for mere aesthetic appreciation or knowledge acquisition. In addition, Imperial Japan sought to justify its colonial governance over the Korean peninsula by using excavated and displayed objects as the historical basis for their claims. As such, Imperial Japan's excavation and museum projects were implemented as political apparatus that generated and circulated the colonial narrative. Such colonial legacy has exerted influences on the scholarship of and exhibitions on Korean art despite vigorous attempts to deconstruct the narrative and de-colonise museum practices. By examining images and documents provided by Japanese archaeologists and the Government-General of Korea, this

paper aims to interrogate the extent to which Imperial Japan devised cultural essentialism whilst suggesting a new perspective to mediate the exploitive practices in the present time.

KEYWORDS Government-General of Korea, colonial museum, colonial archaeology, Japanese imperialism, cultural essentialism, visual politics

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Lina Shinhwa Koo is an art and design historian who focuses on researching the material culture of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Korea in the historical context of the intercontinental exchange and the Japanese annexation of Korea. Implementing interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research methods, Koo is interested in research topics related to colonial visual politics and national identities in Korea traversing various mediums and genres. Koo previously worked as a Curatorial Assistant for Korean Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and Assistant Curator at DOOSAN Gallery New York. She received a BS in Art History and Museum Professions from the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York, and an MA in History of Art and Archaeology in East Asia from SOAS University of London. Koo is currently pursuing a PhD in History of Art and Design at the University of Brighton.

Throughout the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) in the Korean peninsula, Imperial Japan adapted strategies and policies from the European imperialist countries to seize new power and legitimise its colonial governance of Korea on the international stage. The Government-General of Korea, the chief administrator of the Japanese colonial government in Korea, executed a series of cultural projects, including archaeological surveys and museum construction. Such projects helped carry out various tenets of global imperialism and coloniality by directly and indirectly structuring the hierarchical order of 'inferior' and 'superior' cultures. It was around the year 2000 when Korean scholars, such as Choi Sukyeong, Mok Suhyeon and Jeon Kyeongsu, began to study colonial museum display and building as a comprehensive research topic and actively challenged the academic narratives and theoretical assumptions that were constructed upon the colonial government.[1] Since then, scholars of various fields have shed light on complex political meanings embedded in object display and museum practices of colonial Korea. Yet, the study of archaeological excavations, which were preliminary projects for such museum initiatives, has been mostly conducted separately, as shown from Yangjin Pak's thorough survey focused on the Japanese colonial archaeology in Korea.[2] Also, less attention has been given to exploring the impacts of such colonial practices and how to interpret those in the present time. To bridge this gap, this paper aims to study both archaeological and museum projects planned and executed by the Government-General of Korea during the colonial period to interrogate the mechanism of collecting, displaying, and cataloguing objects in colonial museums.

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[1] See Choi Sukyeong, "Joseonchongdokbu bakmulgwan-ui chulhyeon-gwa sikminjijeok gihoek" [The emergence of the Government-General Museum of Korea and colonial projects], *History and Discourse* 27 (September 1999): 93–125; Mok Suhyeon, "Iljeha Yiwangga bakmulgwan-ui sikminjijeok seonggyeok" [The colonial construct of the Yi Royal Family Museum during the Japanese occupation], *Korean Journal of Art History* 227 (September 2000): 81–104; Jeon Kyeongsu, "Hanguk bakmulgwan-ui sikminjuuijeok gyeongheom-gwa minjokjuuijeok silcheon mit segyejuuijeok jeonmang: talmaekrakhwa jemaekrakhwa, one-maekrakhwa" [Representing colonialism and nationalism in Korean museums], *Journal of Museum Studies* 3 (2000): 159–201.

[2] Yangjin Pak, "Japanese Colonial Archaeology in Korea and Its Legacy", in *Unmasking Ideology in Imperial and Colonial Archaeology: Vocabulary, Symbols, and Legacy*, edited by Bonnie Effros and Guolong Lai (Los Angeles: Costen Institute of Archaeology Press at UCLA, 2018), 403–426.

Even before Japan officially annexed Korea in 1910, its intervention in the political affairs of Korea had taken place since the late nineteenth century as part of Japan's vigorous aggression and ambition in the continent of Asia. From 1900 to 1910, faculty members and graduate students at Tokyo Imperial University had multiple trips to Korea with the aim of surveying historical sites and buildings. Yangjin Pak defines this period as the initial phase of Japanese colonial archaeology, which led to large-scale excavations of tombs and buildings from 1910 to 1915 that Pak then describes as the second phase.[3] During the second phase, Japanese scholars classified buildings, monuments, and tombs into different categories based on such criteria as 'worthy of preservation' or 'of historical value'. *Chosen koseki zufu* and *Koseki chosa hokoku*, the archaeological reports published by the Government-General and the Society for the Study of Korean Antiquities, indicate that the sites of the projects were primarily located in the northern part of the peninsula around Pyeongyang, the presumed area of Lelang Commandery of China in ancient times. Pak explains that the intent behind the geographical focus was to find objects that would be used to claim that Korea was once a colony of Han China as early as the second century BCE to justify Japan's colonial occupation of Korea.[4] Many historians in Korea today agree that it was the underlying intent of Japan to make such a claim, although there remain constant debates on the actual geographical history of Lelang Commandery.

Another perspective can be added to this point through the account of Fujita Ryosaku (1892–1960), who participated in major excavation projects in Korea as a member of the Government-General and later as a member of the Society for the Study of Korean Antiquities. In his 1931 article in *Chosen*, a periodical published by the Government-General, Fujita summarised the legacy of Japanese excavation projects conducted in Korea and claimed that the undertakings were Japan's greatest achievements to be proud of.[5] Many scholars in Japan acknowledge such research contributions without doubt, as

[3] Pak, "Japanese Colonial Archaeology in Korea and Its Legacy", 405–406.
[4] Pak, "Japanese Colonial Archaeology in Korea and Its Legacy", 406.
[5] Kang, "The Remains from Ancient Times", 15.

Hideichi Sakazume points out that the archaeological projects performed in Japan's colonies in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were 'developed by the best minds and technologies in Japanese archaeology at the time, and their academic outcomes can be judged above reproach'.[6] At the end of the nineteenth century, archaeology was a relatively new discipline even in Europe and North America, with archaeologists trying to demonstrate the scientific nature of their studies of ancient civilisation across continents.[7] Japan was also in the early stage of developing archaeology as a 'modern' academic discipline. The first groups of Japanese researchers who participated in the archaeological projects in Korea did not have a proper academic background in archaeology but studied other subject areas, such as anthropology and architecture. Therefore, Japanese scholars like Kuroita Katsumi (1874–1946) were sent to study abroad in Europe, learning archaeology from other imperialist countries, including Britain, France, and the Netherlands, and deployed the latest methods and techniques in their research.[8] For instance, the use of high-quality photographs and diagrams with precise measuring techniques formalised by Japanese scholar Sekino Tadashi (1868–1935) in the initial period was implemented in archaeological reports like *Chosen koseki zufu* (Fig. 1) and continuously adhered to by later Japanese archaeologists. This demonstrates that Japan strived to attain the level of 'empirical knowledge' that the western imperialists had pursued and claim its academic prowess in international society through colonial archaeological projects.

[6] Hideichi Sakazume, "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Archaeology in Japan", *The Rissho International Journal of Academic Research in Culture and Society* 2 (2019): 12.

[7] Oscar Moro-Abadía, "The History of Archaeology as a 'Colonial Discourse'", *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 16, no. 2 (September 2006): 7.

[8] Lee Sung-shi, "Kuroita Katsumi-reul tonghae bon sikminji-wa yeoksahak [Colony and historical studies seen through Kuroita Katsumi]", *Korean Culture* 23 (June 1999): 256–257.

Fig. 1: Diagrams and photographs in Government-General of Korea, *Chosen koseki zufu*, vol. 1 (Keijo: Government-General of Korea, 1915), 29. Photo: National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage.

Inaugurating museums in Korea can best be understood as another initiative that Imperial Japan established to follow the colonial history of European imperialists. One of the examples of European models is the Imperial Museum (present-day Indian Museum) that was established under the Government of India of the British Empire. The museum website elucidates its founding history as 'the beginning of the modernity and the end of [the] mediaeval era' of India.[9] Absorbing similar epistemology and symbolism, the Government-General Museum, as a symbol of the modernisation of Korea, was built in 1915 in the grounds of Gyeongbok Palace, the main palace for the royal families of Korea's

[9] The Indian Museum, "History of Indian Museum", accessed 9 January 2021, https://indianmuseumkolkata.org/informations/MQ%3D%3D/history-of-indian-museum.

Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). The museum building was constructed in the style of 'Japanese neo-Renaissance' (Fig. 2) as part of the complex of the first Industrial Exhibition (Korean: *Gongjinhoe*; Japanese: *Kyōshin'kai*) held in Gyeongseong (J: Keijō). Todd Henry asserts that such expositions indicate the effort the colonial government made regarding the 'material assimilation' of Koreans and also explains that the events transformed the sacred palace into a site of public festivities.[10] Henry analyses the aim of the exposition that juxtaposes Japan's modern accomplishment with the underdeveloped state of colonial Korea as 'showing recent socioeconomic advancements and promoting their future development and producing a public milieu through which Koreans could identify with the "progressive" fate'.[11] An postcard advertising the exposition shows photographs of the newly constructed museum building and the Gwanghwa Gate, the main entrance of the Gyeongbok Palace complex, side by side as an extension of the dichotomous narrative of the 'new' and the 'old'. (Fig. 3).

[10] Todd Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 92–97.

[11] Henry, *Assimilating Seoul*, 92–106.

Fig. 2: Postcard of the Government-General Museum of Korea. Photo: Seoul History Archives, Seoul History Museum. https://museum.seoul.go.kr/archive/archiveNew/NR_archiveList.do?ctgryId=CTGRY828&type=D [Accessed 20 January 2021]

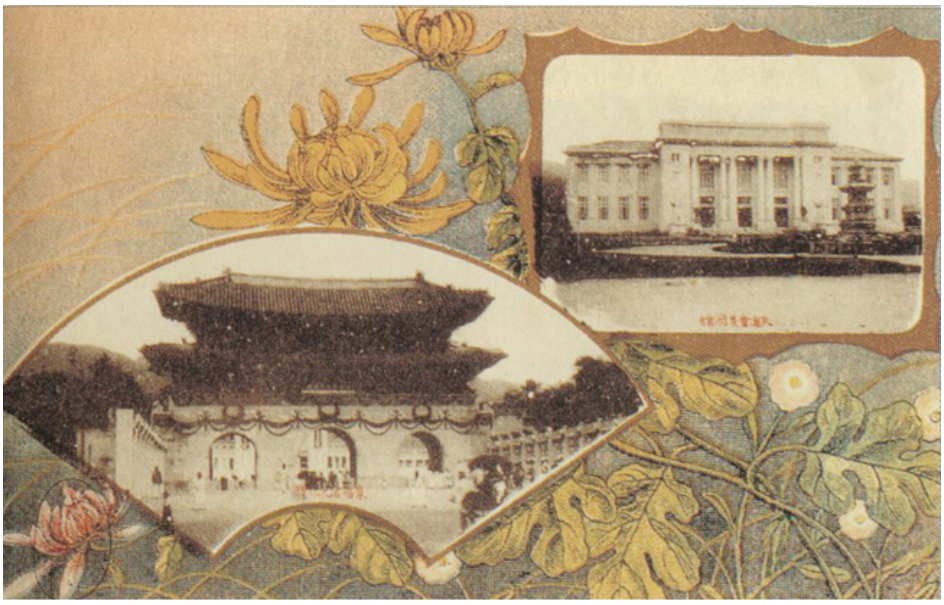

Fig. 3: Advertisement postcard for the Industrial Exhibition of 1915. Photo: Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation.
http://www.k-heritage.tv/brd/board/909/L/CATEGORY/911/menu/901?brdCodeField=CATEGORY&brdCodeValue=911&bbIdx=1610&brdType=R&tab= [Accessed 20 January 2021]

The Government-General Museum, based upon the collection of the artefacts from the multi-year excavation projects, exhibited about 2,000 objects from the pre-historic periods to the contemporary time. In the lobby, Buddhist stone sculptures greeted visitors while dividing the inside from the outside (Fig. 4). This setting allowed for processional entries with monumental sculptures, enabling visitors to have a 'liminal experience' that Carol Duncan describes as a 'move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspectives'.[12] Through such a ritual element, visitors could prepare themselves to gain new knowledge and experience in the space. Also, display cases in the museum galleries resembled European models that originated from the cabinet of curiosities, a comprehensive array of collectables as sources of modern

[12] Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual" [1995], in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 428.

knowledge (Fig. 5). By juxtaposing and displaying objects inside cases, the visualising mechanism reveals the so-called 'enlightenment' mission of the museum. The panes of glass between the exhibited objects and audiences constructed a viewing structure and visual hierarchies similar to how Morgan Ng interprets windows as instruments that 'augment visibility and control sensory perception'.[13] The display method, which strengthened the 'subject-object relation' that Walter Mignolo probes as a sense of the totality of knowledge and epistemology of coloniality,[14] successfully positioned the history and culture of Korea as mere objects for contemplation and for the acquisition of information. As Mok Suhyun points out, colonial modalities were deeply embedded in the selection of objects on display, engendering narratives that support or legitimise Japan's colonialism in Korea. For instance, whilst the artefacts from the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668) and the Unified Silla period (668–935) occupied a significant portion of the exhibition spaces, a smaller number of Joseon-dynasty objects were included in the galleries but were less emphasised. According to Mok, its underlying assertion was that Korea had once had a rich history in ancient times yet the country had declined during the Joseon dynasty, and hence, Japan seized its sovereignty to save the country.[15]

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[13] Morgan Ng, "Toward a Cultural Ecology of Architectural Glass in Early Modern Northern Europe", *Art History* 40, no. 3 (2017): 517.

[14] Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 200.

[15] Mok Suhyeon, "Geundae misul-gwa jeonsi munhwa-ui hyeongseong" [The formation of modern art and exhibition culture], in *Hanguk munhwasa* [History of Korean Culture] (Seoul: National Institute of Korean History, 2016), vol. 21. Digitised version, accessed 10 January 2021. http://contents.history.go.kr/front/km/view.do?levelId=km_021_0050_0010_0020.

