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RESEARCH JOURNAL



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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I am constantly impressed by Gallatin students for their insightful and passionate discussions of a wide range of disciplines that occur both inside and outside the classroom. I often find myself leaving a seminar discussion on the rise of Biomedicine and entering the fifth floor student lounge to overhear an equally scholarly conversation on the politics of non-governmental organizations in Tanzania. In short, Gallatin students are a smart and well-read bunch who study subjects both broadly and in great detail.

The Gallatin Research Journal attempts to capture this lively academic spirit and to represent both the depth and breadth of academic work within the school by publishing the highest quality research by its students. I am excited to present the second volume, which includes research that delves into race relations and southern food, the concept of nationalism, identity in Cameroon, and the philosophy behind the Disney film *Tangled*, to name a few. I hope that you too will be impressed by the rigor and creativity of both the varying content and methods of the works featured here.

This journal undoubtedly builds on the success of last year's inaugural volume. It is my hope that this volume not only entertains, educates, and evokes thought in its readers, but also spurs students to conduct their own independent research knowing that there is a place for their work to be published and recognized at Gallatin.



Sarah Hayes



# EVERYBODY ATE THE SAME

BY MEREDITH ODINAK

This paper examines the binary between black and white identities in Greenwood, Mississippi. It is a result of ethnographic field research conducted in the summer of 2011. My goal was to examine the relationships between the food labels of Southern, soul, and country as they relate to race, class, and location. This research was supported by the Gallatin Dean's Award for Summer Research and was approved by New York University's Institutional Review Board.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
FOOD STUDIES, ETHNOGRAPHY, CRITICAL RACE THEORY

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2011, I conducted ethnographic field research regarding the convergence of race and food in the town of Greenwood, Mississippi. Sparked by previous studies in African American culture and by that culture's connections to the culture of my mother's white family in Mississippi, I became curious about the nature of Southern identity, a black-white race binary. I used foodways and restaurant spaces as a means to examine the binary between black and white identities in Greenwood, because they are key components of Southern culture.

Greenwood is a city with a population of 18,000 in the east of the Mississippi Delta region. The delta is the flat lands between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers. Its rich alluvial soil is what brought the agricultural industry. Though Greenwood is small, it remains a hub for commercial business in the largely rural Delta region. Leflore County, where Greenwood is located, has racial and economic demographics that stand in stark contrast with the rest of Mississippi. It had a 40% poverty rate in 2010 while the state's was 20%, and its population was 72% black and 25% white compared with the state's 37% and 59%, respectively. Race relations in the delta area have a unique history. Having previously been dense forestland, the farmlands that now make up the region were not fully cleared until after slavery was abolished. This means that the race ideologies formed here are not a direct expression of slavery, but rather of Jim Crow (Adams, 2004).

## CRITICAL THEORY

This research brings together the two arenas of critical race theory and food studies. I utilize the idea of race as social construction that Richard Delgado (2001) referred to

in his book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, which “holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 7). I also refer to similar ideas belonging to American historian Barbara Fields (1990), who discusses race in the American South as an ideology formed and changed by structures in history. Delgado also discussed the role of narratives, which I see as key elements to the formation of Fields’ idea of race ideologies.

If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity. (p. 43)

One could say that Delgado is correct in his assertion of the power of narratives to shape and reshape our ideologies. What the above quote fails to emphasize, however, is just how broad the term “narrative” can be. Narratives can include not only traditional written and orally shared stories, but also smaller uses of language as well. Something so apparently insignificant as the labels we give to food traditions can serve to narrativize and institutionalize a racial or social difference. Indeed, food in and of itself is worthy of study for its ideological import. New York University, the first institution to create a graduate program in Food Studies, identifies the field as “an umbrella term that includes foodways, gastronomy, and culinary history as well as historical, cultural, political, economic, and geographic examinations of food production and consumption and post-consumption, using food as a ‘lens’ through which to view, explore, analyze, and interpret society in the present as well as in the past” (NYU masters in food studies, 2012). In my own studies I am using food and its naming as a lens

to view the expression of race identity as it intersects with class and geographic location.

As important as food is to culture in general, it is particularly key to Southern culture and thus becomes a bearer of social markings. Beth Latshaw (2009) said it best when she stated, “From barbecue joints to soul kitchens to country cookeries and church picnics, food certainly appears to lie at the heart of southern hospitality, tradition, and heritage. Moreover, this food is said to possess meaning and symbolism far surpassing what some view as simply a tasty meal” (p. 107).

What I found to be the most telling manifestation of food’s relationship to identity in the Delta region was the practice of labeling it using the three categories of soul, Southern, and country. The reason I use the term identity instead of race is that the construction of race encapsulates other aspects of social identity like class and geographic location. In the two interviews below, two Southern women transition between identities by using different labels for the same foods. In Greenwood, labeling one’s food as soul, Southern, or country is a way of aligning oneself to an identity that is racially marked, economically situated, and regionally specific.

## TWO ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

**A**nn Hoover and Karen Pinkston exemplified the alignment of food label with identity. Ann Hoover cooked out of her and her husband’s store, Hoover’s Grocery, for 20 years, starting in 1989. Hoover’s Grocery is a small convenience store in Baptist Town, the poorest and most predominantly black neighborhood in Greenwood. In 2007, Ann opened another restaurant called Hoover’s Country Kitchen, which stayed open for two years. Until she was seventeen, Ann lived on a plantation just north of Greenwood in Leflore County where her father worked as a farmer and her mother was a housekeeper. She said, “I was a country girl. Real bad,” she chuckled. “I was a country girl” (M.A.

Hoover, personal communication, July 13, 2011).

Karen Pinkston is the wife of Andy Lusco, the fourth in a line of Luscos to own and operate the family restaurant that bears their name. Lusco's opened in its current location in the early 1930s. Owned by the first Luscos to emigrate from Italy in the early 1900s, all of Lusco's recipes come from the family's home kitchen. Karen's family was from Carroll County, just east of Leflore and outside the Delta region, but she moved to Greenwood with her family and grandmother when she was three years old (K. Pinkston, personal communication, July 21, 2011).

## ANN HOOVER

**A**nn started out cooking in Hoover's Grocery with a simple menu of a sausage and biscuit sandwich, and as they increased in popularity she introduced more varieties: "smoked sausage and biscuit, salmon and biscuit, salt meat and biscuit, bologna and biscuit." What started as a simple breakfast sandwich soon became a full breakfast, lunch, and dinner restaurant. When Ann explained her constant flow of customers, I asked if most of her customers were just the people in the neighborhood. She said, "No, all over, all over Greenwood, black and white all over Greenwood. It was a blessing, I promise you. I mean I had a line from almost around the corner to my store waiting to come in." When I first asked Ann if she referred to her food as Southern food, she said yes and used the same phrase, Southern food. Later in the conversation I asked Ann how she would categorize the difference between Southern, soul, and country food, something I had asked others, from whom I had received mixed answers. Ann replied confidently, "They the same. They all the same. It's the same to me, because see I sold all that on my menu, you know I gave them a variety to ask from." She explained how not everyone wants that one thing she might be cooking on the stove, so she had a whole steam table of variety for people to pick what they wanted. When I asked what she would call that food

she responded by saying, “Soul food. Soul food cooking, I did mostly soul food but I can do it all.” Earlier in the conversation I had asked if the food that the white customers ordered differed from what the black customers ordered and she replied by saying, “everybody ate the same,” but then followed this up by explaining how many options they had to choose from. She said, “If they didn’t want neck bone they had another choice, see I always had a line of three meats like I would have meat loaf, I would have neck bone, and I would have smothered turkey leg, and I always had fried chicken.”

When I asked Ann what it was like living in Greenwood, she repeated the sentence, “Greenwood is okay...” a few times before finding the right words with which to continue:

Greenwood is okay, it’s just the people in Greenwood you know we treat each other nice but you can still feel a gap somewhere. I try not to let no gap be in my life with nobody, you know. I teach my children the same thing, I’m teaching my grandkids the same, that people is people. But a lot of people you know they running their mouth they keep a gap goin’ on. See because the younger generation would know about a lot of this stuff goin’ on but we want them to know our the history, what happens, but I get along with everybody [sic].

She later said, “It’s what you make of yourself” (M.A. Hoover, personal communication, July 13, 2011).

## KAREN PINKSTON

I expected my conversation with Karen to focus on the history of Lusco’s, a prominently known destination for the “Delta gentry,” as one interviewee referred to it. Once home to an all black male waitstaff in red tuxedos that would recite the menu to its predominantly white upper middle class clientele in curtained

booths, Lusco's was clearly an establishment with a history of intense binary racial constructions. Once I started asking Karen some questions, I was surprised to find that I was more interested in her own story as it came to intersect with that of Lusco's. I asked her whether she had come to Lusco's while growing up in Greenwood.

I never knew this was a restaurant. My family couldn't have afforded to come here. Besides, my grandmother was a very good cook and she had a garden, she raised her own food, and her brothers, they were from the country, they killed their own hogs. Everything else, the only thing she actually ever bought in a store was probably chicken or beef, milk, eggs, just the basics. Everything else she raised. We just didn't eat out because she cooked everything from scratch. Made homemade biscuits every morning for breakfast, cornbread every day for lunch with fresh vegetables. You know, just the country type of food. So that was what I was raised I will have to say that um, I was never big on eating all of that and my grandmother used to always tell me that she didn't know where I came from because I liked expensive food or other things.

Later in my interview, I asked Karen how she would categorize the food they sold at Lusco's. Drawing on the family's Italian background, and their time spent in New Orleans as new immigrants, she described it as a mix of New Orleans and Italian style. I attempted to clarify by asking, "So, none of it is really Southern, country kind of cooking?" She responded:

Well, we have fried chicken. I mean we don't have like turnip greens and butter beans and cornbread and home cooking. When you say Southern I think of home cooking. Depending on the part of the country that you come from you have different species of fish

and different types of seafood and I guess the seafood that we serve is Southern because most of it comes from either the gulf or Florida or around Texas... It's a pretty broad spectrum... I would say the most Southern thing we have is probably the fried chicken.

When I asked Karen directly what she saw as the difference between soul, Southern, and country, she responded by calling country food “field to table” and referring back to her grandmother’s cooking, with the examples of green beans, peas, okra, and corn. She described soul food as possibly being the same, coming fresh from the garden, but she associated this with having a lot more grease, fried dishes, and/or spices, depending on the cook. When she started describing Southern food, she said that it consists of the things for which the South is known: fried chicken, turnip greens, pecan pie, cornbread, and peach cobbler. She ended by saying, “They’re all very similar but yet there’s just a little something that sets each one apart and I’m not really sure how to tell you what it is” (K. Pinkston, personal communication, July 21, 2011).

## ANALYSIS

Upon examination of the different labels of soul, Southern, and country food, I realized two things: (1) there was a lot of overlap between the foods to which these labels refer, and (2) these different labels were signifiers of identity groupings. What the food is called in each particular context gives it significance over and above the signification of the actual ingredients. These labels are what racialize and give class significance to the food. Although the labels applied to the foods are context-dependent, the foods themselves are constant. Referring to one constant group of foodways by three different labels is a clear instance of language structuring reality rather than reality shaping language. The actual foods that constitute this group of

local foodways are the shared endpoint of at least three cultural histories.

When asked about the difference between the three labels, Ann stated, “They the same. They all the same. It’s the same to me, because see I sold all that on my menu, you know I gave them a variety to ask from [sic].” First she said that all of these labels referred to the same food. However, by saying she served all of them on her menu, she implied that while the food labels differ, her cooking is all-inclusive. When I first asked if her food would be categorized as Southern, Ann agreed, but later she said she mainly cooked soul food. Ann’s oscillation between the terms soul and Southern is made more interesting by the fact that one year after her restaurant within Hoover’s Grocery burned down, she opened a full restaurant in a separate part of town which she called Hoover’s Country Kitchen. She may have used the term country as a more racially neutral way to refer to her food, so as to not deter some white customers with the black exclusivity that the term soul food may connote.

Latshaw’s analysis on soul food can help to shed light on Ann’s language. Latshaw wrote on the creation of the soul food label:

... African American cookbook authors and scholars sometimes frame and define southern food in a slightly different way, interpreting it not as distinctively “southern” per se, but as “soul food” or “Black food,” asserting that this cuisine symbolizes ‘the persistent presence of an African worldview in [their] customs, beliefs and practices.’ (p. 109)

Latshaw referred to soul food cookbook writer Bob Jefferies in saying, “Soul...is a quality that is more accurately said to inhere not in the food but instead in the cook and the eater,” asserting that, ‘while all soul food is Southern, not all Southern food is soul’” (p. 109). She drew from this statement the idea that a white Southerner could never possibly eat or produce soul food. Through Latshaw’s analysis, then, we can understand Ann’s use of

the soul food label to refer to her own identity as a black cook. She makes soul food because she is black-identified, but she sells it as “country” (from her Country Kitchen) because of her roots in the rural outskirts of Greenwood. This is to say, she is also “country identified.” And finally, when she refers to her cooking as Southern food, it is because her clientele isn’t only black or people with roots in the rural south, but rather all the inhabitants of Greenwood, who share an identity as Southern as opposed to Northern.

Although Karen’s background contrasts with Ann’s, her usage of the terms soul, Southern, and country corresponded quite well with Ann’s usage. Before I had even begun to ask Karen to distinguish soul, Southern, and country food from one another, she began referring to the food in her own way, just as Ann had. Karen referred to the food she was raised on as country food, and described some of the typical fare: fresh homegrown vegetables, slaughtered pig, biscuits, and cornbread. Moving from the more rural hills of Carroll County to the city of Greenwood, Karen’s grandmother brought her food traditions with her, naming them from their geographic location, “the country.” Country food is food made and consumed by those living in rural, non-urban communities. This country food that Karen described is very similar to the types of foods that Ann described, which is not surprising given that both women grew up in “the country.” In the same way that Karen’s grandmother kept a kitchen garden while living in Greenwood, Ann cooked from her backyard garden in her own home.

When I asked whether Lusco’s served anything traditionally Southern or country, Karen switched between listing specific food dishes that she associated with the three labels and identifying foods with labels in a more logical way based on physical location in the southern region. When she heard the word Southern, she rattled off a few dishes that she also associated with home cooking like fried chicken, turnip greens, butter beans, and cornbread, most of which were foods she also had referred to as country cooking. As she thought about it, she realized that the label

Southern food can encapsulate the food of the whole region.

When I asked Karen to describe the difference between soul, Southern, and country food, she again switched between notable dishes and logical definitions. In this sense, Karen described southern food as the foods that people outside of the South might associate as part of a Southern identity. As a person from New England, “Southern” is how I personally refer to most of these foods, because it is distinctly different to me by geographic origin. For someone living in the South there is no reason to identify the region as the South unless expressing it to someone outside of the region. As Karen listed off foods she associated with each label, she frequently changed her answers; these foods could also belong to the other categories. Because each food Karen listed fit into multiple categories (depending on the way she thinks about it) she proved that these categories are not specific to each food but rather signify of economic status, geographic location, and racial identity.

As Rachel Slocum (2011) stated in her article “Race in the study of food,” “Producing and maintaining racial identity is dependent, in part, on holding on to food habits, tastes, which are themselves *imagined* as cuisines belonging to racialized groups or nations” (p. 306, my italics). In this quote, Slocum spoke directly to the creation and transient nature of identity through the active engagement in foodways.

On a larger historical scale, we can look at the origins of southern food tradition labels and how they serve to divide black from white. During the slave trade, traders had to carry mass amounts of provisions in order to keep their cargo alive, mainly corn, rice, and yams. In addition to these crops, slaves were able to smuggle seeds from Africa, like okra, black-eyed peas, and watermelon. All of these crops are foods typical of the kind of cooking that is today categorized as soul, Southern, or country, depending on context (Harris, 2011).

According to Miller (1945), food products “create the images by which we understand who we have been, who we are, and

who we should be in the future” (p. 35). A more specific example of this is the way Karen and Ann’s families continue to cook a typical country meal that comes mainly from their own gardens, despite having moved out of the country and into Greenwood. As their families continue to cook “country-style” food, as they each refer to it, they continue to remember their family traditions as they were shaped by a rural lifestyle.

When Ann said that she mainly cooks soul food, she identified with a greater African American community. In Robert Hall’s (2007) article, “Africa and the American South: Culinary connections,” he said:

At some point along the line—many would say that not until as late as the 1960s—what black migrants once called simply “Southern food” or “down home cooking” was transformed into “soul food” and, according to such scholars as Stacy Poe, became an integral component of an emergent black urban identity. (p. 41)

Karen also used labels to realign her own identity in terms of class. When she said, “My grandmother used to always tell me that she didn’t know where I came from because I liked expensive food or other things,” she equated not liking her grandmother’s country cooking to liking expensive food, implying that country food was food of the poor.

Cultural heritage is recreated within one’s current context, and as it continues to be recreated it shapes future ideologies about race and identity. As traditions shift through time, so too do the ideologies of race that they come to represent. The continual recreation of food traditions serves as an example of the process of ideology creation and change that Fields described by saying “The ritual repetition of the appropriate social behavior makes for the continuity of ideology, not the ‘handing down’ of the appropriate ‘attitudes’. There, too, lies the key to why people may suddenly appear to slough off an ideology to which they had appeared subservient” (p. 113). The participation in food traditions

and their identity-associated labels act as the “ritual repetition” to which Field referred. As one continues to cook and refer to food as soul, Southern, or country, it becomes an affirmation of one’s race, class, or locale.

## CONCLUSION

So what is the difference between soul, Southern, and country food? As Ann said, “They all the same [sic].” But at the same time what Karen said also rings true: “there’s just a little something that sets each one apart.” Both are right in their own ways. Because the specific foods under each label overlap almost entirely from one label to the next, it would appear that they are all the same. So what is it that Karen insists sets them all apart, and yet can’t quite articulate? Each label is a signifier of these foods’ belonging to specific racial groups, economic statuses, or geographic location. Even among these categories of identity, we continue to see overlap within race, class and location. Because the foods are being referred to by different labels, the same foods can signify different aspects of social identity. The labels soul, Southern, and country become shifting signifiers of different characteristics of social identity.

If food labels are shifting signifiers to socially constructed identity differences, can the spaces where these categories and food narratives overlap become a potential place for racial unification? The answer to this question is not a simple yes or no. In 2004, the Southern Foodways Alliance of the University of Mississippi had a symposium entitled “Southern Foodways in Black & White.” In an overview of their symposium, they said, “We believe that food is our region’s greatest shared creation. And we see food as a unifier in a diverse region, as a means by which we may address the issues that have long vexed our homeland.” However, the Southern food to which the symposium referred has not always been a tool for unification, because it has a history rooted in the American exploitation of Africans and the resulting

stratification of race, class, and location.

In addition to the strong agricultural ties to Africa that are present in the food of the South, another factor is the presence of black female cooks in the homes of white families, creating the food traditions that wealthier white southerners then experienced and called their own. Sharpless (2010) wrote, “As cooks, African American women profoundly shaped the foodways of the South and, hence its overall culture” (p. xxi). She continued, “Examining recipes codified by white women can be problematic. African Americans have long been wary about the expropriation of their cooking knowledge. Throughout her distinguished career, food historian Karen Hess pointed out the theft of African American women’s creation by their employers” (p. xxi).

Though this did happen, it is not fair to generalize this to be the experience of all white Southerners. Fields (1990) wrote, “Two-thirds of the people of the Old South were free and white” (p. 108). It would be wrong to describe all white southerners as having had their food shaped by black women. The main group that are often left out of this discussion are poor whites. One reason this becomes complicated is that the white and black Southern food traditions are so similar. Though the foods that they eat are similar, they are not unifying, because of the different histories behind those foods. In Ann and Karen’s interviews, we constantly see intersections within their identities shaped by race, class, and location. Though Karen and Ann’s families both come from a poor background, their experiences within the white and black communities respectively serve as examples of a difference between two lower-class lifestyles of that time. Karen’s family-owned land in Carrollton and had several families that lived and worked on their land for them, while Ann’s family lived on someone else’s property, her father working the land that belonged to the plantation owner. Though both women gained economic capital through their successful family businesses, they did not start from the same level of lower class standings, largely due to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow regulations.

