

The Clough Center Journal Spring 2024



**Attachment to Place  
in a World of Nations '23-'24**



**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
THE CLOUGH CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

# THE CLOUGH CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

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2024

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## Clough Center Journal, Volume 2

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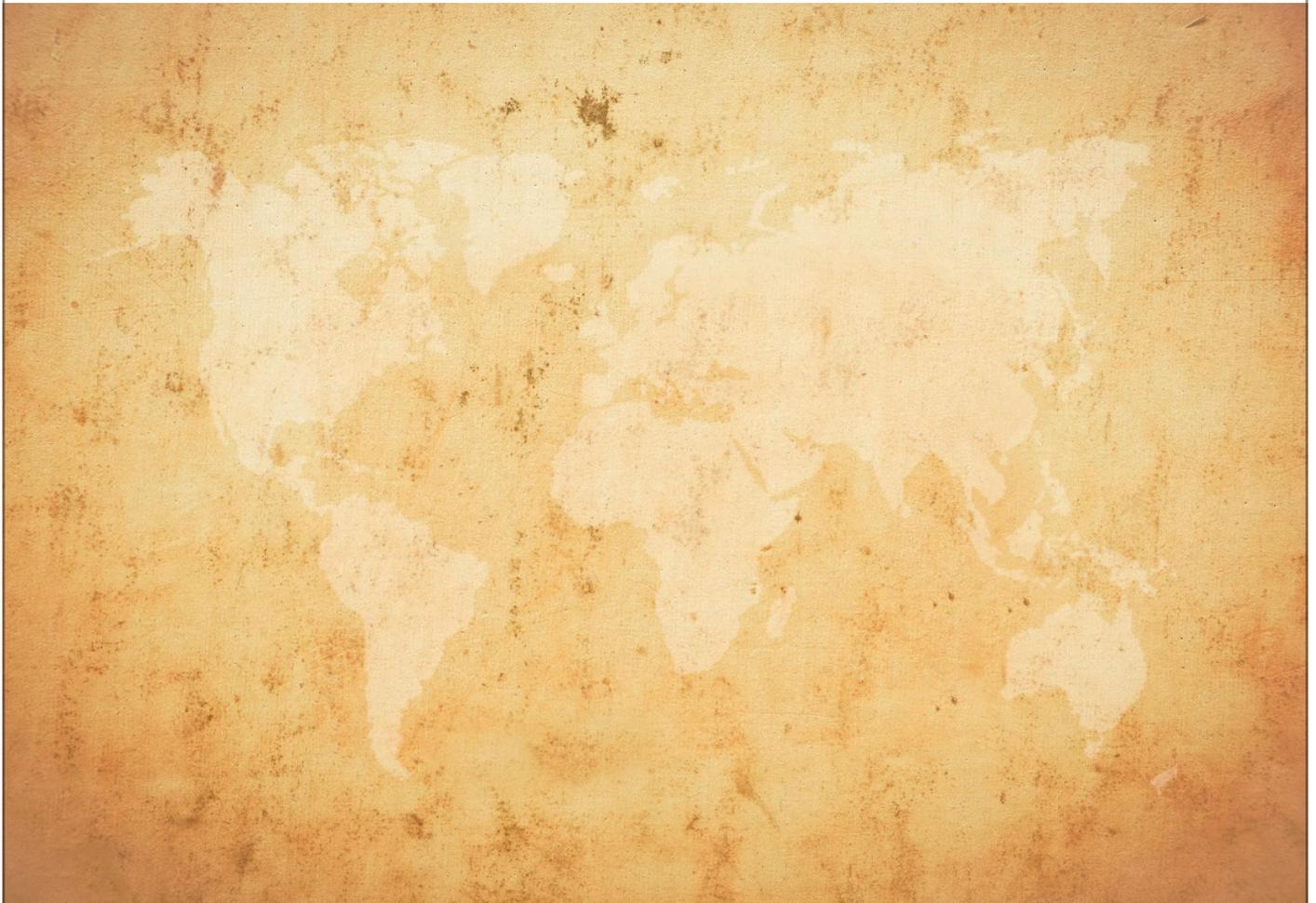
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# *From the Director,* JONATHAN LAURENCE



I am delighted to introduce the 2024 edition of the *Clough Center Journal* dedicated to this year's annual theme, "Attachment to Place in a World of Nations." Focusing the Center's events and activities around this broad topic is an attempt to capture the many ways that people feel connected to, influence, and are influenced by the territories, landscapes, sacred spaces, and other places that do not fit easily into the nation-state schema. On a boundless map, one sees a world of possible connections across time and space. Thinking about real attachments to the places on our maps draws our attention to the cultural, economic, psychological, religious and other relationships that coexist in the same political space as constitutional democracies. The articles written by Clough Center fellows, as well as select contributions from faculty speakers at the Center's public events, provide a vivid snapshot of research interests across the university as they relate to these issues in contemporary political life.

For much of global history, cultural and religious traditions rooted in a given place have been interwoven with the institutions and politics of their societies. Yet other forces have increasingly encroached upon their prior spheres of influence, including the disruption visited by economic modernization and the introduction of national borders. The author Yi Fu Tuan writes that if "space is freedom" then "place is security." Security for some may mean uncertainty for others. Place is linked to an immanently political dilemma, joined at birth with contestation.

Some events loom large as the source of today's open conflicts. The implosion of empires in the wake of two World Wars—first, the Romanov, Hapsburg and Ottoman, and then the British and French and later, the Soviet—gave way to dozens

of new nations, many of whose frontiers have been riven by instability. The twentieth century bequeathed an ambiguous coexistence of religion and politics within the system of nation-states. When the last Islamic Caliph was evicted from Istanbul on March 3, 1924, the custodians of Islam's holiest places—and the very unity of the Ummah—were forever altered, posing the still-burning question of Islam's role in the new political order. Across the sea, by contrast, a sovereign Vatican city-state sealed its authority over Roman Catholicism and established the religion's place in the community of nations. During the Cold War, the major reconstruction project of postwar Europe, the European Union, excluded Moscow. Afterwards, Central and Eastern Europe were welcomed into the EU, while Russia remained outside.

With the entrenchment of nationalism and the enshrinement of citizenship came the promotion of certain ties at the expense of others. The nation-state, omnipotent within its borders, is still learning to modulate and moderate these attachments, and to calibrate their compatibility with citizenship. Democratizing societies have cut their teeth learning these lessons in coexistence. Supranational entities—from global religious communities to the European Union—add layers of complexity to contemporary politics. The past century has been marked by displacement and detachment from place, and the attendant ambiguities that come with "belonging" to the national entity where one resides—or the painful consequences of not belonging. Several contributions to this issue remind us that demographic *un-mixing*—through migration, ethnic cleansing or exile—is a common feature of imperial decline, and comes with the redrawing of lines once superseded by a common identity. Aftershocks of colonial collapse continue to agitate democratic life, on the receiving end of shockwaves from ongoing wars in Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine. At the border separating the USA from Mexico, scenes of conflict and human tragedy still unfold centuries after the collapse of British and Spanish empires.

The question of attachment to place in a world of nations is especially relevant for democracies established in indigenous lands. Native place-names across the USA belie the absence of our

predecessors. Most traces of the original inhabitants have been destroyed. The divided response of democracies, when faced with challenges that defy the logic of national borders, from migration and climate change to indigenous rights, betrays an ambivalence towards genuine cooperation among equals. They are stymied by the limits of their own territoriality, frequently unable to cede more than a few drops of sovereignty to alliances that would distribute responsibilities and protections more equitably. They nonetheless find there is no absolute security that national borders can provide, no natural obstacle that can keep transnational realities at bay.

As an exercise in exploring the complexities of one particular nation-state and the “places” that shape it today, a Clough Center Delegation had the opportunity to visit key political, religious, and historical sites in Cuernavaca and Mexico City in early 2024. There, we were exposed to a different approach to native history, whose legacy is inextricable from official narratives of nationally significant places. The ruins of earlier civilizations about our own era’s constructed legacy in mind-boggling juxtaposition. Traces of collapsed empires near and far can be seen in the physical and architectural landscape and in the human environment. A meeting we had with an Afghan refugee at the *Casa Tochan* shelter in Mexico City, two weeks after his harrowing trek by foot and bus from Rio de Janeiro, captured the tragic ironies of our time and place. His career as an official in Kabul working on human trafficking was cut short by the Taliban’s return after U.S. withdrawal. Now, awaiting a U.S. asylum decision while healing from injuries he sustained en route, he is one pixel of a grand tableau of humanity in motion.

One hundred million people are in circulation around the globe, having fled their homes or voluntarily emigrated. The sense of cycles and waves, that “We are here because you were there,” is inescapable but incomplete. These developments are as revealing of the present and future as they are about the past. Within the last year alone, we have borne witness to refugee streams stemming from expulsions or war: from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, from Gaza and Israel—and from North Africa to Europe, with thousands tragically drowning at

sea. Millions of refugees who remain in Germany bear the traces of the recent Syrian Civil War and military occupations of Baghdad and Kabul.

Together with the March 2024 Spring Symposium, this journal is a high point of an academic year’s worth of programming. It is exciting to publish here the presentations of distinguished scholars who visited the Clough Center this year to bring their expertise to bear on our annual theme, including Arjun Appadurai (Humboldt University), Karen Barkey (Bard), Danielle Allen (Harvard), Karen Cox (UNC) and Charles Mairer (Harvard), as well as a selection of poems by the Berlin- and Istanbul-based poet, Bejan Matur. They are joined in these pages with the remarks of Boston College faculty members Paul Romer (Economics) and Aziz Rana (Law). The Clough Center has benefitted from all of these scholars’ generous participation and from the contributions of a stellar network of faculty affiliates who play a critical role in the life of the community. They are listed at the end of this issue.

The Clough Center’s graduate student Fellows—drawn from Boston College’s programs in English, History, Law, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Theology—have engaged with these themes in seminars and events throughout the year, and they crafted articles in their areas of expertise for this publication. The reflections of our Doctoral Fellows on their field visit to Mexico in January 2024 are also included in this issue’s concluding section, offering a view of how theories and ideas correspond with observed realities on the ground. Meanwhile, a first-rate editorial team was led by the center’s Visiting Fellow Chandra Mallampalli and Postdoctoral Fellow Nicholas Hayes-Mota, with the able assistance of Clough Correspondents Maddy Carr and Sam Peterson, Clough Graduate Assistant Meghan McCoy, and Clough Research Assistant Julia Mahoney. With remarkable variety and concision, the resulting contributions explore everything from the meaning of cosmopolitanism and the visual culture of railroads to the right to assembly and the status of canon law in a world of nation-states. Together, they are a collective provocation to think differently about place and politics in constitutional democracies.

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# I. GOVERNANCE: WHO RULES?

# TWO FORMS OF ATTACHMENT:

## *The Power of Place, the Discipline of Territory*<sup>1</sup>

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Charles Maier  
Harvard University

I want to talk today about space, not outer space but space on the surface of the globe. We use many terms to describe locations on earth. Some are geographical coordinates—latitude and longitude. Others are direct contrasts that locate the speaker on earth—“home” and “abroad,” to take an obvious pair. This contrast can be highly charged emotionally. Recall Sir Walter Scott’s “Lay of the Last Minstrel” written almost two centuries ago:

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,  
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,  
From wandering on a foreign strand!*

Other categories are less directly opposed to each other but have significantly different connotations even if they refer to the same piece of land: I am thinking of “territory” and “place.” Territory and place are the pair that I propose to explore today. They both relate to segments of the global surface; they both signify locations in global space, but they come with different powers of orientation and different frameworks of meaning. It is not that one is good and the other bad. Each has a potential for constructive social action, and each has a potential for destructive human relations. The issue is how we work with them.

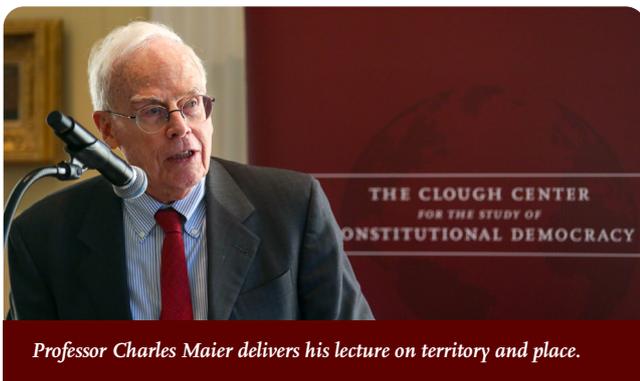
The theme of this gathering, “Attachment to Place,” implies directly the emotional freight that the idea of place may carry. Whether Walter Scott’s “my own, my native land,” or the concept of homeland, or the German term *Heimat*,

these terms convey the power of place. Sometimes the French *patrie* or the Italian *patria* suggest the same emotional content. But place does not have to be a nation—it was just that the mid-nineteenth century writers and artists found homeland the most compelling place that they yearned for or described. But all sorts of places served as sources of emotion, above all “longing.” Whether Washington Irving’s Hudson Valley, Stephen Foster’s “Dixie,” Theodor Fontana’s Prussia, or William Butler Yeats’s Ireland—just to cite places in the Western world—place was a site of emotional rootedness and, of course, a component of “identity,” along with language and religion. In this sense, place can be considered an *identity space*.