Fig. 4: The lobby of the Government-General Museum of Korea. Photo: National Institute for Korean History.

http://contents.history.go.kr/mobile/km/view.do?levelId=km_021_0050_0010_0020

[Accessed 20 January 2021]

Fig. 5: An installation view of the Government-General Museum of Korea. Photo: National Institute for Korean History.
http://contents.history.go.kr/mobile/km/view.do?levelId=km_021_0050_0010_0020
[Accessed 20 January 2021]

Along with the display methods, the Government-General Museum's organisational structure also underlines its pedagogical mission, as it was administered by the Education department at the Government-General. Korean nationals were the main targets of such educational pursuits. *Maeil sinbo* articles on 4 June and 6 July 1916 record the monthly visitor numbers by groups: Koreans, Japanese, and foreigners. According to the documents, the number of Korean visitors surpassed the number of Japanese and the number of foreign visitors.[16] Gyan Prakash insists that the subjectivity and identity of colonial elites were formed upon how they differentiated themselves from colonial subalterns.[17] The photograph of visitors garbed in Western-style uniforms and dress entering the Government-General Museum building incorporates the typical depiction of museumgoers as 'modern citizens' (Fig. 6). Another postcard image captures Koreans of the lower classes

[16] *Maeil sinbo*, 4 June 1916 and 6 July 1916. National Library of Korea Linked Open Data.
[17] Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 19–26.

in traditional clothing walking out of the museum, representing colonised subalterns whom colonial authorities considered as audiences who had to learn 'civic morality' through museum experiences. From the 1930s, the Government-General of Korea planned and organised the 'Movement for the Development of the Mind' to encourage Korean nationals to cultivate their minds and overcome difficulties, the aim being to encourage them to become faithful citizens of the Japanese empire. A *Choson sinbo* article on 20 June 1935 records that the museum held a special day to contribute to the 'development of the mind' of its visitors.[18] As articulated in a *Maeil sinbo* article on 1 January 1936, the establishment of the museum and the archaeological surveys and preservation were executed to achieve the same goal.[19] Such rhetoric unveils the 'enlightenment commitment' of colonial museums that inject social conducts of cultural elites, represented by Japanese imperial citizens, to non-elite nationals of colonies, like those of colonial Korea, under the rubric of aesthetic experience.[20]

[18] *Choson sinbo*, 20 June 1935. National Library of Korea Linked Open Data.
[19] *Maeil sinbo*, 1 January 1936. National Library of Korea Linked Open Data
[20] Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 23.

Fig. 6: A photograph in Government-General of Korea, *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) (1915–16)* (Keijo: Government-General of Korea, 1917). Photo: Seoul History Archives, Seoul History Museum.

Fig. 7: A photograph postcard of the Government-General Museum of Korea. Photo: Seoul History Archives, Seoul History Museum. https://museum.seoul.go.kr/archive/archiveNew/NR_archiveList.do?ctgryId=CTGRY828&type=D [Accessed 20 January 2021]

Object display at the colonial museum serves as an even more complex political tool, envisaging the cultural proximity of Korea and Japan to validate the theory of the 'common ancestral origins' of the two countries. This type of rationale can be understood as 'continental imperialism', which Hannah Arendt deploys to describe territorial expansion in 'geographic continuity' with a mission 'to unite people of similar folk origin'. Arendt also asserts that the rationale is pertinent to an ideological race theory that can be developed into a 'convenient political weapon'.[21] At the Government-General Museum, one of the galleries exhibited earthenware from the Baekje period (18 BCE–660 CE) alongside comparable objects from the Yamato period (250–710) of Japan. In addition to the object display, the gallery label explained that Baekje was once ruled by the Japanese kingdom.

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 223–224.

Actively circulated by Japanese archaeologists and historians through their publications at the time, this controversial theory has been much contested among scholars until today.[22]

According to its mission statement published in 1931, the purpose of the Government-General Museum was to epitomise 2,000 years of history of the Korean peninsula.[23] In line with the mission, the museum designated treasured objects of Korea based on the 'cultural and historical values' and carried out a series of conservation projects. It also helped the colonial government legislate for cultural heritage preservation throughout the colonial period.[24] From 1918 to 1943, the museum published seventeen volumes of *Museum Exhibits Illustrations* (J. *Hakubutsukan chinretsuhin zukan*), which included illustrations, classifications and descriptions of the collected objects written in Japanese and English (Fig. 8). The *Bulletin of the Government-General Museum of Korea* (J. *Chōsen sōtokufu hakubutsukanpō*) also provided textual resources introducing the museum and the arts of Korea to Japanese readers. The gallery description, object registrations, and subsequent publications reveal how museums participated in the canonisation of art and framed a kind of 'historiography' using or perhaps misusing historical and scientific information in the system of colonialism.

[22] See Mark E. Byington, Ken'ichi Sasaki and Martin T. Bale ed., *Early Korea-Japan Interactions* (Cambridge, MA: Korea Institute, Harvard University, 2018).
[23] Junmo Jung, "Hanguk geunhyeondaemisulgwansa yeongu: Guklipmisulgwan-e daehan insikgwa jedojeok mosun-ui geunwon-eul jungsim-ero" [Study on modern and contemporary history of museum in Korea: Focusing on general awareness of National Museum of Contemporary Art and its institutional deficiency], *Journal of Korean Modern and Contemporary Art History* 11 (December 2013): 144.
[24] National Museum of Korea, "Archive of Government-General Museum Documents", accessed 10 January 2020. https://www.museum.go.kr/modern-history/main.do.

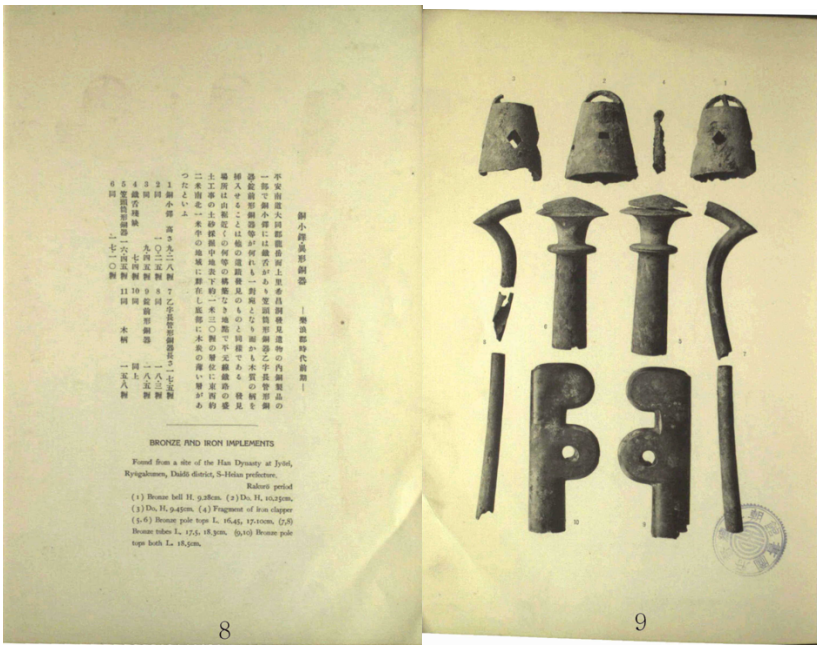

Fig. 8: Illustrations and descriptions of bronze and iron objects in Government General Museum of Korea, *Museum Exhibits Illustrations*, vol. 7 (Keijo: Government General Museum of Korea, 1935), 8–9. Photo: National Library of Korea.

Upon the liberation of Korea on 15 August 1945, the Government-General Museum was closed, and its collection and documents transferred to the National Museum of Korea, which was established in the same year. The terminologies, classification systems, and evaluation methods devised by the colonial museum were adapted and used by the new museum. The comparison of the exhibitions and publications of the National Museum of Korea and those of the Government-General Museum demonstrates that certain objects that were highly valued by the colonial regime continued to be celebrated as 'epitomes' of Korean art nationally and internationally. For instance, the golden crowns of Old Silla were introduced as 'masterpieces of Korean art', highlighted in large-scale exhibitions such as *Masterpieces of Korea*, the first overseas exhibition of Korean art that travelled to eight cities in the United States in the 1950s (Fig. 9). At the same time, those kinds of travelling exhibitions, as a political instrument, were used to internationally proclaim the status of South Korea as an independent, legitimate nation by embracing the term 'Korean art' even

after the division of the country into the North and the South since the Korean War occurred in 1950–1953. Under the circumstances, nationalist sentiments urged scholars and institutions to overthrow remaining narratives from the Japanese colonial period, which often led to the formation of new canons of Korean art. Some of the examples are Joseon-dynasty objects, which had been regarded as the remains of the 'demolished nation' and so had been overlooked by Japanese scholars during the colonial period. After the 1950s, Joseon art became one of the most prominent topics in the art history of Korea, possibly because of an effort to retrieve the 'historical value' of the previous era but often with idealised views and narratives on the dynastic history.

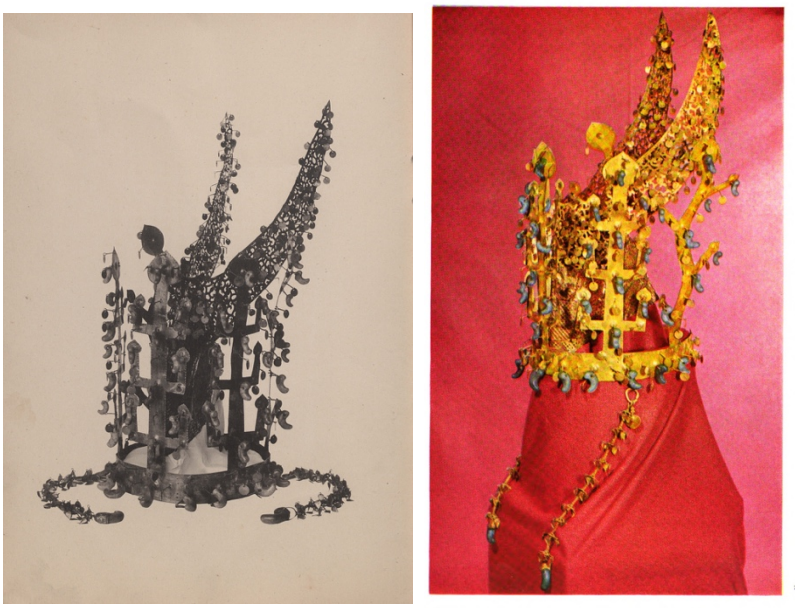

Fig. 9: (Left) Page from Government-General Museum of Korea, *Museum Exhibits Illustrations*, vol. 10 (Keijo: Government-General Museum of Korea, 1935), 4. Photo: Daegu Metropolitan Jungang Library. (Right) Inside cover of *Masterpieces of Korean Art: An Exhibition under the Auspices of the Government of the Republic of Korea*, ed. National Gallery of Art, et al. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1957), 4–5. Photo: HathiTrust Digital Library.

The Government-General Museum's archaeological projects, exhibitions, and publications are poignant examples that show how colonial modalities have been instilled in museum practices in various formats with consecutive impacts on historiography, museum structure, and display mechanisms over time. One of the challenges that contemporary museums face is ending the exploitative colonial legacy in museum practices and mediating tensions around the disciplines of art and archaeology whilst not simply criticising or subduing the fields. Ongoing discourses on interculturality can be seen as an appropriate methodology to enable decolonial praxes. Walter Mignolo explains that 'interculturality is both a complimentary political, epistemic and existence-based project'.[25] It challenges the process of 'othering' that utters, writes about, and exhibits ethnic, ancestral, racial, and moral differences similar to the aim the Government-General pursued by modelling the museum after the European imperialists. Nationalist accounts on the colonial history of Korea are mainly centred around contesting and overturning the colonial narratives and assertions made by Japanese imperialists by seeking the originality of Korean art and using museum exhibitions to promote its quality. Although it is a necessary process, such efforts may inevitably result in engendering the clear demarcation and marginalisation of Korean art, as a collective identity, by continuing modernistic epistemic practices and racial theories. Instead of drawing distinct cultural and artistic boundaries, more attention needs to be paid to how the human world has persistently interacted, inspired, and transformed across borders over time and how art and culture have been fluid and intercultural in history. By doing so, one can participate in de-generating the colonial rhetoric of museums, which asserts that 'cultural behaviours' differ across races and nations, and, instead, take a step towards the idea of decoloniality and human equality in museum practices at large.

[25] Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 57.

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The Disrupt Project: Nikki S. Lee and Transcategorical Identities

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Abstract

In the series *Projects* (1997-2001), Nikki S. Lee defies the globalist demand to present and perform predefined cultural conventions by photographing themself assimilated into multiple American social groups. Demonstrating the body's potential for multiplicity, Lee's integration into varying social and cultural groups resists the boundaries of social containment projected onto bodies due to assumptions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or age. The series questions the social command that the body must represent a naturalisation of a projected identity. Lee's integration into social groups challenged the programme of identity homogenisation that was emanating from America, fuelled by the multiculturalist discourse. The repetition of Lee's self-transformations provokes impassioned responses from the audience, with the photographs creating a reflexive dialogue about the conscious act of seeing as a tool of social containment. However, some early critics branded the series as cultural appropriative, challenging the veracity of Lee's assimilation. Through applying Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry and Judith Butler's assessment of performativity, this article offers a reconsideration of *Projects* as a decolonial work that subverts the global colonial matrix that commands fixed identities.

KEYWORDS Contemporary Korean Art, Korean Photography, Transculturalism, Mimicry, Body Transformation

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Joe Nickols (they/them) is a curator and Art Historian for Messums, a leading modern and contemporary art gallery in the UK. Joe has just completed a Master's in History of Art and Archaeology of East Asia, specialising in Japan and Korea (SOAS, University of London). This follows a BA in Japanese Language and History of Art and Archaeology (SOAS, University of London), and an Art Foundation (Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London). Their research explores representations of the body as the locus of social subversion.

Executed between 1997 and 2001, Nikki S. Lee's *Projects* comprises thematically grouped photographs that depict Lee assimilated into, and performing as, a member of fourteen different socialised groups (punks, senior citizens, skateboards, drag queens, and Latinx groups to list a few) in the United States (US) (Fig. 1).[1] This repeated process of assimilation is an act of social disobedience, with Lee's body refusing the hegemonic pressure to display an expected diasporic identity. This refusal is heightened by the repetition of the process to force the audience to confront their own projections and internalisations of constructed identity. Using *Projects* as a case study this paper explores the subversive nature of mimicry, performance, and parody through application of Bhabha's and Butler's theories. Due to the production of the series occurring in the late 1990s there is an examination of the impact that American multiculturalism had on othering communities through enforced visual behaviours.

Lee assimilated into groups that represent a variety of race, ethnicity, gender, age, class, and sexuality; each assimilation challenges the systemic limitations of each category of identity classification and whether it can operate with Lee transgressing into an identity that rejects the assumed ethnic Korean identity Lee is automatically assigned. Each image depicts Lee, occasionally alone but often with other members of the entered social group, adopting the style, mannerism, and overall mimetic appearance of the various collectives. Each assimilation of identity lasts for a number of weeks or months, with Lee first observing the social group before gaining access and existing amongst them.[2] This carefully constructed yet hyperbolic embodiment of identity

Fig. 1: Nikki S. Lee, *The Punk Project (7),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 1997.

[1] Hyun Joo Lee, "A Passage to the Undercommons: Virtual Formation of Identity in Nikki S. Lee's Self-Transformative Performance." Cultural Critique 104 (2019), 72.

[2] Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee's Yuppie Project." *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (2001): 55.

construction is crucial to expose the strategies of regulation that exist within society.[3] The vernacular appearance of the photographs, taken on an automatic camera with a flash, increases this hyperbole as the normality of the imagery juxtaposes with Lee's abnormal ability to transform and transgress across the social boundaries visualised within them.

Initially, *Projects* may seem to represent a superficial investigation into identity signifiers, but on closer assessment, we can see that Lee is exploring the body's ability to disrupt enforced multiculturalist boundaries of cultural containment. This article proposes a reconsideration of Lee's work as an early attempt to subvert the oppressive forms of social containment that erased the potential complexity of identities in a globally connected world. By exploring *Projects* through a transcultural lens, which accommodates the complexities contained in a singular subject, the decolonial aspect of the series is unveiled, with Lee's commentary rejecting the enforcement of a singular unchangeable identity. The series reveals the inherent racism, sexism, and classism that dominates the cultural and social boundaries of identity in America.