The intersection of race and class is exemplified in the few differing foodways between black and white Southerners. Ann alluded to this when she answered my question about whether the white and black customers ate similar or different foods. After saying “they ate the same,” she continued saying, “If they didn’t want neck bone they had another choice.” The fact that she mentioned some customers not wanting neck bone brings up the few southern food items that are not commonly shared between the black and the white culture. These are often recipes that utilize the discarded parts of an animal once it has been slaughtered, such as neck bones, ham hock, pigs feet, chitterlings (made from boiled pig intestine), and hog maws (made from the pig’s stomach). These foods are more typically found in black southern food because they were historically given to slaves as leftovers from an animal slaughter after the white family had taken what it wanted (Harris, 2011). I am assuming this is why Ann makes the distinction that if some of her customers did not eat neck bone, they had other options to choose from, but she says this without making the specific distinction of race.

Though the differences designated by the food labels are socially constructed and thus have the potential to change, they still affect the social lives of the people of Greenwood in a very real way. These people come from a legacy of the southern region’s deeply scarred history of slavery, Jim Crow, resistance to the Civil Rights Movement, and white supremacist groups, and they will not begin to unify simply because we start to refer to their food by one name instead of three.

The way Ann spoke about her food exemplified a middle ground between uniting people and ignoring very real social and historical divides that perpetuate the separations that exist. When Ann referred to her food using three different labels, she acknowledged a piece of who she is, whether it be as a member of the African American community, as someone who grew up in the lower class, or as someone shaped by her upbringing on a rural plantation in the South. Though Ann recognizes the constructs that

shape who people are and how they see each other within society, she also sees beneath them: “I teach my children the same thing, I’m teaching my grandkids the same, that people is people... It’s what you make of yourself [sic].”

Questioning the difference between soul, Southern, and country food mimics, at its basic level of actual food ingredients, the question, what is the difference between people, black, white, rich, poor, country or urban? At the core, we are all people made of the same flesh and blood, just as Greenwood’s foodways are made of the same tangible ingredients. These cultural barriers of race, class, and location have been built up around us, just as they have been built up around our food. As our bones and blood are made of the same common elements, can our bodies and our sustenance be seen as a unifying factor beneath socially constructed pieces of identity?

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# TANGLED

BY ALEX KAHN

This essay reads the 2010 Disney film of the same name as an artifact produced by contemporary discourses surrounding childhood, following from my hypothesis that childhood itself is also a discursively-produced phenomenon. Drawing on Philippe Ariès's history of the emergence of childhood in western modernity and on critical accounts of the social problems attached to children through the American news media, this essay explores ways in which *Tangled* expresses the relative novelty of the concept of "child" through its somewhat anachronistic treatment of a character supposed to be a pre-modern princess. Further, it asks what relationship the film's depiction of the consumer-child bears to discourses of psychoanalysis and contemporary capital.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
FILM, BIOPOLITICS, CHILD PSYCHOLOGY,  
PSYCHOANALYSIS

## INTRODUCTION

**T***angled* is a swirling mess of contemporary American anxieties about childhood, crystallized into Disney's 50<sup>th</sup> Animated Feature. Perhaps its title refers not to its heroine's hair—which, despite doing many amazing things in the film, never once becomes tangled—but rather to the many issues it brings to the fore, all of which are entangled with each other. I can at least pretend this is the case. Because I have no unified theory of the child to present to you here (although I'm not sure such a theory is possible or helpful), I can only offer you a front seat to my efforts to brush out the knotted, frizzy masses of discourse, with no hope of ever actually accomplishing my task. The most I can hope to do is point out the knots, and as such, this piece of writing is more dossier than essay.

I break this task into two parts. In one, I map the space between Disney's "retelling" of the story of Rapunzel and the Grimms' version, which, although by no means the "original" version of the tale, will serve as an interesting reference point, containing, as it does, some of the newer understandings of childhood of which Philippe Ariès (1962) maps the emergence in *Centuries of Childhood*, along with the baggage of the bygone era, the time "before" children. It is my belief that the changes that Disney made to the Grimms' original version (I won't pretend to believe that this studio would let the credited screenwriter, Dan Fogelman, come up with an adaptation from the Grimms all on his own) unwittingly depict contemporary American childhood in all its glory.

In the other part of my still-ongoing disentanglement, I trace the language of desire that structures the logic of the film's plot and the emotions of its characters. This language is so explicit and pervasive that, while I can't pretend, either, to believe that Fogelman has a copy of *Écrits* on his bedside table, I don't feel

I need to; the language in the film and its closeness to Lacan's formulations serves to show how excellently the film's language explains capital.

## FRACTURED FAIRY TALES

I want to quickly recap the Grimm's version of Rapunzel, which is readily available online.<sup>1</sup> Stop me if you've heard this one: A man and a woman long to have a child. They get pregnant. She's got cravings, so her husband steals her some rampion from Gothel (a German word for "godmother"), the witch next door, and gets caught. The witch lets him go in return for the expected baby, which she promises to love and take great care of. The baby, Rapunzel (synonym for rampion), grows to the age of 12, at which point the witch locks her in a tower. Whenever the witch wants to visit, Rapunzel "locks" her *into* the tower. (Excuse the pun. This hair elevator is one of the few things from the Grimm that makes its way into *Tangled* relatively untouched by Disney hands.) Rapunzel, now 13 or 14, is beautiful, and soon a prince hears her lovely singing, sees the hair elevator in action, and tries it out. Although initially frightened, after the prince professes his love for her and proposes marriage, Rapunzel immediately agrees, dismissing her adoptive mother in an instant. He gets her pregnant right then and there, plans her escape, and leaves. She spitefully reveals his visit to her mother, and, adding insult to injury, calls her fat. In response, the witch cuts off her hair and sends her to wander in the desert. She then impersonates Rapunzel, gets the prince on the hair elevator, and reveals to him her retaliation. He leaps off the tower in despair, blinding himself on some thorns, and then wanders blindly for years until he hears Rapunzel singing in the desert. Her tears restore his sight and they go, with the twins Rapunzel since bore, to the castle to claim their kingdom. The end.

*Tangled* adds so many bells and whistles to this story that it's hard to know where to start. However, incredibly enough, none of

these changes are arbitrary. Each seems carefully planned to paint a more effective myth of childhood. To begin at the beginning, the enchantress of *Tangled*, now named *Mother Gothel*, is just an old lady who, for centuries, has been using a magic flower to restore her youth<sup>2</sup>. According to the narration, this flower's magic comes, not insignificantly, from "a single drop of sunlight that fell from the heavens," and it is this magic that is needed when the queen in a neighboring kingdom<sup>3</sup> is about to die in childbirth. Guards find the flower and use its magic to save the queen's life. As a result, Princess Rapunzel is born with magic hair the color of the sun. Mother Gothel is forced to steal the baby princess when she finds that the baby's hair alone won't work the flower's youth-restoring magic. She keeps her in a tower starting in infancy, not 12, in order to guard her power from those who might take it from her again. This change in age at which confinement begins is an important update because, as Ariès explains in his chapter *From Immodesty to Innocence*, whereas the sexuality of the older child has long been considered important, it was only more recently that the West began to protect the sex of the younger one.

The significance of the magic child is complicated here. There is, first, the idea that the child's power comes from the sun in the heavens, a sun which also serves as the "crest" or, more appropriately, the "logo" for the kingdom in which the child is born. This implies a sort of natural relationship between the state and the ability to give life, a very modern biopolitical notion. Then there is the purpose of the child itself: In the Grimms' version, the witch seems lonely and seems to want the child for company. This in itself is a relatively new idea; Ariès (1962) explains that the enjoyment of children as valuable lands in a sort of mid-point between the total disregard for them as displayed by Montaigne and the performative love championed by Jacqueline Pascal<sup>4</sup>. However, Mother Gothel of *Tangled* has ulterior motives. Her "love," more like Pascal's, is designed to make her constant supervision bearable, which it just barely is. Thinly veiled resentment of Rapunzel's "authentic" youth and beauty pervades

her every line of dialogue (as well as all of her musical numbers), as she is forced to use Rapunzel's magic, glowing, healing hair to turn back the hands of time and maintain her own "fake" youth and beauty<sup>5</sup>. For Mother Gothel, children are a necessary evil. Can we understand the payoff of her investment in Rapunzel's safety to be analogous to the contemporary payoff of raising successful children? In the real world, they take care of you in your old age. In Disney world, they keep you young forever.

It is my opinion that Disney's Mother Gothel is a perfect (if perhaps also a wildly uncharitable) representation of the contemporary American parent. Disney uses Gothel in order to maintain the paradoxical position that good children (like Rapunzel) have parents who carefully protect and train them (the way Gothel does), but also that overbearing, protective, controlling parents are evil and anomalous (like Gothel)<sup>6</sup>. Gothel's primary mode of keeping Rapunzel's treasures for herself is fear-mongering, with undermining as a close second. The list of fantasy and real-life horrors she rattles off in her first musical number, "Mother Knows Best," sounds like a Disney-fied version of all of the "social problems" that Joel Best (2008) tackles in his analysis of the last 30 years of American nightmares: cannibals, quicksand, the plague, and men with large teeth. In Gothel's unfair assessments of Rapunzel ("sloppy, underdressed, immature, clumsy, getting kind of chubby, vague..." etc), she presumes incompetence, much in the way that Hillary Rodham's state, much to Best's chagrin, does of *its* children. This incompetence, Mother Gothel says, is why Rapunzel would not be safe in the outside world, and must not be allowed to leave the tower. Later, though, after Rapunzel leaves, Gothel turns her into a desired object in order to get two thugs to kidnap her, promising them that they may profit from her magic hair. In this self-contradictory stance she mirrors James Kincaid's (1998) adults who, in trying to protect their children, end up eroticizing them.

Indeed, so frequently is the "gift" of Rapunzel's magic hair "protected" and bargained with that it begins to seem like

a stand-in for her virginity. Rapunzel is taught that she needs to fiercely guard this “gift” from others, and immediately upon Flynn Rider’s intrusion into her tower, she knocks him out with a frying pan, suspecting him of being after her hair. Even though the very attractive Flynn is *Tangled’s* replacement for a prince, this Rapunzel clearly has been educated in the importance of “not talking to strangers.” She enacts a very *Home Alone* kind of sequence, in which she stuffs the unconscious Flynn into a closet. It’s almost funny to see a fairy tale encounter between princess and peasant turned into a meet-cute through the use of the trope of the paranoid child left to fend for herself. *Almost*. It has all of the comical inconsistencies of a *Rocky and Bullwinkle* “Fractured Fairytale,” but with none of the self-knowing irony. In the world of *this* princess, it’s “defend” first, ask questions later. The children in today’s audience will, as I did initially, take it for granted that she would act this way. Our culture has trained children to see the world as a series of unknown dangers.

The relationship between Rapunzel and Flynn in *Tangled* has other interesting points of departure from the one between Rapunzel and the Prince in the Grimms’ version. In *Tangled*, the action begins, very conveniently for us, just a day before Rapunzel’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. (The age of consent, it seems, holds constant across the boundary between legal and fairy tale fiction.) Instead, then, of a relationship between a 13-year-old girl and a prince of indeterminate age, we have a relationship between two consenting adults<sup>7</sup>. However, even this update isn’t enough to allow the story to proceed as usual (that is, with Rapunzel immediately falling in love and getting knocked up). Rapunzel wants to leave her tower with Flynn not because she’s planning to run away with him, but because she’s interested in the lights that appear in the sky every year on her birthday. (Unbeknownst to her, these lights are sent out by the king and queen and subjects to commemorate the birthday of the kidnapped princess. This public display of grief at the loss of a child seems so “Megan’s Law,” so performative a display of sentiment, that it’s hard to understand outside of the context of

contemporary America.) Flynn is initially the means, not the end. For him too, Rapunzel is a means to an end; when he enters her tower he brings with him her old crown, which he stole from its place of honor in the castle. His intention is to sell it, but she takes it from him (not yet realizing that it once belonged to her), and refuses to return it until he agrees to take her to see the lights.

One final point on Flynn and Rapunzel: Disney didn't just choose to make her a princess so it could put her face on its "Disney Princesses" merchandise; there's a more important reason. See Ariès, on 115: "The stress laid by the moralists on the need to separate children from the varied world of 'the servants' shows how well aware they were of the dangers presented by this promiscuity of children and servants (the servants themselves were often very young)." In *Tangled*, Rapunzel is made into a princess and Flynn into a member of the servant class (an orphan, actually) so as to reemphasize her role as child, the one in need of protection, whereas in the Grimms' version, he is a prince and she is a peasant.

Although the Grimms leave to the imagination what the girl has been doing in that tower for two years, *Tangled* makes it quite clear that Rapunzel's 18 years in her tower have not gone to waste. Indeed, in that time, she learned a plethora of skills and facts. She cleans, reads, paints, plays guitar, knits, cooks, bakes, dances, plays chess, sews, makes candles, and charts the stars. For Antonio Gramsci (2000), the late modern education of children is essentially the introduction of the child to work, which links up the social and state orders (rights and duties) with the natural order. This linkage is clearly in full force for Rapunzel, who, once in the village with Flynn, befriends townspeople by engaging in the celebration of what she has yet to find out for certain is her birthday. She employs various skills learned in the isolation of her tower, including painting and dancing, to become a natural part of the community that awaited her all those years.

There are a few other loose ends for me to tie up here, mostly because every moment of the film carries with it so much

significance that it's impossible to cover everything I want to in a totally organized schema. However, joining Gramsci's critique of education and the state is Foucault's (1977) critique of discipline and delinquency from *Discipline and Punish*: In one scene, Rapunzel convinces a tavern full of ruffians, ex-cons, scary types, to help her and Flynn instead of turning Flynn in for reward money. "Find your humanity," she chastises, "Hasn't any of you ever had a dream?" The rest of the scene is full of these delinquents baring their souls to us, explaining in song that even though they're all murderers and criminals, way down deep inside of each one of them there's a dream of doing something socially acceptable. One wants to be a concert pianist, another wants true love, another wants to be a mime. (Well, almost socially acceptable.) Underneath their hard surfaces, we're told, all of these men have "humanity." This really is a minor point of the film, but it seems significant to note that no opportunity to slip in some Western capitalist ideology gets passed up. I guess the reason I feel that this is significant is that Disney's people couldn't fit more problematic stuff into this movie if they had actually tried. The sheer volume, the thoroughness of indoctrination, proves to me that the film is really just an index of current conditions, and that none of this is deliberate.

My final point and favorite moment of the modern ideology of childhood comes at the film's pivotal moment: Rapunzel realizes, through a recovered memory, that she is the lost princess. The memory recovery montage is extraordinary. The ideology it carries is clear: The only way for us to release ourselves from our bondage is for us to recognize that we are bound, that something has been taken from us by someone. The correct reaction is anger and blame.

The scene unfolds this way: Rapunzel, having just been "saved" by Gothel by the two thugs that Gothel herself planted, pulls out a flag with the kingdom's sun logo on it, presumably thinking back on the parts of her day of freedom that were not full of deception and evil and selfishness, the parts where she relates to her identity, her people, and her culture. And then she looks up

onto the ceiling of her tower at her artwork, where she finds, in the negative spaces made by all the figures of birds and leaves she's painted in murals for 18 years, the shape of this sun logo, a missing piece. A hole in everything she's ever thought, it defines her life by being excluded from it. She suddenly remembers (putting her memory back together with her body, turning a split into a unity of self) where she first saw it as a baby— it was hanging above her crib— and then the faces of her parents, king and queen, looking down at her. Then she remembers seeing the mosaic in town that day, depicting the king and queen and their lost princess, and she realizes the princess is she. The baby in the mosaic is wearing the crown that Flynn stole, the crown she tried on in the mirror that morning while he was unconscious in the closet. And even then, and in all those moments, she already knew, unconsciously. That crown was meant for her.

There are several things about what happens in this situation to which Susan Clancy (2009), psychologist and author of *The Trauma Myth*, would object. Principally, Rapunzel realizes that she has been used, that all those times Gothel told her she loved her were lies, and then immediately finds anger. Clancy, in numerous interviews with adults who have “recovered” childhood memories of abuse, found that these memories are almost always accompanied with feelings of ambiguity, self-blame, and guilt. It may seem foolish to compare Clancy's findings to a Disney movie, but for the sake of argument, shouldn't Rapunzel feel betrayed and confused? Earlier in the film, she agonizes over betraying Gothel by leaving the tower when it has been expressly forbidden, which, you'll remember, is very different from how the Grimms' Rapunzel acts. She clearly had a strong attachment to her “godmother.” Indeed, if the magic of her hair *can* be said to stand in for her virginity, and if it has been elevated to the level of importance which we give to virginity, shouldn't Rapunzel feel more pain than anger here?

I'm less concerned, however, with the fact that the recovered memory happens in such an absurd way, and more

interested in the fact of its being there in the first place. It joins the ranks of specifically modern accessories to childhood along with the earlier kidnapping and the kingdom's jubilant (jouissant?) annual festival of mourning.

The kind of recovered memory we see here, by the way, is the pop-psychoanalytic version. The kind of psychoanalysis I want to briefly investigate next, however, has never appeared in a Disney movie as clearly as it does in *Tangled*.

## DREAMS AS DESIRE

In every Disney movie, it is fabled, there is an “I wish” song that gets the story going. In *Tangled*, the main character's is “When Will My Life Begin.”<sup>8</sup> Rapunzel wants freedom, and the conversation in the film around freedom is very interesting. In Rapunzel's world, freedom is something laying around waiting for you, and people in power can withhold it from you. This conception of freedom is foundational to liberal and neoliberal governmentalities, and would be interesting to investigate thematically in contemporary stories of liberation. However, Rapunzel wants much more specific things than just plain old freedom, and much of the film is spent in explicit discussion of what those things are. Other characters, too, even minor ones, discuss objects of desire, all using the word “dream.”

In *Tangled*, Rapunzel's first dream is to go see the lights that fill the sky on her birthday. Everything she does is in an effort to make this dream come true, to attain that desired object(ive). First she pleads with Mother Gothel, then she tricks her, then she strikes a deal with Flynn to have him take her to the kingdom. She's entirely wrapped up in the pursuit of this dream. However, once she and Flynn are in a boat on the lake outside the kingdom, the lights just about to descend on them, she's filled with anxiety. She asks, “what if it's not everything I dreamed it would be?” This is the first fear we have about our desired object: that it will not

live up to our expectations. But when Flynn assures her, “It will be,” she’s exposed to the true fear, the more terrible one: “And what if it is?” she asks. “What will I do then?” Of course, as Žižek (1992) would remind us, this is exemplary of our fears related to desire. The first masks the second, the second reveals the hole that the desired object leaves behind once we get it. In the moment we attain the thing we want, there’s the realization that we still want, that we need a new thing. As Flynn says, “Well that’s the good part, I guess. You get to find a new dream.”

This is exactly what happens. In the same scene, seconds later, after Rapunzel has seen the lights, she “sees the light” (during the aptly-titled song, “I See the Light”), realizing that her new object of desire is Flynn. She delivers the crown promised to him for helping her to see the floating lanterns, and he, now having received the object of *his* desire, moves on to a new one: her. Of course, the movie’s happy ending depends on these two never replacing each other with new objects, and strangely enough, according to the logic that Flynn and Rapunzel lay out so clearly in the boat on the lake, it seems likely that someday they will. After all, for each one, the other is only a dream, and once dreams come true, new ones fill their place.

