CLAMANTIS

“To chase down the truth, wherever it lies.”

The MALS Journal
Fall 2017 | Winter 2018
Clamantis is a bi-annual publication for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. We showcase the strongest creative and critical work submitted by current MALS students as well as MALS alumni. We believe that by selecting and integrating work from all four of the program’s concentrations, we will promote intellectual engagement, fruitful questioning, and honest discourse within the realm of liberal studies. If you have questions, comments, or are interested in writing a feature, please e-mail The.MALS.Journal@dartmouth.edu.
CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS  6

LITERALLY / KEN DAVIS  9
Nonfiction

PEPPERIDGE TREE / THEA CALITRI-MARTIN  13
Poetry

RELATIVITY/ KEVIN ANDERSON  15
Poetry

THREE GENERATIONS OF SOUTHERN FOOD AND CULTURE
/ MARGAUX NOVAK  17
Oral History

1999 / BEN VONDERHEIDE  29
Poetry

WYOMING: A STATE IN FANTASY / KASEY STOREY  31
Cultural Studies

SIERRA VIEW / KEVIN ANDERSON  45
Nonfiction

THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN THE RADICALIZATION OF
DIASPORIC YOUTH / MORGAN HAMILTON  51
Cultural Studies

THE WALL / JENNIFER CORMACK  69
Poetry
SILENCE REIGNS / AMIRA HAMOUDA  73

Nonfiction

THE MOE POLITICS IN YEAR, HARE, AFFAIR / JAURI SUN  79

Cultural Studies

LES POMMES ET LES POIRES / JENNIFER CORMACK  94

Poetry

A DOG’S LIFE / MATT ZACHOWSKI  97

Nonfiction

UNTITLED 3 / KEVIN WARSTADT  105

Poetry

EXCERPT FROM FOREST OF THE DEAD / KEVIN WARSTADT

106

Fiction

HOW TO READ THE BLACK ATLANTIC / BRIAN KLARMAN  111

Cultural Studies

CHRISTMAS GIFT / BEN VONDERHEIDE  123

Poetry

BIOS  124
Dear Reader,

WHETHER this is the first time that you have opened up a copy of Clamantis, or the first time you have opened this issue in particular, we would like to thank you for participating in what we see as the broadest-reaching element of the MALS community. Perhaps you are reading this on a computer screen, since this issue will be simultaneously published in print and online on BePress along with past issues and former versions. We are excited by the innovations that are being made to our process with the passing of each term, and we hope that more of you, our readers, will get involved!

The most obvious way to participate in the MALS Journal process is through submitting. The Journal accepts submissions from current MALS students and alumni, so it is never too late to contribute. Within these pages you will see a collection of works from every MALS concentration, ranging in genre from fiction to academic essay, poetry to oral history. We proudly feature photography and other visual artwork that is submitted by our students and alumni as well. As always, we have been fortunate enough to receive a wide variety of fantastic submissions for this issue. Though the selection process is difficult, it is always inspiring to see the diverse results that our MALS courses yield. If anything, that is the goal of the MALS Journal: to showcase the breadth and depth of thought that our program fosters.

The submissions always touch upon a broad array of themes, but every year the Editorial team notices common threads that weave their way across genres. Many of the submissions this year were reflective, specifically processing feelings and images of home and family. This theme clearly emphasizes the need
Letter from the Editors

for a sense of place that we all seek at certain points in our lives. We hope that through your participation in Clamantis as a writer, editor, or even reader, that you can feel a sense of belonging in our MALS community. We certainly seek to create a positive space where ideas can be shared and discussed for the betterment of everyone involved.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the support of our new and returning Assistant Editors. Their dedication to the selection and revision processes was invaluable. We were very impressed by the willingness of our first term MALS students to step forward and take on some responsibility with the Journal even though most of them had not been in the program long enough to have anything to submit. We look forward to future collaborations between editors at all phases of their MALS career.

In addition to the wonderful Editing Staff, we would like to thank our ever-present support network. Without the tireless efforts of Kevin Warstadt and Barbara DeFelice, the Journal’s online presence would have never made such progress. The unwavering support of Wole Ojurongbe and Dr. Donald Pease in the MALS office continues to motivate us. We are also eternally grateful to our faculty advisor, Anna Minardi, whose guidance keeps us on track from start to finish every term. Even our lovely covers are designed by members of the MALS community—the cover of this issue was created by longtime Clamantis cover designer Ken Davis.

With that, we are pleased to present the Fall/Winter 2017 Issue of Clamantis: The MALS Journal.
I work as a copywriter for a nonprofit organization. You would think that someone who works with words for a living would appreciate them. But for a long time, I neglected to do that. I guess I dealt with them for so long, they lost their significance. Then one day I noticed them again and they blazed with life.

I owe this to my daughter.

My daughter is a fit, bright girl of thirteen, blond, a lover of cats and running. She also has autism.

Autism comprises a broad spectrum of brain disorders. These disorders affect social skills, communication, and information processing, among other things.

One of the many ways my daughter makes life interesting is that she takes words literally. If I ask her what she is doing, she will answer that she is talking to me, since that’s what she is doing at that moment. If I ask her if she knows the time, she will look at her watch and say yes. She won’t tell me what time it is, because that’s not what I asked.

It took time, but I have come to love this sort of thing. And her preciseness has been a great gift to me as a writer.

Words are objects that fill our lives with both meaning and misunderstanding. They have a nuanced, muddled ambiguity and complexity. I appreciate them now more than ever because I share my life with an autistic person.

I’ve learned a lot from my daughter’s relationship with words. I especially love her writings. Her sentences are simple and direct and her words are unpretentious. She doesn’t care about impressing readers. She only cares about communicating with clarity. Her tools are plain speech, active voice, and taut,
concise lines. I find it very refreshing. Even scholars, scientists, and presidents should be able to share complex ideas with focus and lucidity.

Lately I’ve been reading the work of a scholar named Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure was an early 20th-century Swiss linguist. He was also a literary theorist, in the structuralist school.

Saussure said there was no inherent connection between a word and what it represents. (Onomatopoeias may be a notable exception.) The meaning we give to a word is subjective, and that meaning is preserved by convention only. Says the fair Juliet: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

This is a no-brainer, of course. A fork is a fork because we call it a fork. Cognitive scientist Steven Pinker calls this a trick, “a memorized arbitrary pairing between a sound and a meaning.” We could call a fork a spoon and it wouldn’t change what the object is or what we tend to use it for.

But Saussure also believed words are relational; i.e., they can’t be understood in isolation from other words. Now this is an inspired idea. Think of a beach. Can a beach be a beach without an ocean? If you remove the ocean, do you still have the beach? Or is the beach now a desert?

This line of thought is probably too abstract—too nonliteral—for my little girl. But the point is, it exhilarates me, and I owe that to her. I never cared about this sort of thing until she came into this world, pensive and curious like a cat. Now I love to study words and language. Without my daughter, I wouldn’t be doing this, one of the many ways my world would be smaller and less rich.

My daughter also taught me that a literal use of language can still be poetic. One day when she was a toddler, we took her for a walk in her stroller. It was a warm and breezy summer day. The sky was clear. She was a bewitching little sprite of a person, laughing and kicking her feet. She talked to the birds, like
St. Francis. Then at some point, she pointed to a blazing blue horizon and a sugar maple swaying in the wind. She said:

“Tree dancing with the sky?”

Wordsworth couldn’t have said it any better. It was tender and accurate and sublime. To this day, it’s my favorite line of verse. I remember it each time I see a tree on a windy day.

What I love most is that my daughter wasn’t speaking metaphorically. She was being her usual, precise self, full of uncompromising wonder. That day, she saw a tree dancing with the sky. Wouldn’t you love to see the world the same way?
PEPPERIDGE TREE

Thea Calitri-Martin

Across the lawn, away from the house
the broad pepperidge tree with
glacial granite, erratic benches
waiting around the thick gray trunk

Leathery leaves move in atmospheric time
tint the shade as spring fresh green
moves through rich summer darkness
into fall’s rosy chill

Stately tree, too big to climb
shelters contemplation
hard rock giving solid cues
for meditation’s end

Closed eyes sense the changes
in airy glissandos
of call and response
shaping the daily weather report

Lean back against the tree
as leaves jam with birds on the wind
add your musical thoughts
to leaf whispered layers, sit in on their duet

Soloing with heart’s desire
listen to the perfect audience
as leaves roar approval
and the birds join in
RELATIVITY (DISTANT BODIES)

Kevin Anderson

I rubbed against you in time, and we felt the ghosts of each other,
The chill recognition when time crossed space,
Within, without, (I love you)
And I reached for you in emptiness.

Stars roll in their black bowls,
Curved bodies and celestial penetration;
We merged, particles within particles,
Vibrating attraction caught in our gravitational spin.

Time roped twisting and place intersecting,
Here, now, and always, (I love you)

As the wing of a night bird brushes the moonlight,
Your cool shadow kissed my cheek,
And I knew, I knew you
Before you were born.

(I love you)
I rubbed against you in time, and we felt the ghosts of each other.
THREE GENERATIONS OF SOUTHERN FOOD AND CULTURE

Margaux Novak

Cast of Mothers & Daughters: Spanning Three Generations

Elizabeth Hill (Mother of Teresa): Born 1926. Youngest of eleven siblings across a twenty-year span. Food brought the family together then, and it’s how she taught her children to come together ever since.

Teresa Hill Lee (Daughter of Elizabeth): Born 1946. Senior Mary-Kay Consultant. Opened a Southern Catering business through her Wilmington Women’s Group to raise money for charity.


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Introduction:
Southern culture and food, for many, is an intermixed and tightly connected concept. There are hundreds of years of history—economic, political, and social—wrapped up in what it means to be Southern. It is each layer of this history that forged Southern tradition, food, and culture.
Oral History

Of course, every part of the South claims its own idiosyncrasies, so I chose to focus on my home state of North Carolina. North Carolina is a unique place for many reasons: It is one of the only states to have mountains, piedmont, and a coastal region. Much of the Civil War was fought on North Carolinian soil, and so there are many historical and momentous events that took place there. Pirates used North Carolina as a home base for their United States operations because of the numerous wide rivers flowing right into the sea. And lastly, North Carolina is a huge agriculture state, and you will read about how this impacted the lives of many I interviewed.

Listening to three generations of women (all mother-daughter pairs) recall memories and instances of growing up Southern, shines a light on heritage and traditions surrounding food and culture in North Carolina. Their stories discuss food, God, family, and being home for the Holidays in a way that is not only nostalgic and insightful, but heart-warming.

The Food Culture of Yesteryear

Robin Wenskus:

I remember so many things that were wonderful about my grandmother’s cooking, like Cornbread Lace Cakes. She would make this cornbread for dinner where she’d put a little oil in the frying pan, mix the batter, and then she would pour the batter into the frying pan. As it dropped in, the hot oil flattened it out and would start cooking real fast because it was so thin. Then as it cooked and the oil bubbled it made these lacy, crispy edges around the cornbread and she’d serve them up hot like that. We called them her Cornbread Lace Cakes. Oh man those were wonderful. And if she wasn’t serving cornbread, there were biscuits. There were biscuits with every meal anyway half the time—that’s very much a Southern thing. We had biscuits growing up for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I learned to cook from this grandmother. She was always in the kitchen or in her garden and she loved it. When I was growing up she was in the kitchen almost all the time. She did everything you can imagine: She canned from fruit trees out back, she’d get chicken for dinner from the coop in the backyard, she’d garden and had vegetables, fruits, you name it.
I hated it when she killed the chickens though. She made me watch once so I’d know how to do it, but I was so scared that I think she soon figured I wasn’t going to learn how to kill a chicken anytime soon. Of course, I was probably around ten, so the whole idea held very little appeal for me. But she was never timid. She used to take that chicken and literally twist its neck. I also saw her chop the head off a chicken once and I had nightmares for days because the chicken danced around a little, you know, it may be dead but its nerves fight for a minute. Anyway, after all that, my grandmother would take that chicken onto the porch and pluck it. I can remember sitting with her while she plucked out all the feathers, and they would get caught in the wind. Suddenly we’d be sitting in the middle of all these floating feathers, and it was beautiful in a strange way.

Nan Smith:

Both of my grandmas were good cooks. My father’s mother, Granny Wren, she was from the hills of North Carolina and she had a high school education. She grew up farming and everything that was edible to her was fresh out of the garden, and so all her cooking was seasonal. She would cook collards or cabbage or a pot of beans just about every day though—she’d add some vinegar and just put them on the stove all day long and they’d cook down until they were practically mush, but that was just her way of cooking. I mean she really wasn’t that educated a person, she could read and write, but she didn’t have any real formal education after high school.

But then my Mother’s mother, Granny Thomas, she was from Stanton, Virginia, and she went to college, she went to University of Richmond and she became a nurse by profession. That’s how she met my grandfather who was a World War II doctor. She really did a lot of gourmet cooking for her day. She took a lot of cooking classes. She kept hundreds of recipes. The first cookbook I ever got—I still have it—is the one my Great Grandmother had and she gave me. It’s called The Rumford Cookbook.

Rumford is also baking powder, and it was such a reliable brand back then, very wholesome. Everybody used Rumford. They published their first cookbook in the early 1900’s. That was kind of like everybody’s go-to around here, way before the Betty Crockers and the Martha Stewarts. The Rumford Cookbook was one of my training books, and I still refer to it. I still have it. It’s
a little red book, a red hardback book. Of course, now it’s covered in flour and oil and gracious knows what else, but I would be completely lost if I had to go without it. There are just some recipes that it’s easier to go look up than remember forever, especially ones around the Holidays that you only cook once a year. But it’s the tradition of it all too, it’s the tradition that matters so much.

Passing on the Tradition

Robin Wenskus:

My grandmother, Beedie, she’s the one who taught me how to can preserves. I can remember so many days watching her and being with her in the kitchen while she was boiling the fruit before she canned. She made apple butter, apple jelly, and plum preserves because we had a plum tree in her yard and, just watching her do all that and go through all that process—I knew it had to be a labor of love.

She cooked all the time in my growing up years, all my growing up years. She had this cast iron skillet, and she’d put her oil in there and she’d bread chicken pieces and add all the seasoning, and cook it all up, oh man, I can still see her standing over the stove with it. She’d make fried steak and chicken-fried steak. And, oh honey, she fried some fried chicken. The woman fried some chicken.

She’d go up in the backyard you know to that big pecan tree. And, of course, when they would drop she’d be there, ready to pick them up off the ground. She’d bring me with her and we’d wear these long aprons so we could collect the pecans in our aprons and bring them back inside to crack open. And then we’d get in the kitchen—and I hated it—but I’d have to help her crack them open, and pick out the pecans and we’d sit there for hours shelling and picking out pecans.

Surely you can’t talk about the South without talking about grits. You’d never know there are so many different ways to make grits, certainly no one outside the South knows about it. I grew up on regular cheese grits, shrimp n’ grits, dinner grits (which is a polite way of saying the cook put a splash of white wine in them, so you’re having them for dinner), and eggs cooked in the grits.
Now my grandmother wasn’t a fan of dinner grits because of the alcohol, but when she was making eggs with grits for dinner she’d cook the grits and then she’d break an egg into them and stir it real fast. The heat from the stove and the heat from the grits cooked the egg up real fast, so you had to keep stirring, and then you wouldn’t be able to tell what was egg and what was grits. It would turn a yellow color and then we’d eat them with country ham or bacon and called them “egg-grits.” I miss her every time I’m eating good Southern food, every single time.

Elizabeth Hill:

As a kid, they never let us in the kitchen because we’d make a mess cooking. Now we had a black cook growing up because Mother was very ill. And she kept us out of her way. But sometimes she’d bring her children over while she was cooking. Two little black children for me and Joelynn, my sister, to play with. Marvelous, marvelous people.

I had black maids all the way through and they loved my children to death and my children loved them. I had never cooked anything until I got married. But I found Melissa, Melissa Buttman. And I’d drive to go get her on Sunday night and drop her off Friday night.

Oh my stars, she did our grocery shopping and everything that we wanted. She always seemed to know exactly what we needed. But she loved cooking vegetables. Didn’t know too much about meat—she was young. But she could cook some Southern vegetables! She was my lifeline then and I don’t know if she even knew it. She would take the kids to the park. And she cleaned house and she was doggone good, good. I was a single working mother back then you know, and Lordy, I don’t know how any of us would have got through without her.