Think, however, of another identifying term, also a basic descriptor of location—that is, “territory.” What is a territory? A place can be a territory; both places and territories can be states. But territory suggests a bordered space; it has been enclosed by a boundary and sometimes given a legal status. Territory controls the space needed to build institutions on which to base taxation, investment, political representation. I think of territory as an *authority space*. The fortified frontier in Europe developed from the fourteenth century on. Territories can enjoy sovereignty, that is, they are subject to no other superior authority unless they delegate certain rights, say as in trade treaties. This quality is what we identify—somewhat misleadingly—as Westphalian sovereignty, a status in international law supposedly confirmed by the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648. Nations and states, therefore, are particular types of territory. Having a world of multiple states is the defining condi-

tion of global politics. It is really difficult to think of territory without a border. This means that those in charge of governing a territory try to control who enters and sometimes who leaves. We know that there is often conflict over a border. It took several treaties with the British and Canadians and a war with Mexico to establish the borders of the United States. Border disputes lead to war; think of the centuries long conflict over disputed borders of Alsace Lorraine, transferred back and forth between France and Germany according to who won the most recent war.

There can be territories smaller than countries, and the boundaries can be informal. Think of urban gangs who seek to control a particular area. We sometimes use the term “turf” for this sort of informal territorialization. We know that certain species of animals are highly territorial. Territory is preeminently a political concept and it implies potential conflictuality—whether between countries, as in geopolitics, or at the edge of countries, with the securing of boundaries. Control of borders against migrants has become one of the most sensitive political issues in both the United States and Europe. A UN treaty of 1948 supposedly guarantees the right to leave a territory (and to return to the same territory), but not to enter another territory. The international migration regime is thus asymmetric: the right to leave a country is enshrined (and was recognized even during the Cold War by the Helsinki Accords in 1975), but there is no right to enter.



*Professor Charles Maier delivers his lecture on territory and place.*

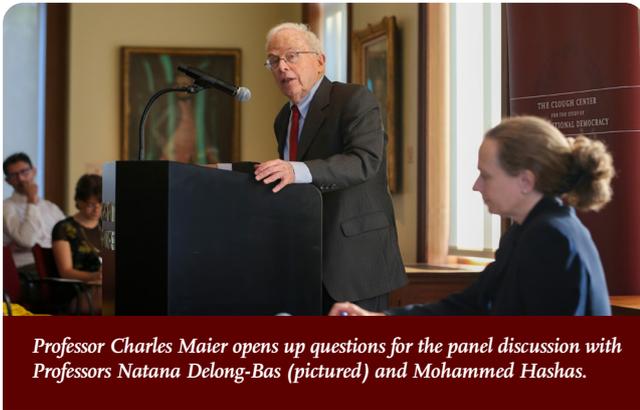
Obviously there are strong social forces that try to overcome borders—capitalism is one, and the major expression of capitalism that seeks to overcome borders we have termed globalization. But globalization and international industry and

finance are not forces that fundamentally opposed territories. Rather they have taken territorialization as a given and sought to build on it with plans for national development—remember the Tennessee Valley Authority or national railroad and highway networks—or to overcome it by making territories become more encompassing, whether through customs unions and confederal attempts like the European Union or the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Religion is another force that transcends territory: think of missionary activity or the Crusades. Christianity teaches that love should transcend boundaries. The Jesuits who built this university arrived in India and China centuries before they got to Brighton. Pope Francis has summoned all of us, rightly I believe, to build bridges, not boundaries. But faith sometimes feels the need for exclusive control over space, that is, over territory. The Catholic monarchs of Spain expelled Jews and Muslims. Protestants and Catholics resorted to territorial separation after a century of conflict and bloodshed between the 1520s and the 1640s.

Historically, from the late Middle Ages on, the structuring of territory and global space became bound up with the advance to today’s modernity. Modern ballistics and gunpowder led to the construction of fortresses in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, to advances in cartography, to the development of national statistics, then to the railroad and advances in technology to penetrate territory. Territoriality has become perhaps the major political issue of our era. On the one side are those who wish to extend it or to overcome it—we call them sometimes cosmopolitans; on the other side are those who wish to reinforce it. One British author, David Goodhart, has referred to the “Somewheres” and the “Anywheres.” The parties we call populist work to strengthen a territorialized world.

Place, I submit, is different. It is centered and leaves a border undefined. It is not about power, geopolitics, or legal structures and institutions; it is about emotional connections to local sites on the globe. Place is an emotional and not a legal framework. Rather than have a clear border, its geometrical representation would be what a



Professor Charles Maier opens up questions for the panel discussion with Professors Natana Delong-Bas (pictured) and Mohammed Hashas.

mathematician would call an “attractor,” that is, a familiar and repetitive orbit. Thus this colloquium aptly refers to the attraction of place. Place tends to leave a warm and fuzzy feeling. Fenway Park is enclosed but it is a place, not a territory.

Unfortunately the reality of place can be different, which is why we cannot simply downgrade territory and surrender to the homey charms of place. The people who cherish a place can be intolerant; they can feel threatened; they can become intolerant and violent. They cherish other signs of identity that call for exclusivity. They can seek to territorialize place by violence: remember the violence in Bosnia, Rwanda and at this very moment Nagorno-Karabakh. I remember once perhaps almost fifty years ago taking a taxi from Laganardia Airport into Manhattan. We passed through the section of Queens called Astoria with one and two-family houses—a bit like Allston next door to Brighton; and the driver told me it was his home. I said, “it’s mostly Greek-American, isn’t it?” And he said yes, and praised the great sense of community it possessed. “How was it preserved?” I asked. “If a Black family wants to move in we threaten to bomb the house,” he said. This, too, alas, is attachment to place. The remedy for the violence of attachment to place due to religion has sometimes been partition if not expulsion—and sometimes exchange of populations. The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 required the Muslims of Greece, localized mostly in northern Thrace, to resettle in the new Republic of Turkey, taking only moveable property, while the Christians of Turkey had to relocate to Greece.

We might also cite the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, who sung the role of place as

“being-in-the-world,” or *Dasein*. Heidegger emphasized the Greek city state or *polis*, or the forest clearing, the *Lichtung*, where the inspiration for art arrived like sunbeams through the trees. Heidegger was a philosopher of place and, alas, also an ardent Nazi sympathizer. Less perniciously, place can be transformed into the archaic or the folkloric. How do we keep place a site for authentic and tolerant community and not let it become just a source for the picturesque, the archaic, the folkloric, or worse, the lynch mob and arsonists? I don’t have a ready answer.

Now, we cannot build a global history or sociology on place and territory alone. There is another important variable that has influenced the role they have played, and that is social class. When I wrote my 2016 book, *Once within Borders*, I noted that the attractiveness of territorial allegiance and attachment to place had found very specific class attitudes and locations. Let me briefly recapitulate what I wrote then. Those who tend to occupy the supervisory positions in politics and the economy—in the digital world, the NGOs, the research universities—claim to transcend territory. They aspire to make it archaic, depriving it of real power over their activities, and of symbolic power as well. When they refer to “territory” they think of strategic micro-locations—Wall Street, the City of London, Singapore, or off-shore banking havens. The archipelago of capital, not the landmass of territory, is their geographical reference. Professional bonds replace territorial loyalties. Their spheres of interaction are not special. This does not mean that they have contempt for social segmentation. Their nonchalance about territorial loyalty takes for granted the capacity to wall themselves off from poor and dark-skinned intruders. But for those who produce commodities and manufactures and contribute to the less exalted services—administrative, military, and custodial—territory remains an important principle for structuring personal security in the world. The protection they derive from borders is fragile and sometimes even illusory, but they feel dependent on them. Their sense of ethnic identity is more beleaguered, and they find political spokesmen who articulate their unease. They seek to re-territorialize, to rebuild the walls and borders. Next year’s presidential election may

well be decided along the lines of this division. I do not know what sort of political or other counsel to draw from these categories. In the end, place and territory are categories that both overlap and oppose each other. They share the property of geographical determination; they are locations. Each of them serves as a sort of spatial anchor or spatial reassurance. They tether us to someplace on spaceship earth so we are not cast adrift in the universe. Place can give us the comfort of community and togetherness, of the familiar, the expectation of returning home—the

theme of so much yearning ever since Ulysses labored to reach Ithaca. Territory can provide the reassurance of a legal framework—a site for protecting our kinfolk and our property, for assuring law and order. But it can preclude preparing for the greater global cooperation that we need to adapt to climate change. Place draws, to cite Lincoln, on “the sacred chords of memory”; territory provides assurance as to the future. But even as they both give us a sense of rootedness, they remain challenges for our global future.

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<sup>1</sup> This piece is a slightly edited version of a paper Prof. Maier delivered at the Clough Center’s Fall Colloquium on “Attachment to Place in a World of Nations,” held at Boston College on October 5, 2023.



# THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY AND THE ROLE OF PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Casey Puerzer  
Political Science

## ABSTRACT

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is a model of how public works programs ought to look in a globalized world. In this essay, I argue that the TVA's sub-national focus, participatory structure, and system of administrative decentralization serve to connect its constituents to the national and international economies without hollowing out the local economy or displacing local cultures. I begin with an overview of TVA's founding, early history, and relationship with the institution of American federalism. I then discuss the agency's positive effects on the Tennessee River Valley and on an international level, highlighting three non-American river valley authorities modeled on it. I conclude with a political-theoretical claim that public works projects, even if they are undertaken by national governments, are not antithetical to "placedness" if properly administered. In fact—I argue—these projects can link individuals to their communities by means of linking them to national and international economies.

## INTRODUCTION

The negative effects of globalization are well known. In particular, globalization can hollow out local economies via deindustrialization as well as displace and dissolve local cultures. These effects can in turn fulfill the preconditions necessary for the development of populist politics. National governments have reacted to globalization in a number of ways, some better than others; but few have begun public works projects for the purposes of large-scale employment and civic education. In the United States, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)—a public works project of this sort—offers a model of how these programs ought to focus in a globalized world. The agency's sub-national focus, participatory structure, and decentralized administration serve to link its constituents to the national and international

economies without hollowing out the local economy or displacing or dissolving local cultures. TVA is an untapped model that, if studied and perhaps reproduced, should stand as a bulwark against globalization's worst externalities.

## AN OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF THE TVA

As a preface, it should be noted that the TVA stands out among the independent agencies of the United States' federal government. Of a long list that includes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and the Social Security Administration (SSA), TVA alone has a sub-national focus. It exclusively serves the needs of the entire state of Tennessee, large portions of Alabama, Mississippi, and Ken-

tucky, and smaller portions of Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. The importance of this idiosyncrasy can hardly be overstated: *the federal government includes an agency that only serves the interests of the Tennessee River Valley.*

This fact has led to criticism of TVA from across the political spectrum. Liberals see its narrow focus to be proof the federal government is privileging the needs of one part of the nation to the detriment of others. Conservatives and libertarians see the agency as a challenge to the Tenth Amendment and the American institution of federalism. I argue that both of these critiques are incorrect: TVA has not been replicated because of the unique character of the Tennessee River Valley both historically and today, and its structure—as decided by the Supreme Court in *Ashwander v. Tennessee Valley Authority* 297 U.S. 288 (1936)—is in accord with the requirements of American federalism.

TVA originated as a keystone program of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR's) First New Deal, a period lasting from 1933 to 1934. Against the backdrop of the Great Depression—then in its fourth year—many people called for direct relief efforts from the federal government. The tenor of these requests ran on a continuum. On the one hand, federalism-skeptic Brain Trust intellectuals like Harold Ickes and Adolf Berle wanted the president to concentrate power in Washington, D.C. in order to begin the process of long-term economic planning. On the other hand, progressive governors like Wisconsin's Robert LaFollette and New York's Gifford Pinchot, as well as "Felix Frankfurter's Happy Hot Dogs"—Harvard Law School graduates like Dean Acheson and David Lilienthal—favored block grants for state-level discretionary spending and federated assistance programs.