Another fascinating moment in this vein was Mother Gothel’s encounter with the two thugs she has go after Rapunzel and Flynn. She has the Rapunzel’s crown, which she knows they want, and she needs something from them. Instead of using the obvious strategy, as Rapunzel did with Flynn, of withholding the crown until they give her what she needs, she simply surrenders the crown while commenting off-handedly that she was *going* to offer them something much better, but if the dumb ol’ crown’s all they want, then it’s theirs, no problem. Now that the crown is finally within their grasp, of course, the thugs’ desire has become unhooked from it, and latches immediately onto this mysterious other thing that Mother Gothel promises. She takes advantage of their need for an object of desire and fills that empty space with her own desired object, making them get it for her. (That object,

by the way, would be her daughter.)

We could even understand the “dreams” of the ruffians at the tavern to work in this fashion. They’ve got absurd goals which they’ve little hope of reaching, and this sustains them as they go about their unsavory business, killing and maiming, and getting blood all up in their mustaches. You have to feel kind of bad for the guys when you find out at the end of the film that they all got what they wanted; now they probably don’t want it anymore.

The song that plays during *Tangled’s* ending credits is Grace Potter’s “Something That I Want.” Here’s the refrain:

And I want something that I want  
 Something I tell myself I need  
 Something that I want.  
 I need everything I see.

Something that I want  
 something that I tell myself I need  
 something that I want  
 And I need everything I see...

This is a never-ending loop of desire, constantly falling back into itself. The voice is that of a voracious, insatiable consumer-subject, wanting to want, in a sort of circular logic, whatever it is that it wants.

The point of all these examples is not exactly to show how close the film is to an accurate representation of the Lacanian formulation of desire (see Žižek, 1992), just like it was not quite the point to compare Rapunzel’s recovered memory with Susan Clancy’s (2008) skeptical re-theorization of that phenomenon. It is, rather, to note that this *kind* of language is seeping into the heart of popular and mass culture. That Disney is finding a way to have the metonymic nature of desire and eat their happy endings too is worth considering. Moreover, it’s interesting that when Lacan presents desire in this way it sounds so bleak, but that Disney has positioned it as the emotional high point of their film. Perhaps the

success of contemporary capital is to have made desire for its own sake so acceptable that such a statement is at home in the middle of a Disney movie.

## CONCLUSION: NO MORE TANGLES?

No, certainly, the tangles remain. However, given the tangled nature of my exploration, my key efforts need some restating: Disney's *Tangled* offers us an excellent way of understanding how childhood has emerged and developed in the time that has elapsed since the Brothers Grimm wrote their version. It's important to do the social-historical work of documenting childhood's emergence and growth in western culture, whether it be directly through historical and sociological methods like Ariès' and Best's, literary methods like Kincaid's, or through theoretical investigations in the vein of Foucault's, Gramsci's, and Lacan's. However, much of that work is done for us in contemporary cultural products if we know how to read them.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 <http://www.literaturepages.com/read/grimms-fairy-tales-59.html>
- 2 That Gothel would prefer to be eternally youthful is sort

of taken for granted. On 124, Ariès draws our attention to the emerging bias against increased age: “God possesses the first age, but the Devil possesses in many persons the best parts of old age as well as of the age which the Apostle calls accomplished.” Indeed, in *Tangled*, old age is something to be hidden and mistrusted.

- 3 It’s funny; the kingdom is described as having “grown” over years and years, much in the way one would describe a township or a business. The links between themes monarchy and liberal democracy are complex in this film, so I’ll use “state” as a kind of blanket term.
- 4 See 115 of Ariès: “A close watch must be kept on the children, and they must never be left alone anywhere, whether they are ill or in good health.’ But ‘this constant supervision should be exercised gently and with a certain trustfulness calculated to make them think that one loves them, and that it is only to enjoy their company that ones is with them. This makes them love this supervision rather than fear it.”  
 Not insignificantly (two words which I think might be the motto of this essay), the film makes reference to the Pascal family, giving its name to Rapunzel’s pet chameleon. Supposedly, it is named for Blaise. Maybe it’s named for an eponymous computer program. I like to think it’s for Jacqueline.
- 5 The song Mother Gothel and, alternately, Rapunzel, sing in order to make the hair work its magic goes like this: “Flower gleam and glow. Make your power shine. Make the clock reverse, bring back what once was mine.” Lost origins are a major theme of the film, although a critical analysis of the concept of origins tends to make one wonder whether they ever existed. We’re meant to think that Gothel’s youth was on loan, never permanently “hers,” whereas Rapunzel’s identity as

a princess was her property, something of which she has been wrongfully deprived.

It hardly seems necessary to point out the contemporary rampancy of television commercials for anti-aging products that promise to turn back the clock, but I'd like to suggest that, especially with Disney films, we've reached a point at which commercial rhetoric has begun to penetrate art, rather than merely the other way around.

- 6 At the end of the film, Rapunzel and Flynn finally meet the king and queen who lost their daughter so many years ago. The long-lost parents are nondescript images of benevolence. Never at any point in the film do they utter a single word—evidence, I feel, for the fact that any characterization at all might have laid them open to the kind of critiques that Mother Gothel must face. Almost like the fantasy children described in James Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence*, they are pure, blank slates onto which we project all of our ideals for what the right parents would be. Disney uses the king and queen to fill the role of a parental figure in the film that isn't evil, but that we know nothing about. The king and queen have an unrealistic relationship with their daughter, and their only act as parents was to allow their daughter to be kidnapped.
- 7 In fact, given Rapunzel's age, all of our complaints regarding Mother Gothel's abusive parenting techniques are moot; her rights as a parent necessarily change when Rapunzel is no longer a minor. Weird as this may seem, then, we could say that, in *Tangled*, Gothel's true crime is her effort to keep an *adult* captive. By this (admittedly twisted) logic, the Grimms' witch has every right to keep her 13-year-old Rapunzel in the tower, and isn't really a villain at all.
- 8 To return, for one second, to the childhood question, consider the significance of saying that someone who is almost but not

yet 18 is actually *not alive*. Forget statutory rape; all we need is a law against necrophilia.

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# INTERPRETING A “ STRANGE WORLD ”

THE IDEAS OF FREUD, THE SURREALITY OF  
BLUE VELVET AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF  
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

BY RYAN P. CASEY

The following paper examines David Lynch’s 1986 cult classic *Blue Velvet* through a Freudian lens, particularly through Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and his essay, “The Uncanny” (1919). By applying Freud’s theories to several dream-related sequences in the film, it is revealed how aspects of the unconscious, uncanny and dream interpretation are inextricable from its structure and symbolism. The paper proceeds to argue that the film challenges traditional cinematic interpretation, even dream interpretation, and thus seems uncanny by challenging our conceptions of what is real and what is surreal or fantastic, and what is or is not meant to be interpreted. *Blue Velvet* thus asks its viewers to participate in a different kind of viewing experience, one in which they may or may not be able to trust what they see or believe. The paper explores alternate ways of attempting to interpret the film and how these attempts subvert film as we know it, suggesting that our conventional methods for watching and thinking about cinema need to be reevaluated – particularly the idea that film functions as a didactic or edifying medium.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
PSYCHOANALYSIS, FILM THEORY, MEDIA STUDIES

In Vladimir Nabokov's (1948) famous short story, "Signs and Symbols," the protagonists' son has been incarcerated in an asylum for "referential mania." This term is Nabokov's creation, which we might deem today some kind of paranoia disorder. But the story does not offer any of this information up front; rather, it is sprinkled carefully throughout the tripartite narrative structure, maintaining our suspense so that, like the "incurably deranged" son, we as readers begin reading too much into the details. Without knowing what is, or what could be, significant, we must pause over every clue. And then, when the ending fails to satiate our curiosity, we must read the story again, even more meticulously this time, noting the weather, the furniture in the parents' apartment, even the flavors of jam on their breakfast table, which are curiously listed in the final sentence. We have unconsciously – and there is the key word, as I will demonstrate – entrapped ourselves in Nabokov's construction. As we may often do when the alarm jerks us awake in the morning, and we can only grasp at the vestiges of what were hauntingly vivid and lifelike mental images, so can we form only a vague interpretation of what we have seen, or think we have seen. Definite conclusions are beyond reach.

We are reduced to this same process while viewing David Lynch's 1986 cinematic classic, *Blue Velvet*, in which the motif of dreams is powerfully present – perhaps omnipresent. Drawing on the work of the German psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, particularly his theories regarding dream analysis and the uncanny, I will examine several pivotal dream-related sequences in the film and argue that they not only challenge the conventions of textual interpretation by opposing said technique(s), but also question the effectiveness of cinema as a genre – both the ways in which we are accustomed to viewing and understanding it, as well as the moralizing and edifying purposes it serves.

The movie's opening montage mirrors the American suburban ideal, just as it mirrors the traditional imagery of dreams: supersaturated colors exaggerate, for example, the juxtaposition of red flowers against a white picket fence; things appears in their

ideal form, from the impeccably manicured lawns to the crossing guard leading docile children in a straight line across the street; a fireman on a passing fire truck waves ever so slowly, as movement tends to seem in a dream – and indeed, as it does toward the end of this quasi-prologue. The camera suddenly indicates that something significant is going to happen, focusing repeatedly on the hose that a man is using to water his lawn, a hose that has become tangled on a branch, and also on the spigot, where water pressure is building up. The cinematography here suggests insistently that we, the audience, should make something of these images, and yet we have no idea what is happening. Even when something does happen, and the man collapses in agony, we cannot be sure why. Our impulse is to go back and think about what the hose and the spigot had to do with the man getting hurt. In reviewing this sequence, we find other details that may or may not be important. Is the television program that the woman is watching, ostensibly some kind of crime drama, foreshadowing something? Who is the toddler waddling down the driveway after the man falls?

It would seem, therefore, that the film is teasing us, simultaneously requesting and resisting interpretation, or at least traditional interpretation. Freud contends that dreams are to be treated as rebuses in which various symbols, and their relation to one another, when decoded, achieve meaning (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 400). In a film in which the protagonist unearths a great deal of morally reprehensible behavior, discovering that there is a sordid underbelly beneath the superficiality of his community, we are poised to look beyond the superficial as well, and find a didactic message. But the surreal elements we have already seen suggest that this task requires something different, something that transcends consciously graspable symbols – and here, of course, lies Freud's idea of the unconscious. In discussing his theory of dream displacement, he asserts that although dream-thoughts, or the actual experiences and emotions we have that compose the dreams themselves, are loaded with psychical significance, “a value of this kind does not persist or is disregarded in the process of

dream formation. . . [T]hese essential elements, charged, as they are, with intense interest, may be treated as though they were of small value” (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 411). In other words, the emotional significance of these events diminishes when they are translated unconsciously into symbolic terms. This theory complicates the process of standard interpretation because it admits that “the dream gives us no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious” (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 412), or that the symbols in a dream may not necessarily represent what is most important to the dreamer, and may in fact entirely omit much of what is significant. Because the signs and symbols comprising the dream-content are appropriated by the individual’s psychology, there is no standardized format of symbolism in a dream. There is no legend, as on a map, either individual or universal, that we can apply to a dream in order to understand it; rather, we must impose our own idiosyncratic interpretations, and who is to say that any one of those is more accurate than another? Thus, it seems that David Lynch is critiquing or questioning the very act of traditional (i.e. symbolic) interpretation. *Blue Velvet* appears to be, and asks to be, something we can decipher, but then it defies interpretation and seems to warn us against it. A film, like a dream, is a different experience for everyone and thus cannot be interpreted generally.

This “symbolic barrier,” as a colleague of mine termed it, is particularly manifest in the famous scene in which the effeminate Ben, played by Dean Stockwell, performs Roy Orbison’s “In Dreams.” There are layers of meaning within the song itself: it means something unique to Orbison, who wrote it; it means another thing to Frank (Dennis Hopper), who is visibly moved by it; and it means something else to each audience member – both in the sense that the scene can be interpreted differently by each person, and also that some of them may have a prior relationship with the song (i.e. they grew up listening to it; it is their favorite tune; etc.). Interpreting this bizarre scene is thus complicated by the fact that we must consider all of these different meanings, which, save for our own, are impossible to define.

Locating meaning becomes a challenge: is it in the construction of the scene itself, or in our own subjective interpretations? It is significant to note that Ben's performance of "In Dreams" is not real; rather, it is the performance of a performance, or, more accurately, a performance of a recording of a performance. It is phony, which further complicates how we can interpret the scene. We are watching a staged performance of a performance of a recording of a performance. Once again, Lynch's scene structure obfuscates our attempts at finding meaning, not to mention the intended meaning itself, whatever it might be. Ben's lipsyncing reminds us that we are watching a film, that everything we are seeing is staged, and that we are complicit in all of this, just as we participate involuntarily in Jeffrey's voyeurism. Like Nabokov, Lynch cleverly forces us to play a part in his construction, thus making it difficult for us to distinguish between our roles as audience members and participants, and subsequently making it difficult to interpret what we have seen. Because of this confusion, the film seems to suggest that cinema is an ineffectual medium through which to convey a message, or rather, that attempts on the part of the audience to interpret films – and, if we extrapolate that, texts in general, filmic or otherwise – are useless.

Initially, it is unclear why we cannot analyze this film symbolically, as Freud suggests. It seems possible, especially when the film presents us with obvious motifs and symbols, begging us, as I noted earlier, to interact with them. Our interaction, however, ends up being something more complicated and frustrating. It is as if our interpretive powers, when faced with *Blue Velvet*, inexplicably fail. One of the most overt references to dreams in the film, which exemplifies this failure of symbolic analysis, comes from Sandy (Laura Dern), who, interestingly enough, first appears in a dreamlike quality, materializing out of the darkness of her front yard. Later in the film, as they are sitting in Jeffrey's (Kyle MacLachlan) car, Jeffrey remarks to Sandy what a "strange world" they live in and laments all the "trouble" it harbors. In what first seems like a non-sequitur, Sandy replies by recounting a dream she

had on the night she met him:

In the dream, there was our world, and the world was dark because there weren't any robins, and the robins represented love. And for the longest time, there was just this darkness, and all of a sudden, thousands of robins were set free, and they flew down and brought this blinding light of love. And it seemed like that love would be the only thing that would make any difference, and it did. So I guess it means here is trouble 'til the robins come.

The natural impulse is to complete a Freudian analysis of the dream, a task made difficult. We then realize that there is a church, its lights blazing, in the background, and church music is playing. These are the first hints that this scene also has something phony about it; the presence of the church makes the dream seem like a cheesy, revealing moment delivering the film's central message – and yet, of course, we cannot decipher that message. In his essay “The Uncanny,” Freud analyzes the word *Heimlich*, which has the dual meaning of familiar/friendly and concealed/hidden. What at first seems paradoxical, when scrutinized, reveals itself as the interesting notion that sometimes, what is familiar to us can be cloaked in unfamiliar terms and *appear* to be *unheimlich*, or what is roughly translated as “uncanny” (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998). As I have said, *Blue Velvet* presents us with situations and symbols that seem familiar and interpretable, but at second glance are virtually unintelligible. Freud stresses that this “uncanny” feeling is based on “a recurrence of the same situations, things and events ... subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances” (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 426), and the film certainly presents recurring images – Jeffrey's flashbacks, most often in reaction to Dorothy's fervent cry of “Hit me!” are prime examples – especially those that are difficult to explicate. Our inherent and familiar desire to interpret the film, to draw lessons/morals from what appears to be a didactic text, seems to be

intentionally impossible, and thus our task as interpreters becomes unfamiliar. The opening scene, for example, when dissected, is comprised of constituent images that are familiar – suburban homes, a heterosexually normative family construct, a popular song by Bobby Vinton – and yet, as I have demonstrated, are suddenly disorienting and strange and unfamiliar when assembled in Lynchian fashion. Might Freud label this sensation *unheimlich*? When Jeffrey and Sandy are eating at a diner and recounting what they have learned so far, Jeffrey admits, “I’m seeing something that was always hidden. I’m involved in a mystery. I’m in the middle of a mystery and it’s all secret”. This notion of something sinister and unknown hiding within the community, the idyllic suburban town in which Jeffrey lives and with which he is presumably familiar, perhaps best highlights the meaning of the “uncanny.”

Attempts at interpreting Sandy’s dream take an even more unusual twist in the final scene. The camera delivers us into this scene by zooming out of Jeffrey’s ear, thus completing the frame narrative established in the beginning of the film, when the camera brings us into the disembodied ear that Jeffrey finds. This technique suggests that what we have just seen may have been a product of Jeffrey’s imagination, but we cannot be sure – indeed, the appearance of a perfectly healthy Mr. Beaumont makes it impossible to know whether this scene is taking place in the future, after “normalcy” has been restored, or if we have returned to the beginning, perhaps even before the beginning, before Jeffrey imagined any of the film’s events. I put “normalcy” in quotation marks not only to acknowledge the fact that in a film as strange as *Blue Velvet*, it is arguably futile to try to argue that anything is truly normal, but also to point out that the fairy tale happy ending seems, like Sandy’s dream and the accompanying church symbolism, to be cheesy and too good to be true – one might say “unreal.” Thus, in a curious juxtaposition that echoes the opening sequence, what is real, or what we perceive to be a familiar reality, is presented as surreal; by contrast, the grim reality of Lumberton’s underworld, what seems to represent surreality

and uncanniness, is presented in a gritty, disturbingly realistic fashion. The film effectively subverts our notions of what is real and what is not, which certainly heightens the presence of the uncanny at work and serves as a commentary on the purpose of cinematic arts, questioning whether a movie's attempts to (re)present reality in fact distort it, and whether a film can be properly interpreted or understood based on this confusion. In this last scene, Jeffrey and Sandy spot a robin on the windowsill. At first, it seems that Sandy's dream has come true, but the robin is obviously fake, mechanical. This fact abruptly interrupts the happy ending to remind us that we are still watching a film, a fictional construction, in the same way that the robin is both a prop as well as a fabricated representation of the social construct and idea of happiness. This is not to say that the film is dismissing the values of hope, love, and felicity, but rather that it is again asking us to choose between construction and interpretation: Are the characters genuinely happy, even if their surroundings are artificial? Can we treat them as real people, or simply as characters, and therefore constructs and ideals in themselves? Does film really capture reality, or convince us that we are watching something real?

These dichotomies – real vs. surreal, construction vs. interpretation, representation vs. presentation, just to mention a few – reflect the theme of the double on which Freud elaborates: “the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character trait, or twist of fortune... [which] has its counterpart in the language of dreams” (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998, p. 425). From a psychoanalytical perspective, this doubling refers to a development of the ego, the conscience, which allows us to examine and critique ourselves. With regard to the idea of the uncanny, it reflects the idea that a new perspective on a familiar concept produces a subtly different, though not entirely contradictory, concept (Rivkin & Ryan, 1998). *Blue Velvet* blurs the distinctions between these concepts, making it difficult for us to know, and in fact asking us to figure out for ourselves, where to draw the metaphorical line. The film certainly does not do that for us, but rather complicates

the task in many ways, and does not leave us any more skilled for it by the end than we were in the beginning. Is it fair to say that we “learn” something from this film, other than basic knowledge like staying out of strangers’ closets and avoiding contact with drug-addicted psychopaths? If anything, I think Lynch’s construction asks us to revisit what we think we know about film and about morality, as well as the connections between these concepts. There is no conventional viewing of the film, and there is no conventional method of textual interpretation (i.e. of any film). Rather, how our individual lenses look at the signs and symbols of a text is what makes the viewing/reading game so fascinating – so long as we don’t develop referential mania in the process.