Multiculturism/Transculturalism

As Lee's work questions the rigidity of identity containment it is necessary to explore the dominant ideology of 1990s America that defined bodies: multiculturalism. The 1990s witnessed the promotion of globalised multiculturalism emanating from America, heralded as an ideology that offered social equality to self-contained differing cultures.[4] However, it acted as a form of cultural colonialism as it installed a matrix of fixing bodies within definitive unshakable boundaries defined by cultural characteristics rather than acquired and flexible identities.[5] As multiculturalism is a signifier of modern liberal democracy, it became endemic across the globe, ensuring the collective homogenisation of cultural performativity. These imagined group identities are not representative of lived experience but are projected by the

[3] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. (London, UK: Routledge, 1993), 231.

[4] Mikhail Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way between Globalism and Multiculturalism." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 68, no. 1 (2009), 334.

[5] Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way," 346.

dominant discourse of that society, which was often based upon Euro-American capitalism.[6] Multicultural modernity paradoxically celebrates the individuality of cultures but rejects the individual autonomy of a subject within them. This creates the isolation of individuals within minority groups, magnifying the Othering effect on their body.[7] Bodies are contained in boundaries that are assigned and policed by their communities, acting as a form of panopticon regulation. A subject is expected to uphold their identity through visual embodiment or performative actions, with disobedience silenced or rejected. The body is expected to naturalise the assumed 'truth' it contains within. The silencing of difference formulates a society of repression that simultaneously reifies and solidifies performative identities.[8] It is this conceptualisation that contains minorities within assumed, and often exoticized, identities, fuelling the narrative of 'shared experience' that minorities must uphold and, if an artist, represent. Significantly for diasporic artists, the Euro-American art market prioritises immigrant artists that evaluate their homeland through their work, and it often recontextualises the artist or artwork in relation to their homeland regardless of their presented cultural critique.[9] Consequently, Cameron McCarthy corroborates that multiculturalism is a discourse of control and containment, and not one of equality and freedom.[10]

Projects began after Lee moved to the US to complete an MFA at New York University. Lee entered into a US art scene that was internally questioning the boundaries of minority identities. The 1990s New York art scene was rife with racial bias, with minority artists accepted into exhibitions based upon assumed 'shared experiences' and identifications, and often rejected for the same assumptions.[11] Simultaneously, the impending 2000 US census instigated debate around the legal recognition of complex racialised identities and

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[6] Zeynep Kiliç and Jennifer Petzen in "The Culture of Multiculturalism and Racialized Art." *German Politics & Society 31*, no. 2 (107) (2013), 54.

[7] Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way," 330

[8] Murphy, Chad. "Hybrid Identity and the Return of the Repressed: Heidegger's »Silence« in Morimura, Abe, and Haneke." *KulturPoetik* 13, no. 2 (2013): 238.

[9] This issue is strongly and extensively discussed by Kiliç and Petzen in "The Culture of Multiculturalism and Racialized Art." (2013).

[10] Michelle Bae, and Greg Dimitriadis. "Travelling Home(s): Contemporary Korean Art After the Postcolonial." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36, no. 3 (2014), 317.

[11] Cherise Smith, "Nikki S. Lee Projects and the Repackaging of the Politics of Identity". In *Enacting Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 203.

diasporic communities, particularly the methodology employed to recognize their hybrid living.[12] This background to *Projects* heightens Lee's investigation into the fixity of the boundaries of identity, as it endorsed hybridity and self-determined identity against the expectation of singularity. The assumption of 'shared experience' defining categorisations extends from the matrix of multiculturalism that dictates that there is a 'natural' culture with an 'origin' that an individual is biologically and biographically predetermined to uphold.[13] *Projects,* however, articulates what Derrida refers to as the 'transcategorical' nature of human beings, which permits the multiplicity of identities within a singular subject that emerges through experience in relation to history, including the potential for varying historical and social difference.

The rigidity of multiculturalism caused considerable trauma to individuals who could not be situated in singular boundaries. During the 2000s transculturalism developed and critiqued the inflexibility of multiculturalism. Unlike multiculturalism, which demands rigid adherence to a projected identity that a subject must adopt, transculturalism permits an intermingling of cultures and the return of agency to the subject.[14] Transcendence is a key proponent of transculturalism as it enables cultural plurality that encourages subjects to move beyond the defined boundaries.[15] Lee's photographs visualise this transcendence: whenever Lee's body enters into new spaces, we see Lee move beyond the confines of an identity matrix that prioritises monolithic singularity. The constant presence of Lee's body within varying social groups presents the possibilities of noncanonical histories, which, in turn, reveals that unrecognised minority experience is excluded from social discourse.[16] *Projects,* therefore, represents the complexity of existence that diasporic communities face due to the multiplicity of their cultural heritage that society cannot accommodate.[17] By applying a transcultural lens to *Projects*, as this article proposes, Lee's entry into various social groups becomes a rejection of this hegemonic bodily control.

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[12] Smith, "Repackaging," 192.

[13] Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way," 334.

[14] Afef Benessaieh, "Multiculturalism, Interculturality, Transculturality." In *Amériques Transculturelles-Transculture Americas,* ed. Afef Benessaieh (Ottowa: University of Ottowa Press, 2010), 11.

[15] Benessaieh, "Multiculturalism, Interculturality, Transculturality," 16.

[16] Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis, "Performing "Planned Authenticity": Diasporic Korean Girls' Self-Photographic Play." Studies in Art Education 56, no. 4 (2015), 330.

[17] Lee, "A Passage to the Undercommons," 73.

Parody and Mimicry

Though *Projects* visualises Lee's attempts to transcend the rigid boundaries of identity by entering into differing social groups, the series was subsumed by harsh critiques accusing it of "deception, pathology, and even criminality".[18] Miwon Kwon, Professor of Art History at UCLA, offered particularly scathing criticism, reducing *Projects* to ethnographic "'going native' performances" that transform the entered social groups into props for Lee's objectification.[19] Kwon argues that Lee romanticises minorities through the purposeful othering of the self without acknowledging the issues of identity that affect the specific social group Lee enters into. However, in this critique, Kwon reinforces the expectation of social groups to uphold specific "shared" identities, with the veracity of that performance corrupted by the presence of an outsider; Lee's body is isolated within each photographic series, branded as a perpetrator of cultural engagement. This isolation ignores the subversion of the act of assimilation as a whole and the photographs' reflexive engagement with their audience to expose their internalised assumptions of identity.

Globalism acts as a form of colonialism that commands uniformity by implementing a panoptical framework of homogenised visuality, producing an innate pressure for subjects of globalism to conform to recognisable forms of Otherhood, containing a subject in sanctioned and controllable categories of difference. This framework perpetuates and creates the assumptions that are used in acts of categorisation. However, through consciously constructed mimicry, one can demonstrate the limitations of standardised difference within the colonial matrix. Mimicry appropriates the tool of containment that the dominant structure employs, corrupting the singular authority of the dominant structure to define boundaries of containment. The deliberate nature of Lee's assimilation initiates this aspect of mimicry. *Projects* is not simply engaging in the mutability of social boundaries through the acquisition

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[18] Joan Kee, "Visual Reconnaissance." In *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 146.

[19] Miwon Kwon, "Experience vs. Interpretation: Traces of Ethnography in the Works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee." In *Site Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, ed. Alex Coles (London, UK: Black Dog, 2000), 85.

of cultural paraphernalia but rather is questioning the constructions of those boundaries in the first place, exposing them as tools of oppression and uniformity.

Judith Butler has proposed that seemingly unchangeable categories of identity, such as gender, are in fact mutable, with their assumed fixity extending from the repetition of stylised acts.[20] These acts are constituted through time, producing bodies that present acts of identity in a mundane context, incorporating bodily gestures, movements, surroundings, presentation, or any other factor that can further the illusory fulfilment of expected identity. Lee's observation of social groups prior to assimilation, enabled the adoption of mundane social queues within *Projects*. These touches add a veracity to Lee's visuality whilst existing within social groups. With the familiarity of the medium and the presentation of Lee within the social group, the images propose a social normalcy. However, this depicted normalcy is corrupted by the repetition of Lee's social mimicry evidencing the prescriptive confines of accepted cultural difference that demands subjects disavow their independent selfhood to participate in society. Lee's assimilation into multiple subcultures challenges the systemic limitations of each category of identity containment. Butler contends that behavioural disobedience of commanded performativity, through displaying characteristics of a group different to the assumed identity of the subject, questions the legitimacy of the commanded performance of both the subject and those commanding the performance; the conscious subversion of societal expectations unveils the operative containment process of assigned identity signifiers.[21]

The disruption of Lee's social mimicry is enhanced by the repetition of the act of transformation. By repeatedly entering into different social groups, Lee not only shows the construct of immutable identities to be false, but also parodies the formation of accepted social norms. Parody, as Linda Hutcheon describes, has the ability to display difference but not similarity.[22] Parody calls attention to the process it seeks to oppose by intensifying the inspection of the very process that it embodies, in Lee's case that of upholding assigned

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[20] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988):

[21] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 122.

[22] Kerstin Brandes, "Morimura/Duchamp: Image Recycling and Parody." *Paragraph* 26, no. 1/2 (2003): 53.

identities.[23] A heightened mimetic difference creates a figure of "partial" recognisability that prevents total acknowledgment of the body, revealing the constraints of a global homogeneity that requires bodily certainty.[24] The flux of Lee's bodily image in *Projects* never permits the viewer to observe Lee within a consistent identity, repudiating the process of containment through surveillance. Lee's partial recognisability within *Projects* refuses subjecthood, and we are forced to wonder who Lee is before or beyond the representation of identity, which further undermines the rigidity of a commanded singularity of identity.

The extremes of Lee's visuality and performance within *Projects* initiates this parodic mimicry as an act of social defiance. *The Schoolgirls Project* and *The Exotic Dancers Project* can be seen as the antithesis of each other, embodying opposing representations of gender and sexualisation. *The Schoolgirls Project* (Fig. 2), the only work executed outside of the US, depicts young Korean schoolgirls in modest uniforms holding fans that create an impermeable barrier to the outside. None of the figures seem emotionally connected with the camera or each other despite the unified boundary held up by the collective. Through the structured choreographed pose, this photograph visualises the outcome of South Korean governmental frameworks that continue to promote gender conformity, insisting that women uphold archaic Confucianist notions of being a 'good wife, wise mother' requiring visualisations of innocence and obedience as signifiers.[25] Many Korean women move abroad to leave these conditions, which are assigned to their bodies by the multicultural hegemony.[26] Conversely, *The Exotic Dancers Project* (Fig. 3) sees Lee adopt a persona who controls their sexuality and body, keeping it in shape

Fig. 2: Nikki S. Lee, *The Schoolgirls Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 2000.

[23] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (1984), 126.
[24] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 129.
[25] Bae-Dimitriadis, "Performing "Planned Authenticity"," 335.
[26] Bae-Dimitriadis, "Performing "Planned Authenticity"," 331.

Fig. 3: Nikki S. Lee, *The Exotic Dancers Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1999.

and receiving a livelihood through it. *The Exotic Dancers Project* explores the sexualisation of female-presenting bodies in American society. The extreme contrast of Lee's visuality tests the assumption that the body naturalises an internal truth; in producing images of sexuality and innocence that extend from the same body Lee physically rejects the rigidity a binary that defines sexual morality, questioning whether the process of naturalisation is in fact a form of manufactured institutionalisation. From a Lacanian perspective, these series reveal the quilting point of identity; the quilting point describes the social construction of identity where the signifying elements affirm fixity and uniformity, concealing the complexity of the signified.[27] Through presenting detailed contradictory versions of the self in *The Schoolgirls Project* and *The Exotic Dancers Project,* Lee ruptures the fixity of identity by presenting the changeability of the signified within a single subject; the rigid articulation of identity becomes meaningless. When in dialogue with each other, both series ask the audience to consider variations of ethnic bodies, fetishizations of ethnicity, and objectification, particularly within a transnational context as the works propose opposing ideals of womanhood within two countries.

[27] Jonathan Kemp demonstrates similar Lacanian application of theory in "Schreber and the Penetrated Male," in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, ed. Chrysanthi Nigianni (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010), 150-67.

Fig. 4: Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 1999.

Projects shows Lee entering spaces where Koreans are not present or have never been seen. This is exemplified by *The Ohio Project* (Fig. 4), where Lee is surrounded by confederate flags, guns, and mullets.[28] The transgression into this space challenges society's assumptions of Lee's body as emblematic of the assumed ethnic Korean immigrant identity that Lee is automatically assigned. As the title of the subseries specifies the location, we must consider the specificity of space. In *The Ohio Project,* Lee is presenting alterity by visually existing beyond the operational reach of cosmopolitan liberalism, challenging the prerequisite that immigrants uphold North American liberalism, as signified through their presence in metropolitan locations.[29] Multiculturalism expects bodies to exist within an assigned space; as a liberal construct it privileges global mobility but only a specific mobility between internationally interconnected cities. [30] Existing beyond those limits challenges the hegemonic matrix. The images reveal the geopolitical bias that centres cities as sites of hybridity and equality. Lee's assimilated identity disrupts the assumed adoption of economically privileged whiteness and democratic liberal North-Americanism promoted through globalisation; Lee, seen draped over a sports car in front of a mobile home (Fig. 5), is clearly adopting the wrong kind of U.S. liberalism. This is affirmed in another image from the series that sees Lee sitting beside a man stroking a gun that rests partially on Lee's thigh, in contrast with the surrounding crochet blankets and

[28] Smith, "Repackaging," 221.

[29] Lee, "A Passage to the Undercommons," 97.

[30] Julie-Anne Boudreau, "Moving Through Space and Being Moved Emotionally: Embodied Experience of Transculture." In *Amériques Transculturelles - Transcultural Americas*, ed. Benessaieh Afef, (University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 71.

Fig. 5: Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (7),* 59.7x40cm, Fujiflex Print, 1999.

floral wallpaper. The picture (Fig. 4) presents the man as a conquering male possessing non-liberal notions of gender roles, with Lee's body challenging the assumption that global liberalism is adopted by all bodies that inhabit its reach.[31] Lee's presence visualises the intersections of minorities and their containment in globalist structures, connecting the racialised body of Lee with the barrier of economic class that the Midwesterners are bound by.

The Ohio Project confronts Kwon's critique of "purposeful Othering" directly, as the expected containment of otherness for Lee and the social group, of ethnicity and class respectively, is used to expose the act of othering existing within Lee's audience, who utilise a marginalising gaze. The hyperbolic image of Lee in the Midwest tests the limits of the viewers' acceptance of Lee's formation of self-determined identity in the Midwest, revealing the internalised judgments that maintain the bodies of Lee and the social group within their prescribed boundaries. The objectification of a viewed body silences the experience contained within that body, with identity judged according to the social context of the viewer, and not the actor/object. The photographs in *Projects* are taken not by Lee but rather by strangers or other members of the subculture. The anonymity of the photographer in *Projects* transfers the notion of colonial ethnographer from Lee to the audience who are observing Lee as the photographer themselves, and subsequently assessing the categorisation of their ethnographic subject, enacting social surveillance. Guy Trebay remarks in a 2004 review for

[31] Smith, "Repackaging," 221.