She stayed with us until she got married and she would have stayed on, she wanted to stay on, but her husband said no, he wanted her home. I had her up with us since my two kids were six and eight, until the oldest was in the 11th grade. When Gary would fall out of bed at night he wouldn’t call for Momma, he’d call “Lissy! I’ve fallen out. Come get me Lissy!” I loved her, and she loved them.
Nan Smith:

I would say my Grandmother Thomas and my Mom were probably my biggest teachers. Our houses weren’t air conditioned back then, so we would peel tomatoes and shuck corn in the basement. The basement would open up and it was so cool down there. To work in the basement was like being in real air conditioning.

When it wasn’t scorching out, we had a side porch with this long glider, just like a sofa, but it was a glider. We had about three or four rocking chairs and we’d sit there and talk about everything—the weather, the neighbors, what everyone in the family was up to, you know, and we all had bowls between our legs because we’d be snapping peas!

My mother always wore a dress even out in the garden, she had a dress on. And she would put that bowl between her legs and she’d shuck corn or snap peas, or shell pecans. We had pecan trees all around their house. I learned at a very early age how to shell pecans, and I would come inside afterwards and my nails would be just black or green underneath them from shelling all day long.

Robin Wenskus:

I was born in 1950 and I cooked and worked with food mostly with my grandma growing up. While my grandmother and I were shelling pecans, a huge North Carolinian pastime because everybody had pecan trees, the boys were out running around, playing in the backyard or something. For some odd reason they didn’t usually get corralled into much of the pecan shelling or corn husking. I think it was because they were too fidgety to sit still that long. You know how boys are sometimes when they’re little? They just can’t sit still that long.

It’s interesting being in the modern world now, and looking back to then. Especially thinking about women’s roles these days. Having the woman be a stay at home Mother (which was the norm back then for those who could afford it) has given way to many women having full-time jobs.

But when I think back to my grandmother I never picked up any resentment from her at all, about being responsible for all the meals and laundry, the
cooking and cleaning, that sort of thing. I mean, she loved it. Her kitchen was her kingdom, and her garden was her chapel.

She would get up at 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning in summertime when the garden was growing. She loved getting out there early before anybody else was awake, and she’d be out there pulling weeds and doing this and doing that watering and puttering around. I can remember her telling me that that was her time with God. She loved getting out there in the garden in the early morning hours when nobody else was up and it was just her and the Lord; She would talk to him and talk with him. That was her quiet time. That was why she loved it.

And then she’d bring in the fresh vegetables and berries and put the fruit in bowls in the kitchen so we could all just walk by and grab something to snack on. But mostly she just loved providing for and cooking for her family. She just loved it.

The Holidays: Southern Style

Nan Smith:

And oh, Christmas time! Now this was a family thing: We would make twenty pounds of fruit cake the Saturday after Thanksgiving. It was always my grandma and my aunt (they lived at the other end of the block from us; they had the French Dutch colonial house and we lived in the Colonial house) and my Mom and me. And I mean we’d start days ahead. You know chopping up the citron and orange peel and then we would soak the raisins in the Mogen David wine and chop up the pecans and then we’d pick out the half pecans to decorate the top of the cakes. We did all that and so it was a weekend event, but we had to start early because there was so much to do. My mom and my grandma would soak cheesecloth in rum and wrap every cake with rum so they were saturated with the flavor.

Then around Christmastime everybody in the neighborhood would always get a big plate of all these things that we’d been making for the past two months: the rum cakes, cookies, candied pecans, you name it. We had tins all
over the dining room loaded down with these cookies and cheese straws for weeks, and it was like, no wonder we had weight issues, we were in the kitchen cooking and tasting everything we made!

While we did that the men had their own job: making the Brunswick Stew! Now this is very particular to Coastal North Carolina, no one else makes real Brunswick Stew. Of course it’s named for our county, Brunswick County, but a few copycats across the Carolinas try and get it right. Anyway, the Brunswick Stew was also my Dad’s job. Every year he’d pull out this huge stew pot. And this is no joke— it looked like a cauldron, a witch’s cauldron. My Dad would go out with my brother and my uncle and they would shoot rabbits or squirrels for the stew, and we always had lots of chicken and beef and pork too. They would start really early in the morning as the meat was the first to go in the pot and cook, and then they’d add all the vegetables to it. It was really the men’s job this stew: it kept them outside and busy and out of the way of all us women flying around the kitchen. It worked for everybody! After the big meal, we would put the stew leftovers in containers and freeze it for the wintertime, of course we would eat off of it for days too.

Teresa Hill Lee:

I even have my grandma’s original North Carolina Spoon Bread recipe. Not too many people know how to make a proper Spoon Bread anymore, but it’s like a soufflé. And it would always collapse, and that would always distress Momma, but always, there it came—out just like with a pancake. The part that would fall was always my favorite though because it was the part that was the most dense and gooey.

Of course, I didn’t have as much trouble back in the day fixing plates for large groups of company because when I was growing up there was no such thing as a vegetarian or a vegan. I mean there might have been people who didn’t eat certain foods, but we never knew those words.

Southern Law & Culture Rules

Robin Wenskus:
Part of the idea behind having everybody over on Sundays after church is that the Blue Laws were in effect, and so nothing was open on Sunday. You couldn’t go shopping and you couldn’t go run errands and you couldn’t be busy here, or busy there. It facilitated people just relaxing and being together.

The Blue Laws came from a time when on Sundays people rested and didn’t work in the fields. The Blue Laws were just the evolution of that mindset, of honoring the Sabbath day to keep it holy. That’s where it evolved from, out of Judeo-Christian values. It encouraged people to just be with each other, for families to be together. There was no commerce. Because Biblically Sunday was a day of rest. The stores were closed, the shops were closed, the theaters were closed. There might be a couple of gas stations. And then maybe one or two drugstores opened just for emergencies. But other than that everything came to a standstill on Sunday. It was all over the South. I don’t know if it was up North or not, but that’s how it was in the South. People respected that day.

Eventually those began to be taken away, now Sunday is no different from any other day and people just run themselves ragged. And it’s hard to get kids and parents and everybody to sit down and even have a meal together. And that has to have had a negative effect on families, and on the closeness that there used to be. And not just with your immediate family, but with the extended family as well. People used to really consider the aunts, uncles, and cousins to be close family. Now, it’s like we as a culture barely have time to keep track of our immediate, nuclear families, not to mention the whole tribe.

The Blue Laws were in place all my childhood. I don’t know why they call them blue, but they were laws that had been on the books for probably hundreds of years where everything on Sunday was closed. Most people went to church, and then they came home and they wanted to be with their families and relax or go fishing or visit friends. And there wasn’t really technology to distract people back then. The only thing you had was the television and the radio, and if you wanted to watch TV, you could, but we didn’t watch TV very much.

Southern Culture Today: At an End, or a Resurgence?

Noelle Smith Parker:
Oral History

My generation is in a different place with the tradition and heritage of cooking, especially Southern cooking. I’m in my late twenties, and I’ve grown up hearing how active my mom was in the kitchen with her mom growing up. I know I was never as involved with my mom in the kitchen. I think also not just technology but I think the fact that girls are now playing sports more and having hobbies more—it’s not about traditional domestic life apprenticeship anymore.

I can cook basic stuff. But there’s no sort of archive or record of recipes I love or cook often because I only use online recipes. My mom’s generation has that kind of record though. When Alex and I went over there for dinner last night, she showed us her Rumford’s cookbook and there was a page that was opened and it was like “oh, like I can see this recipe was used a lot.” It had grease splatter stains on it and everything. She clearly opened to that page a lot, and that recipe was cooked all the time over, just, decades.

The women in my family have passed down the art or love or responsibility of cooking for generations. And I feel like that ended with my childhood a bit, because my Mom and I didn’t cook together unless it was the Holidays. In many ways, I feel like Millennials are the lost generation for many Southern traditions.

But this is something I want to bring back with my children. I feel like, maybe that can be the start of something new.

But for now, you know what we do have? My husband and I have a vegetable and herb garden and chickens. It’s like that part of food-making—the raw and fresh foods part—skipped my Mom’s generation and went straight from my Grandma to me. My Mom loves flowers, but she’s never bothered much with planting a garden of things you can eat, and she would never have chickens. But having fresh foods to serve my family is really important to me. I don’t want to just rely on the pesticide-riddled foods from the grocery store or worry about buying “cage free, organic, hormone-free” eggs, plus they’re so expensive! Now we have enough eggs that my sister and my Mom will drive over and visit and I’m sending them home with fresh eggs. But that’s family isn’t it? Being there to fill in the gaps for each other.
At the table there we sat
All four in splendid form
For dinner had been laid upon
Twas our duty to conform

Pa and ma and sister too
Sat in solemn voice
Ma said spoken prayer aloud
As if we had a choice

Round and round the staring went
Like we enjoyed the show
Who’d speak first and open up?
As if I’d ever know

Munch and crunch now masticate
Dare not open wide
For if you had a thing to say
Be sure food’s kept inside

Clink, clunk, scrape, now scoop
Eat as you’ve been told
Dinner time is more than food
It’s a time to be controlled
Wyoming has built itself on coal. As of 2013, mining accounted for approximately 35 percent of Wyoming’s GDP, making it the most mining dependent state in the entire nation (Ballard). Wyoming produces 41% of the United States’ coal which is more than the next six top producing states combined (Wyoming State Geological Survey). The profit, jobs, and product produced by the coal industry have all transcended their normal boundaries and become both the economic and cultural foundation that the state has built itself on. The masculine ethos and conservative politics of the state are predicated on the coal industry, and Wyoming understands itself through the lens of a coal-driven society. Thus, much is at stake for the state as the coal industry continues to decline. In response, Wyoming’s residents have constructed a fantasy of the coal industry being threatened only by the Democratic party and its political agenda. This fantasy can be defined through Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of fantasy as being rooted in a fundamental, Lacanian approach.

This fantasy keeps the desire for coal to continue to be an economic force and a cultural informant alive by maintaining the belief that enjoyment could be achieved if only “the other”, in this case the Democrats, had not stolen the enjoyment of the thriving coal industry from Wyoming. The achievement of the fantasy remains seemingly attainable because Wyoming has created an embodied form, a tangible “other”, that is responsible for their stolen enjoyment. This fantasy has become detrimental to the state of Wyoming because it misconstrues the reality that coal is not coming back, and it eradicates the ability for Wyoming to begin diversifying its economy and finding other modes of identity and enjoyment.

Slavoj Žižek explains that a community is created by shared enjoyment, what he names, “the Thing.” The Thing is a multi-faceted concept which consists not only of its “feasts, its rituals of mating, [and] its initiation ceremonies” (Žižek 201), but also of the belief that these components make us who we are and allows us to become members of our community. As Žižek
writes, “the national Thing exists as long as the members of the community believe in it” (Žižek 202). For the state of Wyoming, the Thing has become the coal industry. It provides the fiscal means for maintaining the rituals that comprise Wyoming’s “way of life,” while simultaneously creating and informing the culture in which those rituals are enjoyed. The coal industry becomes the “bond linking together its members” (Žižek 201) and Wyoming citizens retain “a shared relationship” (Žižek 201) with it.

In an article written for California Sunday Magazine, author Abe Streep went to Gillette, Wyoming, the city located in the heart of Powder River Basin, where the majority of Wyoming’s coal is produced. He interviewed several different residents, exploring the culture and lifestyle of the state’s most infamous coal town. Streep found that, “Everyone I met said that the community’s bond was the best part of life in Gillette” (Streep). According to Žižek, this bond is based on the shared relationship to the Thing, in Wyoming’s case, the coal industry. The people in Gillette, and the larger Wyoming community, feel that shared sense of community due to their shared rituals of life, which are made possible by access to the coal industry.

The coal industry has become the literal basis for Wyoming’s “way of life.” The money it produces is the largest and the strongest influence in the state’s shared relationship to the industry and that money helps foster a sense of community. In 2014, taxes on coal accounted for approximately a quarter of the state’s revenue, and from 2005 to 2015, the industry provided an approximate 1.9 billion dollars to public schools in the state (Streep). According to a fact sheet, compiled with information from the Energy Information Administration and the Office of Natural Resource Revenue, “Federal mineral royalty receipts help fund schools and colleges, highway and road construction, city and town budgets and the state’s budget reserve” (Fact Sheet: Federal Coal Royalties and their Impact on Western States 1). The residents of Wyoming enjoy well-maintained roads, high-quality public education, pristine state parks, and access to affordable college, all due to the revenue generated by the coal industry. Coal “appears as what gives plentitude and vivacity to [Wyoming’s] life” (Žižek 201).

This coal-funded way of life adheres to a conservative culture. According to a 2017 Gallup poll, Wyoming is the most conservative state in the
nation, with 49 percent of its residents identifying themselves as conservative, and only 14 percent identifying themselves as liberal (Gallup). Speer’s article about Gillette, “Coal. Guns. Freedom: A Week in the Life of the Town that Keeps Your Lights On”, exposes the coal industry’s cultural manifestations that help to form and frame the conservative culture. The head engineer of Cloud Peak’s Cordero Rojo mine has a sticker on his hard hat that reads, “COALS GUN FREEDOM”. At a pro-coal rally, then Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis exclaimed to the crowd, “We should use what God has given us!” (Streep), meaning that Wyoming should continue extracting coal from the mines. Out of jealousy for the athletic prowess and wealth of the Gillette high school athletics, high school students around the state call the Gillette Camels of Campbell County, the “Campbell County Cocksuckers” (Streep). A masculine ethos dominates the state’s narrative, as seen in men like Shawn Beeson. Beeson helped move the Belle Fourche River to run through a Gillette mining site and stated in an interview, “‘We’re proud of the work we do’… ‘People say we’re raping the earth. Well, it’s better than when we found it!’” (Streep). The casual use of the term rape and the belief that the river is better because of it reflects the crippling masculinity of the entire town.

Studies have been conducted on the masculine ethos that surrounds mining communities. Shannon Bell and Yvonne Braun cite a 2010 study done by sociologists, Shannon Bell and Richard York that explored masculinity in the coal mines of Central Appalachia and found that, “the hegemonic masculinity of the coalfield region of Central Appalachia has historically been, and continues to be, tied to coal mining and the coal industry more generally” (Bell and Braun 798-799). Bell and Braun cite yet another study, writing:

Yarrow argues that coal mining has been “socially constructed as the epitome of ‘men’s work,’” and Beckwith (2001, 310) contends that the Central Appalachian coal-mining workforce has been so male dominated that it has created “a context in which ‘miner’ and ‘male’ [have] become conflated, a conflation that is so deeply ingrained that it is virtually uneducable.” (Bell and Braun 799)
As illustrated in the interviews with local Gillette miners, the same masculinity found in the Appalachians has entrenched itself in the mines of Wyoming. This masculine and conservative way of life is threatened. A Research and Planning report found that between 2014 and 2016 Wyoming lost over 1,000 coal jobs due to the economic downturn in the energy industry and that this loss resulted in the disappearance of $11 millions worth of salaries that used to support the Wyoming economy (Richards). A report published by the Center on Global Energy Policy found that the drop in coal-related tax revenue, combined with the decline in oil and gas-related revenue reduced the funding for public education by 25 percent in Wyoming (Houser, Bordoff, and Marsters 15). This loss of money and jobs illustrates that Wyoming’s way of life is undergoing a change that can be felt at the individual level. The cuts create tangible effects that can be felt by the citizens of Wyoming. As Tom Gallagher, manager of the Research and Planning Division of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, said in an interview with Heather Richards, “‘That’s money not spent on car repairs, haircuts, groceries … This is something that’s not terribly visible. It’s something that quietly works its way through the system’” (Richards). The financial decline is a threat to Wyoming’s way of life, to Wyoming’s precious Thing, the coal industry.