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# STATUS AND CONTROL IN THE POKÉMON WORLD

BY SERENA LELAH

This paper explores status and control in the Pokémon World. I refer to the work of three anthropologists, Sherry Ortner, Anne Meneley, and Pierre Bourdieu, in order to shed light on what Pokémon really symbolizes and means to players. The paper examines why players continue to put so much time, energy, and money into a game with no apparent economic reward. Through my research and interviews with players in Nintendo World in New York City, I came to understand that Pokémon offers players what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital. Rather than monetary rewards, players may gain control and status within their immediate circle of friends. Through the acquisition of this power, the game becomes legitimized and thus reinforces its allure to the players. I conclude that the time and money paid in becoming a Pokémon master is reinforced by the acquisition of status and control.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, POPULAR CULTURE,  
VIDEOGAMES

On a regular Friday evening, Nintendo World has a calm, yet busy atmosphere. At the end of the school week, young teens and children hang around the store playing the multitude of videogames available. At the center of the ground floor is a table surrounded by comfy stools, around which congregate many of Nintendo World's regulars. Most seem to be between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. My research delves into the components of status and control in the Pokémon world through the work of several anthropologists. Sherry Ortner's *On Key Symbols* (1973) discusses the function and importance of symbols in a culture. Through her work I explore some key symbols in the Pokémon world, which represent status and need for control. Through Anne Meneley's (1996) ethnography on gift-giving in Zabid, I investigate how status is gained, lost, and maintained within Pokémon. Finally, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) work on symbolic capital reveals that the importance of the Pokémon game to its players stems from the control they gain, and thereby legitimizes the game. Though the regulars usually have many different Nintendo DS games on hand, more often than not at least one of the Pokémon games is amongst them. The entire ground floor of Nintendo World is dedicated to Pokémon. There are shelves and racks filled with Pokémon paraphernalia. Huge bins hold various Pokémon shaped plushies, and a giant sized Pikachu sits in the corner, in case patrons decide to commemorate their trip by posing for pictures.

Printed on almost every Pokémon-related gadget is the image of a red and white Pokéball. The Pokéball is an important symbol, which reveals much about the ideology of Pokémon culture. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner, in her paper, "On Key Symbols," explains how symbols are the portrayal of cultural values. According to Ortner (1973), "Anything by definition can be a symbol, i.e., a vehicle for cultural meaning, and it seems from a survey of the literature that almost anything can be key" (p. 1339). Key symbols may be anything from the potlatch to the Christian cross. Ortner divides key symbols into two categories: summarizing

symbols and elaborating symbols. Summarizing symbols “operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to ‘summarize’ them under a unitary form which, in an old-fashioned way, ‘stands for’ the system as a whole” (1973, p. 1340). A summarizing symbol represents the sum total of a culture’s values and ideals. For example, the American Flag falls into the category of summarizing symbols because it characterizes culturally established American values like freedom and equality.

Unlike summarizing symbols, elaborating symbols are “Vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action” (p. 1340). Elaborating symbols deal with more abstract concepts, which get broken down into simpler forms in order to make them more understandable. There are two types of elaborating symbols: root metaphors and key scenarios. Ortner refers to anthropologist Stephen Pepper’s definition of root metaphors to describe symbols by which a culture aligns itself. Ortner also cites the work of anthropologist Godfrey Leinhardt on the role of cattle in Dinkan, as an example of a root metaphor. According to Leinhardt, the Dinka’s perception of color relies heavily on their “cattle-colour vocabulary,” through which they describe the world around them. Similarly, the Dinka people perceive the structure of their society as analogous to the physical structure of the bull (1973). These examples show how the Dinka people literally orient their understanding of the world around the metaphor of the cow. Key scenarios, on the other hand, are scripts that embody the ideology of a culture. Ortner presents the Horatio Alger myth as an example of a key scenario: “Poor boy of low status, but with total faith in the American system, works very hard and ultimately becomes rich and powerful” (p. 1341). The myth alludes to the American concept of achieving success by implying that through hard work, wealth and power can be attained.

In Pokémon, the Pokéball is a prime example of a summarizing symbol. The Pokéball symbolizes a player’s knowledge

of Pokémon, as well as his or her strength in being able to capture and control the powerful virtual creatures. Pokéballs are essential for the games; without them, it would be impossible to play, because it would be impossible to catch Pokémon. Only by catching Pokémon may players train them to win matches, thereby gaining status and the respect of other players. The process of capturing, training, breeding, and battling are all examples of key scenarios, which, as Ortner explains, “Are culturally valued in that they formulate the culture’s basic means-ends relationships in actable forms” (p. 1341). These four processes are the means by which the player’s status increases. Yet, to reach such an end requires many tedious hours of work. Interestingly enough, Pokémon as an industry does little by way of recognizing its star players; while there are a few tournaments, battles are usually fought unofficially, so no scores are recorded. This means that even though a person might gain respect by illustrating how his or her knowledge outweighs everyone else’s in the immediate group of friends, there are few superstar players who are well known by all players.

At a Pokémon event in March 2011, I briefly spoke to a woman who had brought her nephews to Nintendo World as a treat. She revealed to me just how baffled she was by the large number of adults in attendance. Her point was that for a game that requires extensive amounts of time dedicated to it for no real reward, it seemed like a waste of time. I’d argue, however, that while there is no economic reward for playing Pokémon, players do gain an element of control and power that cannot necessarily be attained outside of the Pokémon world. The Pokémon games allow players to work towards specific foreseeable goals with the knowledge that if they put in a certain amount of effort they will achieve results. The games rely on strategy and mathematics, which enable players to calculate what moves they should make in order to win. A player’s knowledge that he or she can eventually reach his or her goals, and the mathematic quality inherent in the game, allows players to gain power over their virtual lives. This is unlike the regular world, where hard work does not necessarily

translate into achieving goals, even though we would like to think that it does.

Power gain is an example of symbolic capital, which Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) describes in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* as, “a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital, [which] produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects” (p. 183). According to Bourdieu, economic capital, valuable material like money, is not the only factor or value that sways desire for an object. Bourdieu argues that symbolic capital influences people’s actions, even if there is no economic reward. Bourdieu (1977) offers the example of an archaic economic society, in which wealthy families hire a huge labor force, even though doing so is not economically practical. However, in return, wealthy families become feared and respected in the eyes of the peasants. Through the spending of economic capital, wealthy families are able to gain the symbolic capital of increased status.

Economic capital may take the form of both material wealth and of time. Bourdieu (1977) explains that the time a person spends doing something gives great value to that thing. Wealthy families must not only spend material goods, but also time if they are to acquire symbolic capital, whether it be in the form of debts, labor, or supporters. The gain of symbolic capital generates more spending of economic capital in order to receive more symbolic capital. Bourdieu writes,

Once one realizes that symbolic capital is always credit in the widest sense of the word, i.e. a sort of advance which the group alone can grant those who give it the best material and symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in economic terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) make capital go to capital. (p. 181)

The value of symbolic capital resides within the group alone, be-

cause it is generated through wealthy families giving gifts to the peasants in order to obtain power. The peasants, indebted to the wealthy families, must find ways to repay their benefactors. Yet the peasants constantly rely on the wealthy families for aid, which means that they will never be able to pay back the debt in full. In this fashion the cycle of economic and symbolic capital repeats.

The time players invest in the Pokémon games is equivalent to the economic capital they pay. In return, they gain experience, which enables them to become better players. By showing off their knowledge through debating strategies and winning battles, players obtain respect. In this way a player's hard work gets repaid through symbolic capital. A normal conversation around the table in Nintendo World consists of exchanges of barely civil conversations about which Pokémon strategies work better, bragging tales of accomplishments, and nostalgic stories about childhood interactions with Pokémon. One night I had a Pokémon battle with a boy named David, who was explaining to me the strategies behind how to train Pokémon, when another boy jumped in with his own theory of a good battle strategy. David just looked at the boy, and sharply replied "No!" He then proceeded to explain in a matter-of-fact tone why his theory was the right one. The other boy, having been shut down, quietly protested by saying, "Right, but like, it can work this way too." The damage was done however, because David had shown himself to have greater knowledge than the other boy.

This example demonstrates how status is maintained in Pokémon. Anthropologist Anne Meneley's (1996) research in Zabid, Yemen, reflects how status may be gained or lost in the Pokémon world. In her book, *Tournaments of Value*, Meneley investigates the significance of the role of the elite women in Zabid. A considerable portion of Zabidi women's lives consist of "visiting", the act of hosting other women in their homes and being hosted in return. Yet Meneley discovered that these visits were more important than just some rich women having tea.

The book suggests the wider significance of women's

sociability for the standing of their families in Zabid. The women in a particular family are collectively responsible for upholding their family's social connections – part of the family patrimony – through hosting social events and attending those held by others. (p. 190)

Meneley, in accordance with Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, explains that by hosting other women, the hostess pays great economic expenses, yet in return, her guests' presence in her home gives her honor, status, and respect for her family. However, a woman may not only be a hostess; she must give others a chance to host her in return. If a woman refuses to be a guest in another's home, she implies that her family has a higher status than the other woman's family. Should a woman refuse one too many invitations, the other women will stop visiting her, thereby shaming her and her family.

A similar scenario illustrating status and power among women in Zabid is the exchange of qat, a tropical plant; "like the exchange of visits themselves...women indicate both affection and equality and compete with each other, continually maneuvering so as not to leave gifts of qat unreciprocated" (Meneley, 1996, p. 108). Not returning a gift indicates being of lower status than the giver.

Status in Zabid society is always in flux. Though being born into a higher status is helpful, a family's status may rise or fall. "Hierarchy in Zabid cannot be taken for granted because it must be continually re-enacted or altered through the process of recognition inherent in the exchange of hospitality" (Meneley, 1996, p. 180). This is why visiting is so important in Zabid; through visiting, a woman can influence how her family is perceived. Status in the Pokémon world is also never constant. While David was the powerful player in the group that night, on a different night someone else might overshadow him. A few nights later, a boy, Nate, demonstrated his superior status as a player when we traded Pokémon. He offered to give me some really powerful and rare Pokémon, but I explained to him, that as a rookie player, I probably did

not have anything he would want in return. Nate simply shrugged; he chose the weakest, most unused Pokémon I owned. Trading Pokémon is a bit like the qat exchange; first one player sends over a Pokémon, then a second player sends one right back. Also like the Zabidi women, I felt frustration at not being able to return the gift given. The fact that Nate could spare some extremely rare and powerful Pokémon showed how strong of a player he was. The continuous re-strengthening of status requires the consent of the whole Pokémon world in order to legitimize the practices of capturing, training, breeding, and battling. Bourdieu (1977) writes:

The endless reconversion of economic capital into symbolic capital, at the cost of a wastage of social energy which is the condition for the permanence of domination, cannot succeed without the complicity of the whole group: the work of denial which is the source of social alchemy is, like magic, a collective undertaking. As Mauss puts it, the whole society pays itself in the false coin of its dream. (p. 195)

While players do not acquire any economic capital or any status in the world outside Pokémon, by sanctioning this process they give it power and importance. According to Bourdieu, the cycle of economic capital turning into symbolic capital is maintained only because a society neither misleads nor gets misled, but rather misrecognizes the true reality of the key scenarios they undergo.

In this way, the Pokémon culture becomes continuously reinforced through demonstrations of knowledge and strength in battle. The symbolic capital gained through time, practice, and patience rewards players by allowing them to prove themselves to their fellow players. The dynamic between players in Nintendo World reflects this view in that players are consistently trying to one-up each other both through actual Pokémon battles and battles of knowledge. The value of an increase in status gives players power and authority, thus making the time spent worthwhile. Pokémon players in Nintendo World seek this power because of

the control they feel when they triumph over their competitors. Therefore, players return to Nintendo World and continue to play Pokémon well into adulthood because the game offers them an element of control and power, which may not be as successfully acquired in the outside world.

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# HISTORICIZING AND ACCOMMODATING NATIONAL MINORITIES

MODES OF AUTONOMY IN  
MULTINATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

BY NICK GLASTONBURY

The goal of this paper is to examine and critique the historical arc of nationalism as well as to explicate its conceptions by scholars and its iterations in various contexts. What are the ways that nationalism has naturalized itself in political and cultural discourses? Thereafter, the role of nationalism in domestic contexts is explicated. Particularly, the relationship between majority and minority are looked at within single states. The nationalism of the majority, meant to epitomize and perpetuate a collective genealogy, seems to necessarily exclude any other nationalisms within its midst. Therefore, it appears that minorities are *a priori* incompatible with a state majority. However, there are means and models by which minorities can be accommodated and empowered in national contexts. These models can, rather than dismantling nationalisms themselves, open space for constructive dialogue among groups by challenging the innate exclusivism that national movements entail. In doing so, multinational and cosmopolitan societies can begin to move toward more peaceable relations.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
SOCIOLOGY, NATIONALISM STUDIES, HUMAN RIGHTS

Despite the existence of a broad amount of scholarly work on nationhood and nationalism, the nation remains a notoriously elusive object to define. Scholars' and critics' definitions tend to be nebulous and overly broad, saying little about the substantive proclivities of a nation. According to Umut Özkırımlı (2005), "any definition of the nation legitimates some claims and delegitimizes others" (p. 15). Scholars tend to search for a definition that is either objective or subjective. Both criteria, however, fall short of a proper definition. For the purposes of this paper, Eric Hobsbawm's (1990) definition of the nation—"any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as [such]"—will be most effective (p. 8).

The end of the Cold War provided a significant demarcation in the history of nationalism as a symbol of globalization and modernization. However, even prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall or the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nationalism was changing as a political force. The rise of minority nationalisms in the mid-to-late 20th century, and their effect on the political, social, and cultural landscapes of already-extant nation-states, has therefore altered the way in which nationalism can be theorized, understood, and critically explicated. Because of the conflict between minority and majority nationalisms in multi-national states, there is no clear solution by which groups can satisfactorily attain political, territorial, cultural, or other forms of autonomy. However, there are instruments by which accommodative solutions for cooperative multinationalisms can be facilitated. This paper aims to shed light upon the nature and origins of nationalism as a state-building and citizen-rallying mechanism, its subsequent shift to a tool for national minorities to pursue their own sovereignty, and finally, how both of these ideologies can (if at all) be reconciled with one another through several liberal, democratic channels of action.

Nationalism and conventional political theory concerning nationhood and nation-states regards the nation as an eternal phenomenon. That is to say, the theorizing of the nation is predicated upon the widely-held notion that nations have always

existed and that “the existence of nation-states was simply a fact of life” in modern times (Kymlicka & Strachle, 1999, p. 68). This notion of national eternalism, however, is a product of the machinery of nationalization actively implemented and employed by states in order to naturalize the majority groups that fell under their respective jurisdictions, processes which will be further explored below. Nonetheless, many scholars of nationalism, particularly modernist scholars, have refuted this principle in their writings by enumerating the fabricated, constructed, or imagined nature of these communities (Balibar, 1996; Anderson, 1983). For example, Hobsbawm (1992) argues that nations do not construct either states or nationalisms, but rather, nationalisms and states construct nations: as the Italian statesman Massimo d’Azeglio, after the unification of Italy, aptly stated “We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians” (p. 44).

This national idea has three particular and unique stages of development: the first phase focuses upon the rediscovery of a “cultural, literary, [or] folkloric” tradition shared by a common community; the second phase focuses upon “pioneers and militants” who have purportedly made sacrifices for the collective inheritors of this tradition, thereby polemicizing the issue; the third phase sees this collective idea attain popular support from the groups that the aforementioned nationalist militants supposedly represent (Hobsbawm, 1992). Thus, a narrative is naturalized among a particular group to a degree that it seems to exist outside of history. Etienne Balibar (1996) identifies the belief in this narrative—that within a purported national community there is somehow a substantive transmission of values, experiences, goals, and interests from generation to generation—as “fictive ethnicity”. He argues that language is not enough to produce an ethnic identity, but rather, that there must be some sort of racial (somatic/psychological) feature to close the community and keep it as a self-perpetuating and undiluted genealogy.

Balibar’s conception of ethnicity, however convincing it may be, is not on its own particularly relevant in the contexts of

creating and maintaining a nation-state. How, for example, would a state be able to institutionalize itself as the representative of this community and then go on to broker its continuing endurance and vitality? The answer lies not only in the belief in a presupposed and shared past, but also—and perhaps, to a greater extent—on the willingness of such a community to share the present. In this way, the nation is “a soul, a spiritual principle,” and its continuity and livelihood is predicated upon a “daily plebiscite” for the individual, an internal referendum to ensure that one is willing to continue to share and sacrifice for those who fall within her community (Renan, 1882, p. 49).

Although there are many contentious theories on the origin of nations within historic contexts, many of which provoke a great deal of controversy, the modernist school’s conception of nationhood is, for the purposes of this paper, most pertinent. This school articulates that modernity, with its economic, technological, and social developments, is a necessary requisite for the development of national ideologies. Ernest Gellner (1983) argues that nationalism came to being in the age of industrialization, during which time the idea of mass production called for a concurrent economic system in which the workers are interchangeable: this notion of interchangeability is accomplishable primarily through the teaching of a common language (and common principles) in a public school system. Benedict Andersen (1982) asserts that the rise of print capitalism and newspaper culture resulted in the dissemination of a common language, the development of solidarity and shared values and ideas, and therefore, a national consciousness. Hobsbawm (1990) argues that as governments began to play a more important role in the daily lives of people on a mass scale, whether it be the postal service, the police, the military, or the civil service, it became clear that the state had to actively begin cultivating the loyalty of the people, particularly in order to heighten “the degree of sacrifice which could be imposed on civilians”; therefore, in order to coerce the populace into obedience, mass democratization and political

participation, as well as a robust system of national education, had to be introduced to construct a national consciousness that kept the population active and interested in the idea of the nation (p. 83). Regardless of the specific reasons behind the rise of the nation, crucially, it is contingent on the formulation of a national ideology that it can only occur through modern mechanisms.

In its early years as an ideology, though it may seem deeply paradoxical given contemporary perceptions and connotations of nationalist movements, nationalism served the classical liberal value of self-determination. Many scholars, for example, have connected the ideology variously to the French Revolution and the Polish unification movement (Hobsbawm, 1992; Liebich, 2003). In both contexts, nationalism served the purpose of enumerating and attesting to the values of a democracy on such grounds that this democracy—albeit homogeneous—was the highest pinnacle of individual self-determination. Therefore, at its very outset, nationalism was not the threat to the sovereignty of big states as it is now perceived to be. Despite the fact that “the identification of the state with one nation risked creating a counter-nationalism, [and that] the very process of its modernization made this far more probable” nationalism remained, at least in theory, a force for good, for the pursuit of the most respected values available in democratic institutions (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 93).

This liberal notion of nationalism changed in the lead-up to World War I as nationalism began to stress ethnic and linguistic qualities more strenuously as the primary unifiers of the given national community. At this point, nationalism also came under criticism, notably from a Marxist perspective, with some commentators coming to realize the divisive and volatile nature of the principle of nationalism. For example, Rosa Luxemburg, a scholar who was likely among the most opposed to nationalism and certainly one with the most radical approach to dismantling it, asserted that nationalism was no longer a progressive force: it would lead to the oppression of ethnic and cultural communities, and it would also serve to divide the proletariat by creating national

borders. Therefore, the only solution that “offered the possibility of putting an end to the ensuing barbarism,” in her perspective, was a robust internationalist system (Spencer & Wollman, 2008, p. 11).

Furthermore, and more germane to the question of minority nationalisms, Vladimir Lenin’s criticism distinguished sharply between nations that oppress and nations that are oppressed (Spencer & Wollman, 2008). Spencer and Wollman examine this distinction in relation to Lenin’s ideas on imperialism: namely, that oppressed nations have the moral imperative to assert their right to self-determination. Therefore, Lenin makes a normative distinction between different kinds of nationalisms: the nationalisms of the oppressors are so-called *bad* nationalisms, while the nationalisms of the oppressed are the aforementioned *good* nationalisms. However, “Lenin made the potentially contradictory or rather optimistic [assumption] that, once nations had been granted and asserted the right to self-determination, they would not necessarily wish to exercise it”: as history tells, in fact, one of the first goals of a newly autonomous nation is to hegemonize, homogenize, and in so doing, oppress its newly created national minorities (p. 14). Nonetheless, Lenin’s distinction between good and bad nationalisms is an important one, despite the fact that the distinction is rather hazy and problematic, because of the particular contexts in which these forms of nationalism existed in the building and destruction of other contemporaneous nation-states.