FDR opted for a mixed solution. Some of his administration's projects, such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) were clear acts of centralization and federal aggrandizement. Others, such as the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) and the TVA were founded on block grants and fashioned in accordance with the requirements of American federalism.

Before turning to TVA, it must be noted that the American institution of federalism is frequently misunderstood. It neither protects "states' rights" nor calls for simple devolution of policy choices to localities. Rather, it is a complicated system of governance in which the federal, state, and local governments are delegated the powers most natural to their abilities. Furthermore—and importantly in the New Deal period and its aftermath—it allows for joint action to be taken between different levels of government, allowing each to undertake projects that it can perform better than others, and offering multi-governmental cooperation in other situations. As James Madison stated in *Federalist* 39:

The proposed Constitution, therefore, even when tested by the rules laid down by its antagonists, is, in strictness, neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers of the government are drawn, it is partly federal and partly national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not federal; in the extent of them, again, it is federal, not national; and, finally in the authoritative mode of introducing amendments, it is neither wholly federal nor wholly national.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, a few myths about the New Deal must be dispelled before approaching the TVA. The New Deal is not an "it;" rather, the period was a giant assortment of programs that cannot be understood to be the dénouement of any particular political philosophy. Some programs were national in scope, others granted new rights to states and localities. As Sidney Milkis has argued, "the New Deal [was] informed by a public philosophy in which state power would be carefully interwoven with earlier conceptions of American government."<sup>2</sup> One can argue that the New Deal empowered the government, but only if you concede that all levels of government were equally affected.

In the intervening ninety years, TVA operated remarkably smoothly. Some of its capacities were altered after the passage of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts in 1970 and 1972, but it was resilient enough to service the devolutionary policies of the 1980s and 1990s.

## TVA AT HOME

TVA is a federal agency that, peculiarly, does not receive any federal funding. The agency's purpose, as its founding act states, is:

To improve the navigability and to provide for the flood control of the *Tennessee River*; to provide for reforestation and the proper use of marginal lands in the *Tennessee Valley*; to provide for the agricultural and industrial development of said valley; to provide for the national defense by the creation of a corporation for the operation of Government properties *at and near Muscle Shoals in the State of Alabama*, and for other purposes.<sup>3</sup>

According to their website, the agency currently “provides electricity for 153 local power companies serving 10 million people in Tennessee and parts of six surrounding states, as well as directly to 58 large industrial customers and federal installations” and “provides flood control, navigation, and land management for the Tennessee River system and assists local power companies and regional governments with their economic development efforts.” None of these functions were delivered to TVA by federal fiat and without the consent of its constituents. In the words of Philip Selznick, it coopted local institutions, “a process of absorbing new elements into leadership or policy-determining structures as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the agency is administered on a decentralized basis: “a significant degree of power was given to ad hoc organizations and conferences within TVA itself.”<sup>6</sup> Or, in the agency's own words:

TVA is foremost a public power company, which means we care what you think. We value transparency and open communication, providing many ways for you to interact with us. We also strive to be good neighbors through corporate giving, employee volunteer efforts and programs providing assistance to those in need.<sup>7</sup>

TVA contains two advisory councils, the Regional Energy Resource Council and the Regional Resource Stewardship Council, that seek guid-

ance from citizens of the area, it offers many volunteer programs, and it partners with local institutions of higher education. Per Selznick:

An unusual amount of consideration and attention of the TVA agricultural staff is devoted to preserving the integrity of the colleges so that they may receive full public credit for participation in the cooperative program, and particularly to supporting the colleges as indispensable channels to the farm population.<sup>8</sup>

In total, TVA's sub-national focus, participatory structure, and system of administrative decentralization serve to connect its constituents to the national and international economies without hollowing out the local economy or displacing local cultures. In fact, the local economy and local cultures are *strengthened* by TVA; the citizens of the Tennessee River Valley are linked to their community by the same institution that links them to the national and international economies. As Patrick M. Kline and Enrico Moretti from the National Bureau of Economic Research demonstrate with substantive econometric data:

TVA sped the industrialization of the Tennessee Valley and provided lasting benefits to the region in the form of high paying manufacturing jobs. Notably, the impact on manufacturing employment persisted well beyond the lapsing of the regional subsidies, suggesting the presence of powerful agglomeration economies.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, “[m]ost of the national impact of the TVA on worker welfare is accounted for by the direct effects of the program's vast investments in public infrastructure.”<sup>10</sup>

Alternately, one might cite the words of David Lilienthal, the agency's first chairman, in his book *TVA: Democracy on the March*:

The methods of democratic development represented by the TVA are distinctive, but their roots lie deep in the soil of American tradition...in short, the valley's change has gone forward under typical and traditional American conditions, rather than under non-existent “ideal” conditions that would not or could not be duplicated.<sup>11</sup>

## TVA ABROAD

In the opening pages of *TVA: Democracy on the March*, Lilienthal argues that “I write of the Tennessee Valley, but all this could have happened in almost any of a thousand other valleys where rivers run from the hills to the sea.”<sup>12</sup> His examples run the gamut from the Missouri and Arkansas rivers to “Brazil...the Argentine... China...and India.”<sup>13</sup> And these examples do not represent wishful thinking. River valley authorities modeled on TVA were developed in the post-World War II period, most notably in Iran, India, and China. Non-American writers like Julian Huxley—the brother of Aldous Huxley—called TVA “a symbol of a new possibility for the democratic countries—the possibility of obtaining the efficiency of a coordinated plan without authoritarian regimentation.”<sup>14</sup> British and Canadian intellectuals also floated the ideas of a “DVA” on the Danube River as well as the St. Lawrence River. But, the three largest river valley authorities built according the TVA model were in the Khuzestan region of Iran,<sup>15</sup> the Damodar Valley Corporation in India,<sup>16</sup> and the Three Gorges Dam Project in China.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is a model of how public works programs ought to look in a globalized world. It fulfills Tocqueville’s stipulation in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* that “government ought to be centralized, but administration decentralized.”<sup>18</sup> And it has paid dividends. While following the requirements of American federalism, TVA has developed what was one of the poorest areas in the United States; likewise, institutions modeled upon it have done the same in a number of other nations. Public works projects, even if they are undertaken by national governments, are not antithetical to “placedness” if properly administered. In fact, I argue, these projects can link individuals to their communities *by means of* linking them to national and international economies.

<sup>1</sup> James Madison, “Federalist 39,” January 16, 1788, from *Teaching American History*, accessed November 26, 2023, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/federalist-no-39/>.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney M. Milkis, “Ideas, Institutions, and the New Deal Constitutional Order,” *American Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (2014): 167–76, 169.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 12A, the Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933. Emphases my own.

<sup>4</sup> “About TVA,” *Tennessee Valley Authority*, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.tva.com/about-tva>.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: a Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1949), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Selznick, *TVA and Grass Roots*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> TVA, “About.”

<sup>8</sup> Selznick, *TVA and Grass Roots*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick M. Kline and Enrico Moretti, “Local Economic Development, Agglomeration Economies, and the Big Push: 100 Years of Evidence from the Tennessee Valley Authority,” *National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper Series*, no. 19293 (August 2013): 2, [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w19293/revisions/w19293.revo.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w19293/revisions/w19293.revo.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Kline and Moretti, “100 Years of Evidence.”

<sup>11</sup> David E. Lilienthal, *TVA: Democracy on March* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1944), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Lilienthal, *TVA*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Lilienthal, *TVA*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in David Elkbladh, “Mr. TVA: Grass-Roots Development, David Lilienthal, and the Rise and Fall of the Tennessee Valley Authority as a Symbol for U.S. Overseas Development, 1933–1973,” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Gordon R. Clapp, “Iran: A TVA for the Khuzestan Region,” *Middle East Journal* 11, no. 1 (1957): 1–11.

<sup>16</sup> Suranjit Kumar Saha, “River-Basin Planning in the Damodar Valley of India,” *Geographical Review* 69, no. 3 (1979): 273–87.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Sutton, “The Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River in China,” *Geography* 89, no. 2 (2004): 111–26.

<sup>18</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, ed. Jon Elster, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).



# TAXING PEOPLE AND PLACES:

## *How Localism Helps Remedy Tax Problems in America Today*

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### ABSTRACT

The “tax gap”—the difference between total taxes owed and actual taxes paid—is growing, leading many economists and attorneys to seek methods for improving America’s tax morale. This article argues that taxation and tax compliance should be understood as the product of local histories, geographies, and cultures. Taxes are one of the most direct connections between citizens and their government and should not be seen principally as a policy imposed from above, but rather as one rooted to a particular place and its people. First, the article tells the story of how the property tax was used to create public schools in colonial Massachusetts, treating it as a case study in how a place and its people can produce unique systems of taxation. Second, the article argues that a return to more localized systems of taxation would help Americans become less alienated from increasingly national, impersonal taxing authorities. The article concludes by proposing that local forms of taxation—specifically the property tax—should be used as vehicles for improving tax morale, closing the tax gap, and re-instilling in Americans a sense of shared financial responsibility to the places and people around us. Taxes need not be a duty we shoulder begrudgingly; indeed, taxes are a fertile sphere for bolstering local agency, raising up local voices, and cultivating a sense of local belonging.

### INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged (in the halls of the Internal Revenue Service) that Americans do not pay their taxes. That is, they do not pay *all* the taxes which the government says they owe. This “tax gap”—the difference between total taxes owed by the public and actual taxes paid—is growing.<sup>1</sup> While the U.S. has fairly high voluntary tax compliance (known as “tax morale”) relative to other countries, any incidence of noncompliance among taxpayers is cause for concern. Economists believe non-payment is contagious; after all, if your neighbor doesn’t pay his taxes, why should you? This article presents a novel argument: that taxes should be understood as products of the people and places which impose taxes. In the face of broader trends of social fragmentation and atomization, people still expect to

see their tax dollars being put back into their immediate communities. Seen through the lens of how attachment to place persists in a world of nation states, taxation can be understood as an expression of deep local attachment: a community’s attempt to exercise its political objectives through the raising of revenue and the redistribution of property. The first section of this article looks at the history of taxation in colonial America, relying on Massachusetts as a case study, and argues that taxes have always been influenced by local cultures and histories. The second section explains why Americans have become increasingly disconnected and disaffected with their tax system. The third and final section proposes a renewed reliance on local forms of taxation, such as the property tax, as a way of improving tax morale, closing the tax gap, and creating a more rooted American civic life.

## THE PLACE: PROPERTY TAXATION IN COLONIAL MASSACHUSETTS

One place in particular, Massachusetts, provides an illustrative case study for how taxation is intertwined with the place and the people being taxed. More than 200 years after Bostonians threw tea into the harbor in protest of “taxation without representation,” taxes remain the *sine qua non* of the state’s politics. By the 1970s the state had become known affectionately as “Taxachusetts,” sporting the third highest effective individual tax rate in the country (13.8 percent). Throughout the next two decades, Bostonians revolted again (this time with representation), voting consistently to decrease property and income taxes. Over 40 years since this process of tax reduction began, Massachusetts had reduced its overall state and local tax burdens more than 26 percent, the third highest reduction of any state in the period 1977 to 2013.<sup>2</sup> While these modern trends show how responsive a state’s tax system can be to local pressures, the roots of this responsiveness predate the state’s founding. In order to fully understand the modern-day relationship of Massachusetts citizens to their taxes, one must follow taxation from the Old World to the New.

To better understand this history, let us follow one particular form of local tax: the property tax. The property tax has provided local governments with a significant source of revenue since the seventeenth century, but its roots are far older.<sup>3</sup> Use of property and land taxes—often used to support public schools—has its origins among the Anglo-Saxons. By the 1300s in England, the “property tax” had become detached from the land, attaching primarily *in personam* (to the person) rather than *in rem* (to the land). This meant that taxes were not levied against locations, but against the people who lived there. This caused a widespread decline in revenue as more and more Englishmen were able to avoid the tax through personal exemptions. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the state’s “property tax” had returned to becoming a “land tax.”<sup>4</sup> Protestants in England as well as in Ger-

many felt that universal education would protect their societies from rising secularism while ensuring that people could read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Locally-funded public schools were thus a way to combat the domination which the Catholic church had held over education throughout Europe.<sup>5</sup> “Free schools” in England were much used by the ascendant Puritan class following the 1649 English Civil War.