Here, in desperation, is where Wyoming created an Other. With the price of coal plummeting, and the state finances suffering, the citizens began to see a threat to their relationship with the Thing. Žižek writes, “This relationship toward the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our ‘way of life’ presented by the Other” (Žižek 201). He continues:

National identification is by definition sustained by a relationship toward the Nation qua Thing. This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears to us as “our Thing” (perhaps we could say cosa nostra), as something accessible only to us, as something “they,” the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless it is something constantly menaced by “them.” (Žižek 201)
Wyoming’s national, or communal, identification is sustained by its relationship to the coal industry. As Žižek writes, “A nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices” (Žižek 202). Wyoming represents the nation in this case, and its existence appears to be at threat due to the change in social practices being suggested by the left. The Democrats, with their adherence to protective climate regulations, renewable energy, and other progressive legislations are alienated from understanding the ‘Thing’. The Democrats’ culture, politics, and way of life are all inherently different from the core of Wyoming’s voting base, and in a state that is comprised of less than 14 percent of self-identified liberals, they become an easy group to transform into the Other. To a majority of Wyoming voters, the Democrats seemingly cannot grasp the importance of the culture or the industry that is built on coal, because their lives are not inextricably linked to and predicated on it, yet, they pose a constant threat to its existence. As Žižek claims, “The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him” (Žižek 203).

The creation of the other was magnified and solidified in the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, as a new era of culture and economic change was ushered in. Only 32.7 percent of Wyoming residents voted for President Obama, and the state’s citizens were aggravated when he began implementing his Clean Power Plan that aimed at cutting the level of emissions from 2005 by 26 percent before 2025. In his article, Streep exposed some of the thoughts about President Obama from local Wyoming residents:

I went into the cheese shop, where the owner, who wore a JESUS SAVES belt buckle, told me that President Obama was a Muslim. Such sentiments would, over the course of the week, become routine. To ask about the president was to invite vitriol. It was as though one man had single-handedly fabulated global warming, designed the solar panel, and created the hydraulic-fracturing technology that has allowed natural gas producers to undercut the coal industry. “That black sonuvabitch
in Washington” was the phrase used by a man with thinning dyed blond hair and a gold chain. (Streep)

The racist remarks about Obama indicate the process of othering that occurred in 2008. Wyoming’s population of 585,501 people is staggeringly homogenous, 92.8 percent of its residents are white, according to the U.S. census Bureau. When President Obama began implementing changes that impacted Wyoming’s culture, the state viewed him as an Other, intent on destroying their way of life with his oppositional views, a process that was exacerbated by racist sentiment. Obama threatened not only the coal industry, but also the homogeneity that Wyoming residents had come to believe was normative.

A majority of Wyoming expressed similar sentiments towards President Obama’s policies. Wyoming Magazine wrote an article stating, “The federal government is essentially using its power to crush an industry. Instead of allowing capitalism to control the energy market they are artificially killing the coal industry by burying it in bureaucracy, taxes and red tape. In Wyoming we are offended by these actions” (Wyoming Magazine). From the outset, the citizens and politicians in Wyoming conflated the environmental regulations with an attack on not only the industry, but an attack on Wyoming’s culture. Wyoming’s Governor, Matt Mead was resounding in his disapproval of the plan, and joined twenty-three other states in suing the EPA. Governor Mead believed that Wyoming’s future was compromised in the plan and he told Stephanie Joyce in an interview:

I think that the energy strategy overall is I want to make sure we have a way to responsibly develop our minerals in an environmentally sound way. That we can do so and not only meet what other states are doing but frankly set the example for the country on how to go about doing this, so that 10 years, 50 years from now, we can say, we have number one uranium reserves, number one in coal, top ten in oil and gas and we’ve continued to develop those. We have protected our environment, we have found the right balance and that we’ve provided the wealth to the citizens of this state that resulted from that
development, that builds our schools, builds our roads, funds our family services, funds our department of health. And that we do it in a way that 50 years from now, we still love the look, the feel the taste of Wyoming. (Joyce)

Matt Mead draws a causation between the new regulations and the end of Wyoming as it currently exists, and hopes to adjust the approach to climate change, something he admitted he is a skeptic of. He wants to maintain, “the look, the feel, the taste of Wyoming” which he believes is under threat from the new regulations.

Wyoming has helped sustain the notion of the Other by investing in other fantasies, such as one coined by Imre Szeman, “techno-utopianism.” Techno-utopianism is, “a discourse employed by government officials, environmentalists, and scientists from across the political spectrum” in which “scientific advances will enable access to oil resources hitherto too expensive to develop … while simultaneously devising solutions for carbon emissions” (Szeman 812). Techno-utopianism allows the collective community to avoid actually solving the energy and climate crisis by believing that future technology will mitigate the problem. As another bid to keep coal and the culture alive, Wyoming politicians and citizens have been perpetuating the myth that coal can become a clean energy. Matt Mead stated in an interview, “The better way to do it is what we’re trying to do in Wyoming, is with innovation and research, looking at how we make coal as clean and as efficient as possible while still allowing it to continue” (Wyoming Governor: EPA Is ‘Shutting Down The Coal Industry’). Wyoming Magazine also made the call for technology to save the coal industry:

Coal companies understand that simply burning coal for energy creates pollutants. No coal company or state would argue that point however if you take into consideration the carbon capture and clean coal technologies coal becomes a very attractive energy source. Imagine if our coal companies and federal government came together to improve clean coal technology. The industry would thrive and provide the energy our
country needs from energy sources within our own borders.
(Wyoming Magazine)

But, this is an unsustainable belief. There is no technology that will make coal a clean energy and help the industry thrive again, but the belief that Wyoming can continue utilizing coal as it has been, allows the state to believe that they can ignore President Obama’s climate regulations. It helps further demonize the Other for demanding that less coal be produced when there is another “viable” option that allows the coal industry to remain unchanged.

Thus, Wyoming found hope in Donald Trump. The state elected him with 68.2 percent of the vote, the highest percentage of any state in the nation (New York Times). Trump became the embodied representation of the effort to reclaim Wyoming’s culture. Trump upheld conservative culture, and he promised to bring coal back. At a rally in Charleston, West Virginia, Trump stood in front of a crowd of people, put on a hard hat, pretended to shovel some coal, and exclaimed, “If I win, we’re going to bring those miners back.” Trump became the carrier of the myth, that coal could return, if only it were not for President Obama and the Democrats. Within his first weeks in office, President Trump took actions to dismantle the Clean Power Plan, signing the piece of legislation while coal miners looked on from behind him.

Yet, the belief that President Obama killed the coal industry and that Trump will bring it back is a fantasy. A study done by the Center on Global Energy Policy found that, “Increased competition from cheap natural gas is responsible for 49 percent of the decline in domestic U.S. coal consumption. Lower-than-expected demand is responsible for 26 percent, and the growth in renewable energy is responsible for 18 percent” (Houser, Bordoff, and Marsters). The report also found that environmental regulations played a significantly smaller role than the other factors and that changes in the global market also impacted coal’s decline. The report found that:

Implementing all the actions in President Trump’s executive order to roll back Obama-era environmental regulations could stem the recent decline in U.S. coal consumption, but only if natural gas prices increase going forward. If natural gas prices remain at or near current levels or renewable costs fall more quickly than expected, U.S. coal consumption will continue its
The report exposed Trump’s rhetoric for what it was, a myth. Yet, the people of Wyoming still believe in the fantasy he has helped sustain. Žižek writes, “The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it” (Žižek 202). Despite scientific evidence to the contrary, Wyoming still believes that coal will come back, and that the only thing preventing it from doing so is the Democrats. Žižek illustrates that communities, “do not need any external proof or confirmation of the truth of [their] belief” (Žižek 202) and that the belief itself is what upholds the Thing. Yet, this blind belief has become exceedingly detrimental to Wyoming and the possibility for a sustainable future.

Wyoming possesses the resources for a sustainable future. Wyoming has immense amounts of coal, but also has immense amounts of wind. According to an article written by Sarah Strauss and Devon Reeser, Wyoming has “up to 50 percent of the best and most accessible wind in the Western part of the country. Wyoming is among the top ten state producers of wind-powered electricity” (Strauss and Reeser 110). Yet, as of January 2017 Wyoming was “considering a bill that would effectively outlaw renewable energy in the state” (Pentland). The bill titled, “Electricity Production Standard” proposes a penalty of $10 per megawatt hour for all utilities that were produced by solar and wind energy. Wyoming is not doing enough to diversify its economy and take advantage of the rising renewable energy market with the state’s abundant clean resources. The problem being that renewable energy has become associated with the left. Strauss and Reeser write, “Such laws [that implement wind power] would infringe on property rights and increase government control, changing Wyoming culture” (Strauss and Reeser 111).

As Strauss and Reeser state, “Wyoming has been forced to examine its values, seeking balance between preservation and prosperity” (Strauss and Reeser 111). Up to this point, Wyoming has chosen preservation, for it is easier to believe in a fantasy than it is to believe in reality. In order for Wyoming to embrace the renewable market, it would also have to embrace the Other and the culture it represents and Wyoming’s belief in the fantasy of the prosperity of the coal industry allows it to retain its identity while rejecting the Other.
Yet, this fantasy cannot be sustained. The economic truth remains; coal is dying and Wyoming needs to decide whether or not it wants to die with it.

Works Cited


Kasey Storey
They bulldozed Sierra View Golf Course. I understand they put in houses, neighborhoods of stucco tract houses with cement tile roofs and tiny, rectangular yards divided by redwood fences to keep the neighbor’s prying eyes from peeking through the windows, typical California houses with perhaps a pale, crystal-blue swimming pool in each backyard. I haven’t been there to see the neighborhoods. I’m sure they’re lovely, they always are, and I’m sure the Sierras can still be viewed; they can be viewed from almost anywhere in the San Joaquin Valley. Magnificent mountains, the Sierra Nevada, a four-hundred-mile-long gash of jagged rock and exposed granite, up to fourteen thousand feet high, that jut out of the flattest valley imaginable. You can see the curve of the earth across the valley, hundreds of miles of agricultural valley floor, laser-level. The Sierras loom in the background, a vista of a different world: perfect snowcapped black-and-white mountains immanent above a green and growing teeming landscape.

The valley floor used to flood each spring from the Sierra Nevada snowmelt. Thirty feet of snowpack trickled into raging mountain rivers and formed the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi—Lake Tulare, or Laguna de Tache as the Spaniards called it—thirteen thousand square miles of clear-melt lake that would simmer in the summer sun until it steamed itself into swamp by late August, a cycle that had repeated since the Pleistocene era. For centuries, the Yokut people from the Tachi tribe formed villages of up to seventy thousand people (an astonishing population density) and fished the lake in reed boats and collected freshwater crabs and western pond turtles from the marsh. The cycle of flooding continued until the 1950s when the Army Corps of Engineers dammed the final Sierra Nevada river flowing into the San Joaquin Valley and turned the valley into the richest farmland in the world. When my parents dug a hole in their backyard to put in a swimming pool, the dirt was rich, black-as-tar sedimentary topsoil all the way down, full of the smell of earth and life, a million years of sedimentation from glacial melt and prehistoric swamp humus scooped out with a backhoe.
I learned to play golf at Sierra View. On Saturday afternoons, my father took me out to play nine holes for six dollars after 4pm. The course was flat and hard-baked, mostly empty late in the day, and the fairways, half grass and half dirt, spread sparse and tan like the coat of a kennel dog with mange. The greens were greenish, green-like, not really green with dead brown spots and crabgrass, big dirt patches, crispy from the sun, always diseased, bumpy and slow like Velcro. The pro shop was a house trailer up on blocks, the restroom an outhouse. It was the kind of course where guys loaded ice chests with beer in the back of golf carts and played shirtless, sometimes barefoot, sometimes in jeans: lots of sweating, swearing, music playing tinnily from inside carts, an occasional wooden knock as a golf ball banged off a eucalyptus tree. And always the yell of “Fore!”

When my dad first gave me a golf club, he set the grip in my hand, and said, “This is how you grip a golf club.” Of the many options—the Vardon grip, the reverse overlap, the ten-finger grip—my father believed in the interlocking grip, where the pinky and index finger wrap around each other to stay locked and secure. I say he believed because choosing a grip is an act of faith, a devotion, like a sacrament, a prayer you say before each swing. The grip founds the golf swing, and all the swing mechanics spring from the grip; it is the alpha and omega. I haven’t played in years, but my hands still curl into place at the thought, thumbs pointing down an imaginary shaft. How many swings in my life, how many times did I take that grip? And always, I remembered, hold the club softly like you’re holding a bird in your hands, gently, so it doesn’t get away.

As a teenager I spent countless hours pounding balls at Sierra View, grooving an unmanageable swing on the unimaginable driving range, feeling the sting of every impact as the club drove into the cement-hard ground, the hardpan, watching balls arc and curve, carving into the Sierra vista. I played four balls-a-hole when the course wasn’t busy. Jenny in the pro shop would give me free range tokens sometimes.

On windy winter days I could drive the four hundred yard par-fours that played downwind, and I learned to play knockdown shots going into-the-wind, stingers, to take the spin off, so the ball wouldn’t balloon up and almost come back like the dead eucalyptus leaves that blew in my face. I learned to
cut the ball and hit draws, snap hook around corners and spin balls back on the
green. I learned how to chunk buried lies out of the bunkers by hooding the
clubface and how to flop shots with opened wedges that faced the sky. I bent
the tips of all my shafts from repeated collisions with the unforgiving turf, and
the faces of my wedges were worn glassy-smooth and grooveless from hitting
sand shots. I can still feel it all in my hands, in my grip, a million shots, an in-
vocation.

I never made it as a pro. For years, I slummed around the mini-tours,
and I had friends that did the same, all of us dreaming of the million dollar
paydays that were headed our way, the PGA tournaments on emerald-green
golf courses. Joe Acosta made it. He was there, for a time, on the PGA Tour.
Joe came from Sierra View and became the youngest player to earn his PGA
Tour card the year before Tiger Woods turned pro. He was twenty-one. One
day in a tournament, with his back against a tree, punching out hard, Joe’s club
head dug into a tree root buried in the dirt, something popped in his wrist,
and nothing was ever the same. But I guess that’s true for everything. Nothing
stays the same, not the dream, the course, not the Valley, not even the Sierras
and their crown of permanence.

In 1921, Big Agriculture came to the Valley and changed the social,
-economic, and environmental landscape. JG Boswell, the man who would be-
come known as the cotton king of California, bought land in the flood plains
of Corcoran on the edge of Lake Tulare and planted his first rows of Califor-
nia Pima cotton. Over years, he drained and tamed the wetlands around Lake
Tulare, digging dikes and ditches and earthen dams and rerouting floodwaters
through canals. He bought up neighboring farms when they flooded, and by
the end of his life in 1952, Boswell owned one hundred thirty-five thousand
acres of cultivated farmland and had successfully lobbied Congress to dam all
the rivers flowing into the San Joaquin Valley to keep his land from flooding.
Cotton boomed, and Lake Tulare, the largest freshwater lake west of the Mis-
issippi, ceased to exist. A new cycle for the Valley began: ploughed fields, a gas
station, strip malls and ranch houses in cul-de-sac neighborhoods, recreational
dammed lakes in the foothills, and a golf course.

I thought of Boswell a few years ago on my way through the Valley
near Stratford driving to visit my parents in Tulare County. I drove through
enormous fields of unpicked cotton that spread on either side of the road extending to the horizons—dry, brown, infinite fields, everything brown but the Pima cotton blooms. Ahead of me a great whirlwind cycled across the road gathering up cotton into a surging white mass, a cotton storm, a cyclonic cloud, and I hit it, an impact of wind that shook my truck. The air around me became thick and blizzard-white as cotton bolls, stripped from their stalks, swirled up in the air and hung stasis-like, floating, a whiteout, soft and silent slipping across my windshield dreamlike in a slow-motion summer snowstorm like a snow globe world with a Sierra view.

The cotton market had collapsed. The price of cotton had fallen below the cost of picking, so the fields sat fallow and unpicked, suspended. Everything would become an offering to the wind.
THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA IN THE RADI-CALIZATION OF DIASPORIC YOUTH

Morgan Hamilton

On Sunday, February 15, 2015, three young women passed through the security gates at London’s busy Gatwick Airport. Kadiza Sultana, 16 years old, wore dark slacks and a gray sweater; her friends, Amira Abase and Shamima Begum, both 15, were similarly attired, with the former in a bright yellow shirt and the latter sporting a leopard-print scarf. They carried little luggage and dressed as they might at their East London private school, Bethnal Green. In a city with a large Muslim community, the headscarves worn by the younger girls did not draw much attention. Their names were not on any watch lists. Their passports did not raise any alarms. The girls boarded a plane bound for Turkey and, in a manner of speaking, disappeared.