The New York Times that "Lee can rely on the viewer to bring [their] own stereotypes [to the works]", highlighting the importance of the audience's positionality in the project. [32] Indeed, Jennifer Dalton describes viewers within galleries playing a form of 'Where's Wally?', where Lee's identity is 'discovered' by the audience, removing Lee from the assimilated cultural group and returning Lee to the assumptive Korean identity.[33] This conscious operational act of returning Lee to an assigned identity demonstrates the expectation of performed behaviour. Notably, in returning Lee to a single identity based upon an imagined form of "Korean-ness", the audience ignores the 'transcategorical' nature of human beings.

Kwon's queries regarding Lee's ability to 'pass' as an 'authentic' member of the subculture is seen as reductive stereotyping.[34] Under transculturalism, notions of "passing" become irrelevant, as to challenge the "authenticity" of a body's performance is to uphold the matrix of containment within defined identities. The designation of "passing" relies on the decision of the observer as the arbiter of authenticity, erasing the experience and history of the actor and predicating the experience and history of the viewer. "Passing" formalises boundaries of entry into social groups by demanding adherence to physical demonstrations of conformity that are rewarded with acceptance into a group, but it is an acceptance that relies upon subsequently upholding group homogeneity. Assessment of Lee's assimilation as the competent adoption of visual signifiers is problematic, as it affirms the reification of internal identities. Reification of identity aids the subjugation of the Other; as assumed identities become physicalised, they become commodified and containable by dominant groups.[35] Transculturalism accepts the process of cultural transference across boundaries, both real and imagined, and therefore refuses the hierarchy between the marginal and the dominant.[36] Transculturalism allows for freedom from one's own assumed cultural history and identity; as it realises the limits of cultural identity to contain the plurality of an individual, it creates a realm where difference is permitted, and so notions of 'passing' and 'authentic' are no longer

[32] Guy Trebay, "Shadow Play," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 19, 2004), https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/magazine/shadow-play.html.

[33] Smith, "Repackaging," 226.

[34] Kwon, "Experience vs. Interpretation,"83.

[35] Murphy, "Hybrid Identity," 252.

[36] Claire Maria Chambers, "Transcultural Consumption through a "Queer" Narrative: Douglas Maxwell's "Our Bad Magnet" in Seoul." Theatre Journal 67, no. 2 (2015), 237.

necessary.[37] Lee can be seen to transcend formalised boundaries rather than perform total imitation.

Lee's imagery is designed to provoke the audience to reflexively assess their internalised projection of identity construction. The repeated presence of Lee within various subcultures forces the audience to actively construct a projected identity to account for Lee's unexpected presence. Through this process Lee enables the viewer to become aware of subconscious processes, offering them an opportunity to reflect on their application of certain paradigms and questioning whether alternative modes of categorisation or identity could exist beyond those implemented by society. This emancipates the audience from conventional and oppressive modes of viewing the "Other", encouraging a dialogue between the observer and the observed. As Lee stresses, *Projects* is an examination of the discord that exists between internal conceptualisations of the self/other, and the external visualisations of it, which is complicated by the social matrixes upheld by anonymous third parties.[38]

Racialised Boundaries

Projects queries the centrality of race and ethnicity in the operations of identity construction. The globalist matrix extends authority from the U.S to encourage an international hybridity that prefers North-Americanised identities, forcing a linear construction of a monolithic unchangeable history that prioritises the West, thereby erasing localised histories and identities.[39] Multiculturalism promises equality within a post-racial society, yet it "masks the centrality of race and racism to neoliberalism".[40] As sociologist Ruth Frankenburg notes, to assign everyone a place in society based upon their race, even with the pretence of racial equality, is to assign everyone a place in relation to whiteness.[41] *The Yuppie Project* addresses the invisibility of whiteness in identity construction most overtly. Though *The Ohio Project* assessed a version of Whiteness, it is a whiteness that is

[37] Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way", 336.
[38] Lee and Goldberg, *Nikki S. Lee,* 47.
[39] Benessaieh, "Multiculturalism, Interculturality, Transculturality," 29.
[40] Kiliç and Petze, "Multiculturalism and Racialized Art," 49.
[41] Maurice Berger, "Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee's Yuppie Project." *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (2001): 55.

ostracised from white hegemonic dominance through class containment. *The Yuppie Project* sees Lee assimilated into the world of Wall Street professionals, and shows Lee surrounded by people who do not have to acknowledge the power that their skin colour affords them, nor their complicity in perpetuating globalised norms.[42] It is this group that the multicultural hegemony favours most and that demands Lee's adherence to their role as a representative of the assumed Other.[43] Yuppies are accompanied by access to profits from globalisation and the determinist structures that society implements; this group includes the gallery audience that reasserts Lee's Korean identity without consent. The invisibility of Whiteness, or society's refusal to acknowledge its power, perpetuates its dominance within this identity matrix.[44] *The Yuppie Project* places the exclusionary impact of whiteness directly on show.

Fig. 6: Nikki S. Lee, *The Yuppie Project (23),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 1998.

One of *The Yuppie Project* images (Fig. 6) shows Lee at lunch with an Asian who is also participating in the white dominated financial scene. Lee and the diner appear emotionally opposite; Lee is engaged, smiling and confident, like many of the white yuppies whom Lee is embodying, whilst the diner appears remote and disconnected from the surroundings. Though none of the white bodies are overtly racist towards Lee and Lee's dining partner, the isolation depicted heightens the underlying racial tensions.[45] Both are demonstrating the visual social signifiers of the Yuppie group, yet they are isolated due to their difference of ethnicity. This image displays the multicultural trap: though globalisation requires Americanisation, attempts by non-white bodies to hold the

[42] Berger, "Picturing Whiteness," 55.

[43] Grace MyHyun Kim, "Transcultural Digital Literacies: Cross-Border Connections and Self-Representations in an Online Forum." Reading Research Quarterly 51, no. 2 (2016): 200

[44] Berger, "Picturing Whiteness," 55.

[45] Berger, "Picturing Whiteness," 56.

power of whiteness through adopting social conventions are denied; divergence from the expected identity of the Other results in nonrecognition.[46] It is one of Lee's most powerful photographs, uncovering the fractured inequalities that contemporary neoliberalism attempts to obscure. The refusal to acknowledge whiteness in every individual's identity construction is to prevent white people witnessing their own complicitly in effecting the rigidity of social conventions that oppress.[47] Lee's imagery of isolated ethnicity clearly displays the system that assigns racial hierarchy in relation to whiteness. This image's resonance is compounded by the existence of the term 'Buppie', created to describe black urban professionals, which displays the existence of invisible racialised boundaries within a sector defined by a supposed inclusive multicultural ideology.[48] It highlights the invisibility of whiteness contained in the word 'Yuppie' that displays no racial terminology, yet its application is to predominantly, if not exclusively without predicators, white bodies.

Fig. 7: Nikki S. Lee, *The Yuppie Project (30),* 67.8x51cm, Fujiflex Print, 1998.

The ostracization that Lee and the diner receive in *The Yuppie Project* visually reminds the viewer of the continuous isolation racialised bodies experience through the control of difference. Othered bodies are restricted from embodying difference; instead, the dominant ideology transforms their body into a specimen, removing choice from the object's construction of its own self.[49] This contradicts the hybrid living of multiculturalism that supposedly celebrates the diversity of cultures. Chad Murphy asserts that this hybridity contradictorily ensures the repression of alterity in the name of

[46] Kiliç and Petze, "Multiculturalism and Racialized Art," 60.
[47] Berger, "Picturing Whiteness," 55
[48] Smith, "Repackaging," 208.
[49] Epstein, "Transculture: A Broad Way", 329.

globalisation as it prevents difference within categorised groupings.[50] Lee potentially proposes a 'Third Space' that can accommodate heterogeneity in another image from *The Yuppie Project* (Fig. 7). The photograph shows Lee holding Peter J. D'adamo's book *'Eat Right 4 Your Type',* which proposes that blood type, rather than race, ethnicity, or gender, has greater relevance to one's health. This points to an alternative grouping of internal structure, one that is based on aspects beyond the visible social signifiers that currently politicise populations into a hegemonic hierarchy. Furthermore, blood type plays a part in social structures in Korea, and Lee could be demonstrating the hegemonic power of Euro-American multiculturalism to recontextualise "foreign" constructs within its sanctioned framework, which prefers white bodies and ideological construction.

Fig. 8 (Top): Nikki S. Lee, *The Hip-Hop Project (2),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 2001.
Fig. 9 (Bottom): Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project (25),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1998.

Importantly, the social characteristics that Lee adopts each speak to elements of expectations that immigrant and racialised bodies receive. By entering into multiple spaces Lee reveals the "contradictory feelings, behaviours, and beliefs about selected North American cultures and the presence of an ethically marked body within them".[51] However, *Projects* occasionally undermines itself and these pertinent observations when Lee adopts blackface and brownface, in *The Hip-Hop Project* (Fig. 8) and *The Hispanic Project* (Fig. 9) respectively, as physiological signifiers. These transformations move beyond Lee adopting and engaging in the cultural identity of minority groups, but rather perpetuate the physiological associations of certain cultures. Instead of demonstrating that cultural identity is produced and manufactured beyond the

[50] Murphy, "Hybrid Identity," 238.
[51] Lee, "A Passage to the Undercommons," 84.

natural body, Lee fuses the two together and contains the cultural identities within racialised boundaries. When these boundaries are rearticulated through these visualisations, they reinforce the racial hegemony and the privileges of normativity.[52] These projects challenge the resonance of the other works in the series that problematise the construction and limitations of projected group identity. Rather this questions Lee's motivations and asks whether subversive assimilation is enough to displace the dominant norms of self-identification and representation.[53]

Furthermore, in *The Seniors Project* (Fig. 10), Lee used professional prosthetics and make-up to adopt an elderly persona, the only instance of Lee employing a make-up professional to aid the transformation.[54] This adoption of faux physicality creates a caricature rather than transcending the age barrier to reveal the mechanics of the social group. These acts of physical body change problematise the series as they question Lee's own theoretical comprehension of ethnicity, age, and race identities. Likewise, it fuels critiques concerning whether Lee is striving to "pass authentically", which, as discussed, becomes problematic, as it destabilizes the "transcategorical" nature of Lee's other transformations. In these problematic series, it is Lee, and not the viewer, who is reifying and reinforcing assumptions of skin colour and physical abilities, thereby undermining the overall series' proposal of accepting difference and unexpected bodies within social groups.

Fig. 10: Nikki S. Lee, *The Seniors Project (26),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1999.

[52] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 133.

[53] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125.

[54] *Photographer Nikki S. Lee Can Turn Into Anyone*, *YouTube* (TheCreatorsProject, 2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oI8xpJItPVI.

Conclusion

Projects, though occasionally flawed by the practice of conflating physiognomy and cultural signifiers, represents a competent early challenge to disrupt the multicultural matrix that homogenises bodies and is unable to accommodate individual lived experiences. Lee attempts to test the limits of difference their body can accommodate beyond the expected identity of a Korean immigrant, which was ascribed to Lee's body upon arrival in 1990s New York. Lee's varying performativity demonstrates the futility of "pass" as an "authentic" member of an assimilated group, as the complexity of an individual can accommodate identities that are monumental rather than singular. Through heightened and repeated mimicry, Lee is challenging the prejudice and complicity present within observers who maintain rigid projected identity formation. The power of *Projects* lies in its exposure of the act of observation as an act of identity containment. It demonstrates the potential erasure of a subject's experience in acquiring social acceptance that prefers familiar homogenous identity construction; identity is shown predicating on the contextual imaginings of the viewer, who themselves are required to uphold strict multicultural boundaries, ignoring the subject's formation of the self beyond the observable. Lee's assimilations force the audience to comprehend an unexpected presence in social groups, making the process of containment tangible in the conscious response of the observer. Lee's entry into multiple social groups reveals the variety of categories of containment that can be applied as an individual, particularly in relation to economically privileged whiteness. As multiculturalism's international adoption continues, *Projects* demonstrates the limitation of the ideology and acts as a warning of its uncritical adoption. Lee's complex introspection of identity, and the acceptance of an unexpected body within varying social groups, asks the audience to contemplate a "Third Space" where alterity is permissible and allows true hybrid identities to exist freely. Through a transcultural lens this aspect of *Projects* gains greater significance for a world that is increasingly encountering difference and simultaneously oppressing it.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Nikki S. Lee, *The Punk Project (7),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 1997. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Fig. 2: Nikki S. Lee, *The Schoolgirls Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 2000. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Fig. 3: Nikki S. Lee, *The Exotic Dancers Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1999. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Fig. 4: Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (6),* 51x67.8cm, Fujiflex Print, 1999. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

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Fig. 8: Nikki S. Lee, *The Hip-Hop Project (2),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 2001. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

Fig. 9: Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project (25),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1998. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Fig. 10: Nikki S. Lee, *The Seniors Project (26),* 51x67.8cm, *Fujiflex* Print, 1999. Copyright Nikki S. Lee. Courtesy of Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

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A Cry for Justice: Reimagining the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Through the 2004 Kangla Fort Protest in Manipur

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'They have their guns, we have our bodies' - Ima Lourembam

(Member of the Meira Paibi)[1]

Abstract

This paper aims to critically examine the naked protest that was performed by twelve *imas* (mothers) in the State of Manipur in 2004 outside the army headquarters in Assam, India. The protest was against the rape and murder of a women named Manorama by the armed forces and the draconian emergency law, Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA), that allowed these armed forced, to act with impunity. I will analyse the disruptiveness of this protest to indicate the parallel lines that exist between policy frameworks in place and the reality on the ground.

I will indicate that on a large scale, this protest served as an important space for reflection on the women, peace and security agenda (WPS) under the international law framework and its heavy focus on the criminal justice system for addressing such incidents of

[1] Sabarish Suresh, "13 years after Mothers of Manipur protested naked against Indian Army, where is justice?" *Dailyo,* July 15, 2018, https://www.dailyo.in/politics/mothers-of-manipur-naked-protest-thangjam-manorama-indian-army-afspa-meira-paibi/story/1/18391.html (accessed April 3, 2021).

violence against women. This essay will indicate how the lack of accountability and monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of this agenda by member states has frustrated the process of seeking justice and redressal especially in cases of violence at the hands of perpetrators who are an extension of the colonising nation state. On a regional level, this protest, through its disruptive resistance, paved the way for a new form of civil disobedience and public participation. These mothers used the intimate and personal language of their ageing bodies rather than the clinical discourse of the judiciary and the law to collectively voice their grief. In doing so, they compelled 'both the complacent Indian army, accustomed to complete impunity for its actions and a jaded citizenry numbed by regular army excesses' to look at the Indian state's systemic dehumanisation and objectification of its citizens. [2]

KEYWORDS Motherhood, naked protests, India, AFSPA, rape, WPS (Women, Peace and Security Agenda) and Conflict related Sexual Violence (CRSV).

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[2] Panchali Ray, "Political motherhood and a spectacular resistance: (Re) examining the Kangla Fort protest," *Thinking Gender, Thinking Nation: Ideology, Representations and Women's Movement* October 18, 2018, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/19472498.2018.1535543?scroll=top&needAccess=true (accessed April 4, 2021).

INTRODUCTION

On July 15, 2004, twelve *imas* belonging to Meira Paibi, a social coalition in Manipur, staged a naked protest outside the headquarters of the 17th Assam Riffles at the Kangla Fort. The oldest protestor was 75 years old while the youngest was 45.[3] The immediate cause of this was the gang rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama, a political activist fighting for tribal rights, by the Indian Army.[4] Manorama had been detained on charges of militancy by the Assam Rifles. She was allegedly gang-raped by the officers and then shot and killed. Her body was recovered by the villagers three kilometres from her house. Frustrated and without any hope for a legal recourse, the imas bared their naked bodies outside the gates of the Assam Rifles and held white banners with words inked in red saying the 'Indian army rape us' and 'they take our flesh'.[5] Several imas screamed at the army, chanting slogans. These mothers were also raising their voices against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 (AFSPA), which grants the Indian army special powers and impunity in conflict-ridden areas of India.