Puritan emigration to America eventually brought this system of universal education, funded through local property taxation, to Massachusetts. By 1660, the Puritans had laid the basic outlines of American public education and property taxation.<sup>6</sup> The local property tax, however, was initially a concept with limited use: colonial New England governments did not start using it until they had the need to fund public schools. Still, prior to the growth of the property tax, the Puritans used a system they had inherited from England composed of three types of tax: the poll tax, the property tax, and the faculty tax (akin to an income tax). The property tax was not imposed from on high; rather, it developed in direct response to the very specific cultural and religious needs among the Puritans of Massachusetts.

Several factors contributed to the development of the property tax as the primary funding mechanism for public schools in colonial New England. First, it became apparent that there were more children in need of education than there were schools to teach them.<sup>7</sup> Land and rents were also seen as insufficient as a source of funding: land was effectively worthless in New England during this time because there was so much of it. Additionally, New England’s civic geography centered around the town, a unit of social life less common elsewhere in colonial America. Towns and villages thus became the locus of small, locally-funded public schools. Puritans felt themselves to be building on a Protestant tradition from pre-Reformation England of networks of elementary schools. Taken all together, then, Massachusetts was well positioned geographically and culturally to use the local property tax as a mechanism for funding public schools. Cul-

ture, religion, and geography thus contributed to the development of a system of local taxation unique to Massachusetts which spread across the country as New Englanders moved West.

## **THE PEOPLE: FEELINGS OF DISENGAGEMENT AND DISAFFECTION**

Taxes, like places, are imaginary. In other words, what societies choose to tax is arbitrary; taxes have no pre-existence in nature, and must therefore be created by human beings. As a result, taxation which seems unconnected from the lives of citizens (i.e. from the places in which they live, the roads on which they drive, the schools they send their children to) will feel even more ‘unreal.’ Because tax law relies on a legal fiction, in order to close the tax gap and reconnect Americans with their governments, both state and local taxing authorities need to better show citizens how their taxes contribute to their immediate environments. Taxes always exist within geographic spaces and are deeply tied to places whose boundaries the taxing authority has jurisdiction over.

In the nineteenth century, taxation in the United States was more of a local activity than it is today.<sup>8</sup> Taxpayers paid their taxes directly to local governments, and local officials were responsible for collecting taxes and administering the tax system.<sup>9</sup> This close relationship between taxpayers and tax collectors fostered positive tax morale, as taxpayers felt that their taxes were being used to fund local services and that the people collecting the taxes were held accountable.<sup>10</sup> Over time, as the federal government assumed greater control over the tax system, taxpayers no longer related to the tax system at a local level.<sup>11</sup> Under the tax system, taxpayers pay their taxes directly to the federal government, and the centralized bureaucracy of the IRS is responsible for collecting taxes and administering the tax system.<sup>12</sup> This shift has partially contributed to the decline of tax morale, as taxpayers feel less connected to the tax system and less engaged in the process of paying taxes.<sup>13</sup> Some scholars have argued that the problem

with the current tax system is that taxes have become too disconnected from the people and things which are subject to tax. The legal scholar John Prebble has described this problem as “ectopia,” the displacement or severing of the signifier and what is signified: income tax requires a concept of income, but the concept of income will necessarily be artificially constructed.<sup>14</sup> The government does not impose a tax on the receipt of gifts, for instance, despite \$100 from a grandparent being functionally the same as \$100 in income earned from an employer. In this sense, the income tax relies on a “fiction” that taxpayers must play along with, if they are to obey the law.

This disconnect between reality and law can make the tax code appear artificial and distant from how taxpayers and businesses alike experience their own commercial realities.<sup>15</sup> Rather than remedying this “ectopic” divide, modern tax systems simply concoct ever-more complex legal fictions, which only furthers the divide.<sup>16</sup> In the context of so many legal fictions, the tax-avoidant citizen appears more sympathetic, a figure trying to navigate a maze of imprecise anti-avoidance rules which can only accomplish their intended ends by being vague and imprecise (for with specificity would come the risk of even more tax avoidance).

## **LOCALISM AS A PATH FORWARD**

To improve tax morale and civically reengage Americans calls for a renewed emphasis on local taxation. In this respect, the local property tax as it took shape in colonial Massachusetts should serve as a model for what this movement might look like: local taxes created to solve local problems, grounded in the distinct culture of a place and its people.

As other forms of revenue—notably the income tax—have surpassed the property tax in scale and scope, why has the property tax endured at the local level? For one, the property tax targets a form of passive wealth which income taxes and capital gains taxes do not. The tax also has

the advantage of being highly visible at the local level: large estates are hard to hide, so local citizens are always aware of who is paying for local public education. This forces wealthier people to be responsive and engaged in the local school system. The endurance of the property tax is also a tribute to its great versatility: it has a high degree of vertical equity (taxing differently situated people differently) and is redistributive from rich to poor via the school system.<sup>17</sup>

Critics of the property tax argue that it increases inequalities: wealthier places are able to sustain higher tax burdens to fund higher-quality public amenities. Clearly, such critics might argue, some kind of redistribution of wealth is in the interests of fairness and justice. Concerns about inequality should be taken seriously, but an equitable redistribution of local taxes ultimately raises the issue of what communities and places owe to one another, and where we draw the line between one place and another. Should a wealthy town be forced to pay for the schools of a poorer neighboring town? Should suburban taxes be redirected to fund amenities in inner cities? Ultimately, questions of equity are questions of community: who do we want to benefit from the taxes we have imposed on ourselves, and what do we owe people who are outside that polity? Engaging with these questions needs to be done at the local level as part of any broader return to local taxation.

What will this movement toward local taxation look like in practice? It will mean more communication between local taxing authorities and the people. It will mean seeing tangible products of one's tax dollars, and greater transparency around how tax money is spent. It

will mean shifting tax burdens away from the federal government toward states as a way of putting more money into state coffers for local projects. Finally, it will mean raising the penalty for non-payment of taxes. Tax evasion should be viewed as a serious disruption of community, and the names of local tax-avoiders should be published for communities to see who is shirking their duties to the places they live.

## CONCLUSION

Taxes are local phenomena; what, who, and how much is taxed is a product ultimately of the people who come together to tax themselves. Improving tax morale in America will require a better understanding of the local origins of taxes. This article presented Massachusetts as a case study of how one particular type of tax—the local property tax—could serve as a model for a wider return to localism in our tax system.

Dispersing our tax system and returning federal taxing responsibilities to local communities would have several benefits for the tax system and for taxpayers.<sup>18</sup> First, it would increase transparency and accountability, as local officials would be responsible for collecting taxes and administering the tax system.<sup>19</sup> Second, it would increase civic engagement, as taxpayers would have a direct role in the tax process and would feel more connected to the tax system.<sup>20</sup> Third, it would encourage a positive culture of tax compliance, as taxpayers would feel that their taxes were being used to fund local services and that their local officials were accountable for how their taxes were being used.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Natasha Sarin, *The Case for a Robust Attack on the Tax Gap*, U.S. Dep. of Treas. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/the-case-for-a-robust-attack-on-the-tax-gap>.

<sup>2</sup> Francine J. Lipman, "Getting to Know the Commonwealth Formerly Known as 'Taxachusetts,'" *American Bar Association*, 2016, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/taxation/publications/abataximes\\_home/16nov/16nov-pbm-lipman-getting-to-know-the-commonwealth-fka-taxachusetts/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/taxation/publications/abataximes_home/16nov/16nov-pbm-lipman-getting-to-know-the-commonwealth-fka-taxachusetts/).

<sup>3</sup> Jens P. Jensen, *Economics of the Property Tax* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1966), 1.

<sup>4</sup> W. R. Ward, *The English Land Tax in the Eighteenth Century* (London, UK: Oxford University press, 1953), passim.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Monroe, *A Text-Book in the History of Education* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1970), 407-20; originally published in 1905.

<sup>6</sup> M. W. Jernegan, *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1783* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 63.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Puritan Pronaos: Studies in the Intellectual Life of New England in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1936), 63-64.

<sup>8</sup> See Lawrence Zelenak, *The Great American Tax Novel*, 110 Mich. L. Rev. 969, 976 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*; see also Lawrence Zelenak, *Justice Holmes, Ralph Kramden, and the Civic Virtues of a Tax Return Filing Requirement*, 61 Tax L. Rev. 53, 56 (2008).

<sup>10</sup> See Marjorie E. Kornhauser, *A Tax Morale Approach to Compliance: Recommendations for the IRS*, 8 Fla. Tax Rev. 599, 601-03 (2007).

<sup>11</sup> See Zelenak, *The Great American Tax Novel*, supra note 8.

<sup>12</sup> See IRS, *The Agency, its Mission and Statutory Authority* (last updated: May 31, 2022), <https://www.irs.gov/about-irs/the-agency-its-mission-and-statutory-authority>.

<sup>13</sup> See Bryan Camp, *Theory and Practice in Tax Administration*, 29 Virginia Tax Rev. 227, 228, 234 (2009); Zelenak, *Justice Holmes*, supra note 12.

<sup>14</sup> See John Prebble, *Income Taxation: A Structure Built on Sand*, 24 Sydney L. Rev. 301, 306 (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Compare *California Oil Products Ltd. v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation*, 52 CLR 28 (1934) (recognizing compensation for business losses which took the form of capital compensation) with *Heavy Mineral Pty Ltd v. Federal Commissioner of Taxation*, 115 CLR 512 (1966) (not recognizing compensation for losses in the form of revenue and distinguishing Heavy Mineral's situation from the taxpayer in *California* on the grounds that in *California* the business was destroyed as a matter of law, whereas Mineral was destroyed only as a matter of fact).

<sup>16</sup> See Prebble, supra note 14.

<sup>17</sup> Billy D. Walker, *The Local Property Tax for Public Schools: Some Historical Perspectives* (Journal of Education Finance, Winter 1984, Vol. 9, No. 3, SPECIAL EDITION—Taxation), 264-288.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., New Hampshire Assessing Board, *Understanding NH Property Taxes*, <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/mun-prop/property/documents/asb-manual.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> See 76 Fed. Reg. 2193 (2011), Wednesday January 12, 2011, 1979 - 2241; see also Kornhauser, *A Tax Morale Approach to Compliance*, supra note 10.

<sup>20</sup> See Lars P. Feld & Bruno S. Frey, *Tax Compliance as the Result of a Psychological Tax Contract: The Role of Incentives and Responsive Regulation*, 29 Law & Pol'y 102, 104 (2007).

<sup>21</sup> See Bruno S. Frey & Benno Torgler, *Tax Morale and Conditional Cooperation*, 35 J. Comp. Econ. 136, 153 (2007).



# THE RIGHT TO ASSEMBLY: *A Case for Public Space as a Public Good*

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## ABSTRACT

This article argues that the Assembly Clause of the U.S. Constitution can and should be used to generate a right to public space. The availability of public space—understood here as spaces free from the influences of capital—is central to the functioning of a democratic society. It is in these places that people participate openly in debates, form social and political bonds, and thereby engage in democratic participation. This article first analyzes the recent trend of privatizing spaces in the interest of building wealth or attracting development, both of which pose a grave danger to the availability of public spaces. Next, the article provides a brief overview of the current legal schemes which regulate property and the division of public and private space. Much of the legal regulation of property in the United States happens at the local level and through banal legal mechanisms; it is through those mechanisms, I argue, that private actors control most of the development that happens in communities. Finally, the article proposes a way to protect public space and generate an affirmative right to it through the Assembly Clause of the Constitution. Commonly understood as part of the petition process of government, the Clause, I argue, should be used to argue for a right to space *on which the public can assemble*. Such a Constitutional structure will require the consideration of the public sphere and availability of public space. Without such guarantees, there is great risk that all spaces will become commodified.

## INTRODUCTION

A well-functioning civil society and democracy requires public and private space. Public spaces are those where people participate unencumbered in the machinations of civil society: where they spend time with groups of peers, friends, and families, free from the influence of capital or private interests. Public parks, libraries, community centers, and schools are classic examples of public spaces; many spaces for seniors, children, and larger community groups also fall under the category. More generally, to borrow from Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, the “public sphere” encompasses the whole arena of spaces where people participate in the political and interpersonal lives of their

communities. The public sphere is where they engage with social and public issues without coercion from economic interests or the state. Just as important are the streets, buildings, squares, and intersections of daily life where people interact with others—where protests are taken and unions make their presence known. All of these comprise vital spaces of public life. They are central to the thriving of a civil society.

In contrast, private spaces are defined by exclusion. The home is the paradigmatic private space, but the category also includes privately-owned firms, where entrance is contingent on payment. It is the encroachment of private spaces into the public sphere which interests this article. Public and private spaces are both

subject to regulation: zoning codes, business development districts, and common interest communities are examples of legal regimes from various scales of government that regulate, distribute, and classify space. These legal regimes—and the actors who have power within them—promote the domination of capital above all other interests. The result is dangerous for the future of public space.