Their whereabouts are a fusion of speculation and hearsay. The trio likely crossed the Turkish border into Syria shortly after landing, assisted by online acquaintances who met them there. Rumors abound: that the girls joined the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS); that two of them had married and became “jihadi brides;” that Sultana was killed in a Russian airstrike. With little evidence and almost no communication from the girls themselves, their families and the British government have been left tracing the steps that led them to Gatwick and examining the online community in which they had become embedded. Their disappearance has provoked international sensation and raised endless questions about their façade of well-adjusted, middle-class contentment.

The defection of the Bethnal Green girls illustrates the opportunities and challenges created by the emergence of many forms of instant and interactive communication. While new media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have in many ways overcome geographic boundaries and strengthened the social and cultural connections of transnational and diasporic communities, they have also provided a forum for the normalization of extremist ideolo-
gies. At the center of this discourse is a generation of young people who occupy the digital domain, particularly those harboring a sense of placelessness. While this essay explores the ways that Islamic jihadists use social media to attract Western sympathizers and recruits, their predatory methods have been applied by extremist groups across a wide span of religions, ethnicities, and nationalities, from white supremacists in the United States to anti-Muslim factions in southeast Asia.

New media, new methods

A 2014 report by the New York-based security consultancy firm The Soufan Group (TSG) estimated that 26,000-31,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join extremist groups since 2011. The majority hail from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, and Jordan, but a growing subset originate from Europe and North America. Between June 2014 and December 2015, TSG saw the radicalization and recruitment of European actors more than double. By contrast, only 10,000 foreign fighters were estimated to have been involved in the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89). Many join up directly with radical groups attempting to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in favor of an ultra-conservative religious caliphate, though others initially travel to Syria to be part of the more moderate Syrian National Coalition and Free Syrian Army.

Social media is perhaps the most effective tool in the successful recruitment strategies practiced by organizations like Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS (all offshoots of Al-Qaeda). These groups have adapted to new forms of warfare (both physical and psychological) by fully embracing the capabilities of internet-based communications. Unlike “old” newspaper media, which acted as a single voice reaching a particular audience, the new media is both participatory and ubiquitous; globally, over 2.4 billion people use at least one form of social media and more than 2 billion are active on Facebook. The growing availability of mobile applications means that social media users have nearly constant access to the messages sent over these platforms.

The target audience for social media platforms (males aged 18-25 for Facebook, though this range tends to be slightly higher for Instagram, Twitter, and other sites) overlaps with the target demographic of foreign fighters conscripted to Islamic extremist groups (18-29, a full ten years younger than
the average age of foreigners who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980’s). Most are males (though, as in the case of the Bethnal Green girls, some women have “gone jihad”) and inexperienced in combat or politics. The majority are from immigrant, exiled, or refugee families.

Terrorist organizations have a vital head start in recognizing the value of social media as a self-selecting environment; that is, users tend to “buy into” pages and groups that share and reinforce their existing beliefs. Using vehicles like Facebook and Twitter they are able to disseminate information (and misinformation) through videos, images, and memes in brief, easily digested segments that younger users are accustomed to consuming. In doing so, these groups normalize their rhetoric, becoming approachable and mainstream to people who may not yet fully embrace their mission and values. The diverse range of social media platforms ensures that these groups can appeal to users who are already on the cusp of radicalization, as well as those who are not likely to participate in terror acts directly, but will share, repost, or “like” their content.

Unlike their predecessors, modern extremist groups are often well-funded and sophisticated in their recruitment campaigns. They are strategic in their use of enticing content, careful not to alarm potential sympathizers. ISIS, for example, employs a large social media office, al Hayat, which releases periodic “Mujatweets,” depicting the recovery of injured ISIS fighters in modern healthcare facilities. The organization Jabhat al-Nusra has advocated for the execution of Shia Muslims, but avoids calling for attacks on public places until it builds a stronger popular following; this strategy has proven effective in bolstering the group’s growth.

TSG urges governments to step up their efforts to study and utilize social media in counter-radicalization tactics. Potential Western recruits rely heavily on these platforms to attain first-hand accounts of the conflict. To understand how information spreads across “shared” media, TSG conducted an analysis of 44,000 tweets about an array of topics (politics, sports, social concerns, etc.) in the Gulf region. There was a high rate of re-posts but a low number of replies, indicating interest but not direct engagement by users. Conversely, a survey of 22,000 tweets pertaining to the Syrian war during the same period saw a dramatic spike in reposts and replies to original tweets.
implying a high level of personal engagement. Furthermore, the group’s comparison of tweets related to the Syrian war by self-proclaimed jihadist fighters received a much higher rate of replies and reposts than a 35% greater number of original tweets posted by international security experts on the same subjects.

The more well-funded extremist organizations demonstrate a refined understanding of how social media operates, as well as the benefits of strategic marketing. ISIS makes frequent use of stock photos of apparently happy young people engaged in conversation (not unlike many Western product advertisements). They use a graphic of the Facebook “like” button holding an ISIS flag and a Twitter bird portrayed in black with the group’s symbol. A notable short video circulated by recruiters last year was a clip taken from the game Grand Theft Auto. Dubbed over the imagery was a narrator: “Your games which are producing from you, we do the same actions in battlefields.” To a target audience of young male viewers, this implies that joining their ranks will provide access to an authentic experience, while those at home are left with a digital replication of real adventure and honor.

There is strong evidence that terrorist organizations, both in the Middle East and elsewhere, have weaponized recent innovations in communications to extend their global reach. If governments and watch groups hope to counteract their recruitment efforts, it is critical that they, too, learn to speak in the same vernacular as the target demographic.

Borderless networks

Authorities suspect that the Bethnal Green girls may have been radicalized online by a woman who goes by the moniker Umm Layth (“Mother of the Lion”). An advocate of the Islamic caliphate, she has haunted the internet under a number of social media profiles, posting essays and blogs that encourage young women to make the hijrah (the journey back to the Islamic homeland). Through her now-closed Tumblr account, “Diary of a Muhajirah” (a woman who has made the hijrah), she encouraged women and girls from Western countries to travel to Syria and join the Islamic State as brides of jihadist soldiers. “We are created to be mothers and wives—as much as the western society has warped your views on this with a hidden feminist mentality,” she wrote in her account. She offers advice for slipping across international borders and procuring the funds required to make this journey (the
family of Kadiza Sultana believes that she stole jewelry from the family home and used her older sister’s passport to travel to Turkey). She also offers advice for women whose husbands have been killed.

Just as video game culture has been co-opted for the purposes of recruiting young foreign fighters, the roles of marriage and motherhood have been reframed through new media content as a sacred duty. Fighting against an oppressor alongside a jihadist husband and raising a new breed of warrior has been branded as cool, counter-culture, and courageous. Umm Waqqas, an online recruiter who authorities suspect lived as a student in Seattle, Washington until early 2014, shared photos of women in black hijabs, posed with semi-automatic rifles in front of fortified vehicles to her 8,000 Twitter followers. Another blogger, the “Bird of Jannah,” posts “listicles” that follow the template of mainstream clickbait found on social media, such as “10 Facts About Marriage in the Islamic State” and inventories of leisure gifts offered as incentives for young jihadi brides.

The Bethnal Green girls may have felt a particular kinship to Umm Layth: the recruiter is originally from the UK. A Scot of Muslim descent, her real name is Aqsa Mahmood. Raised in an affluent part of Glasgow and well-educated at a private school, Mahmood was purportedly a happy, social teenager, not particularly concerned with religion. Her personality underwent a drastic change in 2013 when, at the age of 19, she met British Muslim Adeel Ulhaq at a mosque in England. Ulhaq encouraged Mahmood’s conversion to fundamentalist Islam and the two quickly made plans to travel to Syria to elope. Mahmood dropped out of Glasgow Caledonian University and was able to complete the journey; Ulhaq, on the other hand, was stopped before he could leave England. He has been imprisoned since 2015 for a conviction related to helping an underage British boy travel to Syria to join ISIS.

Since her departure from the UK, Mahmood posts on various social media, creating new accounts as her old ones are discovered and deactivated. She has called on Muslim youth in Western countries to commit acts of violence against authorities and governments, and has lauded atrocities committed in Tunisia, France, and Kuwait. Allegedly, Mahmood holds a powerful position in the female-only al-Khansaa, a group responsible for enforcing moral behavior espoused by Sharia law. According to intelligence reports, she is an adamant Salafist (an extremely conservative reformist arm of Sunni Islam,
Cultural Studies

salaf meaning “devout ancestors”) and takfir (one who accuses other Muslims of apostasy). Since learning of her activities abroad, her family in Scotland has denounced the young woman, issuing the following statement: “There is no honour, no glory, no god at work in the cowardly massacre of holidaymakers, people at prayer in a Shia mosque or an innocent man at his place of work.” They have described her as “twisted and evil,” and “no longer the daughter they raised.”

A vulnerable population

Mahmood’s trajectory from affluent Western schoolgirl to advocate of terror is not an anomaly. Cultural marginalization can occur across tax brackets and social strata, alienating young people who belong to an ethnic minority from the dominant culture of the “host” country. Young men and women who are raised in the diaspora often experience a sense of statelessness, caught between the culture of their ethnocommunity and that of the hegemony. Discrimination, micro aggressions, and other trauma can contribute to the overall sense of marginalization. Victims of overt or perceived discrimination may react with aggression stemming from feelings of defensiveness and persecution.

Similarly, the separation of religion from culture can be a dividing factor between first generation migrants and their offspring. Experiencing religion and spirituality in a nation where it is prevalent can be a unifying and comforting aspect of life for first-generation migrants. Often diasporic youth live in now-secular families and are not familiar with a less extreme interpretation of their holy texts and ideologies. Because of this, they don’t have access to a counter-narrative to the ultra-conservative religious ideologies being offered by the recruiters they encounter online. In households where secularization has occurred, subscribing to extreme religious views can be an act of rebellion by younger family members.

Events in the homeland can also have an impact on diasporic communities, particularly those with colonial pasts. Individuals living in a host country that once colonized their homeland may feel an ingrained animosity towards the host. Likewise, these individuals may take personally events (conflicts, violence, and political dissidence) that occur in the homeland. For a portion of Muslims in the diaspora, the perception of imperialist behavior by the host country can prove motivation to engage in or sympathize with extremist dis-
course. For example, military intervention for economic gain, thinly veiled as democratization, can be triggering, as can perceived ambivalence or non-action in non-lucrative conflicts (Sri Lanka and Chechnya, for instance).

A variety of factors on both the individual and collective scale can lead to young people in the diaspora feeling disconnected from their family and peers. Unmoored from a social identity and searching for a sense of purpose and belonging, they may approach online recruiters, rather than being targeted for radicalization directly.

Hijrah

Kadiza Sultana was a widow when she last spoke to her younger sister in December 2015; her jihadist husband, an American national of Somali descent, had been killed in combat. Sultana told her sister that she wanted to return to London. “I don’t have a good feeling, I feel scared. You know the borders are closed right now so how am I going to come out?” By that time, British consular service in Syria had been suspended.

In the face of multiple terrorist attacks in Europe, Sultana’s family feared that British officials would not be sympathetic towards a jihadi bride, let alone offer clemency for her defection. British news outlet The Independent reported that Sultana and her sister made plans for the teenager to escape the city of Raqqa (then an ISIS stronghold) by taxi. However, Sultana may have panicked and abandoned her plans after witnessing the death of 17-year-old Samra Kesinovic. Kesinovic and her friend, 15-year-old Sabina Selimovic, both daughters of refugees of the Bosnian civil war who emigrated to Austria, left their homes in 2014 after being radicalized by Vienna-based Bosnian Islamic cleric, Abu Tejda. Images of the girls in burkas holding weapons were widely distributed as ISIS recruitment propaganda. Last year, a Tunisian woman who claimed she had been housed with Kesnovic in Raqqa told The Independent that the two girls were kept as sex slaves and passed to new ISIS recruits as “presents” for their enlistment. She claimed that Kesinovic was beaten to death with a hammer in 2016 after attempting to escape the city. Selimovic is rumored to have been killed while fighting in December 2014.

Harry Safro, a German citizen who left Raqqa and the Islamic State in 2014 and was jailed upon returning to his home country, has been quoted stating, “Many have tried (to flee) but they are either dead or in jail waiting for executions. Among them are a handful of British citizens. I spoke to some
of them who wanted to leave – many say it is impossible...When you make it, you will get a life sentence in jail. Many have already been involved in fighting so they said there is no hope for them.”

A family lawyer for the Sultana family released a statement in August 2016 attesting that his clients had received reports that their daughter was killed by an airstrike in Raqqa earlier that year. The whereabouts of Begum and Abase remain unknown.

Re-integration, de-radicalization, and counter-radicalization

TSG predicts that with ISIS losing territory to Syrian and Western forces, there will be a large reverse migration of foreign recruits. Some who do not shed their jihadist affiliations may continue to perpetrate violence and chaos in nations they perceive as oppressor states. Others will have tremendous difficulty returning to their countries of origin. While a minority may be cultivated as an asset by the government intelligence agencies to provide information on their former collaborators, others may face immediate incarceration upon return. Such is the case of Ahmed Abu Fouad, a Belgian Muslim who travelled to Syria, children in tow, to retrieve his wife after learning she had “gone jihad.” Upon returning to Belgium, both adults were arrested and are still awaiting sentencing.

Their plight is not uncommon for returnees to Western countries, where most governments do not have the resources to monitor the activities of those who have travelled in the caliphate. Fearing the spread of radical ideas, countries like Belgium have adopted a strict “arrest first, ask questions later” policy, imprisoning returnees upon learning of their arrival. Ironically, this has led to furthering the social isolation of those who left, and has allowed for the rapid spread of extremist ideologies between prisoners.

There are no guidelines, no best practices for reintegrating the de-radicalized. France – a concentration point of both anti-Muslim discrimination and terrorism – estimates that over 9,000 young people (many the children of immigrants, some naturalized French citizens) have been radicalized or are at-risk of being radicalized. In 2015, after terror attacks took more than 230 lives in France, the French government announced plans to open twelve residential centers to house young people (aged 18-30) who voluntarily opted into the program. This was a highly experimental approach; the first center, a renovated 18th century manor in the idyllic small town of Beumont-en-Veron,
resembled a college dormitory and claimed to offer a regimented schedule and courses in French history, philosophy, and religion, as well as time for extracurriculars. The citizens of Beumont, initially in favor of hosting the experimental facility despite concerns that the center might itself become a symbolic target of terrorist activity, were outraged to learn from a 2016 radio interview that government officials had decided to change the voluntary residential program to a detention center for Muslims who had been stopped by security forces as they attempted to travel to Syria. Because of public outcry, the French government has agreed to adhere to the original plan. However, in July of this year, the Beumont center was closed after receiving only nine residents.

Gerald Bonner, a sociologist who served on the government-appointed steering committee for the center, expressed doubt as to the ability for de-radicalization centers to work, on the principle that the idea of de-radicalization is itself faulty: “It means that you can take an idea out of the brain, and I think that’s just impossible. Nobody in the history of psychology – nobody – has succeeded. What we have to try is not a kind of mental manipulation but the opposite – mind liberation, a strengthening of their intellectual immune systems. And it’s they who have to do that themselves.”

Sharing Bonner’s doubts is Dounia Bouzar, a French anthropologist who specializes in working with youth – particularly girls – who have been indoctrinated online into radical ideologies. She believes that these youth become at risk because they are “harboring feelings of exclusion, humiliation, or inferiority” while extremist groups offer them “a worldview that can provide them a sense of omnipotence.” Bouzar works with the girls and their families in a two-step approach: rebuilding emotional security by asking patients to recall happier sentiments and memories from the time before their indoctrination, and, secondly, deconstructing jihadist narratives by addressing gaps between what the girls have been told and the realities of that life. Bouzar believes that de-radicalization and detention centers like those planned in France, as well as on-residential programs that have been enacted in the UK and in Germany (the latter having been applied, in earlier decades, to de-radicalizing individuals who subscribed to homegrown neo-Nazi ideologies), reinforce rather than break down terrorist frameworks. Aside from the troubling historical correlations these proposed detention centers carry, their viability
is fundamentally problematic. If an individual at risk of radicalization is responding to a sense of isolation, it stands to reason that further isolation and stigmatization will only compound the motivations leading them to such a dangerous precipice in the first place.