Hobsbawm’s (1990) aforementioned description of the rise of counter-nationalism—that it would, through the processes of modernization, accelerate toward a larger possibility of political problems for the big, established nation-states—is particularly relevant in the interwar period, especially in relation to Lenin’s interpretation of nationalism. Both forms of Lenin’s nationalism (good and bad, liberative and oppressive) contributed to considerable ethnic and national unrest as well as to the “mass expulsion and extermination of minorities” under the watchful

eye of Wilsonian principles of democracy, namely that functional democracy relies on the coincidence of nation and state (p. 133). The most egregious example of this was the nascent republic of Turkey, but such unrest existed throughout Europe, notably, of course, in Germany.

The post-World War II political matrix accelerated the formation of liberative and anti-imperialist nationalisms, especially under the guise of a new human rights doctrine and with the inception of the United Nations as a theoretically international body for the promotion of peace and the welfare of all people. Furthermore, the Cold War saw a bizarre polarisation of the global system, the historical effects of which still remain unclear. The systematic abatement of the Soviet Union's varied and numerous composite nations led to an "explosion of separatism in 1988-92" that Hobsbawm describes as the "unfinished business" of 1918-21, when Europe was partitioned under the Wilsonian principles (1990, p. 165). The rise of neoliberal thought in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the conceptual reappropriation of nationalism, and propagated the formation of new, supposedly legitimate nation-states: these states were formed through decolonization (as in the case of India), revolution (as in the case of the former Czechoslovakia), outside intervention (as in the case of the former Yugoslavia), or some sort of methodological syncretism of all three (Hobsbawm, 1990).

However, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the exponential rise of neoliberal and transnational capitalist dogma, and the subsequent possibility of historically unprecedented modernization and, more importantly, globalization, the forces of nationalism have reached a point of near incomprehensibility. Minority nationalism is on the rise, particularly in eastern Europe and the Balkans. The trouble with the collapse of the communist regimes in these regions is that there is not always "a 'politics of inheritance' but rather a power vacuum" into which any of the concerned ethnic or national groups will most certainly try to assert authority (Breuilley,

1993, p. 363). Therefore, many ethical questions linger concerning discrimination amongst groups who desire self-determinative rights in (or, put another way, secession for) a particular territory. While of course we should “support only state nation-building policies which respect people’s basic human rights,” there remain plenty of means by which majority nationalisms can discriminate against minority groups without violating their international human rights, including legal obligations, coercive internal migration or resettlement, gerrymandering or otherwise disempowering by means of territorial boundaries, or an official language policy (Kymlicka & Straehle, 1999, p. 74). It is therefore not enough for nation-building to merely operate within the confines of international human rights and humanitarian law. The question “Should we endorse state nation-building if it involves minority nation destroying?” seems to distill this paradox to its quintessence, and it is a question to which there is no easy answer (p. 74). While some scholars assert that the historical trajectory of nationalism as a significant and guiding political, social, and cultural force is on the (in?) decline (Breuilly, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1990), there are a great many others whose perspectives are less daring (Kymlicka & Straehle, 1999).

It is in the latter context—that nation-states and nationalism have been and will remain formidable forces in the world—that we must approach the issue of accommodating minority claims for self-rule and self-government (rather than through self-determination, which could potentially coalesce in separatist or secessionist movements). Minority accommodation, according to certain scholars such as Rainer Bauböck (2004), is a more desirable alternative to secession because of the inherent normative value and “functional requirement” of maintaining already extant nation-states’ respective territorial integrities (p. 16). Though it is most sensible to conceptualize questions of autonomy on an individual basis, rather than to broadly assume existing national borders are most appropriate, Bauböck’s theories are valuable for multinational solutions that do not require complete autonomy for

the groups in question.

The concept of accommodating national minorities within existing national regimes is by and large a concept rarely addressed in the literature of the nation-state. It is easy to enumerate the rights that such minorities are entitled to from the state, based upon relevant treaty law: “self-government, group based political representation, veto rights over issues that affect their cultural survival. . . [and potentially] official language status” (Kymlicka & Straehle, 1999, p. 77). The trouble with such a concept lies in creating accommodative systems that are simultaneously (1) robust in enabling and protecting the autonomy of the minority and (2) efficaciously incorporative into the primary state politic. Kymlicka and Straehle advocate a much more comprehensive international system that transcends ethnic, linguistic, or national communities, or a rejuvenation of current international superstructures (most prominently the United Nations). Therefore, in the views of Kymlicka and Straehle, “[t]here is no political theory about the appropriate way to draw boundaries or divide powers within multinational states, or about the forms and limits of self-government which national minorities should exercise” (p. 78). On top of this, because “democracy requires us to trust, and to make sacrifices for, those who do not share our interests and goals,” it is very difficult to trounce the convenience of belonging to a common national, ethnic, or linguistic identity, which are the easiest means of facilitating such a willing community (p. 83). The aforementioned notion of a daily plebiscite captures the critical value of these identities.

Since the time of Kymlicka and Straehle’s writing, more scholarly work has been done on the specific topics of cosmopolitanism and accommodation. To be sure, while theories of cosmopolitanism and minority accommodation remain by and large elusive to scholars, a discourse for autonomous solutions has emerged. Such solutions are ideally intended to incorporate “powers of government beyond those granted to voluntary associations in civil society” that also include “final decision-making authority”

on particular issues directly concerning the group as well as “co-decision making power with regard to changes of the existing division of tasks with central government institutions” (Bauböck 2004, p. 2). These solutions are, of course, in addition to the basic rights and liberties already enjoyed *theoretically* by minority groups that have been enumerated in international humanitarian law and are widely standardized and accepted. Accordingly, there are two divergent, though not wholly separate, critical approaches to autonomy: territorial and cultural. Territorial autonomy (TA) can manifest itself in several different concrete forms, while cultural autonomy (CA) is, at least according to Bauböck’s criticism, more nebulous in structure and symbolic in effect.

In a multinational progressive state, TA can operate through a federation, in which autonomous regions have their own systems of governance but also have a reserved role in the central government. A perfect example of such a federal mechanism is Canada, particularly with respect to the degree of TA the Quebec province enjoys. A similar territorial arrangement is that of a federacy—a proportional exchange of power and autonomy in which a small group within the whole is granted greater autonomy than the other groups within of the population while accepting a smaller role in the larger polity: for example, a parliamentary quota system (Bauböck, 2004, p. 2).

Conversely, a CA system is rooted more in the symbolic representation of groups. One CA arrangement is a “consociational democracy” under which “the emphasis is on power-*sharing* at the level of central government institutions . . . rather than on devolution, which creates a vertical *division* of powers” (Bauböck, 2004, p. 2). A consociational democracy is an effective transitional state but, given the historic example of Belgium, Bauböck claims it’s not a functional one in terms of disarming national conflict. There is of course a substantive dissemination of power under CA solutions, but because we can assume that the group in question is not a geographically or territorially contiguous one (otherwise, TA would be a more likely solution) and is instead granted to the

majority population dispersed across the entire state, it is difficult to construct concrete mechanisms of autonomy without some sort of territorial arrangement.

In most cases, then, TA solutions are preferable to CA solutions on the grounds that TA solutions make the maintenance of cultural integrity much easier for the minority group by virtue of: the group's geographic continuity; that CA does not provide self-government in the sense of a homogeneous self; and that the requirement of self-identification under CA solutions is "coercive and illiberal" (Bauböck 2004, p. 13). Indeed, examining the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina—in which representatives from the three main ethnic groups of the state are elected together to serve a two-year term, each representative serving as chairman for 8 months—it appears to be an effective means of power-sharing in a multinational setting. However, this has in fact served to deepen ethnic divides, as members of each community are only allowed to vote for candidates representing their respective community. For example, a Croat is only allowed to vote for Croat presidential candidates, rather than for Serb or Bosniak candidates. There is thus a distillation and entrenchment of a discourse of ethnic insularity, creating a delicate political situation fraught with interethnic tensions. Therefore, it seems that CA by and large serves better purposes as an interim measure, rather than as a permanent one, in attempts to create an infrastructure for successful TA.

It must, however, be acknowledged that TA solutions are not without problems. Not only do they endanger the economic autonomy of the group by potentially confining it to an economically unhealthy region—such an arrangement is, as aforementioned by Kymlicka and Straehle (1999), legally plausible under the current international system—but these solutions also increase the risk of separatism and secession by creating a set of borders and boundaries which could easily devolve under the right circumstances (Bauböck, 2004). Thus it is clear that neither territorial nor cultural solutions provide an effective remedy for

accommodating minority nations. How, then, can a cosmopolitan state exist without the appropriate mechanisms to empower the composite groups?

The answer, it seems, does not lie within nationhood or nationalist regimes. “Stability in multinational federations depends on weakening the appeal of nationalist ideologies . . . Long-term stability in multinational federations will only be achieved when minorities regard federal citizenship as adding something important to their national affiliation” (Bauböck, 2004, p. 21). Though it is certainly a bit clumsy to expect the imminent decline of nationalism, as both Hobsbawm and Breuilly do, it is a far more reasonable expectation that decompressed and unhostile environments will be created to foster a sense of fraternity among conflicting national groups. Recent theories that take into account the complexity and nuance of post-Soviet nations and nationalism acclaim the efficacy that such solutions would have.

In other words, states do not have to give up nations, but nations will have to accept the coincidence of multiple nations within the state. This monumental task is beyond the array of the international and transnational mechanisms that we have presently, which indefatigably perpetuate the notion of the nation-state, and so require a large-scale, comprehensive restructuring, firstly, of these international bodies. For example, participation in the UN, which is almost exclusively tailored toward nation-states, without regard for stateless nations or national minorities, delegitimizes these groups. Furthermore, it is crucial for already-extant nation-states to embrace multicultural notions of political, cultural, and social life such that national minorities and their contributions to the larger national narrative are glorified and appreciated rather than condemned and subjugated. Lastly, where possible, concrete mechanisms of autonomy, which may include the implementation of a federative system, a transitional consociational democracy, or other such concepts, should be introduced wherever possible in order to ensure a robust and comprehensive incorporation of minority groups into the social, cultural, economic, and political

frameworks of society. While these steps call for great expenditures from local, state, and international superstructures, the value of accommodation in a multinational society to facilitate peaceful inter-minority cooperation is unparalleled.

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# THE CHICK LIT OF HEIAN JAPAN

SUBVERSION IN FEMININE  
APPRAISAL

BY ALEX KAHN

The Heian period of late classical Japan is notable for the literature its noblewomen produced, especially because the words women said were taken even less seriously than the words they wrote; for the men of the Heian imperial court, a woman's "no" almost always meant "maybe." How can we read these women's literary output as resistant to male sexual dominance through its formation of an active female sexuality without reading them into a contemporary discourse of political consciousness, rights, and protest? I examine Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari* and Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* for the ways they transgress the limits on feminine sexual looking that are set up by the ancient Japanese creation myths in *Kojiki*.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
EAST ASIAN STUDIES, PSYCHOANALYSIS,  
GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

## FEMININE AUTHORSHIP

Between the 8th and 12th centuries, the capital of what would later be called classical Japan was Heian (now modern day Kyoto). The imperial court of the Heian period is notable for its sexually-egalitarian writing practices, if not for its egalitarian sexual relationships. This is evidenced by that fact that two women attendants of the Heian rear court produced works now cited as shining examples of classical Japanese literature, and of literature in general. Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* is a compilation of witty and biting observations and a detailed record of the goings-on in the Heian court. It would not be a stretch to call her the Heian H.L. Mencken. Shonagon's contemporary, Murasaki Shikibu, is known for *Genji Monogatari*, or *The Tale of Genji*, which is an epic (but also proto-novelistic) narrative of the torrid affairs of a handsome and fictitious courtier, the eponymous Genji. Ironically, these forms of literature were only later identified as worthy of serious attention; at the time of their writing, they were thought of in the way many currently think of romance novels and were meant only for women of the rear court to read aloud to one another. What might be the import of a literature for and by women in a period when women lacked sexual agency?

## LOGIC OF THE SCREEN

It seems relevant, if perhaps only superficially clever, to preface a discussion of works by two Heian women in this way: The Western scholarship on Heian has described women in the imperial court as being hidden behind screens. The scholars who write this implicitly join the men from whom these women are said to be hidden (Shonagon, 1991). This is of interest because, although it is impossible to know exactly how Heian women felt about this, it is clear today that from the women's side of

the screen, it was the men who were hidden.

There are, of course, many historical facts suggesting that the logic in place in Heian was not one of reciprocity between the sexes. Men controlled polygamy; much of the evidence shows that it was the men who chose where, when, how, and with whom (Sarra, 1999). For these reasons, it seems as though my criticism of most scholars' seemingly male perspective is moot. Despite the fact that the screens were between the men and women of Heian courts, the two realms that those screens divided were not balanced. It probably is more appropriate to say that the women were hidden from men, for that was the purpose of the screen: one architectural tool in an array of devices for preserving gender inequality.

However, there are moments in Heian literature when the concrete materiality of the screens becomes undeniable: rather than functioning like panoptic one-way glass, they allow women to peek out and look at men in the same way that men peek in and look at women. And even more often, there are moments when the woman's gaze objectifies the man in the same sexually-possessing way that the man's gaze objectifies the woman. This suggests that women and men objectify one another in a reciprocity that subverts the power relations that limit women's sexual freedom. Indeed, for the narrators of Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* and Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*, men hold visual interest. They do not merely possess objects or characteristics worthy of attention; they are objects worthy of attention. This upsets the logic of having and being that in many cases serves to distinguish between man and woman. I want to argue that the Heian rear courts become the site of this upset: Reading Murasaki aloud helps to construct the object of a female gaze, and reading Shonagon helps to construct that gaze's subject. The lustful joining of this subject of feminine appraisal to its objects functions to overturn the precedent set by the ancient text, *Kojiki*, to reemphasize the double logic of the screen, and to empower feminine desire.

There is no doubt a way of reading Shonagon and Mu-

rasaki's works as critiques disguised as lower forms of literature, such as romance or gossip. Indeed, it is interesting to imagine Heian women in the rear court reading aloud to one another stories of Genji's forced intercourse with the young Murasaki by way of sharing a private protest of the regularity of events like the one depicted. Certainly, this reading is a convincing one, especially if we take into account descriptions of Heian court salons as women's matriarchal "rooms of their own," in which texts were made by and for women (Okada, 1991, p. 163).

However, it is important to remember the extent to which these works perform a critical function not *in spite* of their concern with romance and gossip, but precisely insofar as they are titillating, and as they do engage the romantic imaginations of their female readers. Okada's reminds us that *monogatari* (tales) like the *Genji* are by nature read aloud, which introduces a degree of difficulty in attributing their authorship to a mind of singular genius and carefully critical agenda. Okada (1991) writes, "It is not, therefore, because the *Genji* texts result from an author's 'genius' or represent a 'higher' level of 'development' that the mechanics of their narrating are complex" (p. 181). In short, we cannot guarantee that the critical power of these works necessarily results from authorial intention. Therefore, rather than seeking transgression merely in what the works say (that is, in the events of the narrative), we should look at what the works do (provide their female readers with arousing and transgressive vantage points on the events in the narrative). It is by giving their female readers a visual language with which to desire that these works unwittingly empower; they stage the pleasures of the sexually-possessive feminine gaze. As D'Etcheverry (2007) notes, texts like the *Genji* were written as aphrodisiacs for the men whom powerful fathers hoped would court their daughters; women read the texts aloud in the rear courts to entertain not only themselves, but also the men that came to visit. My ironic hope is that we might read them as inadvertently, though fortuitously, aphrodisiacal to the women as well.

## KOJIKI, GENJI, PILLOW BOOK

**K***ojiki* helps to set the stage for the interplay of visibility and sexuality in the works of Murasaki and Shonagon by providing a backdrop against which their texts play. Even as early as this ancient Japanese creation myth, in the section describing the mating of sister and brother deities, Izanami and Izanagi respectively, there is emphasis on the impropriety of feminine appraisal. After Izanami and Izanagi agree to have intercourse, and to enact that intercourse by very performatively encountering one another from the opposite sides of a pillar, Izanagi realizes a crucial element has been left unplanned: it has not been determined who will speak first in appraisal of the other's beauty. It is too late, however; as a result of this oversight, Izanami is the one to speak first: "How good a lad!" she exclaims. Feminine appraisal has objectified the man in advance of his having objectified the woman. The fatal consequences of this error are not only sexual but also social and political (Kimura, 1998, p. 154). Later in *Kojiki*, we discover that as a result of this impropriety, the progeny of the brother-sister union were deformed. It is only after the siblings perform the sex act in accordance with rules of propriety that they are able to produce offspring healthy enough to become the islands of Yamato (ancient Japan). We can identify this, as well as many other moments in *Kojiki*, as foundational to a logic of one-sided masculine appraisal as the initiating point of all proper sexual unions. Further, we can look to *Kojiki* and other early Japanese texts for the foundations of the association of looking with sexual possession (Sarra, 1999).

Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari* undoes this convention of the total dominance of masculine appraisal by providing instances of judgment of male objects by female subjects. Moments in the text make Genji seem more like Justin Bieber than Don Juan. In the chapter entitled "Heartvine," we hear of women of many ranks "jostling and shoving into one another in the struggle to see" Genji's radiant presence at the Kamo festival, in what is

“not on the whole considered good form.” Amid “deafening” “sighs of admiration” from his daughter’s attendants, Prince Shikibu (a fictional character bearing no relation to the *Genji*’s author, Murasaki) notes how *Genji* has matured to dazzle the eye. It should be noted that we hear, presumably from the point of view of the lady-in-waiting narrator, that the high courtiers were handsome and well-dressed, but none as much as Genji (Murasaki, 1976, p. 162). Genji incites in women of all classes a desire so strong that it causes them to transgress their usual roles. The prince’s use of the idea of maturation makes Genji seem like a quantity, like produce, or like the young girl Murasaki (again, no relation to the author) whose maturation Genji so carefully monitors later in the novel before he plucks her from the vine, as it were. Genji is an object to be compared with other similar objects, in the same way that Murasaki is an object to be compared with her aunt Fujitsubo.

Elsewhere in the *Genji* we find our hero in similarly “feminized” roles; Sarra (1999) reminds us of one such instance in the chapter called “The Wizard,” where Genji attempts to avoid the gaze of others while mourning the now dead Murasaki. Similarly, Kimura’s (1998) scholarly discussion of the character Kaoru, while intending to draw attention to contradictory pictures of Kaoru that she argues could not possibly both be true unless explained by the omission of the Meshodo (or mistress) in *Genji*, ends up painting a picture of Kaoru reminiscent of the earlier Bieber-esque one of Genji: In the chapter called “His Perfumed Highness,” we learn that Kaoru has numerous fleeting affairs, but also that he has abandoned his relationships with women. The result is to make him irresistible to “comely young serving women,” who flock to his side and, “perversely,” swoon at the slightest token of his interest in them. “It seemed wholly unlikely that he would ever urge himself upon a lady against her wishes.” These descriptors make Kaoru seem not a little like the Lady of a chivalric, European courtly love, one very different from the courtly love of Heian by which so many women were forced to engage in sex acts with men because they just happened to be around. This ideal man, who

somehow occupies a middle space of being able to have *enough* sexual contact with women to make himself seem *worth* pursuing but *not enough* to make himself seem *not worth* pursuing, and who, moreover, would never pursue you, seems to be the impossible product of the pornographic imagination of collective rear court fantasy. This is a man idealized not (or not only) for the standards of other men, but for those of women. This fantastic figure is what makes the *Genji* fun to read, and he is also what encourages its female readers to say, as Izanami once did, “how good a lad!”