The central argument of this paper is that public space must become recognized as a public good: it must become an affirmative obligation which can be asserted to defend against the privatization of all space. This paper proposes that one way to ground this right is through the Assembly Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. An underdeveloped part of the Amendment, the Assembly Clause provides that “Congress shall make no law...abridging... the right of the people peacefully to assemble.”<sup>1</sup> The right to assemble, therefore, can be used to require policy makers, zoning boards, and other governmental bodies to ensure that there are sufficient public spaces provided in communities. It is not enough to entrust the availability of public space to private actors; instead, it must be a guaranteed and protected public good.

This article identifies the current problem with capital’s free reign over the spaces of everyday life and the potential consequences if public spaces do not have legal protection. It then moves to consider the constitutional right to assemble, arguing that it provides a starting point for further policy, legislative, and local decision making to protect public space.

## **IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM OF PRIVATE CAPITAL**

The institutions of capital—here meaning firms, banks, and other institutions designed to generate and maintain wealth—have already figured out that legal categorization of space is necessary for their continued existence. Daniel Immerwahr observes that the world is now home to more than 5,400 “economic en-

claves,” “estates, islands, havens, export processing zones, [and] free points,” which are physical spaces created by legal mechanisms to protect the money and assets kept there from interference.<sup>2</sup> Hoarding wealth in the Cayman Islands is not a new idea, but more and more, capital is turning to dominate *physical* spaces. It is this trend which places public space in jeopardy. While capital can create new spaces—whether by laying claim to the oceans, dominating the housing market in a certain area, or through lobbying governments to change their legal structures—public spaces do not have such powerful advocates. In the United States, zoning codes, common-interest communities, and development districts devalue the availability of public space in favor of private interests and development. It is these legal mechanisms which grant power to private firms, including the power of eminent domain, the ability to include or exclude certain communities, and the ability to decide the ratio of housing, public space, and retail space.

Just as a commercial firm requires space to function, so too does democratic participation and civic life. Housing communities and neighborhoods are a prime example. Though housing is typically privately owned by individuals—and a main driver of individual wealth in the United States—housing developments and their parks and streets are typically maintained as public space, managed and upkeep by local or state governments. But there is a rising trend of private equity firms buying up entire neighborhoods and housing stock. For example, a subsidiary of Blackrock recently purchased 90% of an entire neighborhood in Atlanta.<sup>3</sup> Not only does one firm own the entire housing stock in this area, but they now also control the availability of public spaces for those living there. Institutional ownership of housing is only one example of how capital can encroach on the ability for public space to function and exist. An obligation to include public space within the planning and development process, and the individual right for individuals to have access to public space, would help obviate these concerns.

## THE ABSENCE OF PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTIONS IN CURRENT LEGAL SCHEMES

The same problem is evident in other legal apparatuses. Zoning codes rarely require public space to be included in residential developments, commercial, or mixed-use zones.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, even if public space (or “open” space, as referred to in many codes) was originally part of the design or structure of an area, no community input is required before it is removed. Common interest communities, which are codified types of neighborhood associations, operate with similar freedom. The availability of public space in much of the United States—around homes, shops, and places of work, school, and recreation—is a symptom of voluntary decision-making and accident, not careful consideration. And as land values go up and capital ventures grow their ownership shares of all types of land without a requirement to provide public space, or a mechanism to defend it, public space is in danger of extinction.

This problem is why an affirmative, constitutional obligation is necessary. The current legal scheme, particularly planning, zoning, and allocating space from a government perspective, heavily favors the market and its forces. Business development districts generally give private real-estate developers broad plenary authority to build any type of commercial and residential business “without limitation;” in addition, they “prohibit or restrict vehicular traffic on the streets” to use the power of eminent domain and “do everything necessary or desirable to effectuate the plan of improvement for the district.”<sup>5</sup> These powers are subject to municipal or state review, but nowhere in the requirements for these developers is the inclusion of public space.

## A CONSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO PROVIDING PUBLIC SPACE

It is thus imperative to safeguard the availability of public space by means of new—and effective—legal and policy mechanisms. Without

such protections, the logic of capital’s inevitable end is to occupy all space possible: squeezing out the ability to participate in basic civic life. The Supreme Court’s jurisprudence demonstrates that current protections from the First Amendment do not fully protect the right to participate in public life in private spaces. The Court’s 1946 decision in *Marsh v. Alabama* recognized that religious groups are protected in handing out pamphlets to passers-by in a “company town.”<sup>6</sup> The presence of First Amendment protections does not diminish in “public spaces,” the Court noted. But the Court also recognizes and allows limitations in private, commercialized space. In 1972, the Court decided in *Lloyd Corp. v. Tanner* that a private shopping center had the right to prohibit activists from handing out leaflets.<sup>7</sup> In private, commercial, and contained spaces, private owners—nearly always developers—can control more directly the information presented, the availability of public interaction, and the ability of people to engage with others.

Most interpretive work on the First Amendment’s Assembly Clause has been about the intrusion of protests, pickets, and other forms of organized demonstration or collective action.<sup>8</sup> Yet the language of the Assembly Clause can also be interpreted to generate a right to protect and produce public space. Traditionally understood (alongside the right to petition) as a right to assemble in large groups and to associate with others, it can also be used to generate a right to have space *on which people can assemble*. Rather than protecting the ability for people to briefly assemble merely for petition or speech purposes, in other words, the “right to assembly” also implies that there must exist physical space that is protected for public use. Without such access to space, private actors can wield their exclusionary rights against the assembly of people even for non-petition and protest purposes. A developer who owns all the land in a development district—including the roads and sidewalks—has stronger tools to exclude any activity that they do not sanction, and profit from, than where access to public spaces is guaranteed.

As an example of how this right might be exercised in practice, consider a city council or state legislature entertaining a business devel-

opment plan. Typically, in these cases, the plan would give plenary authority over a large area to a private developer. Yet a policy reflective of a legally enshrined right to public might require the developer to include certain public spaces in the plan, or require that a certain percentage or amount of land be designated for public use. The private party, in this situation, would not own the land which is designated as a public space, and there might be further requirements about its function and open use in the middle of the development area. If the developer failed to comply with these requirements, then the right to public space would allow municipal actors to bring a cause of action against the private party to enforce the constitutional right.

A right to assemble—and therefore, a right to places in which to assemble—will thus create an affirmative obligation on municipalities, legislatures, and private actors to consider the public and private as they plan, zone, regulate, and commodify space. Conversely, without this guarantee, and without access to spaces to interact in the public sphere with one’s fellow members of the civil body politic, there is great risk that all spaces will become commodified.

## CONCLUSION

To allow capital’s complete overtaking of public space is to become trespassers in all places. Without the permission of a private actor—and importantly, paying the price of admission—there are no protections for people’s ability to gather and to assemble. To guarantee the existence and access to public space, the affirmative legal right should be grounded in the First Amendment’s right to assembly. Without such strong protection—one grounded in a Constitutional right—the spaces of public interaction, democratic participation, and everyday life risk becoming privatized, for-profit spaces only. Particularly in cities, where space is scarce and therefore valuable, the incentives for governments, developers, and leaders are strong to allow private development. But public spaces are a crucial part of every community, and they must be protected.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution, amendment I.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, “Zoning Out,” *The New York Review*, November 23, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/11/23/zoning-out-crack-up-capitalism-quinn-slobodian/>.

<sup>3</sup> Elena Botella, “Investment Firms Aren’t Buying All the Houses. But They Are Buying the Most Important Ones,” *Slate* (June 19, 2021), <https://slate.com/business/2021/06/blackrock-invitation-houses-investment-firms-real-estate.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Pattelle v. Planning Bd. Of Woburn*, 20 Mass. App. 279 (1985).

<sup>5</sup> Code language excerpted from Margaret Kohn, “Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space,” (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> *Marsh v. Alabama*, 326 U.S. 501 (1946).

<sup>7</sup> *Lloyd Corp. v. Tanner*, 407 U.S. 551 (1972).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Nikolas Bowie, “The Constitutional Right to Self-Government,” 130 *Yale L.J.* 7 (2021).



# CANON LAW IN A WORLD OF NATION-STATES

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## ABSTRACT

The 1917 codification of canon law transformed the body of law which governs the Roman Catholic Church from one consisting in diverse documentary forms spanning centuries to the form of a modern legal code. Among the factors which influenced the transformation of the Church's law was the rise of the modern nation-state—characterized, in part, by territorial boundaries and a particular juridical order. This essay explores how the rise of the modern nation-state has exerted influence on entities other than traditional state actors—including entities not primarily defined by their attachment to a bounded territory—using the law governing the Catholic Church as an example of this influence.

## INTRODUCTION

The codification of canon law is an important, and insufficiently understood, event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and its place in a world of nation-states. While standard accounts of the contemporary history of the Church portray the Second Vatican Council as “bringing the Church into the modern world,” the promulgation of the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, or the Code of Canon Law, in 1917 is an event of equal importance in the life of the Church. Attention to this reform calls into question a neatly packaged history of the Church in the 20th century, shines a light on the influence of the modern nation-state on entities beyond typical state actors, and complicates the assumed relationship between a legal order and physical space—or “territory”—it governs. This essay considers the significance of the codification of canon law by addressing two questions. First, what was the Church's self-understanding of its motives for the codification of a monumental body of law, dating back centuries? Second, what does the codification of ecclesial law suggest about the influence of the nation-state—and a particular, attendant form of juridical code—as a feature of

the modern world? In what follows, I aim to show that the Church's self-conscious embrace of the legal codes of modern nation-states was grounded in an early 20th-century desire for standardization and consistency, produced by uniform law and clear principles for its application, and that its effect has been insufficiently appreciated by actors inside and outside of the Church.

## CANON LAW IN A WORLD OF NATION-STATES

The codification of canon law entailed the transformation of the body of law which had governed the Catholic Church. Prior to this transformation, ecclesial law consisted in an unwieldy variety of forms, from the canons and creeds issued by the ecumenical councils of the early Church to Gratian's *Decretum Gratiani* and the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*. Bishops around the world complained that the operative laws of the Church—many of which had been abrogated or become obsolete, required cross referencing, and involved the ever-present possibility of contradiction—had become unwieldy at best, and incoherent at worst. “At the beginning of our century,” canonist

Stephan Kuttner wrote, “everybody engaged in the teaching or the practice of canon law knew that it was imperative to bring this law into a concise and clearly comprehensible form.”<sup>1</sup>

Documents of the Vatican’s Commission for the Reform of Canon Law show that the Pope and the members of the Commission took it as their goal to give canon law “a new order and form in imitation of the example set by all civilized nations of our time.”<sup>2</sup> Though such extensive reform was not favored by all members of the Commission, Kuttner wrote that those with the most influence, including the future Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gaspari, “had a profound admiration for these civil codes.” Indeed, he goes on, “[f]rom the start of their preliminary discussions, they were determined to cast the law of the Church in canons and articles in the form of the modern code.”<sup>3</sup> Codification unified canon law, and provided clear and uniform principles for its application. No longer was the Church to be governed, as it had been, on a piecemeal or case-by-case basis. Rather, with codification, the Church was to be governed in a way that was modeled on, and test-driven by, secular states.

The project of transforming the many and diverse legal documents constitutive of the Church’s law to codified form was a monumental one—a fact which Pope Pius X acknowledged from the outset. Although daunting, the Pope explained that the reform was necessary for a number of reasons. Cumbersome voluminousness itself was one reason. Related was the fact that many laws which had either been abrogated or become obsolete were still “on the books”—risking confusion, contradiction, and even misapplication of Church law. A final reason given was that changing times and circumstances rendered some laws of the Church “difficult to execute, or less useful to the common good of minds.”<sup>4</sup> It was, then, an interesting combination of practicability, clarity, historical consciousness and pastoral care which Pope Pius X identified as grounds for the transformation of the Church’s law.

An important effect of the 1917 legal reform was its abrogation of all prior ecclesial law.

Motivated by a desire for clarity, and an awareness of the jurisprudential tangle caused by multiple sources, the 1917 Code incorporated the intended contents of prior law and nullified them in their prior form. As Kuttner explains, “with the promulgation of the Code, all texts of the earlier law lost their formal character as ‘laws’—even where in substance they continue to govern present-day discipline in the form of the new canons.”<sup>5</sup> That is, while, after codification, earlier canonical documents could be used as informative tools for the interpretation of the Code, it is the Code itself, not the documents, which implements the doctrine of the Church into law. Any changes in the Church’s governance would henceforth have to be inscribed in canon law in order to be binding on bishops responsible for their implementation.