In regard to countering the global reach of extremist ideologies, the growing consensus is that the best offense may be a good defense and that counter-radicalization may ultimately prove more effective than any method of re-integration. A community-based approach, such as the UK’s Pakistan and Communications Outreach Team, may be beneficial. The government-sponsored group meets with members of the Pakistani community in Britain to brainstorm policy changes that may disrupt terrorist networks by addressing issues of poverty, unemployment, and employment discrimination that might lead members of the ethno-community to feel sympathetic towards extremist rhetoric. In these communities, women are proving to be powerful allies in prevention initiatives. Generally, the primary domestic caretakers of a household, wives and mothers, may serve as an early warning system in observing changes in the behavior of children and family members. As women are often subject to violence and oppression under extremist ideologies, involving them in countermeasures may provide a sense of agency and perhaps begin a virtuous circle in this fight.

Engaging diasporic communities in policy discussions is a labor-intensive, if worthy, task, and only takes advantage of personal, face-to-face interactions. The other side of counter-radicalization takes place in the same environment being used by extremist groups: the internet. In a virtual biome where advertisement and attention are the leading forms of currency, intelligence agencies are learning to vie for space. Their approach should involve both the removal of terrorist content and the delivery of counter-narratives. In regards to the former, a joint collaborative taskforce was recently formed between the United Nations and tech giants Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube. Together, they are developing policies and mechanisms for removing content that promotes violence and overt extremist content from their platforms. They are also working with organizations like the European Union’s Civil Society Empowerment Programme, which supports open forums where alternative or counter narratives can be shared.
Counter narratives should not dismiss concerns and grievances voiced by the diasporic community, but should address the knowledge gaps in the depiction of jihadist life offered by recruiters. For instance, how many foreign fighters have died in Syria as opposed to native jihadists? What level of contact may a foreign fighter expect to have with their family back in the host country? What living accommodations may they expect? How does the loss of civilian life further their moral beliefs? Alternative stories might be offered by disen- chanted returnees, who would be better engaged in sharing the realities of their experiences than awaiting trial. Finally, counter-narratives should be coupled with viable alternatives to combat that would ease the suffering of those in the home country, including volunteer opportunities within humanitarian aid organizations or placements within local government.

With the recent losses of Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria, (both ISIS-held territories) TSG foresees extremist groups will escalate their social media campaigns to attract new recruits. The democratization of information via the internet means that “local conflicts” no longer exist; every war is, in some aspects, a global war. It will take a committed global effort to counteract the efforts of extremist groups to legitimize and spread their rhetoric; social media has become both a weapon and a battleground in that effort.


8. Ibid.


11. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


18. Cottee, Tracking the Online Life of a Female ISIS Recruiter from the UK.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.


25. Ibid.

26. Veselinovic, Family fears British girl who went to Syria is dead.


28. Ibid.


31. Ibid.


35. McAuley, France to open first of 12 ‘deradicalization’ centers for at-risk youths.

36. Zerofsky, How to stop a martyr.

37. Ibid.

38. Haider, Radicalisation of diaspora communities.

39. Ibid.

Cultural Studies


42. Ibid.
On the top floor of a high-rise apartment, my bedroom overlooked the Army base playground with its towering super long, electric blue and fire engine red slide.
One day halfway up on a blue rung sandwiched between playmates, a yellow jacket stung my hand in the web space between thumb and index finger.

Waiting for my train at an underground newsstand in the Paris metro, I learned the Berlin Wall fell and remembered the bee sting, Raggedy Ann curtains, learning to tie shoelaces, and stories of Checkpoint Charlie—the Russians, the guns, the art of eating wine glasses, shard by shard.

With the Cold War at an end, I readied myself for spring break on the French Riviera. I tucked the news magazines in my satchel and boarded the train of tomorrow. Which hat would I wear to match my bikini? Which beach would I stroll along, bronzed to perfection, as I met my debonair future husband?

I dreamed of window shopping, cafe menus to drool over, marbled hotel lobbies with peeing cherub fountains, a once in a lifetime stroll from Nice to Monte Carlo,
Poetry

little sandy nude beaches tucked into gentle rising hills, 
yacht-filled marinas, and scenic overlooks, high above 
train tracks, to perch on and watch sailboats play

in the pure blue Mediterranean. Throughout that dreary 
Paris winter I stuffed sunshine yellow bags with hope, 
extra francs, and the latest spring fashions, routinely 
tugging nylon web straps for stability, weighing 
the contents for fluency and bravado. Daily I boarded 
the metro to university, wondering which Saint Tropez 
gallery would beg to sell my artwork, which sea view 
home my husband would own, which Picasso sculpture 
would be my favorite at the Antibes museum, and how 
compatible my best friend would be in Nice for a week. 
Four months after the Berlin wall fell, I descended 
the metro staircase into Gare du Lyon and twirled 
through the last turnstile into spring break. As I set bags 
down and applauded myself for timing the 7:00 pm 
departure perfectly, I met furious, lecturing eyes. 
Something about 17:00 hours. Army brats. A 24-hour clock. 
Seizing my largest bag, my friend hightailed it to a platform, 
where he pitched it through the rearmost train door, shoved 
me up the stairs, threw his backpack on my sore feet, 
sprinted alongside the departing train, leapt for the handle, 
dragged his shoes on the last few feet of quai, muscled
himself in, and marched towards the engine. The trek to the front of the train provided ample time for anger to build a sturdy wall.
Tunisia, 1953

She didn’t wait for the clock to ring. She woke up long before. She woke up from another dreamless sleep, a strange feeling in her chest, but it was her belly that she caressed, and the life inside it that she felt. It was a boy. That’s what the wise women and men of her village in Kerkennah told her. They also said that by the time her boy would come, they would have driven the French away from their land. They even promised her that he wouldn’t be born colonized; that he wouldn’t be called uncivilized. And she believed them.

The clock on the pale wall of her room struck midnight. She felt an increasing uneasiness in her chest. She looked at the clock again. She wanted to freeze it until the prophecy of her fellow villagers became reality. But it was too late. The hands of the clock moved on, announcing another day: December 25th, 1953. She had promised herself not to give birth in that month, for it was a month of death, not life. Farhat Hached had died the previous December. He was Kerkenien, like them. He left the island for the city to fight against the colonial system that was crushing them. He established the first Tunisian workers’ syndicate. He called for equal rights between Tunisians and French. And when he led the independence movement with Bourguiba and Ben Youssef, his fellow islanders inside and outside Kerkennah rallied behind him until they heard of his assassination by the French that took place in December 1952. After his death, she gathered with other women and men in the village and listened in tears as they pledged to carry on Hached’s legacy and to free the country by his first anniversary. And she believed them.

The clock’s hands seemed to be moving too fast, as if following her quickening breath and rapid heartbeat. She pursed her lips, tightened her fingers around the fabric of her dress, then shook her head several times. Each time, she seemed to be saying no, not now; each time, she seemed to grow more adamant. But he, who was inside, was more adamant than she was, for he kicked hard. And with her screams, all promises were shattered. Soon, the women from the village surrounded her. Their faces were yellow in the dim
“Push, push,” they all cried. She did not believe them this time. She did not push. She just screamed in pain as he squeezed his way out of her. Her scream soon mingled with his cry. But as she held him against her chest, they looked at each other in silence. Nothing was left to say. Silence reigned.

Morocco, 1984

The baby had grown into a man.
And now, it was his turn.

He walked into the living room and sat next to his wife. In silence, they watched the news about his country, Tunisia. Men and women filled the streets there. They protested against their president Bourguiba and his policies. Soon they were chased by police and by the bullets flying out of their guns. More than sixty were dead, the journalist said. She turned off the TV, but the images continued to roll through her head. She watched them again and again, then wrapped her hands around her belly, as if to protect her unborn child from the chaos in her head. She turned around, looked at him, and pressed her hands even further against her belly, as if to tell him that she would never take her baby to that chaotic place he called his home country.

He looked back at her, smiling, then told her that those who come to life in silence were never born; that he was born in the loud chaos of Tunisian independence; that he was actually born in 1956, not in 1953. And in the 1970s, when Bourguiba, the liberator, had turned into a dictator, he too walked in the streets with his Tunisian compatriots. Together, they claimed back their country with loud shouts. But the police chased them. And the dictator wanted to silence them. Forever. So he ran and ran until he found himself out of the country, first in Niger, then in Morocco. Now, he told her, as he sat in his apartment in Casablanca, it was time to return, for the dictatorship was about to fall.

He was about to walk out of the living room when she started to breathe hard. She wrapped her hands around her belly and screamed loud. She screamed at him that it was time. She screamed in pain in the delivery room. She screamed in fear when she saw her baby silent in the nurse’s hands. She screamed until she heard the cry of her baby girl. She held her tight to her
chest, and watched her cry. She then turned around and gave her to him. He took her in his arms and lulled her to sleep, humming the songs of Bob Marley, for those were the only ones he knew: songs about the revolution and the better future he promised his baby girl.

Tunisia, 1987

The baby girl had a sister.
The sister was me.
And the he was my father now.

When my father held me in his arms for the first time, Bourguiba was still in Tunisia; the dictatorship had not fallen. When my father held me in his arms, he didn’t hum any song, for he had stopped listening to Bob Marley by then. All his generation had. They stopped singing about the revolution. They stopped talking about the revolution. Instead, they smoked and bitterly mocked their dictator. Instead, they drank wine and whiskey and cursed their world. And in the ears of their newborns, they no longer whispered promises, for deep down they had accepted silence. And in silence, I was born.

Tunisia, January 2011

There was another birth. A new beginning. Or end?
Both, or neither?
I don’t know.
All I know is that it was my turn now.

I ran very fast in the streets of Tunis. I ran with the crowd, then alone, and only stopped when I saw our apartment door. I collapsed on the floor, panting for air, my heart throbbing hard, and the words of the crowd still echoing in my head; “Down with the dictator! Down with Ben Ali!” I shook my head and rummaged through my bag for the keys before bringing myself to my feet and opening the door. When I stepped inside, I saw my father and my mother standing in front of me, quivering. They looked at me with angry eyes. I told them I was all right. And as the day started to roll through my mind, I felt a warmth inside my heart. That’s what hope must feel like.

I sat next to my parents in the living room. In silence, we watched the news about Tunisia. It was January 14th, 2011. My father switched from one
news channel to the other, keeping count of the dead, until he heard the journalist say that Ben Ali had left the country. “He left!” we all cried in disbelief. At that moment, I had the strange feeling that everything was possible. That’s what freedom must feel like — or maybe rebirth. So I started counting the newborns. And by the end of the night, as my father was having his usual glass of wine and cigarette, I told him the final count; we were ten million born that night. My father patted my head and let out a laugh, whose bitterness I did not understand, not back then.

I did not understand. Instead, I rushed to university the following day, dreaming of our new democracy and eager to start rebuilding our country. But the university was empty that day, and the day after, and the day after that. And when students finally came back, they split into many groups. In one, I heard students parroting Marx’s words and promising their comrades a heaven on earth. In the second, I heard others parroting the words of the Koran and promising their brothers and sisters a heaven above the sky. In the third, a student declared that we needed another Bourguiba to lead the country. In the fourth, they all cursed Bourguiba, the seculars, and the enemies of Islam. And in the last, they prayed for Ben Ali to come back.

I did not understand, even when I saw this happening in the whole country during the following months.

I did not understand even that day in June, when I walked to the exam room and heard the classmate who always spoke in French, and never in Arabic, explain to her friends that all the problems and miseries in our country were the result of colonization and the ongoing Western conspiracy against the Arab world. I did not understand, even when I walked inside the room and sat next to the girl who often joked that we should have remained colonized for nothing good could come out of us. No, I did not understand, even when I saw the contempt in her eyes as she looked at all of us in that exam room.

I only understood when I looked up at the clock on the wall and saw its unmoving hands, for in them I suddenly glimpsed our past, present, and future and realized how unborn we all were. And when I finally understood, I bent over my paper exam, like everybody else.

Silence reigned.
THE MOE POLITICS IN YEAR, HARE, AFFAIR

Jiarui Sun

In 2015, under the background of China’s “Internet Plus” policy and the intensified censorship of foreign animations, a political allegory animation, Year, Hare, Affair (in Chinese: 那年那兔那些事, which literally means ‘the story of that rabbit happened in that year’) went viral overnight among Chinese Internet users.

This study aims to see how a hegemonic political discourse uses different approaches to sustain its hierarchy in a diverse, multicultural society in the age of the Internet. I will first look into the dynamic cultural tension between the hegemonic political power and the distorting nature in the process of decoding that motivates the animation’s production. Second, by introducing the concept of moe, I aim to study the animation’s strategy to stop the distorting process and fix the meaning of its content. Finally, by studying the governmental actions to promote a new patriotic identity for its young supporters, this study will arrive at the conclusion that the Chinese government has updated its propaganda strategy to maintain consistency between the encoding and decoding processes.

Year, Hare, Affair: A New Shell for the Old Ideology

The animation Year, Hare, Affair is about a Rabbit family (representing the Communist Party of China and its supporters) that works hard to defend their household, Zhòng Huā Jiā (a homophonic word for Zhōng Huá Jiā, 中华家, the family of the Chinese nation), and help it prosper against the attack and suppression from the Chickens (Japan), Bald Eagles (the United States) and Russian Bears (the former Soviet Union and later Russia).
According to Stuart Hall, in the process of producing a TV program, the professional broadcasters assume their position when encoding a message which has already been signified in a hegemonic manner (“Encoding, decoding” 101). This is particularly true for the production of Year, Hare, Affair. Originally adapted from a series of manga and a novel created by grassroots artists on a military fan online forum, this animation is defined as a show that “uses animals as an allegory for nations and sovereign states to represent political and military events in history. The goal of this project was to promote nationalistic pride in young people, and focuses on appreciation for China’s various achievements since the beginning of the 20th century” (“Year, Hare, Affair” Wikipedia page). Most of the stories and discourses in this animation are consistent with the historical narrative in official text books. As Hall states, “more often broadcasters are concerned that the audience has failed to take the meaning as they – the broadcasters – intended.” (“Encoding, decoding,” 100). To the animation producers, the denotation of their allegories needs to be particularly preserved because otherwise their hegemonic discourse will be disrupted. To achieve this, a series of adjusted historical pictures are displayed at the end of each episode, which directly connects the animated characters in the animation with real historical scenes (Figure 1, 2 and 3). In this way, the animation eliminates most of the other possible assumptions of the allegories in the animation and directly fixes the meaning of its narrative.

In “Encoding, decoding,” Hall points out that “systematically distorted communication” is what the TV broadcasters have to confront. In our case, today’s mass communication promoted by the Internet has taken the Chinese public to a time when serious pedagogies such as mainstream newspaper articles, central TV channels, and textbooks are now all subject to parody. The rise of social media also puts millennials on the frontline of the country’s ideological establishment (Figure 4). Growing up twenty years after the Cultural Revolution, these young Internet users don’t relate to the difficult times of war and famine that are fundamental to the Party’s patriotic discourse. Instead, they feel much closer to the Japanese pop culture and the global celebrity culture, which are calling for an individualistic expression of feelings and emotions. Hence, this generation becomes immune to the conventional governmental
propaganda that emphasizes collectivist values. In a sense, to them, the distortion in communication is more likely to happen than ever.

Moe as A Strategy

So how exactly did this animation achieve this goal? What are its strategies to fix the political message for its targeted young viewers without boring or offending them? And how do the viewers respond to or interact with these strategies? To answer these questions, I will look into the animation’s protagonist, the Rabbit, as an object intentionally designed to fetishism. Also, I want to bring in the concept of moe as a powerful, self-conscious strategy that is used by this animation to engage its audience.

Before looking into the character Rabbit, we first need to bring the perspective of the viewers to our discussion. As said, the Rabbit is a character purposely designed for fetishism. And when it comes to the discussion of fetishism, observers have the tendency to focus on the work that is done to fetishize the object. However, as Hall points out, the signifying process is not completed until the relation between the action of looking at the image and the meaning of the image is built (“Race, Representation and the Media” 16). In other words, meaning does not exist until the viewer has associated it with a certain image in the process of looking. Hence, it is necessary to study the signifying process of certain images from the viewers’ perspective, one that involves the emotional reactions and participations on the recipients’ side. It is particularly true in today’s digital era when the interaction between the visual and the viewers plays a crucial role in the process of assigning meanings to specific images, which in turn contributes to the emergence of all kinds of subcultures. The conventional detachment between the cultural product and its consumers in the TV/newspaper era is now replaced by an active interaction that contributes to the construction of the viewers’ emotions and political views.