To be sure, Shonagon’s *Pillow Book* also provides many such examples of the object of feminine appraisal: The text abounds with descriptions of well-dressed courtiers, well-behaved lovers, and, perhaps most interestingly, well-coiffed and sweet-faced little boys. However, Shonagon also offers a glimpse of the subject of such appraisal, and as such, she models the kind of looking that Izanami did; she speaks first. To be sure, it should be noted that impossibilities of translation make various expressions of Shonagon’s “subjectivity” rather tenuous. For example, it seems notable that she says “I enjoy” and “I enjoy watching” as often as she does (Shonagon, 1991, p. 34). Because of the grammatical structure of the pre-modern language in which the book was written, however, it’s difficult to intuit what kind of “I” functioned here. Could it be that the book merely says that “it is enjoyable to watch”? It is possible that the subject is present only ambiguously.

Other instances of such linguistic ambiguity prove more productive for our reading of Shonagon, however: Sarra (1999) points to a sentence in Shonagon’s defense of the court lady’s seemingly superficial lifestyle, which, in its double reading, seems to capture the inevitable two-sidedness of the visual that her work restores to the screen: “There are very few people in the world who do not get to look at her/ who she does not get to see” (p. 225). It is not at all the point that, reversing the existing order, women should necessarily get to see men without ever being seen themselves. Rather, upsetting the order entirely, it is that men *should not* get to see women without ever being seen themselves.

Sarra (1999) argues that not only does Shonagon encourage woman to see and to be seen, thereby encouraging them to gain knowledge about the world, but she also puts her own connoisseurship on display, effectively letting her own gaze become the object of others' desire. While watching from her carriage at smaller Shirakawa, Shonagon catalogues the dress of the men before her, who are, in this case, seen without seeing their observer. She compares their appearance as a group to a field of pink flowers, and notes a particularly handsome specimen by name, despite the fact that she feels she probably shouldn't record that information; if she doesn't, how will she remember who it was who looked so lovely on that day? Once again, she writes that she enjoys watching. I wish to emphasize that her motivation in all of this looking is pleasure. The search for visual pleasure, rather than for justice, is what meets Shonagon's gaze as she watches the proceedings from afar. Whatever transgression does emerge, it emerges as an aftereffect, controlled neither by the men nor by Shonagon herself.

## CONCLUSION: PLEASURE BEFORE DUTY

Ultimately, I wish to emphasize that the emergence of a proto-feminism through these literary works does not rely on a sense of duty to represent femininity or on a sense of solidarity with other women, or at least, not as much as it might on the pleasures of reciprocity. I believe that Heian yields other areas of study where this case might be made. Visibility is not the only field in which this sort of reciprocity emerges; in "Chinese Learning," Fukimori argues, contrary to dominant histories, that there is evidence, especially in Shonagon and Murasaki, of women's knowledge of Chinese poetry and calligraphy, or *zue*. It is on this account that LaMarre (2000) can argue that, in addition to men being able to write in modified Chinese kanji, or in a

feminine hand, women also can write in the original characters as well, in what was known as the masculine hand. Effectively, the sexes can write in “drag” as one another. Again, however, what is to be emphasized here is that Shonagon’s use of *zue*, to take hers as an example, seems more motivated by her desire for approval from her peers in the rear court and surprise from male courtiers than by any explicit feelings of responsibility to transgress gender roles, or of any mass political gains made as a result of such a transgression. As Shonagon makes clear enough through her various conservative aesthetic and social critiques of impropriety, she’s not above a rather reactionary political perspective if it brings her pleasure.

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# HALLYU DOIN'

AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
KOREAN WAVE

BY ABIGAIL LAUREL

This paper defines the Korean Wave (Hallyu) in a global setting and explains its components, which are mainly Korean drama (K-drama) and Korean pop music (K-pop). The First Korean Wave is initially explained and related to the creation of a “Pan-Asian” identity. Next, the Second Korean Wave, or Neo-Korean wave is introduced along with its crossover to global markets. The paper explores this cultural phenomenon through the aspects of nationalism, globalization, technological advancement, social networking services (SNS), cultural hybridization, and the development of audiovisual-based societies. The aesthetic of Korean popular culture and where it fits into the global market is explored through examples of contemporary pop culture events. The importance of technology for creating consumer communities is emphasized and the possibility for an image based society as the new global economy is addressed through examples provided by the Korean Wave. Finally, the future of Korean popular culture is examined, evaluating how long it will continue and how it advances the global community towards dream societies.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
HALLYU - WOOD, K - POP, CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION,  
SOCIAL NETWORK SERVICES

The spread of Korean popular culture is known as the Korean Wave, or Hallyu. This cultural phenomenon uses advanced technology, visual appeal, and creative cultural hybridization to create a space in which youth can assert their identities and challenge the customs of past generations in Korea, as well as in the rest of the world. This paper discusses the aspects of the Korean Wave that are currently spreading and the means by which they spread, but also how this exciting popular culture phenomenon is much more than just a pop show. The most important questions surrounding the Korean Wave are about its cautions and its future. In this essay, I will analyze those questions, as well as discuss critical aspects of the Korean Wave, such as globalization, technology, and image-based societies.

As a recent contribution to the global sphere, the Korean wave has enjoyed wide global exposure over the last decade (Babakhani, 2004). Different nations have different names for it—in China, it's Hanliu, or “Hanguo Re” (Korea Fever), in Japan it's Hanryu, and in Korea it's known as Hallyu. The term refers to the concept that popular culture, including dramas, pop music, iconic celebrities, and movies, has become a major South Korean export. The Chinese press coined the term “Korean Wave” in the 1990s to refer to the popularity of Korean pop culture in China (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011). The first Korean Wave started in the 1990s when Korean dramas (K-dramas) became very popular in Japan and China. At the core of this wave were dramas, but some Korean pop (K-pop) bands also became popular at this time among teens in Japan, China, and Taiwan. Later, popularity spread to Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Maliangkay, 2006). Korean pop culture has become an integral part of Korea's national image. It is a major success both commercially and artistically in domestic as well as international markets (Babakhani, 2004). In fact, Korean pop culture has become so popular that South Korea has been referred to as the Hollywood of the East, or “Hallyu-wood” (Farrar, 2010).

According to Shim (2006), the Korean Wave is indebted to

the media liberalization that swept across Asia in the 1990s. Dator and Seo (2004) argue that perhaps the Korean Wave is the long-awaited flowering of post-colonial Asian artistic expression. Most sources agree that the winning combination of attractive celebrities, impressive presentation, quality of technology application, and lack of profanity and sex are what make K-dramas and K-pop so successful among Asian people. The most appealing quality of Korean artists themselves is that they are skilled in singing, acting, dancing, and performing with great ease and style, and are also well trained in different languages and cultures to be able to appeal to different Asian countries. Korean pop culture became so popular in Asia because Asians see it as cool and trendy while maintaining conventional Asian values and sentiments, such as family values, Confucianism, and long-standing traditions (Dator & Seo, 2004). Because of this, Korean popular culture is more relatable for Asian audiences and has become more popular in Asia than Western popular culture (Farrar, 2010).

Whatever the reason for its notable success, the Korean Wave is a vision of a modernity in which the youth play the most important role. South Korea is seen as a country in transition, not only because it has changed from a cultural importer to a major cultural exporter, but also because the old, conservative generation is being displaced by the newly affluent and young generation (Bang Singapore Pte Ltd., 2009). Some say Korea's dynamic young generation is the engine behind the success of Hallyu. The power of the youth is at its strongest now because South Korea's newfound economic prosperity and political democracy have allowed its creativity and imagination to blossom (Dator & Sea, 2004). Therefore it comes as no surprise that most media in the Korean Wave is directed at youth. For example, Korean dramas depict lifestyles that the youth of today dream of, with romantic love stories and luxurious living conditions. Almost all dramas that are exported from Korea are of the contemporary, young, urban romance category (Huat, 2006).

K-dramas portray love relationships in a way that is

more tender, meaningful, and emotional than sexual. The quality of intense romantic passion without the over-sexuality makes K-dramas popular throughout Asia. This is an example of Korean popular culture remaining distinctively Korean while utilizing widespread values of drama to appeal to everyone, even audiences outside of Asia. Therefore, even if one does not know anything about or understand Korean culture, one can still enjoy and appreciate it (See [www.kpop-jpop.com](http://www.kpop-jpop.com)).

K-pop music stars are also uniquely youth-oriented as well as globally appealing because they have a youthful energy that is fresh but unthreatening to fans (Park, 2011). They have become widely popular because their styles are easy for fans to imitate. But one of the most appealing aspects of K-pop music is that each song has a specific look, feel, and dance that makes it unique. This adds a fun dimension to the works and contributes to the popularity of Korean singers overseas.

In addition to dramas and pop music, “b-boying” is another new form of artistic expression that has become a huge hit in South Korea and neighboring Asian countries. B-boys, or hip-hop breakdancers, are great examples of the dynamism of South Korea’s youth. B-boys embody the kind of dynamic, dexterous, and youthful excellence for which the Korea Wave has come to be known. One reason b-boying has become so popular is because the movements expressed with the body can transcend borders and appeal to Korea’s image-conscious youth (Lee, 2008). Hip-hop dance has been a welcomed import in South Korea. The explosive development of South Korea’s hip-hop dancing is similar to South Korea’s sharp global ascendance in popular culture. B-boy crews are known to practice on the lowdown until they are at such a high level of technical and performance skill that when they come out to the public, they shock everybody. Similarly, the unexpected success of Hallyu is astonishing people worldwide. According to the 2008 documentary film *Planet Bboy*, “Korea is spawning new super hero killers. They’re just inspiring people to go ridiculously crazy.”

South Korea is flourishing in cultural mediums with far-reaching economic and creative impact. Discovery Channel's series "Hip Korea" (2009) refers to Seoul as an inspiringly dynamic city that overflows with creative expression. Shim (2006) reports that to the general public of South Korea, Hallyu is "a surprising national achievement" (p. 28). All this achievement has led to a great deal of national pride. The Korean Wave's success is a testament to the growth of South Korea's industry, the ingenuity of its producers, and the strength of support from the general Korean public (Babakhani, 2004). Because of the Hallyu phenomenon, Korea is experiencing many benefits such as an increased demand for other Korean products like electronics and cosmetics, and a drastic increase in foreign tourists visiting the country (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011).

In addition to this economic success, Hallyu has significantly improved the international image of South Korea and social recognition of Koreans in general (Huat & Iwabuchi, 2008). By accepting Korea's popular culture, Asian nations show that their views of South Korea have improved. Dator and Seo (2004) claim that to its neighboring countries, South Korea is "viewed as a prominent model to follow or catch up to both culturally and economically" (p. 5).

The consumption of Korean drama by the Japanese is indicative of how Korean popular culture has spread throughout Asia and improved Korea's international reputation. Japanese consumption of K-drama has provided the fans an opportunity to take another look at Japan's historical relationship with Korea. Because Japanese women love Korean drama so much, they are able to view their Korean neighbors in a more positive light. This shows that the success of East Asian popular culture can join with politics to break through previous political barriers between ethnic and national groups and improve transnational cultural sharing (Huat & Iwabuchi, 2008). One Korean diplomat said Korean dramas and songs had done more for international relations in less than a year than diplomats had done with decades of effort

(Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011). In a panel discussion, Jung-Sook Park, a former K-drama actress turned cultural ambassador, described Hallyu as an “organic power” with the potential to reduce cultural tensions across East Asia and contribute to a new regional identity, or a pan- East Asian identity (Waite, 2007).

Pan-Asianism is a movement for Asian nations to create a united regional identity. The Korean Wave provides Asians with the assurance that in a world of increasing globalization, Asian identity remains strong. East Asian countries are united while concerns of Western cultural imperialism are displaced by celebration of the arrival of East Asian pop culture in the global entertainment market (Huat, 2006). One example of this new pan-Asian identity is personified by the members of popular K-pop girl groups Miss A and 2NE1, who have members not only from Korea, but also China and the Philippines (Jeong, 2011). Many other popular K-pop bands also have mixed race groups. This is evidence of the power of the Korean Wave to unite East Asian countries.

The strength garnered from this East Asian collectivism enables Korean popular culture to create a presence that can co-exist with long time United States cultural domination of the global media industry. Koreans use global popular cultural forms such as drama and music to express their local sentiment and culture, but these mediums have also come to appeal to audiences outside of East Asia. The popularity of Hallyu’s growth in the West is due to Koreans’ ability to skillfully blend conventional Western and Asian values in pop culture, creating a vision of modernity (Shim, 2006). While Asian audiences enjoy being able to relate to K-dramas, Western audiences enjoy the refreshing humor, fanciful plots, and sincerity portrayed by K-dramas (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011).

In South Korea and its neighboring countries, there is an ongoing negotiation between the Western and non-Western cultures that makes the Korean Wave phenomenon an interesting case study in the context of transnational communications. The struggle against Western media saturation that Korean pop

culture must navigate provides insights on a level of globalization that cannot be found in the United States. American culture is too dominant to have the problem of struggling with takeover from a non-Western culture, and therefore cannot attain the global vantage point that Korean pop culture has (Dator & Seo, 2004). The level of modernity created by the Korean Wave is caused by the international struggle it embodies, otherwise known as hybridization. This cultural hybridization involved in Korean popular culture is how Korea is making major advancements in globalization and improving transnational culture-sharing between East and West. One way that Koreans innovatively utilize hybridization is by combining Asian languages and cultures and Western language and culture in music. Korean pop songs often have parts that are in English, and some recent songs directed at the American market are entirely in English. By mixing East and West, this hybridization works toward sustaining local identities in the global context.

One might argue that K-pop culture is not original and should not be interpreted as such. But this argument only demonstrates the hybridized nature of K-pop culture. It is not a completely original culture, but instead should be recognized as a “transborder phenomenon” and interpreted comparatively to historical predecessors, such as American pop or Japanese pop (J-pop) (Lee, 2005). Instead of taking credit for making something new, Korean artists take pride in utilizing globally popular trends and making them their own. Cultural hybridization can be seen in the way Koreans appropriate global popular cultural forms to express their local sentiments and culture. This form of redevelopment is a new hybrid technology. Though the ideas behind the products are not new, these hybridized cultural products are in fact a relatively new cultural construction (Lee, 2005).

Jeong (2011) states, “Because K-pop songs have such diverse backgrounds, they are that much more likely to be accepted internationally” (p. 8). For example, most Korean singers record their albums in the local languages of whatever country to which

they are marketing their album. This is not common practice in the United States or any other countries. The success of Hallyu is the latest cultural sign that audiences are becoming transnational (Ireland, 2007). This hybridization provides an example of how cultural change occurs and how new cultures are established. Contemporary Korea No. 1 (2011) states, “The Korean Wave is not just ‘Korean,’ but a byproduct of clashing and communication among several different cultures” (p. 15). Because of this, the Korean Wave is able to act as a vehicle for communication between very diverse cultures, contributing to globalization.

The effects of globalization are much more prominent in the second Korean Wave than in the first. The second wave, sometimes referred to as the “Neo-Korean Wave,” began in 2010 with Korean popular culture expanding outside of Asia. Korean pop has begun spreading to audiences in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. This wave, instead of focusing on Korean dramas, is centered on Korean pop music. However, “the barrier between TV dramas and pop music is slowly but surely coming down” (Jeong, 2011, p. 4). K-pop stars often act in K-dramas, such as popular drama “Dream High.” In “Dream High,” stars from the old Korean Wave come together with the new, young stars.

In the Neo-Korean Wave, K-pop’s break into American markets is becoming much more apparent. For example, the edgy girl group 2NE1 represents Korea in MTV Iggy’s Best New Band Competition and getting a lot of exposure to Western markets. A caption under a video posted by MTV Iggy of 2NE1’s hit song “I Am the Best” reads, “Get ready for 2NE1’s global takeover” (See [www.mtviggy.com](http://www.mtviggy.com)). MTV Iggy also describes 2NE1 as “breaking grounds at the forefront of the international K-pop craze” because “they’ve made a reputation for themselves as mind-blowingly innovative” (What is K-Pop?, 2009). They even compare 2NE1 to Lady Gaga and Nicki Minaj.

Another example of K-pop getting greater global exposure is popular boy group BIGBANG in the running for World Wide

Act in the MTV European Music Awards (EMA). MTV EMA (2011) reports that BIGBANG recently had the first K-pop album to reach the top 10 in the United States iTunes chart.

K-pop is globally appealing because it is music of fusion, as previously discussed. Korean music producers try to craft songs by taking trends from different countries, blending appealing melodies, strong beats, and good hooks that get stuck in the listener's head. On top of that, the high standard for sound quality sets Korean pop music above other foreign pop music (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011).

The widespread globalization of K-pop is a new development. The first official debuts of Korean pop performances on a European stage were in Paris in June of 2011. Tens of thousands of fans, mostly in their teens or 20s, came from all over Europe, including Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Latvia, and Serbia. These fans shouted the names of each singer, sang along to the songs in Korean, and followed the dance moves with the performers.

Most recently the impact of Hallyu in the United States was seen on October 23, 2011 when SM Entertainment held the first concert of an Asian pop group performing in Madison Square Garden. In a review of the concert, Benjamin for Billboard (2011) reports, "K-pop officially hit New York." At the sold out show, seven pop acts performed, including BoA, Kangta, Girls' Generation, f(x), SHINee, Super Junior, and TVXQ. Kangta, one of the solo performers, stated between acts, "We would like to have this opportunity, if there was any wall between the West and East, to take this opportunity to squash this wall."

Also in a review of the concert, Caramanica of the New York Times (2011) writes about the seven featured groups, "any one of which any American reality TV talent show or major label A&R worth its salt would be thrilled to have discovered." Regarding K-pop he reports, "American teen-pop at its peak has never been this productive." These reports show the beginning and the potential of the impact that K-pop is having on the United

States market.

Other American artists are also recognizing the potential of hybridization portrayed in Korean music and contacting to collaborate. For example, will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas is eager to receive Korean pop music. will.i.am is excited about an album he made in collaboration with 2NE1 that will soon be released. Regarding the project he states, “The plan is to make someone from Korea big in every country, not just in Korea” (will.i.am, 2011).

Recently, popular super girl group Girls’ Generation released their first English single in the United States, “The Boys.” T.O.P., a Korean singer from BIGBANG, just became the new face for Calvin Klein, and the entire BIGBANG group starred in an ad for The North Face. These are just a few of the many examples of Korean pop culture making an appearance in the United States markets, proving that the Korean Wave’s use of advanced cultural hybridization has led to a major advancement in globalization.

In addition, Hallyu has both intensified and changed the way audiences, especially youth, consume media products. The youth of today have become sophisticated consumers with high standards for quality, so it is therefore not surprising that they would turn to Korean pop culture products that meet that criteria. The surface impact of K-pop culture on the youth is apparent in the use of the images of Korean celebrities in their everyday lives, such as decorations on backpacks and notebooks and on the walls of their rooms. In this way, the consumption of Korean pop culture can affect the personality and life trajectory of the consumer. Shim (2006) believes the way “audiences can identify themselves with what they see is most important in their construction of pleasure from media consumption” (p. 333).

As previously stated, Korean dramas are popular in Asia because of their ability to touch the right chords of conventional Asian sentiments. But as these dramas and other pop culture media begin to circulate more broadly both within and outside of Asia, more people are exposed to these media, and are forming a sense

of living in the shared time and common experience of modernity. People begin to form communities in which they can discuss and share with each other in relation to the media. As Huat (2006) reports, “the avid consumer often seeks ways to intensify the pleasure of consumption through active engagements with others similarly disposed” (p. 36). These communities formed around the consumption of media are called consumer communities (Huat, 2006).