This essay aims to analyse the protest through three specific intersections. The first section will detail the geopolitical and ethnic context within which this protest occurred. It will focus on the growing state-sponsored structural gender-based violence in post-colonial India especially in areas of exception, such as the States of Manipur, Kashmir, and Chattisgarh, where insurgencies have led to constant conflicts with the state. While locating this growing violence at the hands of the State, this section will also dwell on the lack of attention and discourse by the Indian Women's Movement on this issue. The second section will focus on the disruptiveness this protest brought for resistance movements across India by analysing the unique approach to the traditional concept of political motherhood and political performance. The imas instead of staging their naked bodies as essential feminine vulnerabilities staged them as a site of violence and hence through their 'wilful nakedness

[3] Geeta Pandey, "What Made These Grannies Go Nude in Public?" *BBC News,* March15, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-39179515 (accessed April 3, 2021).

[4] ibid.

[5] ibid.

discovered a new militant way of describing the gendered grammar of violence'.[6] In doing so they questioned the ideas of citizenship, democracy, and the role of a nation state under draconian laws like the AFSPA. The third section will indicate the significance of this protest by looking at the events that occurred around Manorama's case and the review of AFSPA. This section will reflect on how this protest provides space for analysing the limitations of international law principles, namely, the WPS agenda and CEDAW, in dealing with such incidences. This section will indicate why there is a need for the WPS agenda to look beyond the purely law-based reforms in addressing such issues towards more non-legal, participatory, and community-oriented ways.

Methodology and Limitations

This essay engages in a desk-based academic research. The methodology was selected due to practical and financial reasons that meant it was not possible to conduct direct ethnographic research during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India. Theoretical analysis includes reference to primary sources such as UNSC Resolutions, national and international legislation and case law. Secondary sources include books, research essays, journal articles, and NGO reports. These sources were used to identify the key areas of focus for the essay: political motherhood, gender as performative, and the WPS agenda. The analysis is aimed at indicating the disruptiveness of this protest by understanding its form and impact and by reflecting on the larger relationship this protest has with the WPS agenda.

This essay examines how gender interacts and behaves through socially constructed roles and institutions. Gender is understood as an identity created through the 'stylised repetition of acts'.[7] It is recognised as an identity in interaction with various other elements,

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[6] Deepti Misri, "'Are You a Man?': Performing Naked Protest in India," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 3 (2011): 603, https://doi.org/10.1086/657487 (accessed April 3, 2021).

[7] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1998): 519, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893 (accessed June 25, 2021).

such as social ordering, race, caste[8], class, ethnicity[9], nationality, age, and geography[10]. Furthermore, gender is analysed as manifesting through hierarchies and power dynamics. This essay has been analysed within a heteronormative framework since this is the gender identity by which the Meira Paibis view themselves. Their protest has, however, broken free from the social stereotypes around heteronormativity. Therefore, this essay looks at how this gender identity was used by the Paibis through their naked, ageing bodies to enter previously restricted public and political participatory spaces. Within gender-based violence, this essay focuses mainly on rape cases involving cis women and girls by army men in conflict areas of India, since the rape of Manorama that triggered this protest was cis-normative in nature.

State and Gender in Post-Colonial India

The geo-political, ethnic context within which this protest occurred is unique. The erstwhile Manipur kingdom came under British rule after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. When Britain ended its colonial domination of India, Manipur was briefly independent with its own constitution of 1947; however, in 1949, India coerced the then Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement.[11] Manipur hence joined India amidst much conflict.[12] Many ethnic groups and sectarians had demanded an independent homeland, and when these demands went unheard, there were multiple armed political uprisings across the state demanding self-determination. As a result, India enacted a series of anti-insurgency emergency and security laws including AFSPA.[13] These laws have been widely condemned for being used as a tool for exploiting and oppressing women as well as tribal and indigenous communities.

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[8] "Manipur Data Highlights: The Scheduled Castes Census of India 2001," Census India, accessed June 25, 2021, https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_manipur.pdf.

[9] Bhagat Oinam, "Patterns of Ethnic Conflict in the North-East: A Study on Manipur," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 21 (May 24, 2003): 2033, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4413594 (accessed June 25, 2021).

[10] Vinod Khobragade, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Self Determination: A Dilemma of Multi Ethnic State: A Case of North East India" *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 71, no. 4 (2010): 1159, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42748944 (accessed June 25, 2021).

[11] ibid (n 9), 998.

[12] Pradip Phanjoubam, "Why it matters how Manipur became a state" *The Telegraph,* February 26, 2019, https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/why-it-matters-how-manipur-became-a-state-of-india/cid/1684958 (accessed April 3, 2021).

[13] ibid (n 10).

The AFSPA was introduced into India based on a 1942 British ordinance that was issued during the Second World War to curb the Indian Independence Movement.[14] It was only supposed to be applicable temporarily for a period of one year until the armed political uprising could be curbed. However, this did not happen, as the Indian government kept extending the applicability of AFSPA across these states.[15]

The transformation of this disruptive temporary security provision into an everyday reality is abjectly visible in the frustration and pain that the imas indicate through their protest. Their rage is a result of living in a constant state of anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty where, under the guise of temporary, arbitrary and excessive human rights violations have been committed. Extrajudicial killings, rapes, and fake encounter killings by army men are common occurrences in Manipur.[16] First information reports (FIR) against the armed forces are rarely lodged at police stations.[17] Indeed, there is a systemic denial of accountability for the citizens of Manipur against the abuse and oppression of the State.[18] The UN Special Rapporteur, after his visit to India, said that the 'widespread deployment of the military creates an environment in which the exception becomes the rule, and the use of lethal force is seen as the primary response to conflict'.[19]

India as a whole has further side-lined the trauma that the citizens of these regions have been suffering under these security laws. The conflicts in the northeast have been dismissed by being termed as 'internal mini insurgencies'. The lack of nationwide rage against the violations that have been and continue to be committed here explains why the people of Manipur have always felt treated like second-class citizens. Despite the rage of

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[14] Naseer Ganai, "In 20 Years, Centre Denied Prosecution Sanction Under AFSPA In All Cases Recommended By J&K Govt Against Armymen" *Outlook,* January 20, 2018, https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/in-20-years-centre-denied-prosecution-sanction-under-afspa-in-all-cases-recommen/307132 (accessed April 3, 2020).

[15] "Notification: Imphal, the December 17, 2020 No.2/8(6)/97-H," Government of Manipur, Home Department, accessed June 25, 2021, https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/NEDiv_ManipurAFSPANotification_01022021_1.pdf .

[16] Human Rights Watch, *These fellows must be eliminated: Relentless violence and Impunity in Manipur* (September 29, 2008) https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/09/29/these-fellows-must-be-eliminated/relentless-violence-and-impunity-manipur *(*accessed June 25, 2021).

[17] ibid.

[18] ibid.

[19] Human Rights Watch, "Getting away with murder: 50 years of the armed forces (special powers) Act" August, 2008 https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/2008/india0808/ (accessed April 3, 2020).

Manipuri women manifesting in various forms of protest, including the world's longest hunger strike lasting for more than 16 years by Irom Chanu Sharmila, the overall attention to the constant state of exploitation and surveillance these communities live under, is negligible. This secondary treatment is also clear from the events that occurred after the imas ended their protest: all twelve imas were arrested and jailed for three months.[20]

Yuval-Davis writes about the connection between nationalism and racism to indicate how minorities are viewed as deviants from the 'normal' and so are excluded from essential resources and power structures.[21] She explains how the construction of nationhood involves the formation of specific gender roles around what constitutes masculine and feminine.[22] Sexual violence remains a common method to subjugate and suppress dissent in these regions. Nussbaum sees this pattern as having emerged during the partition of British India into the two nation states of India and Pakistan where women were raped to bear the children of Muslims and Hindus. The female body was symbolised as the nation, and in the struggle of the two emerging nations, the possession and impregnation of women became a weapon for consolidating power.[23] Even when women were not abducted but were raped and then brutally murdered, this too was an act symbolising the power of one group to damage the domain of rule of the other group, dishonouring the group in the process.[24] The idea of masculinity within a state was hence increasingly defined and derived from the control of the female body, and the female body hence came to represent more than just that; instead, it represented a nation, and by controlling it, the idea of being able to control India emerged.[25]

Yuval-Davis and Anthias write about one of the complex links between the state and women being 'their social role in human production.'[26] Women's roles are relegated to the periphery in the construction of a nation and are limited to reproducing 'biologically,

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[20] ibid (n 1).

[21] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Sage Publications, 1997), 11.

[22] Alexander and Simone A James, "M/othering the Nation: Women's Bodies as Nationalist Trope in Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory," *African American Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 383.

[23] Martha Nussbaum, "Body of the Nation," *Boston Review,* May 23, 2017, http://bostonreview.net/martha-nussbaum-women-mutilated-gujarat (accessed April 3, 2021).

[24] ibid.

[25] ibid.

[26] ibid (n 22), 381.

culturally and symbolically.'[27] They are identified as 'bearers of the nation'[28] and symbolised as the 'repository of group identity'[29] but are 'denied any direct relation to national agency.'[30] This limits women to private spaces, preventing them from exercising their rights as citizens and participating in public decision making. These rigid gender roles for women are visible in post-colonial India as well, especially among ethnic and religious minorities seeking self-determination and autonomy. The Indian state has adopted in these spaces 'the guise of a dominating, masculinist nation state, acting with immunity and impunity.'[31] Over time, in response to the dissent around this masculinist behaviour, state violence has been perpetuated and legitimised.

The lack of a critical attitude towards the state by the post-independence Autonomous Women's Movement (IWM) has further solidified this pattern of violence. Due to its emergence from within the nationalist struggle for independence, the idea of nationhood remained entrenched in its approach to the issue of violence against women. As such, the IWM's resistance was limited to criticizing the bourgeois state or to leading a civil rights movement against the declaration of the emergency in 1975.[32] The serious feminist challenge to the masculinised state has been a fairly recent development. This challenge arose only after a gendered analysis of the partition of India into two nations revealed how nationalism was used to incite and justify the large-scale violence and atrocities committed against women in both the newly founded India and Pakistan.[33] The 2002 Gujarat riots was the second large-scale incident post partition which refocused attention on the state's complicity in gender-based violence. There is a plethora of literature in India on violence against women, but the focus on the systemic terrorization of women by the Indian army and military groups in the

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[27] ibid (n 22), 373.

[28] Renata Pepicelli, "Rethinking Gender in Arab Nationalism" *Oriente Moderno* 97 (2017): 201.

[29] ibid.

[30] Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa" *Transition* 51 (1991): 104-123.

[31] Kalpana Wilson, Jennifer Ung Loh and Navtej Purewal, "Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India" *The Feminist Review Collective,* 119 (2018): 3.

[32] Paromita Chakravarti, "Reading Women's Protest in Manipur: A Different Voice?," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 5, no. 3 (2010): 57 https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2010.305597731461 (accessed April 3, 2021) .

[33] ibid.

so called 'disturbed' states of the Indian nation is lacking.[34] [35] Banerjee, in the documentation of the Naga Women's Movement for Peace, speaks about the lack of inclusion in mainstream feminist politics of the lived experience of the women in the northeast under the conflict. [36]

Political Motherhood and The Performance of Resistance

This protest was uniquely disruptive because it employed the performativity of a naked protest but through the bodies of mothers, a body that is not sexualised or politicised in a way that allows for the normal naked protest disruption strategies to be employed. In India, stripping away the clothes of persons belonging to minority groups, such as *Adivasis* or *Dalits,* is a common form of humiliation.[37] Here, by removing their own clothes, these imas challenged the humiliation that is attached to stripping away clothing. Berger distinguishes between nakedness and nudity. He states that 'while the naked body operates innocent of an outside gaze, nudity places the body on deliberate display, as an object of gaze and representation.'[38] Within this protest, the disruptive nudeness of the imas' sexually scripted bodies creates a sudden temporality which becomes the visual memory of the revolution and creates a new politics of remembering that rejects morally influenced ideas of nudity. This body politics defies the cultural ethos and mortality that is imposed on women and rejects the male gaze that objectifies and scripts upon the female bodies through violence. The Meira Paibis made the army personnel victims in the face of maternal nudity, a cultural taboo, and the sexualisation of ageing female bodies in a way that is not visible in a neo-liberal marketplace. This protest radically redefined the way in which rape, especially at the hands of state actors, was viewed across India. It led to a shift in the view around rape being a private issue to one that is an act of state terror requiring political redress and public discourse. It

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[34] ibid.

[35] See, Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, "Organizing against Violence: Strategies of the Indian Women's Movement" *Pacific Affairs* 62, no. 1 (1989): 63 https://www.jstor.org/stable/2760264 (accessed September 13, 2021).

[36] Paula Banerjee, "The Naga Women's Intervention for Peace," *Canadian Women's Studies* 19, no. 4: 137 https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/7944/7075 (accessed September 13, 2021).

[37] Human Rights Watch, "Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's Untouchables," February 12, 2007, https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/02/12/hidden-apartheid/caste-discrimination-against-indias-untouchables (accessed April 14, 2020).

[38] John Berger, *Way of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1972), 54.

exposes through the 'embarrassing nakedness, the routine rapes committed by the army.'[39] Foucault[40] and Mbembe[41] theorise that the acts of naked protest serve as bio political encounters between the subject and the sovereign. The acts are expressions of political demands where the body is the site of governance and bio power.

Motherhood has been one of the few modes through which women in the Northeast region of India have historically been able to collectively resist and politically participate. The Meira Paibis originated as a mothers' movement in the 1970s to engage in a response to the production, distribution, and consumption of illicit alcohol within the Meitei community.[42] Women, through their shared identity as the 'biological mothers of the community', organised interventions aimed at addressing the corruption perpetuated by hegemonic liquor lobbies.[43] Their original name was Nasha Bandi (Stop Alcohol Intoxication).[44] Their name changed to Meira Paibis (Torch Bearers) when they shifted their focus from issues within their community towards addressing the exploitative and violent measures employed by the state. As this shift occurred, they began organising resistance movements against security forces through cases involving enforced disappearances, custodial torture, and fake encounters. It is interesting how the social sanction Meira Paibis received due to their identity as community mothers to take punitive action against vagrants in their community shifted from within the community towards the violations inflicted upon the community by the post-colonial Indian state through the use of the security forces and emergency laws.

This protest separates itself from other collective resistance movements in Manipur that employ motherhood in the same way as here. While embracing motherhood, this protest,

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[39] Ibid. (n 19).

[40] Foucalt, *Birth of Bio Politics: Lectures at the College de France* (Palgrave MacMillian, 2004).

[41] Achille Mbembe, *Necro-Politics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

[42] Their use of motherhood politically was not inspired by any other movement but became more organised around the same time in the mid-1970s when other well-known mothers' groups arose across the world against dictatorial and fascist regimes such as 'Madres de La Plazo de Mayo' (Argentina), 'Co Madres' (El Savador) and 'Grupo Apoyo Mutuo' (Guatemela) from ibid. (n 1).