Moe (in Japanese: 萌え, pronounced as ‘moh-eh’; or in Chinese: 萌, pronounced as ‘méng’) is an important concept in Japanese ACGN subculture. According to Asako P. Saito, moe may be defined as “an affectionate response to fictional characters” (Galbraith, 17). In her article, Saito continues to explain that “moe is triggered by fictional characters; it does not exist in the character itself, but is found within the person who is responding to the character. Thus,
certain characters may elicit strong emotions in people” (Saito, 138). In other words, moe is a strong, affectionate emotion that a viewer experiences for a certain fictional character.

Because the Japanese kanji can be easily adapted to the Chinese language, when the term moe (萌) comes into Chinese, it is soon assimilated into daily usage. However, as the word becomes widely used in all kinds of contexts (newspaper entries, official social media accounts, television news reports etc.), the public has gradually neglected the fact that moe is originally working on the subject who is watching an animation, not the object in the animation. Hence, not enough attention is put on the effect on the viewers, or the investment viewers put into these products. When it comes to the study of an animation that is promoted as a moe anime, there is a tendency to overlook the psychological effect of, and the power behind, those moe-arousing characters. So here I intend to point out that the process of getting to feel a strong, usually affectionate emotion towards a fictional character remains the core of moe. And the cultural industries (both in Japan and China) have developed a whole set of comprehensive strategies aiming to arouse an emotion of moe in their viewers.

In Year, Hare, Affair, the main character Rabbit is widely tagged as a moe figure for its physical features: long fluffy ears, a big, round white head with a smiling face, pink little hands and a child-like, gender-unspecific voice, all these features are defined as “moe-points” by its viewers. Apart from the appearance, the Rabbits also use an innocent, child-like language, which rephrases the nuclear weapon as the Mushroom Egg, and the economic development as “making small pennies. In this way, the animation sugars up the conventional nationalistic discourse with simple, familiar language that is easier for the young generation to take in and digest. By transforming the conventional image of a solemn Communist Party into a gentle, friendly, witty rabbit, the animation guides the audience to see the Party from a pair of affectionate eyes. As Hall has pointed out, the meaning of an image is always contextual (Hall, 18). Despite the Rabbit’s appearance, it is the context that the animation has put the Rabbit in, i.e. the political/military history of the last century, that generates a comprehensive, powerful meaning. Watching the child-like, innocent Rabbit, who is whole-heartedly devoted to helping his household pros-
per, the viewers are deeply moved. The emotional impulse to help, to protect, and to defend the Rabbit is aroused, and a devotion to the regime is achieved.

With this innocent facade, the animation is able to conceal the complicated political background of the rise of the Communist Party and the violent history of its rise to power in mainland China. The gentle, smiling rabbit bypasses the brutal side of the Party’s history when it persecuted landowners, capitalists, scholars, and intellectuals throughout the last century. In the meantime, other characters, such as the Japan Chicken or the Bald Eagle are all presented as clumsy and violent clowns that create humorous effects. Laughing along with the triumphant witty Rabbit, the young audience comes to the agreement that the Party gains its regime naturally because all of the enemies are unintelligent and evil.

Also, we should bear in mind that most of the audience of this animation is already familiar with the moe culture hence the encoding process becomes transparent to them. The process of personifying the characters and recognizing these specific moe features can then be understood as what Stuart Hall would call the investment of the viewers (Hall, 17). The viewers cannot drag themselves out of the images, because the moment they set their eyes on them, they spontaneously feel the effect of moe arising and the meaning behind them is naturally recalled.

Furthermore, as Hall points out, “the meaning that you as a spectator take, depends on that engagement – psychic, imaginary, engagement – through the look with an investment in the image or involvement in what the image is saying or doing” (“Race, Representation and the Media” 17). The animation constantly relates the audience’s ordinary life with the narrative of national well-being. For instance, in one episode, a Rabbit who fights in North Korea says, “we eat noodles with snow here, so that our Dears back home can debate over whether tofu jelly should be sweet or salty for ten pages [online].” The ordinary experience of eating and debating over tofu jelly is now associated with the heroic acts conducted by the Volunteer Soldiers who fought in North Korea, creating a strong emotional reaction among the viewers who type in crying Emojis and comments like “I can’t help crying” on the bullet screen (Figure 6). In this way, as the audience follows the hints of decoding
hidden in the narrative, they are gradually trained to project their own experience and their own identity onto the character Rabbit.

Because the moe effect has caused enjoyment (watching their beloved character playing on screen is extremely satisfactory), as well as a sense of belonging (the shared feeling of moe effect has created a fandom of a considerable size for this animation), the audience becomes the one who calls for the moe features in this animation. By feeding its audience with moe features, the animation gains control over the process of decoding. As Hall has suggested, images are “trying to construct a position of knowledge or identification for the viewer in relation to what has been depicted in the image” (“Race, Representation and the Media” 16). The animation has not only signified the character Rabbit as the Socialist China, but also its supporters, i.e. the numerous Rabbits that look alike and chant slogans together (Figure 7). The juxtaposition of historical figures with allegorical animal figures breaks down the estrangement between ordinary people and the great historical figures. In this way, the animation subtly leads to its fans’ self-identification as a part of the narrative, which can be found in the bullet screen comments where many address themselves as “I Rabbit” or “We Rabbits” (in Chinese: wǒ tù, 我兔). And this identification is exactly what the propaganda aims to achieve: to create a recognition of the nation, to gain acceptance for the hegemonic history narrative, and to generate a “natural” sense of support for the current regime.

In the meantime, the moe effect fits well with the individualism that is popular among the young generation. The feelings of affection and sentimentality, as well as pride, are all personal and closely connected with every single viewer’s ordinary life. To these fans, their moe reaction is turning the imagined concept of a native nation from an almighty “motherland” to an adorable friend and a reliable partner. By individualizing the emotion of patriotism, the moe effect conceals the collectivistic nature of the propaganda and turns the fans of the animation into a part of the collective nationalistic advocate without feeling a loss of individual identity, even though in reality they are fundamentally turned into homogenous subjects under the regime.

Also, the animation uses moe as a way to sugar up the ideology that praises diplomatic conspiracy. The absolute friend-or-foe division and racism have been innate within the Communist Party’s propaganda discourse since, if not before, Mao era. In this animation, one of the Rabbit’s moe features is
what is called fù hēi (in Chinese: 腹黑) or black belly, literally meaning the white rabbit has a hidden black, cunning or scheming inside, especially when it comes to the topics of diplomatic negotiations. For example, in the episode about China’s economic support for African countries, a Rabbit cunningly offers a Hippo (a symbol for African countries) an interest-free loan and asks for resources in return by asking, “Do you have coal? Oil? Tombarthite? It’s okay if you don’t have money, as long as you have resources!” On this scene, the bullet screen is filled with a same line of comment from different users, “seeing our Rabbit is such a bully, I am so relieved” (Figure 8). To these commenters, the Rabbit’s cunning personality contrasts with its innocent appearance, making it even more adorable. This kind of affection is also aroused when the usually polite, cute Rabbit occasionally makes a vulgar remark, or when it acts violently – a little bunny can’t create big harm, but isn’t it adorable to know that it has an attitude? In this way, the animation actually helps the authority in China to justify its tough, sometimes violent actions towards other nations. The animation’s fans’ pursuit for moe has concealed the fact that the ideology behind it is actually replacing the basic morality and sanity with appreciation for violence and bullying.

Likewise, the moe effect is also achieved at the expense of racism towards other nations or races. For instance, in the same episode about China’s financial support for African countries, the dark skinned hippos are portrayed as so unintelligent that they don’t even know the answer to the question “1+1=?.” In the animation, the Rabbit delightfully says, “you are so simple-minded! Now that all the other animals don’t play with me, we can become friends!” (Figure 9) Not only does the animation stigmatize the African people as unintelligent barbarians, it also simplifies and romanticizes the Socialist China’s relation with Africa as two little animals play together. Although in this case, the animation seems to go against the Party’s consistent rhetoric of “uniting African brothers.” The difference in species paves way for the nationalistic rhetoric in the conventional propaganda of the Communist Party.

The Power Intervention in the Promotion of Year, Hare, Affair

According to Hall, the meaning can never be fixed, but power will always want to make attempts to fix it through means of intervention (“Encoding, decoding” 96). The promotion of the animation by the propaganda
institutions of the Communist Party in China is exactly an attempt to fix the meaning of the animation’s allegories. While the moe effect of the animation immediately won high clicks online for it, what makes Year, Hare, Affair particularly influential among the Chinese internet users was the public praise and promotion from the official social network accounts run by the governmental propaganda institutions such as Communist Youth League and Xinhua News Agency. In this section, I will discuss why and how this animation is used by Communist Youth League’s social media accounts as a new form of propaganda.

To start, we can look into the means of intervention the Chinese government is currently conducting. In the last fifteen years, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (abbr. SARFT; He, “China’s ban”) has created a series of regulations on the censorship over cultural products, including a ban on homosexual relationships and a ban on the usage of dialects on TV (SARFT, “Notification”). Meanwhile, the government has been encouraging the domestic cultural industry to deliver the mainstream values. The domestic animation industry has been one of its main focuses since the end of last century with financial support growing over the last ten years (Saito, 142). Under these circumstances, it is not a surprise to see the domestic animation Year, Hare, Affair is welcomed by the government. As said before, all these attempts are examples of what Hall would call power interventions to fix meanings: “what ideology tries to do, […] what power in signification is intended to do [is] to close language, to close meaning, to stop the flow” (“Race, Representation and the Media” 19). It is not about whether foreign or grassroots cultural products contain information that is potentially “harmful”, rather, it is the power’s nature that requires it to be the only and absolute authority to take charge of the register of meaning/interpretation to any kind of image that is viewed by the public.

Furthermore, Year, Hare, Affair received particular attention from the Communist Youth League (CYL) because the Chinese government is well aware of the importance of naturalizing dominant ideologies among young people. In 2015, the Weibo account of the Central Communist Youth League (CCYL) started to share and compliment the animation since the third episode of the first season aired. Afterwards, it constantly follows up with updates and starts to address the account’s patriotic young followers as Rabbits. Also, the
language this account uses gradually assimilates into the colloquial language in the animation, unlike the traditional distant dogmatic rhetoric. Internet users have recognized this as the League to be “selling moe”, meaning, using tricks that arouse moe to lure followers. And it works – the mascot League Rabbit (adapted from the animation) is warmly welcomed; the CCYL’s Weibo account has gained five million followers; many Weibo users use lines in Year, Hare, Affair in the comment session below CCYL’s posts. In a word, by learning to re-code the Party’s fixed, unquestionable narrative into the young Internet users’ language, the power has reached an agreement with the young recipients who are willing to learn the cultural codes that are not only engaging, but also praised by the authority that they recognize and adore.

Conclusion

The animation Year, Hare, Affair is an attempt to fix the meaning in a new way of encoding. By making use of moe, the animation uses animal fetishism to disavow and romanticize the problematic violent history and racist ideology so that the message is naturalized for the young viewers. The satisfaction one gets from the moe contents encourages the viewers to invest their emotion and identity into the animation’s characters and narrative. In this way, the governmental propaganda has gone deep into the viewers’ individual experiences and won itself a group of devoted young followers who believe in both the ideological propaganda and the justice in the authority’s potentially violent or conspiratorial diplomatic decisions. However, despite the seeming success of this animation, meaning is always fluid and can never be fixed (“Race, Representation and the Media” 19). While in China we are witnessing a developing conservative attitude towards the cultural industry, it is also true that the official discourse is now only a part of public opinion. The traditional political power that is able to control the entire public opinion is replaced by a struggling political power that wants to win back its power from the public by assimilating itself into the ecosystem of the internet. While we will always stay alert to the expansion of political power over the means of representation, this assimilating gesture gives us the confidence that the power is making compromise and is exploring possible negotiation with the nature of fluid meaning.
Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1: Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十ー). Season 1, Episode 3, 5:50. 2015. Screen shot. The subtitle explains the real photo was taken at the battle of Chosin Reservoir in North Korea in November 1950 when the People’s Volunteer Army of China was attacking the besieged American troops.

Figure 2: Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十一). Season 1, Episode 9, 5:14. 2015. Screen shot. The subtitle explains that it is a photo taken when the staff at China’s nuclear plant pressed the button of China’s first nuclear bomb on October 16th, 1942.

Figure 3. Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十一). Season 1, Episode 10, 6:53. 2015. Screen shot. The subtitle explains the picture was taken on April 1st, 1950 when P. R. China and India established a diplomatic relation. The Rabbit is placed next to Zhou Enlai, P. R. China’s then Foreign Minister, and the Elephant, the symbol of India in this animation, is placed next to Jawaharlal Nehru.
Figure 4. Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十一). Season 1, Episode 9, 1:50. 2015. Screen shot.
On this screen shot, the bullet screen is made of comments from various viewers who identify themselves as a Rabbit by posting their year of birth (the Arabic number at the beginning of each comment), their major/occupation and the title Rabbit on the screen. Also, from this list, one can tell the active viewers of the animation are very young, mostly born after the year 1995.

Figure 6. Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十一). Season 1, Episode 4, 7:50. 2015. Screen shot.
A Rabbit in the Korean War saying their sacrifice in North Korea allows the young generation to have a happy life at home.

Figure 7. Year, Hare, Affair. Dir. Shi Yi (十一). Season 1, Episode 6, 3:40-4:26. 2015. Screen shot.
This is a scene when the Rabbits are motivated by their leader to build nuclear weapon (which is called the Mushroom Egg in the animation) with their own hands. The subtitles in the two pictures suggest a big group of Rabbits are chanting “Build the Mushroom Egg!”
After giving African countries an interest-free loan, the Rabbit asks for resources in return. On this picture, the bullet screen comments are filled with comments that read, “seeing our Rabbit is such a bully, I am so relieved” (in Chinese: 看到我兔这么流氓我就放心了).

In these two pictures, the Rabbit asks the Hippo (representing all African countries) a question of “1+1=?,” and the latter answers “I don’t know!”

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Cultural Studies


“Year, Hare, Affair.” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Year_Hare_Affair
LES POMMES ET LES POIRES

Jennifer Cormack

I.
Where a student and I paint portraits
Juicy light spills on the table,
Strikes a composition: her nude pear
Next to my perky pomegranate couple.

II.
Sunlight glints off the smooth
Shiny surfaces in patches
Of brilliant white light,
Ornamenting wonder.

III.
Fleshy substances are tucked inside
Empurpled, chartreuse skins.
Mine boasts a rosy-red, deep magenta
Adamic apple countenance.

IV.
Brown specks and scars dot the surface
Haphazardly, while cadmium orange,
Venetian red, and burnt sienna streak
The mysteriously impenetrable peel.

V.
The tight uniform ball, not perfectly
Spherical, feels leathery and lumpy.
It fits my palm, baseball weight,
And is utterly odorless.
VI.
The crown protrudes, separates
Into six sepals, narrows to a point,
Like a flower. Feathery stamens
Emanate from inside the sepals.

VII.
My pair rest against one another,
Husband and wife: where one
Is weak, the other is strong. They weep
Separately. Mourn collectively.

VIII.
Color explodes our night in Pear-is.
We cut dense globes pole to pole.
They bleed. Fall apart into aril
Patterns, like a honeycomb puzzle.

IX.
Pulp, separated by translucent
Membranes, holds aril clusters.
Crimson casings, pine nut size,
Seal each teardrop.

X.
I taste an aril, slowly puncturing
The fleshy seed. Tart juices
My palette, and I crunch
It like a cashew.

seeing and interpreting can never come full circle. According to Huyssen, this elusiveness results from describes it, resists a full coming together
Analisa Goodmann
My alarm goes off every morning at 7:15 am, which is to say, at that hour I feel a soft, pointy nose poking me in the leg. As I groggily open my eyes, I see the blurred image of an eager, smiling dog stretching his body hopefully at the side of my bed. He is medium size as dogs go, about 50 pounds, solidly built with a dark, reddish brown coat that is in vivid contrast to his chest and paws, which are highlighted in pure white. But his most compelling feature is his eyes: they are a marbled combination of blue and brown. “Is it morning time already, Simba?” I mumble. It is a question I ask rhetorically, since I know that, save for fire or flood, Simba will only wake me within a minute or two on either side of that precise hour, appointed back in the day when I actually needed an alarm to wake up. And since, on some level, I am also aware that I am talking to a dog.