While the legal codes on which the 1917 Code was modeled governed particular geographic borders, the institutional Catholic Church was, during the same period, making two simultaneous moves. The first was dissociating itself from historical monarchies; the second was asserting supra-national authority: the church claimed governance (though not strict political sovereignty) not only within the boundaries of the newly-independent Vatican City, but over believers all over the world. That is, as the Church adopted the form of law of the territorially-defined modern nation-state, it sought to exercise authority over land and people *not* necessarily bound by any defined territory. The form, if not the content, of the law of modern nation-states, would therefore govern the form, if not the content, of the law of an institution which claimed supra-national authority.

## THE REFORM OF ECCLESIAL LAW AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council, the first ecumenical council to be held after codification, is a useful example of the way the secularly informed reform of ecclesial law of 1917 influenced the Church. Vatican II produced many documents of the sort which *had* been the source of law prior to 1917. Famous documents like *Gaud-*

*ium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* introduced potentially transformational ideas for the life of the Church about power, authority, Christian teaching, interreligious dialogue, and a host of other subjects. After the codification of canon law, however, these documents were not themselves legally binding. They would have force only if their ideas were inscribed into canon law, an understanding reflected in the fact that the Pope called for a commission for the revision of canon law at the same time he called the Council. As history would have it, many of Vatican II's important ideas were *not*, in fact, incorporated into the new Code, which was promulgated in 1983 and remains in effect today. Why these reforms did not make their way into the 1983 Code is a complicated subject that I cannot treat here. Yet the differences between the language contained in the 1983 Code, the language used to *describe* the 1983 Code, and the ideas which have legal force in the Church today demonstrate the significance of the change wrought in 1917.

On one hand, at the time the 1983 Code was issued, Pope John Paul II described the document as an effort to translate the language of the theological reflection which had taken place at Vatican II into the form of the law now governing the Catholic Church. The pope acknowledged the translation was not perfect: "it is impossible to translate perfectly into canonical language the conciliar image of the Church," he wrote. "[N]evertheless," he continued, "in this image there should always be found as far as possible its essential point of reference."<sup>6</sup> The pope communicated a similar idea the following year when, speaking to a gathering of canonists, he referred to the 1983 Code as "the last major document of Vatican II."<sup>7</sup> The language and documents of Vatican II, he explained, should be used as guideposts for the interpretation of canon law, *notwithstanding* the fact that the documents themselves were not legally binding.

On the other hand, the language contained *in* the Code of Canon Law itself is different. The Code announces criteria for its own interpretation, and those criteria do not include the documents of Vatican II. Rather, the in-

terpretive instructions contained in the Code (that is, those with legal force) contain ideas quite different from the words the Pope used to describe it at the time it was introduced to the world. Canon 16 reads as follows:

§1. The legislator authentically interprets laws as does the one to whom the same legislator has entrusted the power of authentically interpreting.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of canon law, "the legislator" is the pope when applied to the universal Church, and a diocesan bishop when applied to the particular Churches. This means that while Pope John Paul II articulated one set of intentions at the time the 1983 Code was promulgated, the Code itself leaves interpretation of the Code subject to the sitting pontiff or bishop's interpretation of the law—the very person, it is arguable, whose power the Code is meant to restrain vis-à-vis the People of God.

Outside of the Church, attention to the codification of canon law prompts reflection on the way the emergence of the modern nation-states, and their legal codes, influenced non-state entities. The codification of canon law demonstrates that bodies of law meant to govern entities differing in important ways from the emergent nation-states were profoundly influenced by those states' legal models. Long before the Church's theology undertook to engage with or embrace elements of the modern world with the theological reforms of Vatican II, leaders understood it to be in the Church's best interest—internally and relationally—for its legal order to do so.

The reform of canon law is consequential for the working of the Church, and for what it demonstrates about the influence of modern nation-states on non-state actors. Neither has been sufficiently explored in a formal way or understood in a practical way. An account of the history of the Catholic Church which dates its "coming into the modern world" to 1917 rather than to 1965 prompts reflection on the way the codification of canon law interacts with the Church's attachment to place at the dawn of the 20th century.

## CONCLUSION

Attention to the motivations for, and the influences on, the codification of canon law disrupts a neatly packaged narrative of the Church's accommodation to, and participation in, the modern world. As is evident from the Code's effect on the implementation of Vatican II's theological principles, the narrative of the codification of the law of the Catholic Church also makes clear why it is important for Catholics to understand Church law. Indeed, with this

information in mind, it is interesting and exciting to see that, in the 2023 Synod Report, recommendations from Synod participants made regular reference to the need for important doctrinal changes—on matters ranging from marriage and family issues to the role of women to the power of bishops—to be reflected in canon law. Finally, the story of the codification of Church law prompts reflection on the way the emergence of nation-states has influenced non-state actors and, in doing so, exerted still greater influence on the modern world.

<sup>1</sup> Stephan Kuttner, "The Code of Canon Law in Historical Perspective," *The Jurist*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1968, 129-48, 132.

<sup>2</sup> Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs "Codificazione del Diritto Canonico," (Roma: *Ponenza*, February, 1904), 27-31, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Stephan Kuttner, "The Code of Canon Law in Historical Perspective," 140. Kuttner is drawing on minutes kept from meetings of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs from March 3 and March 17 of 1904.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Pius X, "Arduum sane munus" (19 March 1904).

<sup>5</sup> Kuttner, "The Code of Canon Law in Historical Perspective," 139.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*.

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Communicationes* 16 (1984), 125-127.

<sup>8</sup> Code of Canon Law, c. 16, §1, 2, in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983).



# TRANSNATIONAL LITURGIES: *Enacting an Alternative Political Vision at the U.S.-Mexico Border*

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## ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church has long supported migrants and has engaged in various ministries to both help meet their material needs and advocate on their behalf. One theologically rich and symbolically potent way that the Church has expressed its solidarity with migrants is through the regular celebration of Catholic liturgies on the U.S.-Mexico border. On November 4, 2023, the Dioceses of Juárez, Las Cruces, and El Paso celebrated their twenty-sixth annual border Mass. Border Masses engage both Mexican and U.S.-Americans in a single, shared liturgy that challenges the rigid divisions circumscribed by the boundaries of the nation-state. This brief essay examines the vision of society implicitly presented by border liturgies. While the Church recognizes that the state has a right to control its borders in service of the common good, it also affirms that people have the right to migrate in order to find a more secure and prosperous life for themselves and their families. The essay will explore how the Mass communicates the reality of a unity deeper than national affiliation and forms participants to become agents of change in pursuit of a more just and hospitable society for displaced peoples. As the Clough Center explores arrangements of space and community beyond the parameters of the nation-state, the strategic location of the border Mass offers an example of one religious community's hope for unity that transcends state borders.

## INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church has long advocated for the rights of migrants. Through the propagation of encyclicals and pastoral letters, the provision of social services, as well as engagement in direct political advocacy, the church has sought to promote a more inclusive and hospitable global culture for displaced peoples. One theologically rich way that this stance has been expressed is through the celebration of transnational liturgies at the U.S.-Mexico border. On November 4, 2023, the Dioceses of Juárez, Las Cruces, and El Paso celebrated their twenty-sixth annual border Mass. The liminal placement of the liturgy between two states imbues the Mass with a potent symbolism. While the border has inspired hope for millions of migrants in search of a better life,

it is also a site where many have faced racial discrimination, harsh environmental conditions, political exclusion, and violence. The Mass thus functions as both a condemnation of inhumane immigration policies as well as a summons to an alternative social life. As the Clough Center explores arrangements of space and community beyond the confines of the nation-state, the strategic location of the border Mass expresses Catholic hopes for a unity that transcends state borders. This brief essay will examine the border Mass and describe the political vision enacted through this unique liturgy by emphasizing its implicit critique of the artificiality of the border, its central focus on the dignity of marginalized people and the call for greater solidarity with them, and its promotion of reconciliation and unity across national differences.

## CONTEXTUALIZING THE BORDER MASS

While a variety of Catholic communities have celebrated transnational liturgies on the U.S.-Mexico border in recent decades, the annual Mass hosted between El Paso and Juárez first took place in November 1998.<sup>1</sup> As a ritualized act of worship, the liturgy provides a traditional form in which participants can pray, celebrate their faith, and commune with one another. Its unique context, however, instills special meaning in the Mass. A major goal of this liturgy has been to remember and pray for those who have died in their attempt to cross into the United States. Organizers intentionally schedule the Mass on or around *Día de los Muertos*, which is both a Mexican cultural holiday and Catholic memorial in which the dead are honored and called to mind. Certain items ritually included in the liturgy remind participants of migrants' often treacherous journeys: images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a symbol of protection, since this sixteenth-century manifestation of the Virgin Mary is regarded as a guardian of migrants and other marginalized peoples; tortillas and water bottles, which symbolize the basic subsistence on which migrants depend for their survival; and white crosses, which symbolize those who have died on their way to the U.S. In this way, the Mass draws attention to the difficult conditions and exclusionary border policies that have left migrants vulnerable to death.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond merely remembering the dead, the Mass also nurtures the imaginations of participants so that they can see beyond the brutalities of the status quo. As former bishop of El Paso, Armando Javier Ochoa attests, the border Mass reminds the community that the border "signifies something artificial."<sup>3</sup> Priest and theologian Daniel Groody echoes his sentiment: "This Eucharist really is a way of saying that you know we don't have to be this way. This [border] is a political construction. This may have its value and it may have its worth but it's not absolute."<sup>4</sup> For them, the border Mass helps to cultivate an alternative vision for society, one that emphasizes social bonds across national differences. Indeed, Ochoa even reinterprets

the meaning of the border wall "not as something of a separation but a bridge of unity."<sup>5</sup>

## THE COMMUNICATIVE DIMENSION OF LITURGY

As theologian Kyle Lambelet observes, a primary function of liturgy is its communicative power.<sup>6</sup> Every Catholic Mass communicates the story of the Christian faith and describes the type of life Christians are called to live. Importantly, the Mass emphasizes the Christian ideal of unity across difference. As a statement on the border liturgy released by the Diocese of El Paso attests, "The Mass signifies our unity in diversity, our communion and mutual support, our ongoing encounter and accompaniment, as we seek to respond to our refugee and migrant brothers and sisters at our door."<sup>7</sup> In this way, the unique setting and circumstances of the annual border Mass offers the Christian story that it communicates as a counter-narrative to the story implicitly told through U.S. border policies.

What is the story told through U.S. border policies? U.S. policies give the impression that the border separates two ontologically distinct realities. The mobilization of sophisticated military technology to prevent migrants from entering the U.S. has caused the borderlands to become a site of "low-intensity warfare."<sup>8</sup> This has implicitly resulted in the mischaracterization of largely peaceful migrants who come to the U.S. in search of a better life for their families as enemy combatants. Such a perception has imbued the border wall with a kind of transcendent purpose. Because the people on both sides of the border are perceived to be so radically different from one another, those on the U.S. side need to be separated and protected from those on the Mexican side. Current bishop of El Paso, Mark Seitz, observes, "The wall deepens racially charged perceptions of how we understand the border as well as Mexicans and migrants. It extends racist talk of an 'invasion.' It perpetuates the racist myth that the area south of the border is dangerous and foreign."<sup>9</sup>

The border Mass attempts to dismantle the perception of radical difference between those north and south of the border. While there are

two altars and multiple clerics concelebrating on both sides of the fence, the organizers make clear that the bifurcated gathering constitutes a single liturgy.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, symbolic elements of the liturgy highlight that the border is merely a human construct and therefore does not possess ultimate meaning. At the 2010 Mass, priest and peace activist John Dear observed white balloons released on the Mexican side after communion. He wryly notes how “the balloons took to the sky and crossed illegally onto the U.S. side.”<sup>11</sup> The ease with which Mexican balloons cross to the U.S. falsifies the depiction of the border as untraversable. The sign of peace also takes on special significance during this celebration. In lieu of transnational handshakes or embraces, the pressing of fingers through the fence poignantly expresses the communion enacted by the liturgy itself. At a border Mass in 2016, El Paso Diocese spokesperson Steff Koeneman observed, “As far as the faith is concerned, there is no border there . . . There is a physical and political and governmental border, but in terms of faith and belief in God? No.”<sup>12</sup>