[43] Sumi Madhok, "Coloniality, Political Subjectivation and the Gendered Politics of Protest in a 'State of Exception,'" *Feminist Review* (July 2018): 119.

[44] Iboyaima Laithangbam, "Women vigilantes of Manipur," *The Hindu,* November 04, 2014, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/women-vigilantes-of-manipur-to-observe-meira-paibi-day-on-december-29/article6563476.ece (accessed June 25, 2019).

through its nakedness, breaks free from the traditional image of a mother. It has hence led to a reimagining of their identity and has shattered the colonial narrative of 'women as nation-mother needing their valiant sons' for protection.[45]

> The Meira Paibi as mothers of Manorama deployed the idea of motherhood to shock and shame the army whom they rendered as disobedient and wayward sons. By simultaneously insisting on their maternal status and inviting rape, they made the very act of viewing their naked bodies fraught with the horror of primeval taboo and oedipal guilt. By doing so they turned the shame of rape back on Manorama's rapists.[46]

This protest hence deconstructed the 'politics of objectification' and the manner in which its presentation and representation occurs through the female body. They used the female bodies of ageing mothers, which is outside the bounds of sexualisation traditionally, to subvert the patriarchal idea of rape as a tool that dishonours the woman, her family, and the community.[47]

Some feminists argue that the use of motherhood as a form of protest is not feminist because it reinforces the patriarchal notions that associate women with the role of nurturing and caring.[48] They claim that this 'form of politics falls back upon the sacrificing motherhood image that appeals to the state with "tears and curses" and which re-establishes both the biological and social norms that legitimise nurture and care.'[49] I do not believe this is true. Many of these women, while very active in working on small social issues, occupied the private sphere and were restricted from being public participants in politics and from voicing their opinions and representing their stories; hence, for them to have engaged in a protest that is so disruptive of their everyday reality is a feminist act. For instance, the imas did not inform the male members of their family about this naked protest. This refusal to seek

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[45] ibid. (n 5).

[46] ibid. (n 32).

[47] ibid., 48.

[48] Malathi de Alwis, "Motherhood as a Space of Protest: Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka" in *Women in Peace Politics,* ed. Paula Banerjee (India: Sage Publications, 2008), 153·
Amanda D. Watson, "Feminist Politics Still Needs Motherhood," and Katerina Krulisova, "A Mother's Violence in Global Politics," in *Troubling Motherhood: Maternality in Global Politics,* ed. Lucy B. Hall, Anna L. Weissman, and Laura J. Shepherd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[49] ibid.

acknowledgement from male leadership indicates how a space was created for feminist resistance.[50]

These women instead of staging their bodies as a ground of female vulnerabilities staged it as a site of violence as a result of the 'historical, legitimated and legislative product of the state in which gendered and caste-based modes of powers converged to form the AFSPA Act.'[51] Judith Butler speaks of the 'theatricalization of political rage' within the context of the US queer activism through performative methods such as die-ins, kiss-ins, and drag balls. She argues that the mixing of theatre and politics 'recontexualises queer from its place within a homophobic strategy of abjection and annihilation to an insistent and public severing of that interpellation from the effect of shame.'[52] This performance does a similar recontexualisation where the discourse of female victimhood and shame changes into that of feminist resistance.[53] The protest erased the rape-power dynamics, an extension of state masculinity, that were used to oppress the locals in this region.

Sharon Marcus speaks of 'rape as a scripted interaction which takes place in language and can be understood in terms of conventional masculinity and femininity as well as other gender inequalities inscribed before an individual instance of rape.'[54] This script allows for the exertion of masculine power and the feminine powerlessness. Thus, by identifying this script, she asks us to create 'a gap between the script and the actress'[55] so that we can challenge the language of rape which attaches violence and shame to its subjects. This challenge allows for a transformation where women's bodies are represented in new and militant ways.

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[50] Teresa Rehman, "Tales from the Mothers of Manipur," *Scroll,* February 28, 2017, https://scroll.in/article/830390/we-are-notorious-women-we-have-a-lot-of-stories-to-tell-tales-from-the-mothers-of-manipur (accessed June 25, 2019).

[51] ibid. (n 9).

[52] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1998): 527, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893 (accessed June 25, 2021).

[53] Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Post Colonial* (India: University of Illinois Press 2014), 13.

[54] Sharon Marcus, "Fighting bodies, fighting words: A theory and politics of rape prevention" (2002): 390 https://www.thehinducentre.com/multimedia/archive/02677/Sharon_Marcus_-_Fi_2677620a.pdf (accessed April 4, 2021).

[55] ibid.

Thus, while maternal care becomes the entry point for involvement in a highly militarised society for these mothers, their methods question the stereotypes and biases attached to the role of mothers, their sexuality, and their bodies. While posing this challenge internally to their traditional image and roles, their methods externally question the violence that is scripted upon women's bodies and the lack of accountability platform against these forms of colonization and exploitation by the nation state.

Reflections from the protest: Exploring new ways for justice and peace-building

This section looks at the effectiveness of this protest and critically analyses it to highlight the limitations of domestic and international legal frameworks with respect to conflict related sexual violence (CRSV).

Within the domestic framework, this protest was important, as it attempted to dismantle and bring to light the exploitative and colonising provisions of this emergency law. Under the AFSPA, the powers granted to the Indian army are wider than those sanctioned to states during emergencies.[56] The state government can declare any area as 'disturbed[57] and grant the armed forces the power 'to shoot to kill, to raid houses and to destroy any property that is likely to be used by insurgents'.[58] They can arrest any person without warrant on the reasonable suspicion of having committed or of being about to commit a cognizable offence. In the name of maintaining peace and security, all acts by such personnel are outside the purview of judicial scrutiny without the previous sanction of the central government.[59] However, in almost all cases, the central government denies sanctions for a judicial review.[60] Furthermore, the government's decision to designate an area as disturbed is not open to

[56] ibid. (n 19).
[57] The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, s 3.
[58] ibid. s 4.
[59] ibid. s 6.
[60] ibid (n 14).

judicial review.[61] Therefore, the AFSPA is incompatible with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials according to which a law enforcement official or member of the armed forces must only engage in use of firearms as a last resort. [62] [63]

While this protest did not lead to AFSPA being repealed, it did lead to a committee being set up to review the Act. The Reddy committee, after careful examination, recommended that the government repeal the Act.[64] The Justice Verma Committee, which was constituted in 2013 after the Delhi gangrape incident, also acknowledged the existence of sexual violence allegedly committed by the armed forces in areas where the AFSPA was applicable, and called for it to be brought within the purview of ordinary criminal law.[65] While the Indian government refused to accept these recommendations, a series of socio-legal interventions that resulted from this protest led to certain accountability mechanisms being introduced through judicial interventions within the AFSPA. In a recent judgement, the Supreme Court has directed for all encounter deaths in disturbed areas to be thoroughly investigated irrespective of whether this involves the death of a militant or a civilian.[66] A judicial probe was also launched to investigate the rape and murder of Manorama.[67] After ten years, the case wound up at the Supreme Court where the government was ordered to pay Manorama's family compensation even though the culprits were never convicted.[68]

Within the international law framework, in particular the WPS agenda, this protest is significant, as it highlights the limitations of this agenda in empowering and protecting

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[61] ibid. 35.

[62] Amnesty International India, 'Briefing: The Armed Forces Special Powers Act: A Renewed Debate in India on Human Rights and National Security' (2013) https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/asa200422013en.pdf (accessed April 4, 2021).

[63] ibid. (n 23).

[64] ibid. (n 1).

[65] Justice Verma Committee, "Amendments to the Criminal Law" January 23, 2013: 150 https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy_committee_reports/1359132636--Justice%20Verma%20Committee%20Report%20Summary_0.pdf (accessed April 4, 2021).

[66] Extra Judicial Execution Victim Families Association (EEVFA) v. Union of India, W.P. (Criminal) No. 129 of 2012.

[67] Ravi Nitesh, "Right to Justice Deprived by State: Case of Manorama Vs AFSPA from Manipur, India" *OHRH* January 7, 2015, http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/right-to-justice-deprived-by-state-case-of-manorama-vs-afspa-from-manipur-india/ (accessed April 4, 2021).

[68] ibid.

women in conflict regions especially around their role in seeking justice and engaging in peace-building. The rage of the imas that is visible in this protest highlights the violence that goes beyond those inflicted by the security forces – it is embedded also in the structural frameworks within the rule of law, which is used to colonise and exploit these indigenous communities and their lands. The militarisation of the society and economy of Manipur for over seventy years has meant that these communities have lived in a constant state of unrest and insecurity with severely compromised spaces for exercising their political voice.

The main reason for the imas to engage in this performative, nude protest rather than engagement directly with the rule of law was because of the lack of due process under the law, the presence of widespread impunity, and the poor implementation of the WPS agenda by India. This agenda under the UNSC resolutions and CEDAW is rich and detailed in its efforts to address CRSV; however, it fails to translate substantively into the reality on the ground. The agenda has created a strong theoretical framework, such as (i) recognising structural gender inequality and discrimination as the root cause of CRSV; (ii) recognising the responsibility of the state towards the actions of non-state actors within their territory,[69] and (iii) recognising 'sexual exploitation and abuse', which is often perpetrated by national troops, peacekeeping forces, humanitarian actors, and immigration officials and calling for them to be provided with gender-sensitive training for identifying and protecting vulnerable women and girls.[70] Temporary special measures have been suggested for increasing gender equality and representation and for the incorporation of informal judicial mechanisms, such as truth commissions and people's courts.

The WPS agenda, however, fails on several key fronts, and this has been highlighted and reflected in the protest by the imas as well. It relies heavily on the criminal justice system to urge member states to take the necessary actions to protect the rights and particular needs of the women in areas of conflict. Without the cooperation of member states, this agenda's effectiveness and its incorporation in domestic laws is severely compromised. For instance,

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[69] CEDAW "General Recommendation No. 30 on 'women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations'" (2010) CEDAW/C/GC/30 para 10.
[70] ibid. 41 (b).

UNSC Resolution 1325[71] was the first resolution under the WPS agenda. This resolution calls for every member state to draft and implement a National Action Plan (NAP), which is a context-specific framework to ensure the inclusion of women in politics and peace building and to offer them protection from violent conflict. However, without any accountability platform within the UNSC resolution, there is no way of monitoring or urging member states to adopt this. Consequently, India is one of the countries that 21 years after this resolution has failed to implement the agenda.[72] Moreover, while public participation of women is a key part of the WPS agenda, we see in Manipur the very patriarchal formation of such spaces. Public protests are generally shut down in Manipur through the use of excess force, tear gas, and rubber bullets.[73] This protest, with its disruptiveness, shocked the army to the point where they were unable to at least immediately employ their usual tactics for curbing such public demonstrations.

The heavy focus on constantly reforming the procedural and legislative elements of the criminal justice system as the solution for addressing this issue has limited the applicability and interventions through this agenda. This limiting perspective towards peace building reforms looks only at one kind of politics, namely, that of the criminal justice system, when in fact, there is a need to cultivate a politics beyond the law that takes into account other systemic criminal inequalities that serve as limiting factors. Charlesworth and Ottomon recognised the limiting role that these legal structures play in their analysis of the tension between evolution and revolution within law and wrote that 'the techniques and methods for responding to this "message" have largely resulted in the establishment of criminal justice techniques and models that reproduce the structures and limitations of dominant and existing criminal justice models.'[74] This singular feminist narrative fails to challenge the underlying structural, procedural, and legal limitations to the criminal justice model and hence restricts the ability of the WPS agenda to imagine other forms of redressal

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[71] UNSC Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325 (2000).

[72] Global Network of Women Peace-builders, "No Money, No NAP: Manual for Costing and Budgeting National Action Plans on UNSC 325" https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/GNWPCostingBudgetingManual_Eng_4web.pdf 9 (accessed June 25, 2021).

[73] ibid. (n16 and 19).

[74] Gina Heathcote, "Feminist Dialogues on International Law: Successes, Tensions, Futures" (*Oxford University Press* 2019): 5.

mechanisms. Unlike the UNSC resolutions on WPS, CEDAW recognizes some quasi-judicial forms of justice and reconciliation. It therefore calls for informal judicial mechanisms, such as truth commissions and people's courts, that allow for people to voice their grievances and for collective healing should judicial platforms fail.[75] While one of the aims of the protest was to highlight the draconian AFSPA emergency law, the larger aim was to allow for collective healing through a public demonstration of grief. In this protest, both the imas and the spectators, who were Manipuri citizens outside the army headquarters, were seen crying and yelling at the Indian army.[76] The imas, through their disruptive protest, have challenged this rigid legal framework for addressing conflict and highlighted the need for other alternate platforms.

[75] ibid. 75.

[76] ibid (n 1).

Conclusion

Through this essay, I have attempted to indicate that this protest's success lies not so much in the legal reforms it introduced as in the social changes and collective action that it brought about. Its disruptiveness served as an entry point for these mothers into the political space, as it successfully broke the binary between political and personal motherhood through the use of their pain and anger to rupture the norms that identify them as grieving mothers. It paved the way for a new form of civil disobedience in this region through gender performativity; in particular, 'acts that fail to adhere to the resultant gendered order are disturbing, putting into relief and troubling the constructed nature of social order.'[77] The day of the protest is observed by activists now as 'Anti Repression Day'.[78] Since the protest, the Meira Paibis have held multiple other campaigns against the AFSPA across Manipur. They have started documenting incidents of human rights violations and have formed solidarity networks across Northeast India to facilitate transmission of this information to activists, the media, and the general public. All their protests continue to employ the techniques of peaceful civil disobedience and disruptive resistance methods that redefine the performance of gender within their community. They continue their justice and peace-building efforts, calling for an end to the impunity extended to the security forces through such draconian security provisions.

I have indicated through this disruptive protest the innovative use of political motherhood and nudeness to challenge the rigid and often hollow conventional structures around state accountability. This protest highlights the parallels that exist between the policy frameworks in place, often within the international law structure and the reality on the ground. Without any coherent and effective monitoring and accountability mechanism, the provisions do not translate into practices and, as such, civil society organizations and groups at the community level remain isolated and excluded from the wider discussions within the

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[77] Abonga, Raphael Kerali, Holly Porter & Rebecca Tapscott, "Naked Bodies and Collective Action: Repertoires of Protest in Uganda's Militarised, Authoritarian Regime" *Civil Wars* 2020, no. 2-3 (November 2019): 208, https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2020.1680018 (accessed June 25, 2019).
[78] Simran Sirur, "17 years since their naked protest against Army, mothers of Manipur say fight not over," *The Print,* July 22, 2021, https://theprint.in/india/17-years-since-their-naked-protest-against-army-mothers-of-manipur-say-fight-not-over-yet/700093/ (accessed September 15, 2021).

human rights space in addressing CRSV. There is therefore a need for these agendas to reimagine new ways of achieving justice and engaging in peace building through more non legal and community driven initiatives.

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Chinese Roots of Political Religion: Statism in Modern China, 1897-1924

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Abstract

The concept of "political religion" has not been adequately applied to the study of political thought in modern China. This article intends to demonstrate the theoretical potential of political religion in deepening our understanding of Chinese political thought by offering a preliminary analysis of the evolution of statism in China at the turn of the twentieth century. As a political aspiration of constructing a strong China in the modern world, statism has led many Chinese political thinkers to imbue the search for ways of strengthening the state with eschatological fervour. By examining the thoughts of Liang Qichao, Sun Yat-sen, and early Chinese Marxists, I argue that the persistent theme of viewing a strong state as the guardian of Chinese civilization and the trailblazer for future humanity has contributed substantially to the popularization of the political religion of Marxism-Leninism. The tenacity of statist ideals in today's party-state can also be seen as having inherited the religiosity of the quest for a modern China that began in the early twentieth century.