The consumer communities become a network of active fans and occasional consumers, existing beneath official international relations, but are nonetheless the key link between pop culture space and public space. Huat and Iwabuchi (2008) call the interactions between Korean pop culture consumers “meaning-making” activities. According to them, analysis of pop culture circulation demonstrates the effects pop culture has on the imagination, meaning-making, meaning-changing, and negotiation of differences.

Korean popular culture therefore has an emotional and psychological impact on its consumers. The psychological and emotional effect of Korean pop culture is intensified by the pop culture sphere, which has expanded into an engaging public sphere where interactions with like-minded fans take place. In this way, not only has Korean popular culture facilitated individual identity formation, it has also facilitated community formation, in which fans help each other build identities, shifting the relationship from consumer consuming product to consumer engaging with consumer. While Korean pop culture is based on commercial consumerism, this consumerism has transformed into a network of influential personal interactions.

In order to begin an exploration of the full social and intrapersonal effects resulting from the Korean Wave, there must first be an understanding of the greatest catalyst for its expanse and development: technology, specifically the Internet. Koreans are so involved with the development of technology that CNN reporter LuStout (2011) describes South Korea as the “most

wired population on the planet” where the sense of “gotta-have-it technolust” makes it “the land where tomorrow reigns.” In their series, “Hip Korea,” the Discovery Channel (2009) states, “In Seoul, digital is more than just a playground. For the youth of Korea, it’s a way of life.” Perhaps one reason for the pride the youth of Korea take in the Internet is that it liberates them from the strict ways of older generations (Dator & Seo, 2004).

In the Neo-Korean Wave, the utilization of the Internet and social media has accelerated the speed at which the Korean Wave has spread so much so that there can be no comparison to the first Korean Wave (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011). The innovative transformations in technology have dramatically accelerated and deepened the impact of Korean popular culture throughout more of the globe than ever before. These days, most Korean fans first come into contact with or consume Korean media through the Internet. Because K-pop content has become so web-friendly, it spreads more easily than the content of the first Korean Wave. This transcendence is evidenced by the emergence of social networking services (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. SNS have altered K-pop marketing strategies (Jeong, 2011).

Consumer communities are generally too ephemeral to stabilize into effective organizations in civil society, so the Internet is an important instrument for such consumer community engagements (Huat, 2006). The instantaneous power of media communications makes it easy for consumers to engage with each other because it enables what happens in one place to have instant impact on others in another place economically, politically, technologically, and culturally (Huat & Iwabuchi, 2008).

To research the consumer communities that form through Internet culture, I examined one form of SNS blogs, specifically Tumblr. Examining the social network structure of K-pop bloggers was an important step to understanding what sort of media and social space it represents (Paolillo, 2008).

Many young people, both Korean and non-Korean, are

so invested in Korean popular culture that they feel the need to compile all their favorite aspects of it in a blog (or sometimes multiple blogs) and share the blog with the world. To join this vast consumer community, I first created a Tumblr where I posted only Korean popular culture related content and followed only blogs that mainly posted Korean pop culture related posts. Identification of the relationship between social network and content required a collection of a large sample of Tumblrs. I followed about 50 other k-pop blogs for this experiment. By creating this Tumblr, I was able to connect to a large social network of K-pop fans, photo editors, and GIF and meme creators.

Bloggers post as much available content as possible about Korean groups, music videos, songs, dance moves, slang, dramas, movies, and fashion. For example, the loyal fans post on major events that happens in their favorite stars' lives. New songs are celebrated with lyrics translated into several different languages and animated GIFs are made of the newest and best dance moves that come with the new songs. Bloggers can also learn about Korean culture by exploring others' blogs, or people can directly ask each other questions involving K-pop trivia or personal interests.

Although this K-pop consumer sphere is not alienating, it is fairly tightly knit with inside jokes, themes, and phrases, that someone visiting the blogs for the first time would not immediately understand. In order to comprehend many of the posts, one must explore relationships between bloggers as well as research the more popular K-pop stars. Some blogs are more useful than others for this research, as there are many dedicated to particular artists, groups, or dramas. Other blogs are specific to themes such as Korean fashion, stationary, or photography.

Mystified by the time and effort fans put into their blogs and celebration of K-pop, I asked some of the creators of the most popular K-pop blogs why they love K-pop and what it means to them. The answers were varied and speckled with emoticons.

Some people seemed too mesmerized by Korean popular culture to be able to give me real reasons. For example,

asiankpoplover responded,

I don't really know how to tell you, I don't know why I love K-pop, I just do...when I saw K-pop singers and groups I just started really liking the songs and bands and everything else about it. For some odd reason, K-pop is really important to me. I never thought about it ever until you asked.

Other bloggers were a bit more certain of their reasons. One blogger popular for her photo edits, smile-seoul, responded,

Korean Music has really changed my whole life & knowing myself better. I edit kpop/photoediting because it's my interest & improve my photo editing skills while enjoying things I like to edit. I really like editing to asian culture and related stuff, it's so inspiring \*o\* [sic].

One blogger expressed that he enjoys k-pop because he feels more comfortable idolizing k-pop stars than other stars because they are more relatable: "there are a lot of shows where the K-pop bands are and then you can see who they 'really' are. You know what I mean? :D [sic]"

Bloggers also had a lot to say about the music itself. kpopoholic replied: "the music is so good. I like it really really much [sic]. It's better than those current songs which are so...I don't know. It's not my style." smile-seoul added, "Unlike American music [which is] basically some auto-tune & same tune+beat... K-pop has something for everyone ^^ [sic]"

Through these interviews, I found that many bloggers found it difficult to express in words (or even emoticons) the range of emotions that K-pop encompasses. It seemed that the blogs themselves, with their bright colors, carefully edited photos, and upbeat K-pop songs that automatically play upon entering the site, better expressed the passion that the bloggers feel. These blogs therefore not only portray the emotional and technical depth of the consumer communities that have formed around

Korean popular culture, but also the aesthetic that is specific to these cultural spheres.

Much of the aesthetic of Korean pop culture is introduced through music videos, which play a major role in Hallyu. YouTube has become a vital means of spreading k-pop and building the its aesthetic. The visual aesthetic often becomes even more important than the sound for audiences who listen to the songs in Korean but unable to understand the language can still enjoy the music accompanied by the visual appeal of the video. With the provision of video as well as audio, music become a multi-sensory experience. This enables K-pop artists to charm audiences with “dynamic dances, attractive singers, and strong melodies and rhythms” despite language barriers (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011, p. 58). In fact, YouTube has played such an integral role in the cultural trade market that it is sometimes referred to as the “YouTube Silk Road” (Jeong, 2011).

Evidence of the YouTube/K-pop phenomenon can be seen all over the world. Amazingly, as previously discussed, at the Paris debut concert in summer of 2011 fans from all over Europe flocked to see performers from Korean idol groups that had never released an album or held a performance in Europe. Because of the Internet and specifically YouTube, the pop singers had already become popular in Europe before they had their debut there. What’s more, fans were so adamant about the K-pop concert being held in Paris that they organized a flash mob in front of the Louvre to call attention to their desires and assure the concert would take place. The video of the flash mob can be seen on YouTube (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011).

Recently, on November 7, 2011, *The Wall Street Journal* released an article about Google’s plan to set up a YouTube Channel exclusively featuring Korean pop music because of its success. Gale (2011) reports that judging by the response to the recent series of K-pop concerts, the channel will get plenty of online interest. K-pop news source allkpop.com comments on this event: “this move will prove significant to furthering the advances

of the Hallyu wave worldwide” (Lawlietta, 2011).

YouTube has played a significant role not only for the spread of music videos made by idol groups, but also for videos made by the fans themselves from all over the world. One of the newest phenomena of the Korean Wave is the cover dance video, in which fans imitate the dances to songs by their favorite singers. The original music videos as well as the fan-made imitations achieve new records for hit counts everyday (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011). In this way, with fans redeveloping the Korean cultural products they consume, K-pop is regenerating itself through social media, thereby playing “a powerful role in cultivating and maintaining ideals of self and nation” (Howard, 2006, p. 106).

Clearly, the expansion of Korean pop culture through YouTube and other SNS has played a key role in the advancement of the formation of consumer or cultural communities. New technologies have made new behaviors, new values, and new lifestyles possible via the Internet space in which these Korean pop culture-based communities can come to life. According to Lee (2004), “K-pop is a sociolinguistic breathing space for young [people] to construct identity and socially connect with others” (p. 446). The discursive space formed around K-pop provides a place for youth to assert their projected identities as well as challenge dominant representations of authority and resist mainstream norms and values by creating new meanings. These cultural spaces are based on values created by members of the consumerist communities, and so become a unique space where new and creative thought is welcomed.

The cultural spaces that are constructed through the use of global forms, though they are spaces in which real-time interactions take place, are not grounded in reality. They originate from an imaginary world of popular culture. Shim (2006) refers to these communities, which are based on imagined values, as “imagined communities” (p. 39). Within these imagined communities, fans not only relate to each other based on the media they consume, they create and experience transnational consumption space

within which they negotiate their cultural and gender identities in this age of globalization (Huat & Iwabuchi, 2008).

In these virtual worlds created through k-pop, image is everything. According to Howard (2006), in Korean popular culture, image is the most essential quality, while talent, music, and creativity play secondary roles. As with music videos and blogs, the aesthetic experience is what embodies the feeling of K-pop the most. That is why the formation of the Korean pop culture aesthetic is paramount for the Hallyu movement, and why technology is so important for the deliverance of this very visual culture wave.

One example of the dominance of image in the contemporary South Korean pop culture scene is that K-pop bands spend a lot of time and effort on their appearance and presentation, ensuring they deliver the highest quality visual experience to satisfy the youth's aesthetic-driven culture. According to Park (2011), most Korean singers and groups either have a very distinct look or are a mixture of members with different looks to please people of all tastes. Their styles are thoroughly and carefully prepared by professional stylists and are the most significant part of who they are as celebrities.

Through the spread of K-pop, the importance of image also spreads to many other regions. For example, it can be seen in the consumerist communities on Tumblr that have formed around K-pop. The K-pop aesthetic comes through in these communities in the proliferation of picture editing. Many followers of the Korean Wave like to edit pictures of Korean models and celebrities. They come up with their own style of editing and spend many hours working on hundreds of photos until they have a large collection that acts as a casual portfolio that others can freely view or use on their own blogs.

In addition to emphasizing the prominence of the image in K-pop, these artistic works promote engagement among consumers. For example, I see many people complimenting each other's photos, asking each other what brush they used in

Photoshop to get a certain effect in a specific picture, and if they can have permission to attempt to replicate the Photoshop on each other's photos to try to learn new skills. These exchanges promote the identities and meaning-making activities of the consumer communities. The conversation that takes place between consumers regarding k-pop aesthetics creates an artistic community, which is affirmed by the popularity of the edited photos that circulate through hundreds if not thousands of users.

Judging from South Korea's image-based popular culture that is sweeping the globe, South Korea may be at the forefront of this transition from information economies to dream societies, which depend on image rather than text. Because of its lead in image societies, the latest Korean Wave has been able to move from a pop culture sphere to an entire industry. Some companies are recognizing and utilizing this transition. For example, Intel has tagged Girls' Generation as their new Asian face (Jeong, 2011).

The government of South Korea has also recognized the potential of the new dream society and is implementing policies to base their economy on popular culture by forming official policy towards becoming a dream society. The government of South Korea announced it would take concrete measures to promote local "culture industries," such as establishing a graduate school to provide specialized training in "culture technologies" (Lee, 2005). South Korea has embraced pop culture it and begun using it to its advantage. Korea is in the process of becoming the world's "coolest" nation as a result of Korea's leaders recognizing that the dream icons and aesthetic experiences are the wave of the future (Dator & Seo, 2004).

Though these new dream societies may give some indication to the future of our economies, it will take some time before the dream society becomes reality. For now the question is, what is the future of Hallyu? Undoubtedly, Hallyu's impact is on a global scale, but for how much longer will South Korea be able to ride the wave?

There are, of course, criticisms of the Korean Wave.

Some people criticize the Korean government's involvement in promoting a national brand, while others say the wave is nothing but a passing fad. Some people condemn what they see as the mechanical nature and hyper-commercialization of the culture (Contemporary Korea No. 1, 2011). There are rumors that the Korean government has exaggerated K-pop popularity and created an inflated view of the wave (Lee, 2005). Still, there is no doubt that Korean pop culture is continuing to spread globally. Over the past two decades, its popularity has only grown (Lee, 2005).

Some people think K-pop is too ingrained in Korean identity to be successful in the United States and believe it will need to change in order to fit in. But perhaps the recent success of K-pop in the United States and the collaborations with famous American artists are proof enough that K-pop does not need to fully assimilate to American culture to find a niche in the market.

Rather than national identity, what has become the most essential element of K-pop is international collaboration. Jin-Young Park, otherwise known as JYP (2007), the founder of major K-pop record label JYP Entertainment, states in a Korean Wave lecture conducted at Harvard University, "The most important thing is making things together and sharing it with the world." JYP even wants to do away with the title of "Korean Wave" because he believes it excludes other nationalities. He says Hallyu was indeed once about introducing and creating Korean culture, but now it has transitioned to focus on mutual global understanding through cultural sharing and improving public perceptions of international relationships (Waite, 2007).

Indeed, the success of the Korean Wave is not necessarily due to its Korean-ness, but rather its cultural hybridity. Russell (2008) believes that Korea is at the forefront of a variety of changes that are affecting the rest of the world. Due to the level of globalization, along with the advancements in technology and image societies, the Korean Wave is leading the world into the future.

Certainly, Hallyu has shown how modern and cosmopolitan Korea is, but the greater implications of the Korean Wave stretch far beyond that. Through creative means, the youth of South Korea and beyond are actively exploring important concepts such as nationalism, globalization, technological advancements, consumerist communities, and dream societies.

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# THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

CULTIVATING IDENTITY IN  
DOUALA, CAMEROON

BY LEIGH ROME

This paper draws from ideas on the fluid state of citizenship that exists in Douala, Cameroon. It discusses two separate ways of negotiating identities in Cameroon: through youth movements and cultural movements. Identity is highly contested in Cameroon, as it determines citizens' role in the economy and access to resources. However, the ways in which the state has attempted to solidify identity and link ethnicity and citizenship make identity highly problematic, especially in a situation where there is massive migration. Solidification of identities in Cameroon has led to state policy of autochthony as means of citizenship. How are new identities for being and belonging formed and constructed in a situation where they are so repressed? The competing ideas of autochthonous roots in Cameroon as compared to migratory *routes* and attempts to create new publics create tension. Cameroonians are producing these new publics in light of the failure of the post-colonial commons in Cameroon, which makes it clear that Cameroon can no longer rely on the old categories of colonial nationhood; it needs to change the paradigm to account for the fluidity of ethnicity and the dynamism of its citizens.

AREAS OF INTEREST:  
AFRICAN STUDIES, POLITICAL SCIENCE, DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Identity is often contested in Africa because the cultural landscape of the continent exists in excess of national boundaries. Citizenship ascribed on the basis of belonging to one nation-state is not fluid enough to account for the many spaces in which Africans operate. In Cameroon, European colonialism, and in particular, the anthropological cohort, developed a certain construct of ethnicity that has endured as one of the main factors determining citizenship in Cameroon today. However, the dominance of these ethnic structures is being challenged as individuals define their own identities instead of blindly accepting the dicta of the state. In Douala, Cameroon, individuals are creating new identities and communities for themselves through cultural movements and youth movements. While by no means inclusive of how all identities are being renegotiated in post-colonial Douala, these examples provide insight into how citizenship may be defined in a more inclusive sense, and allow for identity to be cultivated instead of proscribed. Discussing the ethnic constructs that exist today in Douala necessitates pinning down a workable definition of what identity is. For the purposes of this analysis, identity is the end result of the processes of being, belonging, and becoming that individuals engage in to make sense of their circumstances and surroundings; “Identities are not undifferentiated and one-dimensional social realities” (Vubo, 2010, p. 621). Rather, identity is re-workable, and for many, a life-long process of cultivation and contestation. Contrary to this liberal interpretation of identity, in Cameroon today, identity is interpreted by the government very narrowly, as being inextricably tied to ethnicity.

Ethnicity is the theory that a group of people may identify with each other in an intrinsic way by having a common language, culture, or religion while simultaneously being linked through their ancestry. The root of the word “ethnic” is the Greek word *ethnikos*, which referred to someone who was not a member of the *polis*. Ethnicity thus is fundamentally about dividing people into categories, and indeed, in Cameroon, ethnicity as interpreted

by the government classifies individuals into inflexible groups. This sort of division becomes complicated in Cameroon, where it's not necessarily clear that people fit into categories defined by a single ethnicity.

“Where do you come from?” can be a contentious question, and can lead to a host of others. Is the answer where you come from or where your parents come from? Is it where you were born and raised? Is it the language you speak? Is it the area you live in? The assumption by the government that ethnicity can be easily discerned feels like a straitjacket for many Cameroonians. This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that there are high stakes to one's ethnic identity; it is directly related to citizenship. For purposes of governance, ethnicity is interpreted as something solid, but in a place where culture transcends boundaries and encompasses multiple identities, this is inherently problematic.

How did ethnicity come to be such a loaded topic? The question of ethnicity in Cameroon is shaped by historical factors of agency and regional migration (Fonchingong, 2005). The territory that comprises Cameroon today was technically under the auspices of the vast Kanem Empire, but its inhabitants were free to migrate to other kingdoms. Most analyses of the period before colonization list ethnic groups, traditions, and “customary” or “tribal” territories as substantiation for a pre-colonial past, but this in itself is a form of historical revisionism and neo-nativism. It is not that there were inherent distinctions in the past between the groups referred to today as the Bamileke, Bamoune, or Beti, for example. Rather, ethnicities overlapped and individuals could commute between different identities. There were no political or cultural constraints on identity, and if people did not agree with the rules of the land they were in, they could join a different group elsewhere. This pre-colonial acceptance of difference was frequently misinterpreted and broken by colonialism. Colonial interpretation of ethnicities was strict, while previously, ethnic identity was negotiable.

Cameroon's colonial experience is unique in that the country was colonized by three separate powers. The Kanem Empire had traded with the Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish from 1492 onwards, and in 1844 Christian missionaries entered Cameroon, and British settlements cropped up to compete for the territory (Mbaku, 2005). At the Berlin Conference in 1885, Germany "claimed" Cameroon and soon set up structures to extract resources like timber and exploited the fertile soil for cultivation. At the end of World War I, Germany's colonies were confiscated, and Cameroon became a League of Nations mandated territory. "The colony was splintered to cater for French and British interests against the backdrop of the imperialist compass that ensued" (Fonchingong, 2005, p. 363).

Today, Cameroon is divided into ten provinces, two of which are Anglophone (the former Southern Cameroons, which were colonized by the British), while the remaining eight are Francophone and were once under French auspices. While French and British colonial strategies were somewhat different, both emphasized ethnicity as a means of control in Cameroon. These short, late, and consecutive periods of colonization involved little investment in Cameroon; it was never considered a settler colony, and thus full investment in infrastructure was not deemed necessary.

The colonial challenge in Cameroon, as elsewhere, was to create knowledge systems about the colonized people being in order to maintain control. This led directly to the cultivation of identity constructs; it was easier for the colonizers to rule if they could divide the people in some way to prevent united rebellion. These policies solidified ethnicities that had previously been fluid, and overstated and even invented ethnic differences to segregate the population. As Mahmood Mamdani articulates in *Citizen and subject* (1996), colonialism bounded identity and broke it into smaller pieces, declaring that each polity had its own ruler and defining boundaries that delineated a common identity.