The Mass’s implicit critique of U.S. border policy does not mean that the Catholic Church embraces a policy of open borders. The church has long maintained that the state has a right and duty to protect its borders in service of the common good.<sup>13</sup> As theologian David Hollenbach observes, however, the church’s recognition of the universality of human dignity means that a state’s rightful sovereignty over its borders does not legitimate disregard or contempt for the foreigner.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, because Catholic teaching maintains that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, respect and care must be given to all people regardless of their national affiliation. This respect and care become all the more necessary when migrants come from contexts of severe hardship and vulnerability. Indeed, the church affirms that people have a right to migrate when the conditions in their homeland require it, and the church calls on sovereign states to accommodate such migrants whenever possible.<sup>15</sup>

## THE FORMATIVE DIMENSION OF LITURGY

What the border Mass protests, therefore, is not the existence of national borders, but the failure of the U.S. to adequately accommodate migrants’ urgent needs. Indeed, the border Mass provides a space to lament the destructive effects of border policies, and in doing so, it highlights the inherent dignity of migrant peoples. Beyond this, the border Mass also seeks to form participants to become agents of change. In addition to liturgy being communicative, Lambelet notes that liturgy is formative: it not only bears witness to the central mysteries of the Catholic faith, but it spiritually and ethically molds participants for a life of discipleship in which the Christian story gradually becomes one’s own.<sup>16</sup> The cultivation of greater concern for migrant peoples is an essential part of this formation. The Biblical tradition is filled with exhortations to care for the stranger. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus identifies care for the stranger with care for Jesus himself, and the refusal to care for the stranger as refusal to care for him (Mt 25:35, 43). He memorably asserts, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).<sup>17</sup>

From a Catholic perspective, key to the work of moral formation is the pursuit of reconciliation. Border policies have resulted in sharp divisions between migrants and U.S. citizens. The Mass thus provides a platform to seek forgiveness for the collective sins committed against migrants seeking security in the U.S. As Bishop Ricardo Ramírez proclaims, “At Mass we always ask for forgiveness. [At the border Mass,] I ask God to forgive our country for not welcoming immigrants.”<sup>18</sup>

The reconciliation promoted and effected by the Mass, however, goes beyond confession and forgiveness. The Catholic Mass is believed primarily to be a force for unity. In his reflection on the Eucharist at the border liturgy,

Ramírez emphasizes the oneness at the center of Christianity: the oneness of the trinitarian God, the one baptism that incorporates Christians into the Body of Christ, the one cross that saves, and the one meal that Christians share. He proclaims, “There is no symbol and reality stronger than the Eucharist to express the unity of the Body of Christ.”<sup>19</sup> At the Eucharistic table, the participants not only eat the Body of Christ but become the Body of Christ. Theologian William Cavanaugh notes that the Eucharist is not merely a ritual repetition of the past; “it is rather a literal re-membering of Christ’s body, a knitting together of the body of Christ by the participation of many in his sacrifice.”<sup>20</sup> The result is a new social body that necessarily transgresses the borders of the world.

Being transformed into the transgressive Body of Christ, however, is not a cause for self-exaltation or Christian superiority over other peoples. By becoming one in the Body of Christ, the church must become the gift that is shared at the altar. Cavanaugh posits, “The fact that the Church is literally changed into Christ is not cause for triumphalism, however, precisely because our assimilation to the body of Christ means that we then become food for the world, to be broken, given away, and consumed.”<sup>21</sup> The unity forged in the Eucharist, then, results in the formation of a people ready to give themselves away in service to others. As Kevin Seasoltz asserts: “Any work for the unity of the church that overlooks the needs of the world is not in the tradition of Jesus. The Eucharist is meant to mediate the unity of the Church and the unity of humankind. It builds

up the church, but it also gives the Church a missionary task which includes the ethical responsibility of taking liberating actions for justice in the world.”<sup>22</sup> The reconciliation enacted by the Eucharist at the border, then, not only serves as a condemnation of the culture of division, but also empowers the church to become a force for change in the world.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief essay, I have attempted to describe the counter-narrative expressed through the celebration of the Catholic Mass at the U.S.-Mexico border. It is a counter-narrative that emphasizes the unity of humankind, challenges the sharp divisions enacted by border policies, centers the experience of marginalized people, calls for greater solidarity with them, and promotes reconciliation across national differences. Of course, this idealistic, eschatologically oriented vision offers little in the way of concrete policy proposals to address the inherent complexities involved in immigration. As various commentators on the border have also observed, the self-selective participation in the Mass often means that those present are already committed to the work of migrant justice.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the formational impact of the liturgy may be limited. Nevertheless, the border liturgy constitutes an act of witness that utilizes Christian rituals and the power of place to expand the collective moral imagination. In line with the Clough Center’s annual theme, it ritually expresses one religious community’s belief that there are bonds deeper than those prescribed by the nation-state.

<sup>1</sup> Christopher White, “Border Mass a Reminder We are Called to Live in Communion,” *Cruce*, November 1, 2019, <https://cruce.com/church-in-the-usa/2019/11/border-mass-a-reminder-we-are-called-to-live-in-communion/>.

<sup>2</sup> John Carlos Frey and Daniel Groody, “One Border, One Body,” (Groody River Films, 2008), <https://vimeo.com/23878925>.

<sup>3,4,5</sup> Quoted in Frey and Groody, “One Border, One Body.”

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Lambelet, *Present! Nonviolent Politics and the Resurrection of the Dead* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in White, “Border Mass a Reminder We are Called to Live in Communion.”

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martinez, Alison Elizabeth Lee, and Scott Whiteford, “The Geography of Border Militarization,” in *The Shadow of the Wall: Violence and Migration on the US-Mexico Border*, edited by Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martinez, and Scott Whiteford, (Phoenix, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Mark Seitz, “Night Will Be No More: Pastoral Letter to the People of God in El Paso,” August 3, 2019, §35, <https://www.hopeborder.org/nightwillbenomore-eng>.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 212.

<sup>11</sup> John Dear, “Mass on the US-Mexico Border,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 9, 2010, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/mass-us-mexico-border>.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Nathaniel Grimes, “Church at the Wall: A Political and Liturgical Analysis of Border Masses,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 191-192.

<sup>13</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and *Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano* (CEM), “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” January 22, 2003, §36, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope>.

<sup>14</sup> David Hollenbach, “A Future Beyond Borders: Reimagining the Nation-State and the Church,” in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migration of Peoples*, eds. Agnes Brazal and Maria Theresa Davila (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 173.

<sup>15</sup> USCCB and CEM, “Strangers No Longer,” §35.

<sup>16</sup> Lambelet, *Present!*, 37-38.

<sup>17</sup> Bible quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>18,19</sup> Quoted in Frey and Groody, “One Border, One Body.”

<sup>20</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 229.

<sup>21</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 231-232.

<sup>22</sup> R. Kevin Seasoltz, “Justice and Eucharist,” *Worship* 58, no. 6, (November 1984): 525.

<sup>23</sup> Grimes, “Church at the Wall,” 195.

# AFTER ACQUISITION: *The Institutional and Strategic Logic of Nuclear Reversal*

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## ABSTRACT

What institutional and strategic logic explains a state's decision to abandon its nuclear weapons? Scholars studying nuclear security have not addressed why a state would build nuclear weapons but then willingly dismantle them after successful acquisition. This article fills this gap in the literature by arguing that states build nuclear weapons for security-related causes, but that the same logic could lead them to give up the bomb when international institutions create a distinct space in which security can be reimagined. The case of South Africa provides a successful story of a government that built nuclear weapons, yet then reversed course on account of international institutions like the Non-Proliferation Treaty and International Atomic Energy Agency. These institutions provide a space of socialization through which states can assert new kinds of agency.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of nuclear weapons proliferation—a research agenda exploring why and how states seek to build nuclear weapons—has examined multiple causal forces, relying on material variables like security and economic policy orientation and normative variables like the value of nuclear weapons as a symbol for the prestige of states. At the same time, the study of nuclear reversal—investigating why a nuclear-armed state may abandon its bomb—has exclusively relied on normative variables of identity and prestige to explain the causes of nuclear reversal. Neither of these two research agendas has attempted to synthesize their observations to explain both proliferation and reversal in a coherent framework, largely because there has only one case of a country that built the bomb and completely dismantled it: South Africa. This article attempts to synthesize outcomes of proliferation and reversal by conducting a short case study of South Africa, which will further our understanding of today's international politics driven by security competition between nuclear-armed states.

I advance two arguments. First, I argue that South Africa was motivated by its desire to seek

security to build the bomb, but that it envisioned the security benefit generated from the bomb as a two-tiered one: initially, as a useful resource against existing security threats in the region and then, after the reduction of threats, as a convenient tool to be integrated into the global security architecture of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Second, I claim that the NPT generated a novel spatial reality that allowed both nuclear-armed and non-nuclear states to reconsider the basic functions of security, one that for South Africa converted nuclear weapons from a political asset to a liability.

This article proceeds in the following order. First, I conduct a short case study of South Africa's full pathway from building nuclear weapons to dismantling them. Second, I analyze the case, with an eye toward showing that international institutions can be conceived as a spatial reality for states to enhance their security. Finally, I conclude by describing some further avenues for future research. South Africa is the only nation-state to date that has sought to enhance its security by joining international institutions around the NPT and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and it was able to pursue this course because its nuclear program provid-

ed an avenue to demonstrate a commitment to a new understanding of security. These nonproliferation institutions presented themselves to Pretoria (South Africa's administrative capital) as an effective space to socialize with existing non-proliferating nation-states in those institutions and to gain prestige through abandoning nuclearization. In this sense, nonproliferation institutions present a way to fundamentally reimagine the national "place" that is relevant to security.

## **SOUTH AFRICA: THE ONLY REVERSER IN NUCLEAR HISTORY**

South Africa's path from clandestine proliferator to responsible reverser was characterized by fluctuating relations with its close strategic partner, the U.S., as well as an intense security environment. Abandoning the bomb served an institutional purpose for Pretoria by allowing it to integrate itself into the global security architecture.

African states were not generally a major concern for the U.S. during the Cold War era, but South Africa drew America's attention because, from a security perspective, it was the major African state that the U.S. found most attractive for cooperation. At least for the early decades, South Africa was able to align with the U.S. despite the Apartheid regime because of the ideological frame of fighting against the spread of Communism, which for South Africa was particularly threatening during the process of decolonizing Africa.<sup>1</sup> "For 30 years," Robert Jaster notes, "South African leaders ... nurtured hopes that South Africa would be accepted by the Western powers as a southern arm of NATO."<sup>2</sup>

Security cooperation between the U.S. and South Africa materialized in the form of both nuclear and conventional aid. In 1956, the U.S. assisted the South African military in building radar systems, provided training and military equipment, and promoted the purchase of fighters and bombers from Washington.<sup>3</sup> In 1957, the U.S. provided nuclear aid to Pretoria through Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program, which supported nuclear energy development in Pretoria through the provision of uranium and plutonium for research, as well as enriched

uranium for fueling nuclear power reactors.

However, the security environment significantly deteriorated during the 1970s, and South Africa began to consider indigenously developing a deterrent capability for security that moved beyond the peacetime applications of its nuclear program. A military coup in Portugal resulted in the collapse of the Caetano regime and subsequently the decolonization of Angola and Mozambique, which aligned against the apartheid regime with other African states after independence. The expanded presence of the Soviet Union and Cuba heightened Pretoria's fears of a potential Soviet-backed assault.<sup>4</sup> In cooperation with the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, a large build-up of Cuban forces was installed in Angola, which at its peak contained 50,000 troops, while Mozambique became an ally of Moscow after the establishment of a socialist regime.<sup>5</sup>

South Africa thus prepared to conduct a covert nuclear test in the Kalahari Desert with Israel's support.<sup>6</sup> The military had been considering nuclear development since the late 1960s: General H. J. Martin, the Chief of Staff of the South African army, "noted that the country was prepared to manufacture nuclear arms, and connected this option with missile development."<sup>7</sup> However, this coincided with the deterioration of relations with the United States and Europe, as the anti-apartheid movement successfully pushed policy to turn against the regime. As U.S. limitations on arms transfer and other economic sanctions grew, in 1981, General Magnus Malan declared that "South Africa is today involved in total war...everyone is involved and has a role to play."<sup>8</sup> Positioning itself in a middle ground between Communist threats and the U.S., South Africa manufactured 7 nuclear weapons in 1979.<sup>9</sup>

In 1986, the U.S.'s effort to thwart Pretoria's nuclear aspirations culminated in its invocation of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which banned all nuclear trade with Pretoria. Ironically, however, as the US's sanctions strengthened, the security environment improved for South Africa. The Cuban forces withdrew from Angola as it became infeasible to bankroll their presence, and Soviet troops did as well owing to the domestic political changes under Mikhail

Gorbachev.<sup>10</sup> In 1988, a tripartite agreement between South Africa, Angola, and Cuba was made to cement the withdrawal arrangements.