KEYWORDS political religion, statism, Marxism-Leninism, totalitarianism

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a third-year PhD student in History at SOAS. Currently, my project seeks to trace the rise of statism in modern China back to the internal context of intellectual developments from the early nineteenth century to the eve of 1895. The ultimate question I intend to raise is why statism, a strand of thought upholding the state as the worldly embodiment of cosmic authority and the highest source of good, would prevail in modern China. More specifically, by situating statism within the broader intellectual landscape of nineteenth century China, I pay special attention to the cosmological legacy bequeathed upon statecraft agendas and reform movements, which greatly enhanced the tenacity of statism in modern China. In addition, I look closely at the nineteenth century literati's self-image, as their political thought evolved in response to changing socio-political situations.

Introduction

Before developing its own modernity, China is generally regarded as a civilization with distinct ontological visions among the Axial civilizations.[1] Irrespective of whether the Axial Age paradigm is accepted or not, the juxtaposition of China and other worldly civilizations, especially the West, presupposes fundamental differences inherent in each culture. It is no wonder, then, that the modern transformation of China, which saw the total disruption of the imperial order under Qing rule, was once understood by scholars like John K. Fairbank as "China's response to the West" in Western historiography.[2] In recent decades, however, this stereotype has been challenged and surpassed by scholars devoted to "discovering history in China."[3] Seen in this light, China's 'century of revolution' should also be reconsidered as more than the mere outcome of foreign impacts. I would go further to argue that the eventual establishment of revolutionary regimes in twentieth-century China has its foundation rooted in the historical evolution of modern Chinese political thought. By upholding statist doctrines through the delicate appropriation of Western ideas, Chinese political thinkers descried the most powerful expression of their ideals in the revolutionary ideology of Marxism-Leninism. To elaborate on this point, I will examine the quests for a modern Chinese state by prominent political thinkers from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century through the lens of political religion. In doing so, I will ask the following questions: Did the elements already exist in Chinese political thought that were prone to the adoption of the political religion of Marxism-Leninism? How was Chinese statism expressed through the rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism? Did religious sentiments play a role in early Chinese Marxists' advocacy of such an ideology?

Several points ought to be clarified before beginning our investigation. The study of intellectual history in modern scholarship has placed considerable emphasis on the contextualization of the evolution of ideas, which accords with R. G. Collingwood's distinction

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[1] S.N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 33-56.

[2] Ssu-yü Teng and John King Fairbank, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[3] Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

of an event as having an outside "in terms of bodies and their movements" and an inside that can only be perceived "in terms of thought." For Collingwood, it is the historian's central task to think through every action in the event when understanding the agents' rationale behind such actions.[4] Yet such a sociological approach always risks exaggerating or marginalizing the real influence of the event in question vis-à-vis conceptual transformations based on the historian's pre-established narrative, even if the slight possibility of acquiring the "right horizon of inquiry" in studying historical mind-sets is granted.[5] Moreover, the unfolding of historical events, which constitutes the external process of intellectual evolution, is closely but not necessarily related to the intrinsic properties of ideas. The analysis of the history of ideas thus cannot be distracted by the multitude of background information.[6] Hence, I prefer to adopt an intellectual approach in this article, which focuses on the inner logic of ideas and how they are symbolically perceived, appropriated, and reinvented by individual thinkers in contribution to a general discourse and in their construction of a symbolically meaningful world.[7] The dynamics of Chinese politics and social transformations in the period concerned should therefore receive minimal attention due to the consistency of my discussion. The idiosyncrasies of political thinkers and the philological textual study of their works, which well deserve a standalone analysis, are also omitted since they do not constitute the essence of the symbolic formation of ideas that generates a life of its own.[8]

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[4] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. ed., with lectures 1926–1928 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 213–7.

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. ed. translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Continuum Impacts (London: Continuum, 2004), 301–2.

[6] For a similar discussion, see Lao Sze-kwang, *Xinbian Zhongguo zhexue shi*, vol. 1 (Taipei: Sanmin chubanshe, 2012), 1–20.

[7] On man's symbolic creativity, see Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1944).

[8] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Volume 4: The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, eds. John Michael Krois and Donald Philip Verene, trans. John Michael Krois (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

Political Religion and Its Applicability to China

Though the study of religious elements in political movements can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, apart from the interpretative tradition of totalitarianism, it is only in recent decades that "political religion" as a concretized conceptual toolkit has been used in the comparison of dictatorships.[9] And just like totalitarianism, the very definition of political religion is widely debated and the legitimacy of describing political phenomena using religious categories is called into question from time to time. Hence, by adopting a historical approach, some scholars suggest the concept be tested out on Communism, National Socialism, and Fascism with respect to the question of truth, to rituals aimed at constructing faithful communities, and to the totalitarian understanding of politics.[10] From this point of view, political religion seems to be applicable only to societies where totalitarian regimes are or were once established. Hence, it will be problematic for the case of China, since the totalitarian model has long been deemed inadequate for the study of state-society relations in the country due to the institutional dynamics and the violent outbreak of the Cultural Revolution that defied totalitarian control by a rigid bureaucratic system in Maoist China.[11]

However, in the ideological dimension, China can be regarded as a case in point to interpret the political religion of Marxism-Leninism.[12] Some recent studies have also extended the scope beyond totalitarianism in deploying political religion to examine the sacralization of

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[9] Hans Maier, "Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume 1: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, ed. Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2004), 188-203.

[10] Philippe Burrin, "Concluding discussion," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, ed. Michael Schäfer and Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2007), 165-167.

[11] Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 12-14; Margaret M. Pearson, *China's New Business Elite: The Political Consequences of Economic Reform* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997), 23. Mao Zedong's encouragement of mass movement during the Cultural Revolution, though intended to consolidate his personal rule, in effect dismantled the foundation of Soviet-style totalitarian regime by sweeping away the existent party-state establishments. See Andrew G. Walder, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 180-314.

[12] Klaus-Georg Riegel, "Marxism-Leninism as political religion," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, ed. Michael Schäfer and Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2007), 61-112.

politics even in Western democracy.[13] Thus, the kaleidoscope of approaches to the nebulous term should encourage us to think outside the box instead of deterring us from making useful connections between political cultures. Of the many attributes political religion possesses, the one that stands out is the elevation of the state to a soteriological status as being the sole source of reality. Through a teleological interpretation of history and a messianic vision for the future, the immediacy of inner-worldly salvation is proclaimed, and the state becomes the locus of such a salvation. Eric Voegelin, a pioneer in the field, depicted this process as the state transforming individual experience to a supra-human reality.[14] Therefore, political religion can be narrowly defined as a set of beliefs and ideologies fusing statist doctrines with religious appeals. As we shall see, Chinese political thinkers in the early twentieth century frequently imbued the notion of a puissant state with eschatological fervour. In this sense, deploying the term 'political religion' in the examination of statism in early twentieth century China is well justified.

To demonstrate the religiosity of proposals for a puissant state in early twentieth century Chinese political thought, in what follows, I will first look at the conceptualization of the state by notable political thinkers in the late Qing and early Republican period. Then I shall examine the rationale behind early Chinese Marxists' advocacy of Marxist conceptions of the state. In doing so, I intend to capture a persistent theme of the statist aspiration to build a strong China in the modern world through analysing connections of the inner logic in their respective theoretical constructions. My discussion will thus be focused on the anatomy of ideas per se while minimizing the inclusion of background information which may prove to be confusing rather than illuminating.

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[13] Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen, and Maartje Janse, *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism: The Sacralization of Politics in the Age of Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[14] Dietmar Herz, "The concept of 'political religions' in the thought of Eric Voegelin," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume I: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, ed. Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2004), 150-151.

State as Cure: Liang Qichao and Statism in the Late Qing Period

China's transformation from empire to nation-state is unquestionably shaped by external forces, often in the form of Western aggression. Yet historical identity also played a nonnegligible role in making the state as Chinese as it is modern. Already in the early nineteenth century, traditional Chinese literati were putting forward constitutional agendas in response to the novel situations generated in previous centuries.[15] By the 1890s, when the relative peace of the Tongzhi Restoration had given way to renewed waves of imperialist intrusions, the Qing state became utterly incapable of defending China against mounting foreign threats. The Qing's defeat in the 1894 Sino-Japanese War further revealed China's weakness and invited a wave of imperialist invasions that threatened the "partition of China."[16] In the face of such desperate situations, reforming the falling empire to rescue the Chinese civilization became an increasingly pressing matter.

When explaining the need for transition from monarchy to democracy, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), the eminent reformer and political thinker, firstly declared the teachings of *Chunqiu* (春秋) as profound in forecasting three ages of human civilization: aristocracy, monarchy, and democracy. Then, by dividing each age into two stages, Liang came up with six types of polities (tribal, feudal, monarchical, constitutional, presidential, and parliamentary) respectively. He asserted that these polities must unfold in an orderly sequence: "When the time is not due, no one can stride over it (the emergence of new polities). When the time has come, no one can obstruct it."[17] Though paying reverence to Confucian classics, Liang was following his master Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927) in situating monarchy on an evolutionary scale to

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[15] Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[16] Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Late Ch'ing Foreign Relations, 1866-1905," in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 11, Late Ch'ing 1800–1911, Part 2*, ed. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 101-15.

[17] Liang Qichao, "Lun junzheng minzheng xiangshan zhi li," (On principles of the transformation from monarchy to democracy) in *Yinbingshi heji wenji*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 139.

point out its historical role and emphasize the inevitability of its change. As social Darwinist as it may sound, Liang's approach was more sophisticated when he went on to provide a historical account of how different polities corresponding to different stages developed over time. For Liang, in the primitive age (i.e., Age of Disorder, *Juluan shi* 據亂世), clans of people suffered from endless warfare since "whoever has blood and energy (*xueqi* 血氣) has the propensity to compete." The emergence of feudal states and later monarchy was the persistent effort to sanction conflicts and regulate human behaviours.[18] This implicitly Hobbesian line of argument enabled Liang to call for the progression of the Chinese state into the contemporaneous polity of democracy in a sense of promoting Chinese civilization in particular and human civilization in general. But even for the West, where democracy had been effectively implemented, the final Age of Great Peace (*Taiping shi* 太平世) was yet to be achieved since polities that belonged to previous ages still existed. The reform of China's monarchy thus took on a messianic hue as being part of the global evolution in politics to advance human civilization into a new epoch. This message was more clearly delivered in Liang's depiction of "the fate of Earth (*dadi zhiyun* 大地之運)" where it was said that the fate originated in the Kunlun Mountains and initially moved to allow India, Persia, Babylon, and Egypt to prosper. Then it made its way to Europe resulting in the flourishing of first ancient Greece and Rome and then modern nations such as France and England. After that, the fate went across the Pacific to East Asia and brought about Japan's rise. As it would continue eastward, China's thriving was bound to be imminent in the next decade.[19] Liang's mythical reconstruction of the vicissitudes of world civilizations conflated political reform with religious sentiment, empowering the state to act in the name of cosmic power. And it is precisely through the concept of power that the religious sphere encroached into the definition of the state, as the state is empowered through being depicted as the sole agent in

[18] Ibid., 139-142.

[19] Liang Qichao, "Lun Zhongguo zhi jiangqiang," (On the coming revitalization of China) in *Yinbingshi heji wenji*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 148.

actualizing messianic visions.[20] Hence, before the fateful reform of 1898, intellectuals like Liang had begun to vest in the state religious characteristics.

The utter failure of the 1898 Reform and the consequent disastrous Boxer Rebellion disillusioned Liang of any attempt to swiftly transform China into a modern state. However, his statist stance was only enhanced as Liang reflected upon recent events and engaged systematically with Western political theories.[21] While exploring the reasons why China was then weak, Liang blamed Chinese ideals, customs, politics, and current affairs.[22] By ideals, Liang meant the traditional Chinese conception of political order, and for him, there were three strands of thought that led to the enfeeblement of China: ignorance of the difference between the state and all under Heaven (*tianxia* 天下), ignorance of the boundary between the state and the imperial court, and ignorance of the relationship between the state and its people. Through the hammer of the state, all three pillars of political order, namely, Heaven, the Emperor, and the people, were dismantled by Liang, and by accusing Chinese people of being slave-minded, fatuous, selfish, pretentious, craven, and lethargic, Liang hinted at a thorough transformation of the spiritual world of ordinary Chinese as the prerequisite for building a strong Chinese state. Interestingly, Liang described this process as healing a patient whereby "good doctors must first investigate the origins of the disease. The longer the disease lasts, the more profound the origins. The more severe the disease, the more complicated the origins."[23] In Liang's mind, the cure was explicitly expressed in his translation of the German political theorist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli's (1808-1881) formulation of the state as being organic. By citing Bluntschli's assertion that "scholars since the eighteenth century have regarded citizens as society and the state as the

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[20] Hans Otto Seitschek, "The interpretation of totalitarianism as religion," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume III: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships - Theory & History of Interpretations*, ed. Jodi Bruhn and Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2007), 122.

[21] Peter Gue Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2012), 120.

[22] Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun," (On origins of China's accumulating weakness) in *Yinbingshi heji wenji*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 396-426.

[23] Ibid., 397.

cumulation of individuals…which is not the case,"[24] Liang completely moved away from the more liberal conception of the state as in the social contract theory associated with Rousseau,[25] which appeared in his earlier writings as the ideal model for political modernization.[26] According to Bluntschli, the state was the combination of body and spirit and therefore was able to grow and develop in response to changing environments as opposed to machines. Citizens were the very embodiment of the state and could express its will and rights. In this way, the identity of modern individuals was defined by the state, and the process of healing was reverted. In order to transform the Chinese spirit, the state must be elevated as the locus of such a transformation (i.e., the cure). Thus claimed Liang:

> Today, China's biggest disadvantage and what it lacks most are organic unity and coercive order. Liberty and equality are really secondary… We must mold clan people (*bumin* 部民) into citizens of a nation (*guomin* 國民) first, and only then can we talk about their happiness. Like Bluntschli said, social contract theory suits the society, not the state. If it is not used correctly, citizens might be dissolved and returned to clan people, not the other way around.[27]

Convinced of the organic nature of the state, Liang was quick to disseminate his ideas and agendas as the sole cure for a sick and debilitated China through captivating rhetoric.[28] In doing so, he turned farther away from the liberal tradition and leaned toward statism with religious fervour to save China as a civilization from total devastation. Unlike nationalism, with its anthropocentric focus on the political arrangements of peoples in the secular world,[29] Liang viewed the state as representing the authority of a higher order dictating human affairs. This could partly explain his advocacy of constitutional monarchy, which partially retained the image of an emperor as the Son of Heaven in the last years of Qing rule. Liang was not alone in

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[24] Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo," (Theories of the eminent political scholar Bluntschli) in *Yinbingshi heji wenji*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 1188.

[25] For Rousseau, however justified a sovereign is by general will of the public, it must be based on the consent of autonomous individuals to relinquished their partial freedom in exchange of order and protection of rights by the state. Liang at this stage, however, saw the state as self-legitimizing and a precondition for individual welfare.

[26] Zarrow, *After Empire*, 125-127.