The colonizers were also preoccupied with keeping

people where they were and discouraging or outright forbidding migration. Most Europeans involved in colonial rule believed that Africans belonged in rural areas, and that every African belonged to a village and a tribe. “Both Indirect Rule and *la politique des races* were inspired by the idea that people should be kept where they belong in order to facilitate ruling them; identity should be rooted in the soil” (Geschiere & Jackson, 2006, p. 4). Here, scientific racism as articulated by the colonial anthropologists warned about the “detribalized African” who was a danger to colonial rule, and should be kept out of cities at all costs.

G.W. Hegel (1956) was one scholar who used this brand of scientific racism to justify exploiting Africa, declaring “Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world—shut up...the land of childhood which, lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night” (p. 91). Anthropology treated Africans as objects to be studied to substantiate prejudices of their “primitiveness.” One’s ethnicity was as rigid as the images captured by colonial photographers; once frozen in time, one was restricted from movement and denied subjecthood. These ethnic paradigms continue to hold weight today. As the British and the French withdrew, citizenship in Cameroon was deracialized but not detribalized.

In 1961, the British Southern Cameroons joined the French mandated territory to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, an entity with a single president, Amadou Ahidjo. Ahidjo adopted the authoritarian legacy of colonialism to attempt to stabilize the population, which was comprised of two separately governed territories that had endured different colonial pasts: “As head of the new federal republic, Ahidjo faced the challenge of creating a country, and developing a new national consciousness among a group of people with different colonial experiences, political memories, and convictions” (Monga, 2000, p. 725). Ahidjo’s strategy to account for difference was to adopt a policy of “regional equilibrium.” He created a sort of ethnic

alchemy to allegedly standardize how many candidates from an ethnic group should receive certain state benefits or pass national examinations (Monga, 2000).

The “ethnic arithmetic” practiced by Ahidjo did little to soothe the transition of Cameroon into one state. Ahidjo adopted the colonial policies of ethnicity without acknowledging that the categories used for his “equitable” division of power were irrational themselves. Instead, “this emphasis on regional and ethnic identities resulted in the creation of an acute, sustained awareness of ethnic belonging and regional affiliation” (Monga, 2000, p. 726). The Cameroonian government was diminishing individuals’ abilities to fit in by codifying difference. Ahidjo’s choice “...constitutes the genesis of ethnicisation, the polarization of communal identities” (Fonchingong, 2005, p. 364). Ethnicity and identity very much remained contested issues in Cameroon when Ahidjo resigned as President in 1982 and appointed a successor, former Prime Minister Paul Biya, who remains the President of Cameroon to this day. Biya has further capitalized on ethnic divisiveness as a method of rule: “...The key to the survival of the state has been its inertia—the capacity to play off sectors, regions, ethnicities, ministries and actors against each other so that the independent initiative is tempered...” (Simone, 2005, p. 523).

Biya inherited the state as a one party regime. While there is technically universal suffrage, elections have generally been regarded as flawed, and the President is not obliged to consult with the National Assembly before acting. Thus, Biya’s power is largely unchecked by any political mechanism. To maintain his grip on power in the face of rising commodity prices, increasing poverty, increasing unemployment, and general dissatisfaction, instead of addressing grievances, he has pursued policies that divide and destabilize the country by exacerbating ethnic tension to divert attention from state accountability. Biya’s strategies have in effect “...increased the political and economic benefits of ethnic loyalty and made the development of a national

consciousness quite difficult” (Mbaku, 2005, p. 5).

Thus, neither presidents of Cameroon since independence have governed in ways that were conducive to formation of an identity beyond ethnicity. In Cameroon, most individuals are acutely aware of their ethnic and regional affiliations, as “... access to state functions depends not primarily on competence and merit but instead on one’s strategic ethnic and regional affiliations” (Monga, 2000, p. 726). For example, it is assumed one will not attain acceptance into a university without a powerful connection or patron, and there is *de facto* segregation of which ethnic groups may hold which jobs in both the formal and informal economies. “The ethnic factor has continued to influence the equilibrium of administration and appointment to high office. It has also persisted in the popular imagination as the motive force behind all social phenomena within the political sphere” (Vubo, 2010, p. 597). Maintaining the colonial ethnic status quo overall provides for coerced, rather than voluntary identity.

Identity in Cameroon has high stakes because it is a large determinant of one’s role in the economy. Failure of the state to provide reliable services has led to a “do-it-yourself bureaucracy,” which means that civilians perform tasks and services commonly provided by the state (Mbembe & Roitman, 1995, p. 343). However, how one gets access to purchase scarce materials, or even find money for them, depends on where on the economic spectrum one fits in. If you must provide your own gauze and bandages at a hospital in order to be treated, how are the unemployed of Cameroon served? This fact is complicated by the reality that certain economic opportunities are restricted to certain ethnic groups: “Douala is...increasingly fraught with tensions about who has the right to operate there and whom particular resources such as land and economic opportunities belong to” (Simone, 2008, p. 76).

For example, since the Bamileke have stereotypically been successful economically, there is a stigma to identifying openly as

Bamileke, as their success has given them a reputation of being both ruthless and greedy. The expression, “Tu es Bamiléké?” (Are you Bamileke?) is an idiom that serves to accuse someone of being avaricious. Yet paradoxically, while many Cameroonians resent the Bamileke for their economic success, the reason that many Bamileke were forced into these entrepreneurial (and ultimately profitable) positions in the first place was that the state openly saw them as strangers and discriminated against them. Bamileke are thus forced to engage in commercial activities because they are barred from the civil service and formal private sector employment (Simone, 2006). This is a bizarre contradiction that in many ways is emblematic of the absurdity of ethnicity-dominated rule in contemporary Cameroon.

According to Geschiere and Jackson (2006), the obsession with characterizing people has led to increased competition for resources beyond traditional employment in Cameroon:

The abrupt switch by the development establishment... from a strongly statist conception of development to a policy of decentralization and “bypassing the state” raised similar questions: who can claim to ‘really’ belong to the “community” that is supposed to profit from a new-style development project? (p. 4)

This is an additional source of tension. How does ethnicity play in to who is entitled to reap the benefits of donor investment? The government argues that it is based on blood and familial ties to the area where the project is taking place, but in urban spaces where individuals are fighting the traditional constructs of ethnic identities, it is difficult to parse out who is entitled to receive what.

Migration additionally complicates identity and opportunity in contemporary Cameroon. The colonial powers saw Africans as rural by nature, and believed that the city was “not African”; Africans were to remain on their “tribal” areas, and the “detribalized” African in the city was dangerous. Yet migratory processes have always been important as a way to seek

opportunities, and today, cities in Cameroon are migratory poles. Indeed, many see it as impossible to stay where they are and expect to prosper; "...this impossibility is reflected not only in reiterating the historical capacities of many African populations to move and to move long distances, but in wide-ranging and diffuse tactics attempting to affect a mobility of perception and action within the confines of the city itself" (Simone, 2006, p. 361). Cities in Cameroon are growing at an exceptional rate, and this is partly because of migration. The rate of urbanization has increased from 28.5% in 1976 to almost 50% today (Fon, 2010).

Many persons seek their fortunes in the city, which leads to diverse urban populations. Cities are assumed to be places of wealth, and an escape from rural poverty, especially post-structural adjustment, since structural adjustment programs were incredibly injurious to rural economies dependent on crop cultivation. When people can no longer compete at home, they go to the cities, in the hope that they might be better off. The city is seen as a more desirable option for the rural poor. At least in the city, one's future is not yet known. In the cities, from an identity standpoint, it is also true that it is more possible to negotiate one's identity within the diversity of people that cities attract. In Cameroon, cities provide a space for rethinking ethnicities, and challenge what the state advocates in its reliance on firm ethnic identities. The agency of migration places a crucial role in self-determination and identity cultivation outside of state auspices.

Solidification of identities in Cameroon has led to state policy of autochthony as means of citizenship. This means that "...attachment of elections and citizenship to regions encourages a more formal distinction of rights based on birth or residence: the distinction between *autochtones* / *allogènes* or natives and strangers" (Nyamnjoh, 1998, p. 321). In Cameroon, this polarization of society in terms of identity led to hostility (Sama, 2007). Autochthony creates an imagined threat of the stranger who usurps power and benefits, and in Cameroon,

this perception has created fear and lead to a rhetoric of ethnic cleansing as a sign of indigenous superiority (Nyamnjoh, 1998).

Autochthony is inflexible and not contextual enough to show all sides of the story. In many cases, the people termed “strangers” are actually second- or even third-generation descendants of migrants. The end result of autochthony is that “national integration is jeopardized by ethno- regional jingoism, fanned and sustained by the state. People are overtly encouraged to demonstrate stronger loyalties to their ethno-regional or sub-national groups than to the Cameroon nation” (Fonchingong, 2005, p. 369). This loyalty is overpowering, and ethnic discourse in Cameroon subverts all other structures to it. A Cameroonian expression astutely explains the problem: “Kontchou does not represent the Bamiléké; Mboui does not incarnate the Bassa people, and Owona is not mandated by the Betis to defend their interests. However, all three men, and many others, originate from one and the same ethnic group: the chop tribe!” (Crisis Group Africa, 2010) The “chop tribe” derogatorily refers to the methods that the party and President Paul Biya engage in to promote their divisive ethnically based rule, which is ultimately detrimental.

Ethnic rule has been directly challenged most prominently by those in the cities, where people do not understand why their neighbors are privileged in ways that they themselves are not, for a characteristic they did not get to determine. There has been backlash to government policies of ethnicity, and some organizations have lobbied that the government actively promotes ethnic conflict. For example, Laakam is an organization that has accused the government of fostering prejudice against the Bamileke (Nyamnjoh, 1998). They protest that “Cameroon’s cultural diversity, instead of serving as a melting pot for state construction, has been used by unscrupulous politicians to foster *dived et impera*” (Fonchingong, 2005, p. 367). But thus far, the state has not budged in its ethnically divisive policies. This realization has led many people to work outside of the state and create new

ethnicities for themselves that are voluntary.

People are making their own claims to identity by producing structures apart from the government. Individuals have instead constructed “regimes of subjectivity,” defined by Mbembe and Roitman (1995) as:

...A shared ensemble of imaginary configurations of “everyday life,” imaginaries which have a material basis; and systems of intelligibility to which people refer in order to construct a more or less clear idea of the causes of phenomena and their effects, to determine the domain of what is possible and feasible... (p.324).

Two ways individuals are claiming and framing these new identities are through cultural movements and youth movements. Both allow people to create something new and separate from the state apparatus of ethnicity.

Artistic movements in Africa have traditionally been at war with states that have disfranchised them, and Cameroon is no exception. Post-independence the government was out of step with its people, and art was one way to make community through voluntary organization instead of ascribed ethnicity. Artists are aware of the futility of the government attempting to classify the population into strict categories, and protest through their works. This is a devised means of survival in dissonance with the state. Voluntary artistic organizations have created communities, particularly in Douala. One prominent organization advocating arts-based citizenship is Doual’art, an “experimental laboratory” which has existed since 1991.

Doual’art has worked to commence dialogue on ethnicity in Cameroon by providing a forum for critique of the government and a space for art productions. In doing so, Doual’art has encouraged voluntary communities to coalesce around the arts, either through direct participation or observation. It is a safe space for multiculturalism and diversity, and allows and encourages individuals to embrace a concept of identity that

exists beyond ethnicities. Identity in Doual'art is specific to each individual, and is largely whatever each person perceives or cultivates his or her identity to be. It is certainly not restrictive based on ethnicity, and identities are malleable.

Authors have also challenged the ethnic policies of the government and how divide-and-rule tactics have damaged the country. This brand of literary critique dates back to the colonial period, where authors recognized how concepts of ethnicity as they existed in practice were being mutilated by the colonizers. Pre-independence, a writer from British Cameroon named Sanke Maimo produced a play called *I Am Vindicated*, which dealt with these issues of restrictive identity that resonated with the qualms of his compatriots (Mbaku, 2005). Other works published during the colonial period, including *Un enfant comme les autres* (Pabe Mongo), *L'enfant Bamileke* (Jean Mba Lenou) and *Tout pour la gloire de mon pays* (Victor Fotso), "...reflected this search for liberty and self within the context of a morally idealistic world view..." (Mbaku, 2005, p. 85).

Writers in Cameroon today also reflect on the persecution of the government in its ethnic policies, and such activities have increasingly come under attack. One particularly critical author, Bertrand Teyou, has been imprisoned since November 2010 for allegedly insulting President Paul Biya's wife in his book, *La belle de la république bananière: Chantal Biya, de la rue au palais* (The Belle of the Banana Republic: Chantal Biya, From the Streets to the Palace), which provided a critique of the government profiting from divisive rule in Cameroon. Literature has become political as attempts to sidestep the government's ethnic policies are being increasingly persecuted themselves.

The artistic community in Cameroon has successfully shown one avenue that the possibility of new identities outside the ethnic constructions for which the government advocates can take. Urban artistic culture in Douala is a response to the capricious nature of politics in Cameroon; it is "...shaped by a sclerotic political regime that not only runs in a patrimonial

fashion but rewards and punishes almost arbitrarily” (Simone, 2006, p. 364). According to Monga (2005), artistic movements are embracing fluidity of identity as a strength and a potential way forward for Cameroon:

While politicians are thus sacrificing the very notion of a common Cameroonian nationality and identity, some artists and intellectuals have drawn on the same categories to try and break ethnic boundaries and define a popular national culture characterized by acceptance of ethnic differences (p. 723).

In this separate sphere, artists use cultural difference to produce a new community based on ethnic tolerance and respect (Monga, 2005). They force dialogue on ethnic issues with the hopes of bringing about positive change. For example, Petit Pays, a Douala musician, proclaimed in his first album release that his mother was a Duala and his father a Hausa, and French-speaking comedian Dave Moktoi impersonated an Anglophone man to discuss the absurdity of stereotypes. “...Popular culture... ultimately provides a public space of mutual ethnic acceptance in Cameroon,” which could lead to widespread change in how identity is defined and perceived (Monga, 2005, p. 744).

Simone (2008) advocates, “urban popular culture is a mirroring process through which residents understand something about their collective life, as well as a vehicle through which implicit forms of social collaboration are put to work” (p. 76). Yet in accepting this reading, one must acknowledge that the process cannot stop there – artists must work to obliterate the forces that encourage Cameroonians to see their lives in ethnic terms in the first place. Without this progression, ethnicity will continue to dominate as the most prominent mode of identity. By contrast, if the fruitions of these cultural movements are capitalized on, they could revolutionize the formulation of identity to make it more useful to the people and less of a burden.

Youth movements also provide a means for identity to be renegotiated beyond ethnicity. Yet defining “youth” as a category itself proves difficult, as youth is defined differently in different

contexts. For this reason, Durham (2000) advocates for defining youth as a social “shifter,” in the sense that in the fluidity of a “shifter,” the definition of youth “...can go beyond immediate relationships being negotiated and draw attention to the structure and its categories that produce or enable the encounter” (p. 116). Regardless of how youth may be defined, the fact remains that in terms of actual age, Cameroon is a “young” country. According to the United Nations, more than half the population of Cameroon is under the age of 20. The 2010 census also found that 22% of young people in Douala are officially unemployed. Being in this position of disenfranchisement without a clear solution has led youth to contest the ethnic boundaries that are, for many, stifling their ability to fully participate in the economy.

The power of youth to question the dominant discourse and promote a counter movement is not unique to Cameroon: “In many cities across Africa youth have often undertaken efforts to upend social practices and local power regimes which they believe hold them back or contribute to a suffocation of possible change and progress” (Simone, 2008, p. 83). In Cameroon, the young population has a great stake in how ethnicity relates to employment. Cameroon has traditionally had a high rate of school attendance, but there is no guarantee that even the best education will lead to a job, as formal employment as controlled by the government is based on patronage and ethnic ties rather than qualifications. This means that in order to support themselves, many youth participate in the informal economy. Many of the moto-taxi drivers, the “call-box”<sup>1</sup> owners, and the market vendors in Douala have had higher education in Cameroon – 80% of the motorcycle taxi drivers in the city have a high school diploma, while half of them have a university degree (Crisis Group Africa, 2010). There is high aggravation amongst youth that the government recognizes their ethnicities as more important than their qualifications.

1 People who charge other individuals on the street to use their cell phones

Young people in Cameroon are acutely aware of their situation. As popular rapper Valsero wrote in his song “For 2008, I Speak”:

This country kills the young  
 the old don't let go  
 50 years of power and after that they don't let go  
 The young are slowly dying while the old are getting  
 drunk on firewater in their fortress  
 This country is like a bomb and a coffin for its youth  
 Beware, when it blows up they will be only bits of flesh,  
 so make way the old, the torch must be passed on

It is true that not all youth in Douala are interested in contesting the ethnic apparatus of the state, “but there are sensibilities on the part of increasing numbers of youth that are at least capturing the imagination, as well as being translated into various actions” (Simone, 2005, p. 519). No one is claiming that all youth in Cameroon are politically active. But a significant portion are, in some capacity, aware of the role that ethnicity has played in defining their parents’ identities, and are actively contesting these paradigms. Youth movements that have resulted from this realization are an important departure from commonly accepted ethnic norms. These youth movements sculpt new identities that are not tied to the ethnicity that they have inherited. Indeed, ethnicity is not a relevant distinction, as youth in Douala have often migrated from their families and are living on their own, not even in the same city or country as their parents, and have severed ties with them. In Douala, Simone (2006) found through his interviews with youth that there was a “...prolific desire to ‘make oneself into a new person’” outside of the identity that had given to them from birth (p. 365). This new ideology instead promotes tolerance, diversity, and stepping beyond ethnicities.

In 2005, young Cameroonians in Douala organized a weeklong exhibition that “...was expected almost to act as

a repository of dreams that could launch everyone's private initiatives into a different plane of orbit: a kind of collective talisman that could concretize the strivings of neighborhood youth" (Simone, 2008, p. 84). The success of the program demonstrated how organized youth are amongst themselves, as well as how urban youth in Douala are finding ways to move through the city on their own terms (Simone, 2005). Youth are not afraid to be outspoken about their new identities. As one interviewee claimed, "the difficulty is that the old rules no longer apply, and efforts to adhere to them only get us into trouble" (Simone, 2005, p. 516). There remains the promise that when the youth of today became tomorrow's leaders in Cameroon, they will change the dominant paradigm. But the fact that they will not remain obedient to what the government tells them they are has already led to fracturing in the government apparatus and forced Paul Biya to clamp down even harder on the "youthquarters" in Douala to retain control. So far Biya has had the force to remain in power, but youth as a vehicle for change—especially youth who are highly educated—should not be underestimated.

Finally, citizenship is something that constantly mutates, but in Cameroon, the policies the state has chosen to pursue require people and cultures to be static in order for them to work. Rather than letting publics formed by agency suture into commons organically, thus drawing attention to the social agency that people have, the state uses coerced communities as a control mechanism. How are new identities for being and belonging formed and constructed in a situation where they are so repressed? The competing ideas of autochthonous roots in Cameroon as compared to migratory *routes* and attempts to create new publics create tension. The state is in dissonance with its people; while Cameroonians are defining themselves beyond ethnicity, they are being told by the state that their participation, resources, and opportunities are constricted based on a feature over which they do not have control.

The weakness in ethnicity as a ruling structure is thus

that one idea of modernity is never enough to frame a people in its entirety, yet the idea of overlapping modernities is a reality not taken into account by the state in Cameroon. The commons in Cameroon predicated on ethnicity is fracturing, and through these fractures come new publics, of which two examples—art movements and youth movements—are coming to light. Cameroonians are producing these new publics in light of the failure of the post-colonial commons in Cameroon, which makes it clear that Cameroon can no longer rely on the old categories of colonial nationhood; it needs to change the paradigm to account for the fluidity of ethnicity and the dynamism of its citizens.

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