Like the child a couple didn’t plan on having but loved as much as any other, Simba was a mistake. My daughter Alex, then 16, had just won her first major show jumping ribbon in Wellington, Florida, the pinnacle of the sport in the U.S. She and my wife Lucia were feeling elated when they came across a somewhat sketchy breeder who was skirting both horse show regulations and state law selling puppies out of one of the barns. I had just driven back to our rental house when I got a breathless call from Lucia: “You have to come down here and see these Australian Shepherd puppies,” she exclaimed. “They are the cutest things in the world.”

Lucia and I had owned dogs of every shape and size in our 25 years together, sometimes two at once; so to say we shared a weakness for a cute puppy was something of an understatement. Alex, meanwhile, was a chip off of our collective block. Though she had been crazy about horses since she was two years old, dogs have always come in a close second, as is the case with many “horse people.” So Lucia’s call was not to be taken lightly.

For some months I had been beating back the notion that we should get another dog. We had only just adopted Dharma, a Collie with a variety of
health problems, the previous winter, at a time when we already had a 12-year old terrier mix in declining health. To my mind, another dog at this juncture was a pet too far. But Alex had recently become obsessed with Border Collies, perhaps the world’s smartest and highest-energy breed of dog. She had every Border Collie rescue site in North America bookmarked on her laptop, and was always the first to know when a new dog became available. Lucia, meanwhile, having helped numerous immigrants to find work and horses to find homes, was a sucker for a rescue of any kind – man or beast. I knew that ultimately I was swimming against the current. “I’ll come to see them,” I said. “But we are not getting another dog.”

I made my way over to Ring 5, where the breeder was set up, and sure enough there were six tiny Australian Shepherd puppies surrounding a dish of dry kibble, battling one another for position. Aussies, are they are frequently called, are closely related genetically to Border Collies, so Alex was in her element. “Look at that incredible Blue Merle!” Alex exclaimed, referring to a tricolor puppy with black markings on a silvery grey and white coat. I bent down and reached out to pick him up when out of the melee raced a reddish-brown puppy that had to be the tiniest of the litter. Suddenly, without warning, he leaped what must have been three feet off the ground into my arms and sunk his head into my chest. From that moment on, resistance was futile.

It is extremely unusual for a dog to want to leave its pack, especially one that is barely six weeks old. The puppy was obviously miserable at the horse show for whatever reason; adopting him would be one step removed from a rescue. By this time I knew it was inevitable there would be another dog in our lives at some point. While Aussies and Border Collies are equally smart and energetic, I thought, at least we would be taking home this small, quiet puppy, rather than adopting some high-strung Border Collie whose owner needed to be rescued. Within minutes, the puppy was ours.

I wanted to name him Sandy, after one of my childhood heroes, Sandy Koufax, a Hall of Fame pitcher for the Dodgers. But Alex held the naming rights to our family pets, by virtue of her proven ability to quickly size up an
animal and come up with a name that just seemed to fit. “This dog isn’t a Sandy,” she informed me. “I think we should name him Simba.”

As with previous pets, the name proved prescient. The puppy looked like a little lion. And tiny as he was, he was already able to give our big Collie Dharma a run for her money in games of tug-a-war and fetch. When we got Simba home to Connecticut and took him in for shots, we quickly learned why he was so small and needy: he was allergic to most common dog foods and had stomach parasites to boot. A restricted diet and months of antibiotics eventually cleared up the problems, and Simba assumed his rightful place at the head of the household pet pecking order - he was king of our beasts.

When we returned to Wellington the following winter, Simba amazed us with his athletic prowess and endurance. Barely a year old, he could keep up with the horses that Lucia and Alex would gallop for miles along Wellington’s ubiquitous canals, even while losing ground here and there from diving into the water – alligator infested, we later found out – to cool off. Once back at our rental he would collapse on the floor and be indistinguishable from an animal rug for a spell, only to be ready to go again an hour later. At that point, he and Alex would typically go off on a five mile run through the farms and fields leading to the horse show. One day Simba managed to annoy Alex’s big jumper Carayan, who was grazing calmly out in a huge paddock, by nipping at his hindquarters. When Carayan turned and bolted off after him, Simba found gears we didn’t know existed to outrace the horse to safety outside the fence. Googling afterwards, I learned that Aussies can run at speeds of up to 35 miles per hour, faster than all but the very fastest land animals, not to mention the fastest humans.

Aussies are a bit like Secret Service agents - they tend to get attached to one person, whom they make it their job to protect and defend. In our household that person was Alex, who took on the not-inconsiderable task of channeling Simba’s immense energy and intellect into productive activities. They went everywhere together. There was dog training, where Simba would typically complete his task before the other dogs figured out what was being asked of them. There were dog agility classes, where he learned to complete complicated courses incorporating tunnels, chutes and see-saws. And there
Nonfiction

were hours on end spent at the barn, where Simba would lie inches outside the ring whenever Alex rode but never go in and get in the way. At night he would sleep on the floor next to Alex’s bed.

Simba also developed some unusual talents that were not part of the dog training curriculum. If you gave him a large bottle of water, for instance, he would hold it between his two front paws, put the top between his teeth and spin the cap off. Then, while continuing to hold the bottle, he would bite down hard on the edge of the lip, flattening it, until the grooves for the cap on opposite sides interlocked. Then he would stand the bottle up on the floor and show you his work. You could pick up the now-capless bottle and turn it completely upside down without a single drop of water spilling out.

On numerous occasions, Simba demonstrated the truth of Yogi Berra’s adage that you can observe a lot by watching. He showed a keen eye for imitating human behavior. Like many dogs, Simba enjoyed riding in the car with his head sticking out the window, which had been cracked open slightly so he could take in the surrounding sights, sounds and smells. On some days, of course, it was simply too cold to drive with a window open. But this did not pose a problem. After staring at the driver for several minutes with pleading eyes, he would take his front paw and swipe at the switch controlling his window until he had lowered it enough to assume his usual riding position.

Simba also had a squirrel’s instinct to save for the future. He would hide a wide array of toys and treats in or under sofas, or bury them outside, retrieving them again days, weeks or even months later. On the long drive from Connecticut to Wellington a year later we decided to stay at the Ritz Carlton in Palm Beach the final night. Feeling exhausted after 10 hours in the car for the second day in a row, we ordered room service for dinner, including a plain burger for Simba. He seemed to wolf it right down because it was there one minute and gone the next. The following morning, when Alex got up and opened the curtains, out flopped half of Simba’s burger, which had been crammed into a decorative cuff in one of the curtains in case we stayed a second night.

Late one summer when Simba was two, things began to change around the house. Clothes from Alex’s closet were laid out in the spare bedrooms. Big moving boxes arrived. When the suitcases finally came out, Simba knew his worst fears were being realized. Alex was going away. After she packed
up her car and left, Simba spent days on end sitting on the sofa gazing out the window, awaiting her return. But Alex was off to college at Emory University in Atlanta, and would not be back until winter break.

This was a difficult transition for all of us. Alex had always been close to home due to her nearly life-long struggle to overcome some severe medical conditions. Nonetheless, she probably handled the challenge best. She threw herself into college life, making friends, joining clubs, riding on the Emory Equestrian team, all while taking on a challenging pre-med curriculum.

Meanwhile, those of us left at home struggled with her absence. Lucia sorely missed their daily conversations about school and typical mother-daughter stuff, as well as trips to the barn and to horse shows, which were a family activity. I had work to distract me somewhat but evenings were particularly tough. I missed the nightly routines I had shared with Alex: watching a little baseball, checking her arithmetic (her math was fine), proofreading her papers. And more than anything I missed the passion she exuded for the thing she cared the most about: horses and the “horse world,” as the micro-culture is known to those who compete.

Lucia and I had been through the college transition once before with Alex’s older brother. But Jeffrey went to school in Boston, a short drive from Connecticut. We also still had Alex in the house to care for. Alex being in Georgia made it feel like she was on another planet. Eventually, though, life goes on. Lucia and I resumed old activities that had long been shelved: traveling on the spur of the moment, attending antiques auctions, reconnecting with old friends who did not have a child in boarding school or “winter” in Florida.

Simba too resumed a semblance of a normal dog’s life, going to parks, chasing balls, riding in the car with my wife as she did her errands. I did my best to provide a substitute for Alex, giving him lots of attention, but he remained loyal, seemingly afraid to grow as attached to me or Lucia as he had been to her. Where before he would be at Alex’s side whatever she was doing, now he would hedge his bets, situating himself equidistant from the two of us, even if that meant not being in the same room as either of us. A few months after Alex’s departure for school, we moved to a house on a large pond that was favored by several flocks of Canada geese. I made it Simba’s job to keep the geese off the lawn, and he embraced it with fervor: he had been heartbroken by Alex’s departure, and the geese would pay the price.
Now that I had given him a job to do, Simba was warming up to me, and I to him. He slept in our bedroom at night, and he soon learned my sleeping and waking habits well enough that he was at the bedside poking me at the appointed hour every morning. We soon developed a morning ritual that has lasted until this day: the dogs go out while I make their breakfast, then they eat their breakfast while I make my own. Once they’ve finished eating, Dharma gets pills for her arthritis and incontinence and the terrier gets pills for her heart disease, each delivered in large balls of cream cheese that everyone gets a taste of, me included. Only then do I finally sit down to eat my own breakfast. Everyone gets a taste of that too.

I always used to laugh when childless married couples would say, oh, the dogs are our children. It’s a common refrain up in Connecticut where I live and always seemed preposterous to me. You just don’t know the difference because you’ve never had kids, I always thought. But now that we were “empty-nesters” I was beginning to understand.

On weekends, Simba and I began going for a long walk down the road, just the two us. On special days, we’d take a trip to the schoolyard or a nearby dog park. He loves nothing more than to roam through a school’s open fields, sniffing the grass for the previous presence of other dogs, and then marking each spot as his own. At the dog park it is more about maintaining order. Like the referee at a boxing match, he watches for dog play that seems to be getting out of hand, then races in between the pugilists to break things up. Even large dogs do not intimidate him. Once when he was only a puppy a two-year old German Shepherd at least twice his size made a menacing move towards Alex. In an instant, Simba had the dog on its back with his teeth on its neck. To this day he has it in for German Shepherds and I need to remind him to “be nice” whenever one is around.

On work days we move to my adjacent office after breakfast. Simba lies on the floor and wrestles with a chew toy while I catch up on email and the news. When it is time to head off to work, I walk over to Simba, give him a pat, and say: “I have to go to work today, Simba. But I’ll be back.” He immediately drops his toy and moves to the sofa, where he assumes a mournful pose, head resting on the arm, his entire face seeming to droop and his mouth turning downward into a frown. Over time he has come to equate the phrase “I’ll be back” with my departure for a considerable period of time, and
whenever I use it he will retire to the sofa in my office from wherever he is and assume his dejected pose.

About a year and a half ago I came down with an illness that left me feeling weak and light-headed much of the time. I couldn’t go into the office. Indeed, I could barely eat without becoming nauseous, thanks to the impact of high potency antibiotics on my stomach. I passed day after day on the couch in my office, trying to stay current with work and what was happening in the world. From the start, Simba sensed something was very, very wrong. During the entire month I was laid up, he barely left my side. His growing loyalty to me made it immensely easier for me to handle it. At night, once I’d worked my way upstairs, Simba slept on an area rug by my bedside, eschewing his favorite sleeping chair on the other side of the room. And 7:15 came and went each morning without any attempt by Simba to rouse me. I was deeply touched by what seemed like his display of empathy, an emotion most experts say a dog cannot feel.

Eventually doctors concluded that surgery would be required to correct my condition. Alex flew home from Atlanta to watch the dogs and Lucia and I traveled to Manhattan for the surgery and recovery. We were in the city for five days. For the first time, Alex’s arrival home was not greeted with bounds of joy from her former puppy. Instead, Simba spent nearly the entire time up in our bedroom softly whimpering, sitting in his chair gazing out the window during the daytime and lying on his small rug at night. Almost no amount of cajoling could get him to come downstairs to rejoin the living.

When we finally returned home, Alex made sure that all three dogs were there to greet the car. Lucia was the first to get out and was mobbed with grateful licking from all concerned. Still feeling weak from the surgery, I watched from the passenger’s seat. As soon as Simba noticed me he ran to my open door and whimpered, pawing the ground, imploring me to get out. But I just didn’t have the energy. Suddenly, as he did the first time we laid eyes on each other, Simba leaped into my arms and burrowed his head into my chest. I hugged him tight to my body. And neither of us moved for at least 30 seconds while Lucia and Alex looked on.

I held back the tears that were welling in my eyes. Simba was my dog now.
UNTITLED 3

Kevin Warstadt

Perhaps, he thought, it would be best
to make within the woods a bed.
To lay therein myself to rest
and disappear without a trace.

Some are duty bound to graves,
but solitary men can hope
to shuffle off, and do no harm,
and be free from memory.
EXCERPT FROM THE FOREST OF THE DEAD

Kevin Warstadt

It was raining over Kanagawa Prefecture when I entered Aokigahara Forest. The storm had broken in the northwest and moved south over the trees, and over Mount Fuji, and settled above the quiet streets of Kamakura. There it rained on the happy and the sad, the rich and the poor, the young and the old. It rained on the mangy dog outside of the butcher shop, and on the weary vendors of the fish market, and on a husband and wife and their young son who ran together, laughing. The rain fell on the living in Kamakura, but all was quiet for the dead of Aokigahara Forest, save for the sound of lonely drops, which formed and fell from black boughs.

So it was when I entered the forest, intent on ending my life. What better place to die than the forest of the dead, where men and women came from all over Japan to slip silently away and to rest eternal? The world was lit by a gentle gray light which danced its way through dark trees and gathered in pools on the ground.

I stared up through the trees at the empty sky and breathed in the nothingness, and my lungs filled with quiet. It sat there and I listened. I ventured forward into the wood, in search of the perfect tree.

The ground was soft, with a rich dark soil, and a bed of leaves that dampened the sound of my foot-falls. No sound seemed to pass in Aokigahara Forest. It died there, as did everything else.

The trees were bent, tired things. They twisted around each other, embracing one another, and formed small, circular glades, where tiny, white flowers grew. I got lost in those many glades, walking the circles, and reaching out for meaning. I felt that I had entered a dream, and all the world became a fog, and all the trees the same tree, and all the flowers the same flowers.
It was in this dream that I heard the faint sound of music in the distance. It was quiet at first, faint, like the murmuring of the heart. But I walked toward the sound, and it grew louder.

I came upon a glade of particular size. Here the flowers were denser, the trees more straight and tall. I saw at the far end the source of the sound. A woman sat in the boughs of a large tree and on a violin played a sweet, sad song. It sounded to me like the song of life, and I sat on a fallen log to listen.

“Your playing is lovely,” I said. She looked down at me from her perch. She ceased her playing, but the song continued.

“Thank you,” she said. “I love to play more than anything in the world.”

I nodded and was quiet. “How did you die?” I asked.

She closed her eyes. “I hanged myself here, in this very tree. They found me, and buried me in a cemetery in Yokohama.”

“Hmm,” I said. “Why did you do it?”

She was quiet for a moment. She looked away from me.

“When I was young, I fell in love with the violin. I wished only to play, and I practiced always, and I grew very skilled and was happy. I became the youngest member of the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and felt the world was full of love.”

“As I grew older, my hands began to shake. I was sick, you see. My grandfather had been sick, as had his grandfather. They all died to that disease, which made them stutter when they spoke, and sent tremors through their bodies so they couldn’t eat or drink without aid. For some time still I tried to play, but I knew that my time was short. When I could no longer play, I came here to die.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.
“It’s okay,” she replied. “Now I play every day, and do nothing else.” She closed her eyes, and began to play again.
Matt Hill
HOW TO READ THE BLACK ATLANTIC

Brian Klarman

I.

Paul Gilroy’s highly influential book, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, takes up the daunting task of understanding race by establishing the Atlantic slave trade as a “heuristic” (Gilroy, xi). This task is daunting because the project of explaining race is so historically complicated and the stakes are so high. Gilroy is attempting to describe blackness, diaspora, and, hence, modernity—each of which could be an impossibly large task alone—through a paradigm “that [he] heuristically called the black Atlantic world” (Gilroy, 3). While the black Atlantic may be useful for those concerned with certain aspects of New World slavery, this paper offers a cautionary warning for using it as our only methodology for understanding African diaspora. In other words, Gilroy’s heuristic is useful, but only insofar as we realize that it is one limited account and many more theories must be incorporated.