[27] Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia," 1187.

[28] Liu Wanming, "Fuyan 'Guojia shenti': Liang Qichao yu 'shengbing de Zhongguo' xingxiang zhi sanbu," *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 57, no. 06 (2017): 27–37.

[29] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

propagating statist doctrines, but what he had in mind was fundamentally different from the republican conception of the state by Late Qing revolutionaries, such as Sun Yat-sen (孫中山, 1866-1925).

State as Legislator: The Image of Republican China in Sun Yat-sen

By stressing the homologous nature of the state and the human body, Liang Qichao was meant to keep the Qing state at least nominally intact. After all, a good doctor would never destroy the human body in order to cure a disease. Yet clearly this analogy was not accepted by everyone, and those with a republican vision of the future Chinese state fervently propagated their agenda through the rhetoric of revolution. Sun Yat-sen in 1897 described this view succinctly as "holding popular sovereignty as the ultimate creed and thus adopting republicanism in politics. And how can republicanism be achieved outright? I thereby claim the responsibility of revolution." Similar to Liang, Sun also excavated Chinese traditions in support of his agenda: "Republicanism is the soul of governance in our country and the legacy of past sages. Those talking about ancient times all emulate governance in the time of Three Dynasties (*Sandai* 三代), but little do they know that Three Dynasties actually espoused the soul of republicanism in their political process."[30] Through the metaphor of Three Dynasties, Sun shifted the Chinese ideal of the Golden Age from ancient times to the tangible future. The eschatological character of Sun's republicanism became more apparent when he openly denied the incremental approach to China's political reform in a 1905 speech to Chinese overseas students in Tokyo and stated that "trains on railroads were initially ill-designed and only modified afterward. When China decides to build railroads, should we use the ill-designed trains or modified ones? ... Also, constitutional monarchies around the world must be founded by blood so as to be genuinely constitutional. Why should we adopt the defected constitutional monarchy (instead of republicanism) if blood

[30] Sun Yat-sen, "Yu Gongqi Yinzang Pingshan Zhou de tanhua," (Conversations with Gongqi Yinzang Pingshan Zhou) in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 172-173.

has to be shed?"[31] Here Sun was appealing to political martyrdom with a certain degree of religious piety with regard to republicanism through the rhetoric of blood. In this way, resorting to revolutionary measures could be seen as a process of purification as one demonstrates his devotion to republican ideals. Ultimately, this purification must be conducted among all Chinese people for popular sovereignty to be established. Thus Sun in his 1906 strategic plan for revolution claimed that "previous ages were times for hero's revolutions, now is the time for national revolution. National revolution means all people in the country possess the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity so that they all shoulder the responsibility of revolution."[32] Values of Western liberalism were then appropriated to serve the Chinese revolution, the exclusive nature of which derived its legitimacy from the elevation of Republican China to a soteriological status with eschatological fervour, at least among revolutionaries. Any moderate proposals would be oppugned not only in the name of progression but also with religious ardour.

Despite ex post facto propaganda, revolutionary uprisings before the 1911 Revolution received little public support within China.[33] The harsh political realities after the establishment of the Republic of China also sparked widespread resentment against central authority, resulting in the militarization of the political order and the rise of local strongmen.[34] Worst of all, the momentous revolution failed to transform the political tradition of rule *by* law into rule *of* law, rendering legislative attempts in the first few years of the fledgling republic disastrous power struggles that exhausted political tolerance and endangered state authority.[35] Witnessing how Republican China turned out to be anything but the Elysium the revolutionaries dreamed of, Sun Yat-sen altered his idealist stance and worked out a more practical outline for guiding national reconstruction in the wake of warlordism that ravaged the political landscape of China and

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[31] Sun Yat-sen, "Zai Dongjing liuxuesheng huanyinghui shang de yanshuo," (Welcome speech for oversea students in Tokyo) in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 283.

[32] Sun Yat-sen, "Zhongguo tongmenghui geming fanglue," (Strategies of Revolution for Tongmenghui) in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 296.

[33] Zhou Jianchao, *Mimi shehui yu Zhongguo minzhu geming* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002), 55-56.

[34] Mary Backus Rankin, "State and Society in Early Republican Politics, 1912-18," *The China Quarterly*, no. 150 (1997): 263-269.

[35] Li Jiannong, *Zhongguo jin bainian zhengzhishi, 1840-1926* (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 332-333.

substantially undermined the central authority of the state.[36] Tellingly, the image of Republican China in Sun's reconstruction plan revealed his own version of statism. Firstly, by admitting the inadequacy of nation-building up to his time, Sun attributed this inadequacy to the lack of a proper sequence in deploying Three People's Principles (*sanmin zhuyi* 三民主義):

> If the nation does not go through the period of military administration (*junzheng* 軍政), counter-revolutionary forces could never be extirpated, and revolutionary doctrines could never spread among the populace to gain their understanding and support. If the nation does not go through the period of political tutelage (*xunzheng* 訓政), the people who have been long enslaved and recently liberated would never know new ways of life. Then they would either stick to their old ways of irresponsibility or be used by counter-revolutionaries unknowingly. The biggest problem of the former is that revolution cannot reach its complete destruction (of counter-revolutionaries). The biggest problem of the latter is that reconstruction cannot be carried out.[37]

Hence, the subsequent process of national reconstruction should strictly follow the steps laid out respectively in the three periods of military administration, political tutelage, and constitutionalism (*xianzheng* 憲政) to ensure the successful transformation of China into a modern republic. Furthermore, the notion of popular sovereignty reappeared during political tutelage, as local autonomy at the county level would extend to the provincial level and, finally, the national level.[38] This seemingly bottom-up manner of political formation would contradict statist doctrines. Yet a closer look at Sun's logic shows that he presupposed the presence of a strong state as the basis for superimposing Republican agendas onto local communities. Thus, political propaganda was necessary since military administration to "civilize" (*kaihua* 開化) commoners and, in the period of political tutelage, state-sponsored appointees would assist local governments in properly establishing local autonomy. Moreover, only those wholeheartedly

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[36] For the early Republican history of politics and warlordism, see James E. Sheridan, "The Warlord Era: Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916-28," in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 12, Republican China, 1912–1949, Part 1*, ed. John K. Fairbank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 284-321.

[37] Sun Yat-sen, "Zhiding jianguo dagang xuanyan," (Declaration of Fundamentals of National Reconstruction) in *Guofu quanji*, vol. 2 (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1989), 172.

[38] Ibid.

advocating revolutionary creeds were seen as qualified candidates in local elections.[39] Therefore, Sun Yat-sen vested his image of Republican China with the role of legislator in the sense of not only bulwarking constitutional authority but also directing the minds of ordinary people by giving laws for new life in the name of revolution. In this way, the secular power of the state is united with the spiritual power of ideology.[40] The religiosity of this image is very clear.

For both Liang and Sun, the state was indispensable in transforming imperial subjects into a modern national community. As efforts to establish a rule of law in the early Republican period were encumbered by devastating power politics, the very notion became doubted and even mocked.[41] As a result, imbuing ordinary Chinese people with a sense of national identity was increasingly associated with fostering their revolutionary instead of legal consciousness. Hence, while Sun Yat-sen regarded the state as legislator, his conception was soon to be superseded by more powerful rhetoric in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

State as Guardian: The Political Religion of Early Chinese Marxists

Although Sun Yat-sen did not hesitate to harness the power of the Soviet Union when pushing forward his revolutionary agenda against the warlords, he remained reserved about its communist vision.[42] Yet the Soviet ideology (i.e., Marxism-Leninism) had been attracting the minds of solicitous Chinese who bolstered revolutionary ideals since 1919 in the search for the means to construct a strong Chinese state similar to that of Sun. When introducing Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese public, Li Dazhao (李大釗, 1889-1927), allegedly the first Chinese Marxist, zealously proclaimed:

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[39] Sun Yat-sen, "Jianguo dagang: Guomin zhengfu jianguo dagang," (Fundamentals of National Reconstruction) in *Guofu quanji*, vol. 1 (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1989), 623.

[40] Peter Bernholz, "Ideology, sects, state and totalitarianism," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, ed. Michael Schäfer and Hans Maier (London: Routledge, 2007), 247-252.

[41] Chen Zhirang, *Junshen zhengquan* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1980), 108-112.

[42] Liu Zhichao and Hu Yuhai, *Minguo Junfa Shilue* (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1998), 163.

> Those first enlightened in Europe are now calling for peace for the people. No emperors, no armies and no secret diplomacy. We need national self-determination and the European Union as the basis for a worldly union. This signals the dawn of a new epoch.[43]

For Li, Marxism-Leninism apparently served as the prophetic blueprint for the most advanced civilization in the world. By referring to the slogan 'national self-determination' after the Versailles Peace Conference, Li implied that an independent China would join forces with other nations in fulfilling the destiny (a worldly union) of mankind. This messianic vision was the general mentality for many Chinese intellectuals to adopt the theories of Marxism-Leninism on national issues.[44] As the initial zeal concretized to the systematic learning of theories, their statist stance gradually crystallized. Li Da (李達, 1890-1966), another prominent early Marxist, explained that "to analyze the nature of the state, we see that class interests are its end while the common good is its means. The reason why the state belongs to a certain class and acts as its tool of exploitation to procure its existence lies in the joint force of this end and means."[45] The notion of class struggle was adroitly utilized by Li Da in his analysis of the state, which for him exists solely for the exploitation of classes. But while maximizing the interests of the exploiting class, the state also satisfies certain needs of the exploited class so as to maintain order. And the state is endowed with such power because the exploiting class controls the economy. Thus, Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899-1935) wrote that "the state is an organization dominated by the ruling class…an organization formed due to economic development that enabled this class to enforce its will upon other classes."[46] By introducing the rhetoric of class into the discourse, Marxist conceptions of the state bestowed upon Chinese radicals a powerful theoretical weapon to expound the root of the Chinese state's weakness. Failures to build a strong modern Chinese state simply resulted from the fact that such attempts were led by economically backward and morally corrupt classes;

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[43] Li Dazhao, "Xin jiyuan," (New epoch) in *Li Dazhao quanji*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 268.

[44] Lu Junda, "Shilun 'Tianxiaguan' yu Zhongguo gongchandang minzu lilun de guanlian," *Heilongjiang minzu congkan*, no. 144 (2015): 25–30.

[45] Li Da, "Jieji yu guojia," (Class and state) in *Li Da wenji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), 328.

[46] Qu Qiubai, "Guofaxue yu laonongzhengfu," (State law and peasant government) in *Qu Qiubai wenji: Zhengzhi lilun bian*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013), 146.

only the proletariat would be able to direct historical development and restore China to a puissant state in the destined global revolution.

Such eschatological fervour was explicitly manifested in early Chinese Marxists' writings on the ineluctability of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Since the political superstructure is determined by the economic infrastructure, all dominating institutions at the moment would be ultimately superseded. As Qu put it, "Capitalism is a temporary phenomenon like all previous economic stages. The development of productive forces and struggles by the advanced class are bound to bring its downfall."[47] More positively, dictatorship of the proletariat could in theory promote production to a great extent. Li Dazhao claimed that "it (dictatorship of the proletariat) is not aimed at harming production but questing for progressive and appropriate production, namely, redistributing production to incubate its unity so as to avoid chaos."[48] In addition, to ensure that the proletariat stays in power, a state with cogent forces to safeguard class interests was imperative. Thus, rejecting the utopian elements of the future proletariat in China, Li Da maintained that "prison is necessary, so is a police force, since we must deal with enemies of communism. The army is also necessary, since we must fight against capitalist rivals."[49] Now the state was depicted as the guardian for the novice Chinese proletariat, who under its aegis would accomplish the great socialist revolution in China. The very success of such a revolution would bring China back to the spearhead of human evolution in historical materialism, indicating the resurgence of Chinese civilization buttressed by an almighty modern Chinese state. Statism was therefore fused with religious sentiments forecasting a this-worldly salvation (i.e., global communist revolution) and the state elevated as the guardian of the revolution (i.e., the locus of salvation). This was summarized concisely by Cai Hesen (蔡和森, 1895-1931) in his letter to the young Mao Zedong: "No collectivization and socialization of

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[47] Qu Qiubai, "Shehui zhexue gailun," (An introduction to social philosophy) in *Qu Qiubai wenji: Zhengzhi lilun bian*, vol. 2, 333.

[48] Li Dazhao, "Shehui zhuyi yu shehui yundong," (Socialism and social movements) in *Li Dazhao quanji*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 196-197.

[49] Li Da, "Wuzhengfu zhuyi zhi jiepou," (Analysis of anarchism) in *Li Da wenji*, vol. 1, 90.

property without the state…No protection of the revolution or against counter-revolutionaries without the state."[50]

Conclusion

Since the collapse of the Chinese empire, disruptive shockwaves to the traditional political order have lingered on, and struggles over the political meaning emerging therefrom extended from the twentieth century to the present day. Nevertheless, statist doctrines upheld by competing visions, regardless of their ideological affiliations, have been gaining currency in modern Chinese political discourse.[51] As we have seen, Chinese political thinkers, such as Liang Qichao, had ascribed soteriological characteristics to the state using the metaphor of curing a sick body even before the demise of empire. Liang's effort to create a modern national identity was then radicalized by revolutionary visions like that in Sun Yat-sen's imagining of a Republican China, where the state was regarded as legislator in ordaining laws to civilize Chinese people. Such revolutionary zeal eventually found its most powerful expression in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which ingeniously accommodated eschatological fervour by depicting the state as the guardian of the messianic global revolution. Early Chinese Marxists were thus fully imbued with religious sentiments when propagating the political visions of Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, they continued the statist aspiration promoted by previous thinkers like Liang and Sun and came up with the most feasible plan in their eyes to actualize the enterprise of constructing a strong Chinese state. The ideological gravity Marxism-Leninism ascribed to the state during the communist revolution and the success of state-building in the Soviet Union had convinced many Chinese that Marxism-Leninism was the sine qua non to realize the ideal of building a strong China, which might very well underlie their acceptance of such a political theory.

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[50] Cai Hesen, "Guanyu Zhongguo geming wenti zhi Mao Zedong tongzhi de liangfeng xin," (Two letters to comrade Mao Zedong on Chinese revolution) in *Cai Hesen wenji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), 51.

[51] Zarrow, *After Empire*, 295-320.

From the beginning, Chinese political thinkers have been appropriating ideas of Western political theories to expound their ideals concerning essentially Chinese formulations of a proper cosmic order. The continuous search for a strong state as the guardian of Chinese civilization and the trailblazer for future humanity has made them susceptible to the enchanting visions offered by political religion. In addition, the religiosity of their quests contributed greatly to the eventual adoption of the political religion of Marxism-Leninism and the establishment of the revolutionary regimes of KMT and CCP in twentieth century China. Even today, the party-state still strives to secure its legitimacy by portraying itself as the culmination of the historical destiny of Chinese civilization epitomized by the ascendancy of a strong Chinese state on the world stage.[52] Chinese political religion was thus the outgrowth of a combination of factors shaped no less by particular realities at home than by the "Age of Extremes" on a global scale.[53] The history of revolution and the roots of radical politics in modern China thus defy the impact-response model deployed by Fairbank and require us to shift attention instead to the internal dynamics of Chinese politics and political thought. It would also be fruitful when scholars reflect upon the concepts derived from Western contexts and attempt to address Chinese political culture on their own terms.

[52] Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 229-262.

[53] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 21-224.

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