If we read Gilroy’s understanding as the complete story of African diaspora—or even African slavery—we risk establishing a Eurocentric, essentialist paradigm. In what follows, there are three portions of Gilroy’s model that I will argue cannot be universalized without silencing other experiences: section II will critique the concepts of “Africanness” as reducible to “blackness,” section III will problematize the idea that the Atlantic Ocean speaks for all diasporas from Africa, and section IV will critique the conclusion that modernity can thus be described by the Black Atlantic. My hope is to encourage scholars to understand the multiplicities of experience that constitute the African diaspora, rather than assuming one, singular history of slavery. Hence, this paper offers “a corrective to [the] myopic vision” (Larson, 143) that scholars of the Indian Ocean refer to as “the ‘tyranny of the Atlantic’ in slavery studies” (Allen, 328).

Before moving into my three critiques of a universal reading of Gilroy’s text, it is important to quickly summarize what premises The Black Atlantic puts forward. Gilroy wishes to critique “the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms in cultural criticism” that is “supported by a clutch of rhetorical
strategies that can be named ‘cultural insiderism’” (Gilroy, 3). He is attempting to change the paradigm of cultural description from one that is highly nationalist and essentialist to one that is more “rhizomorphic” (Gilroy, 4). To speak of a more fluid, historically contingent form of identity, Gilroy turns to the ship on the black Atlantic: “[t]he image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons” (Gilroy, 4). The slave ship takes on immense importance, as it signifies people moving through cultures and nations that will forever destabilize identities (Gilroy, 16). The ship, as a heuristic, shows that we are not “fixed,” but in “shifting places,” making the black Atlantic similar to “theorisation of creolisation, metissage, mestizaje, and hybridity” (Gilroy, 16; 3). Hence, we can view Gilroy’s work in line with that of other post-structural scholars of identity, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Stuart Hall.

Whether Gilroy wishes to universalize his theory of the black Atlantic to describe all African diaspora is unclear from the text. While at times Gilroy uses language that makes his theory sound universal—something that has been critiqued by George Elliott Clarke, who claims the text is “fraught with contradiction” because of its internal essentialism—Gilroy also claims that The Black Atlantic is focused on one historical phenomenon and not the entire world (Clarke, n/a). Within the first few pages, he notes: “[t]his book addresses one small area in the grand consequence of this historical conjunction” (Gilroy, 3). Additionally, in the preface, Gilroy explicitly states: “my conclusions are strictly provisional. There are also many obvious omissions” (Gilroy, ix). Hence, I believe the intention of the book is not to describe all African diaspora, although it is unclear if Gilroy succeeds in meeting this goal. Discovering Gilroy’s intention, however, is neither the aim of this essay nor pertinent to its importance. Irrespective of how Gilroy wishes to answer the question of universalizability, what is relevant for this paper is how we, as scholars, ought to understand the text; my focus is on what would give this heuristic the most academic value.

II.

Throughout The Black Atlantic, Gilroy uses the term “black” as a signifier that is synonymous with African. For example, in the second paragraph of chapter one, Gilroy slips between the language of black and Anglo-African when he states that “black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great
cultural assemblages” (Gilroy, 1). Here, the terms “black English” and “Anglo-African” are synonymous, as both are between the assemblages of English culture and African history (Gilroy, 2). In addition, Gilroy seamlessly switches between using the term “black” and “African-America” when referring to the United States (Gilroy, 4). This slippage becomes central to the black Atlantic, as the black Atlantic is synonymous with the events of the Middle Passage—or moving Africans to the Western world (Gilroy, 4). In other words, the black Atlantic is the movement of Africans across the Atlantic by slave ship, where the word black inherently signifies African identity. Hence, the idea of “blackness” as “Africanness” seems evident in Gilroy’s theory, making it likely that readers will interpret the two words as being synonymous.

The idea that Africans are seen as black, however, is not universalizable. While Gilroy speaks of England, the Caribbean, and the United States, where it may be historically appropriate to link “blackness” and “Africanness”, if one were to interpret this rule as being able to be applied across both space and time they would risk exporting a Eurocentric model of race. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza highlights the importance of thinking about the terms we use and the “national and transnational contexts that frame them” in “African Diasporas: Toward a Global History,” a text that will guide this section (Zeleza, 6). The conflation between “blackness” and “Africanness” is predicated on the “conception of ‘Africa’ as ‘sub-Saharan Africa,’ a racialized construct that haunted African studies in Euroamerica over the last century and that some African scholars have desperately sought to deconstruct” (Zeleza, 6-7). Because most Euro-American interaction with Africa, particularly in the slave trade, occurred in sub-Saharan, most Western scholarly work speaks of sub-Saharan Africa. This trend, Zelza explains, is highly problematic: “[t]he conflation of African diaspora formations with the histories and geographies of Atlantic slavery disregards the histories of other African diasporas” (Zeleza, 7). Confining our study of Africanness has caused scholars to miss diasporic movements. Current migrations from Northern African countries may not fit into the prominent black paradigm (Zeleza, 8). Hence, we might want to refrain from thinking of Africa solely in terms of “blackness.”

The second Eurocentric assumption in play when scholars allow “blackness” to supplant “Africanness” is that slaves only went to places where they were darker than other inhabitants, as in the West. However, outside of
Globalization

the Western world, Africans may be considered to have lighter skin. While surprising to those who theorize race in terms of blackness, “there are many Asians who are as dark as many sub-Saharan Africans and as light as many North Africans. Color, in this case ‘blackness,’ therefore, is not always a reliable indicator of ‘Africanness’” (Zeleza, 13). If black skin does not correlate perfectly with African heritage, then assumptions that our Euro-American understanding of race will hold internationally would be dangerous. It appears that the understanding of race as derived solely from studying Atlantic slavery “is not terribly helpful in deciphering the full dimensions and complexities of African diasporas in Asia” (Zeleza, 13). Hence, if one were to universalize the idea of “blackness” as “Africanness,” they would be stuck with a Eurocentric model that is globally distorting, particularly in parts of Asia.

Is this, one might ask, an attempt to say that any use of “blackness” as “Africanness”—be it historical, political, or theoretical—ought to be eradicated? If we cannot say that all Africans are black, does it make sense to use the terminology of “blackness” to speak of the historical treatment of race in Western areas? While this section, thus far, may sound like an attempt to annihilate concepts of “blackness,” the only concern is with the universalization of “blackness.” The point is not that we should eliminate the concept of “blackness,” but that we must be wary of it becoming our default tool when attempting to speak of African diaspora:

‘Africa’ and ‘Africans’ of course include ‘blacks’ but are not confined to them, and before the twentieth century some Africans went to Europe and Asia as enslaved people, but not all, perhaps not even the majority, and their identities were not always framed by American-style regimes of racialization. Other social inscriptions and ideologies such as religion sometimes played a more salient role. (Zeleza, 9)

Hence, with caution, I believe that Gilroy’s concept of “blackness” could be appropriate. Even Zeleza, who is critical of Gilroy, notes that “[s]ome of the scholarship on ‘Black Europe,’ ‘Black Britain,’ ‘Black France,’ and so on, is illuminating, but much of it … is clearly problematic” (Zeleza, 9). Therefore, it is necessary to use “blackness” carefully in order to avoid Eurocentricism.
III.

The conflation of sub-Saharan Africa with its interactions with the West also highlights the second point that I would like to analyze: the focus on the Atlantic Ocean. Using the Atlantic as a heuristic implies that the journey across this ocean clarifies an experience for African diasporic people. This is shown by Gilroy’s focus on the slave ship, which is always theorized in relationship to the Atlantic Ocean: “[s]hips immediately focus attention on the middle passage” (Gilroy, 4). One reason that Gilroy uses ships as a motif is that “[s]hips also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernization” (Gilroy, 17). Hence, readers are constantly faced with the idea that movement from Africa is equivalent to sea travel on the Atlantic and, again, faced with the question: ought we universalize the Atlantic slave trade as standing in for all diasporas? Here, using support from both history and historiography, I would caution readers to see the Atlantic only as a single experience that explains where some people, such as Gilroy, can find their history, but does not speak for all of those who have an African past.

Universalization of the Atlantic to African diasporic studies risks masking historical events surrounding Africa, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean. Yet, the practice seems commonplace for many academics. “There is no question that the Atlantic model dominates African diaspora studies,” Zeleza notes, while calling for scholars “to de-Atlanticize and de-Americanize the histories of African diasporas” (Zeleza, 4-5). One leading scholar who is challenging the role of the Atlantic is the historian Richard B. Allen, who recently wrote European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850 because of the “reluctance of many historians of slavery, slave trading, and abolition to look beyond the confines of the Atlantic” (Vink, 139).

The fact that the Atlantic slave trade was neither the only form of African diaspora nor a model that could be universally applied throughout the world is not a new revelation. This field has been slowly rising. In 1997, Edward Alpers’s article “The African Diaspora in the Northwestern Indian Ocean: Reconsideration of an Old Problem, New Directions for Research” gained attention among scholars, such as Richard Allen, yet Alpers was not
Globalization

the first to raise this criticism. He quotes Joseph Harris from over a quarter century earlier, claiming:

[O]ne must acknowledge that the African diaspora in the East has not received the study it deserves. . . until serious, more up-to-date studies appear, hopefully by Asians, on the Asian dimension of the African diaspora, we will remain grossly uninformed about the scope and impact of the global dimension of the African diaspora which clearly has been an important factor. (Alpers, quoting Joseph Harris, 62)

Alpers himself, however, gained a lot of new information since Harris’s complaint. The Islamic slave trade, for one, generated an African diaspora of considerable importance, as did the import of slaves by Portuguese Indians (Alpers, 64-65). Yet Alpers demanded more from researchers.

Today, much more literature about non-Atlantic African diasporas is present, yet most scholars still “tend to focus on the Atlantic world” as a result of “methodological nationalism and Euro-centrism” (Allen, 328-329). The importance of the Indian Ocean for the existence of the Atlantic slave trade is often ignored. Before Europeans decided it would be viable to bring slaves to the New World, they used Indian Ocean islands, such as Mauritius, as “the crucial test case” (Allen, 328). Leaving these islands out of our understanding of slavery is a huge methodological flaw as “[m]ore indentured laborers landed in Mauritius than in any other colony” (Allen, 328). Hence, even for those interested in the Atlantic slave trade, the Indian Ocean is of importance.

Furthermore, we now know that the Indian Ocean served as a path for African slaves and migrants to move East. As early as 650 C.E. it is estimated that slaves were taken on the Indian Ocean, with sufficient data to satisfy many scholars (Larson, 129, Hooper and Eltis 365). From 650 C.E. until 1750 C.E., “the demand for slaves in the northwestern Indian Ocean was expanding” and there was little to no “direct European influence” on this process (Hooper and Eltis, 368). Even once European control effected the African slave trade, the primacy of the Atlantic was not a given. It was not until late in the chronology of African slave trades that the Atlantic began to outpace the Indian Ocean
as the primary demand for slaves. As Jane Hooper and David Eltis note, “for most of the seventeenth century, the numbers carried off from Southeast Africa to Asia by the various large European East Indies companies would have exceeded the size of the captive flow into Atlantic” (Hooper and Eltis, 355). These early trades to Asia often involved the Indian Ocean, moving African slaves by small dhows that carried less than 100 people at a time—a form of trade that contrasts deeply with the large slave ships used in the Atlantic Ocean’s Middle Passage that Gilroy references (Hooper and Eltis, 357-366).

Size of ship is not the only way the slave trades that resulted from the Indian Ocean were different than those to the Western world from the Atlantic. In countries across the Middle East and Asia, slaves “entered domestic units as wives, concubines, household helpers, and laborers, or government service as administrators, servants, and soldiers” (Larson, 136). This stands in contrast to the New World, where slaves were used mainly for cultivating agricultural lands (Larson, 136). It is, however, worth noting that some slaves in the Mediterranean were forced to work in salt marshes with terrible conditions, similar to in the West (Larson, 137).

Another major difference in slavery was the treatment of men, women, and children. While the West was often more interested in obtaining male slaves for labor, Islamic countries preferred women. Some suggest that African slave women outnumbered slave men two to one (Larson, 137). Furthermore, in the Islamic, if slave women were married to free men they were often freed. These laws were the same in “the Hijaz, the Maghreb, Oman, the Persian Gulf, and North India,” showing some level of regional consistency (Larson, 137). Under such laws, any child born with a free father was free, even if the mother who birthed the child was a slave (Larson, 138). Finally, historians claim that “slave concubines who bore children to free men were themselves to be manumitted” (Larson, 138). Hence, child birth was highly tied to freedom. These customs on slavery, marriage, and reproduction are highly dissimilar to the practices in the Western world. In America, a slave master would rarely marry or free a slave: “practices of marriage and manumission were usually publicly shunned or disallowed by law” (Larson, 138). Children of female slaves were themselves slaves. If the father was a white slave owner, this made no difference (Marquis, 101). Therefore, we can see that the gendered role of African slaves differed based on culture and location. Hence, if we would like a fuller,
Finally, I would like to evaluate what is at stake in the black Atlantic for Gilroy: modernity. The purpose of this heuristic, above all, is “to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic” (Gilroy, 17). For Gilroy, the slave ship holds such significance because it “provides a different sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin,” critiquing the Western tradition of seeing modernity as enlightenment (Gilroy, 17). It is, however, worth observing that while beginning modernity with the Atlantic slave trade holds utility for Gilroy, it cannot be applied as a global change in epoch. In other words, universalizing modernity may be problematic because it depends not only on time, but also place (Silvia and Vieira, 75).

In a critique of Jürgen Habermas’s view of modernity as enlightenment, Filipe Carreora da Silva and Mónica Brito Vieira argue that understanding modernity as singular is historically inaccurate. If Gilroy is correct that we are to look for “the hidden internal fissures in the concept of modernity,” then it is important not only to pay attention to how the view of enlightenment as modernity has obfuscated Euro-American exclusion, but how alternative views of modernity may be problematic (Gilroy, 38). Because Gilroy’s project “is to conjure up and enact the new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity,” it is necessary to account for all modern experiences (Gilroy, 38). Claiming that there is a singular modernity, however, does the opposite. As Silva and Vieira explain, “far from acknowledging its huge internal variety and contradictions, to conceive of modernity as a single phenomenon results in a fatally flawed understanding of it,” where many histories are lost (Silva and Vieira, 65). If the experiences with both diaspora and slavery are pluralistic, then starting modernity in the Atlantic is inaccurate and risks masking the trauma of non-Western modernities. The trend of reducing one culture’s modernity to global modernity risks “the limitations of self-centric cultural conceptions, ‘Eurocentrism’ being one of the most influent and pervasive” (Silva and Vieira, 67). Hence, we ought not conclude that a singular set of experiences can describe modernity for all.

Gilroy’s concluding connection between modernity and the Atlantic slave trade reveals what is at stake in conflating Euro-American understand-
ings of race and diaspora into larger conclusions about modernity. What is offered here, then, is a different hermeneutic for reading historical accounts of slavery. I hope I have displayed the importance of thinking in pluralities of messy history that cannot neatly follow a singular story or theory. History, here, is a never-ending proliferation of events that we cannot fully pin down, yet must not stop searching for, as each event helps to understand our current position. Lastly, and most importantly, this is not a call to stop positing heuristics to understand the world, but a call for a multiplicity of paradigms that are situationally available, to better our understanding. Hence, while The Black Atlantic served here as a departure for my critique it was by no means the end, only a singular point of scholarly intervention that must be expanded upon.
Globalization

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Analisa Goodmann
CHRISTMAS GIFT

Ben Vonderheide

They kept a photo album on that wood chest
Filled with old yarn - inside like moldy bread.
Its outside a smudged green stenciled with red
The perfect space for this collection to rest
And wait to have every picture addressed
But one in particular highlights the spread
Cut to me and my puppy laughing in bed
Another picture perfect moment expressed

 Memories aren’t like photos one bit
 There’s no anxious colored glossy paper
 Now showing: “the time your pup attacked you”
 PLAYING your minds theater, remember it?
 Traumatized Person stars in the caper
 So see, do pictures provide the best view?
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Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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