The revised external outlook was accompanied by the election in 1989 of President F.W. de Klerk, who preferred building democracy at home and revitalizing South Africa's relations with the West. In the absence of security threats, it became plausible that nuclear weapons had become a hindrance in advancing those policies.<sup>11</sup> In the background of these motivations was, of course, the fact that the history of international pressure on the regime over apartheid left it desperate for some avenue into greater respectability. De Klerk immediately ordered relevant organizations to dismantle atomic bombs in 1989, and in 1991 South Africa became the first country to reverse its nuclear status. Beyond unilaterally terminating nuclear programs, Pretoria allowed IAEA inspections, and joined the NPT in 1991.<sup>12</sup> In 1995, South Africa regained its permanent seat on the board of IAEA and was instrumental in the NPT obtaining indefinite extension.<sup>13</sup>

Washington reacted positively to South Africa's political and nuclear change by removing its embargo on the sales of computers, aircraft, and petroleum products to its military.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. supported the consensual lift of an arms embargo in 1994 in the Security Council. In 1995, security cooperation between the two states in intelligence areas restarted and, under the IAEA safeguards, a peaceful nuclear contract also regained momentum.<sup>15</sup> In the same year, Alfred Nzo, the South African Foreign Minister, described South Africa's new sense of security: "The NPT provides us in Africa and the general community with greater security than did the nuclear weapons which were destroyed... I believe that security is provided by nuclear disarmament rather than by nuclear proliferation."<sup>16</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS A DISTINCT PLACE

As security threats decrease, the concern of a state contemplating reversal becomes less about present security benefits, and more about future benefits that might be gained from a powerful

ally in the context of an international security architecture. If common threats are abated, the reversing power has an opportunity to recover troubled relationships and build stronger security ties. Moreover, Pretoria realized, failing to do so would incur its own costs. While the ideal outcome might be a formal alliance, a more likely second choice was becoming a new key player in the international security regime around nuclear weapons themselves. Then, at least, the reversing state could form a constructive security relationship with its allies and avoid being perceived as a destabilizer in a new global security environment. This might be called the "institutional benefit of reversal," and it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reversal.

One important implication of the South African story is that international institutions play a role as a distinct "place" for a proliferator to socialize with actors who have successfully demonstrated a preference for nonproliferation by being members of the NPT. Through and only within this institutional space, a nuclear-armed state need not feel its security diminished by dismantling the bomb because of the social rewards, like prestige, available to the reversal state by socializing within nonproliferation institutions. This gain in prestige was particularly unprecedented in South Africa's case, given that no nuclear-armed state had ever discarded its nuclear arsenal after successful acquisition. The decision to dismantle a nuclear arsenal was a policy decision that could grant status in and of itself, because of the sheer difficulty of replacing nuclear weapons' effectiveness in deterrence. Thus, "a particular high status image may be considered a good in and of itself," which becomes a paramount necessity for the reversal power to denuclearize.<sup>17</sup> In some basic sense, nonproliferation institutions allowed South Africa to completely change the terrain of its security by entering into the space created by the IAEA and NPT.

Alastair Johnston's constructivist theory of institutions is particularly relevant here. In justifying the relevance of cooperative norms in a given social environment, institutions are a useful environment to investigate because they are places where social pressures to engage in pro-norm behavior are most concentrated by the interaction between existing actors and new actors.

Studying the ways in which pro-norm behaviors are produced is feasible through a focus on the two microsocial processes of socialization: persuasion and social influence. These micro-processes are the mediating public manifestations between existing actors and new ones, the internationalization of values and rules that become taken for granted. An international institution like the NPT provided both material and social benefits to Pretoria by trading the security of the nuclear deterrent for the expected effect of socialization with existing non-proliferating actors that would, in turn, grant social prestige and security by making South Africa the new trendsetter of nonproliferation.

Theorizing international institutions like the NPT as a distinct place for states to seek security allows us to rethink our assumptions about what kinds of places are relevant to how states conceive of security. The case of South Africa shows a powerful role of the NPT in a way that was not understood before: policymakers of Pretoria saw it as a way to integrate into the global security architecture. This means that the NPT was not just an international law to prevent proliferation from new states, but a new institutionalized social place where even a nuclear-armed state could envision dismantling its bombs because it had become an active participant in the law, reinterpreting the meaning of seeking security. To be sure, the easing of security threats in the region played a crucial role, but the presence of the NPT provided Pretoria with an additional normative and material incentive for the government to dismantle the bomb because without it, there was no alternative way of envisioning a strong institution where its security could be guaran-

teed indefinitely. Thus, the NPT was not just an international law as an institution, tantamount to a spatial reality, where states who opposed nuclearization could gather and form a distinct community around nonproliferation identities.

## CONCLUSION

The case of South Africa's nuclear dismantlement shows that it was not just the reduction of the security threats in the region that drove reversal, but the availability of alternative means to seek security. The NPT filled that role. It represented a space in which minor powers like South Africa could envision their self-preservation against nuclear-armed states by providing an opportunity to socialize with other non-proliferating states, and to construct their own international identity and agency in an unfolding anti-nuclear movement. For South Africa, the spatial opportunity was precisely that, in a time of looming domestic change, the de Klerk regime could pursue the political act of joining institutions to reassert a new form of international and diplomatic ties with non-proliferating nation-states, transforming South Africa's political identity from a power-oriented nation-state to a prestige-seeking one by making it the first state to discard nuclear weapons entirely and join institutions for a new kind of agency. Further research could explore whether other international security institutions besides the NPT serve a similar function of providing a spatial instrument to secondary powers to advance their security, and whether different institutional arrangements affect how the institutional interaction space is used by states to build agency.

<sup>1</sup> Anna-Mart van Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb: Cold War Perspectives," *South African Historical Journal* vol. 62, no. 1 (2010): 101. For a general overview of South Africa's path to nuclearization, see Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambition: Why Countries Constrain Their Nuclear Capabilities* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995), 7-44.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Scott Jaster, *The Defense of White Power: South African Foreign Policy under Pressure* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1989), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson (2008), 18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb: Cold War Perspectives," 103.

<sup>5</sup> Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb: Cold War Perspectives," 103; Waldo Stumpf, "South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Program: From Deterrence to Dismantlement," *Arms Control Today* vol. 25, no. 10 (1995/1996): 4.

<sup>6</sup> Helen E. Purkitt and Stephen F. Burgess, *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Richard K. Betts, "A Diplomatic Bomb for South Africa?," *International Security* vol. 4, no. 2 (1979): 97.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lucky E. Asuelime and Raquel A. Adekoye, *Nuclear Proliferation in South Africa: History and Politics* (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 93.

<sup>9</sup> T.V. Paul, *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 114.

<sup>10</sup> Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb: Cold War Perspectives," 114.

<sup>11</sup> Stumpf, "South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Program: From Deterrence to Dismantlement," 6.

<sup>12</sup> Purkitt and Burgess, *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Michal Onderco, *Iran's Nuclear Program and the Global South: The Foreign Policy of India, Brazil, and South Africa* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Alex Thompson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 162.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Purkitt and Burgess, *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments," *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001): 487-515, 501.



## II. MOBILITY: WHO MOVES?

# TRANSFORMING EMBODIED EXILE

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## ABSTRACT

In this piece, I contribute to social theory on embodiment and exile by developing the concept of embodied exile. Building on insights from Lara Mitias and Edward Said among others, I argue that the embodied spatiotemporal human experience involves exile from past selves which results in unavoidable uncertainty. I term this aspect of lived experience embodied exile, which is the product of time's passage and changes internal and external to the self from moment to moment. The uncertainty that stems from embodied exile is characterized by the boundaries that we relate to each other within, or our technologies which we create and maintain to live together as social beings. In the postmodern world, our boundaries of relationality produce shattering experiences of embodied exile at an unprecedented rate, creating uncertainty that is degrading to the self rather than generative, which incentivizes individualism and tribalism for survival. To redefine this uncertainty, I suggest we reform our boundaries of relationality by adopting feminist politics that work to recognize our hybridity and cultivate collaboration in eliminating our technologies that inflict systematic violence.

## INTRODUCTION

Most often, exile is conceived as living with the inability to return to one's homeland given the threat of persecution. Numerous political leaders, intellectuals and artists throughout history have documented this experience imposed upon them by their birth nations. But are there other ways we should understand the lives of humans as characterized by "living in exile"? After putting theorists of exile and embodiment in conversation to understand the embodied self as a place from which one can be exiled, I contend that a significant feature of the human experience is consistent exile from past selves, given the passage of time and myriad changes within and outside of our body-minds from moment to moment. This perpetual presence, the inability to return to past selves or predict a future self, is the foundational source of the uncertainty that characterizes our lives. The nature of this embodied exile and the extent to which this uncertainty is life-taking instead of life-giving depends

on the boundaries within which we relate to each other, which I advocate for reforming to facilitate more life-giving experiences of selfhood.

## EXILE

Exile as described by Edward Said is a condition of terminal loss, such that one's achievements "are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever."<sup>1</sup> He argues that exile involves feelings of deprivation and urgency that stem from not being with familiar others on familiar land and from needing to reconstruct a broken life.<sup>2</sup> This persistent uncertainty makes exile a jealous and selfish state at its worst, which may lead to passionate hostility to outsiders, creating situations where people are exiled by exiles. Here Said cites the conflict between Palestine and Israel, where Jewish exile has served as justification for Palestinian exile and created cycles of brutal nationalist violence. He defines an exile as anyone who is prevent-

ed from returning home and must spend time creating another world to make up for their disorienting loss, oftentimes leading them to prioritize scrupulous individualism or tribalism, mobility, and skill.<sup>3</sup> Yet Said also insists that exile imbues the exiled with a fresh perspective, given their lack of previous exposure to subsequent surroundings and their understandings of multiple lands, as well as a greater capacity to make home wherever one happens to be.

While Said's conception of exile is an extreme expression of the exile involved in embodiment that I outline below, one that I advocate for eradicating, his insights on its affective and cognitive outcomes are instructive for helping us understand how boundaries of relationality that perpetuate violence inform conduct based on the nature of the uncertainty they create. Further, his account of exile's individuating effects is echoed by Zygmunt Bauman's characterization of everyday postmodern life as one in which people attempt to control pervasive threatening uncertainty by focusing on the self instead of the forces that create the circumstances of the self.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Said offers us insight into the barriers and opportunities for transformation that exile creates at the individual and structural levels, insofar as it amplifies self and group-based interests alongside capacities for engaging in reconstructing ways of living.

## EMBODIMENT

The philosopher Lara Mitias argues that the historically situated body-mind must be recognized as the preeminent place because it enables and codetermines experiences of all other places, environments, and climates.<sup>5</sup> She defines a "place" as something that incorporates its contents—cultural, material, natural—and co-evolves with all other places, which collectively create the fields of activity that the self, or the body-mind, operates within.<sup>6</sup> Our emplacements, which we can think of as either in place or dis-placed depending on whether they are life-affirming or life-negating, are multiple, reflecting the many places to which our embodied selves exist in relation. Simultaneously, they are both psychological and physical.

These emplacements determine the present self as contextualized by both its own history and that of the other "places" in which it resides, producing a constant interactive evolution of place. Furthermore, as Mitias emphasizes, "our many irredeemable postmodern displacements" provide even more incentive to recognize the embodied self as the place which foregrounds all other places.<sup>7</sup> She insists that such a recognition will allow us to minimize the displacement that stems from the fragmented abstractions of place that characterized modernity, namely dualities like subject/object, internal/external and being/nonbeing which create untenable hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> These dualities reduce the complex co-determination that defines our lived experiences, allowing for the prioritization of the thinking self over the embodied self, as well as other places and their contents. Mitias suggests that dissolving these binaries will facilitate a comprehensive integration of the mind and body that allows for one to feel at home, or in place, in any place which promotes sympathetic creative coordination.

Leading cyborg theorist Donna Haraway also argues for disrupting hierarchical categorization with her instance on the importance of recognizing our hybridity with technology and all that is living during this unprecedentedly relational moment. Her postmodern cyborg is an amalgamation of "permanently partial identities with contradictory standpoints" and she urges that we struggle to see from each at once to harness the power of multiple vision.<sup>9</sup> Beyond the self, working to understand and ameliorate the embodied experiences of those who are displaced by rewriting our technologies with attention to tensions and resonances is essential to achieving this transition. She insists that the people who straddle boundaries of personhood because they are refused stable categories within webs of power have valuable experience rewriting technologies to create livable lives. Her vision of the path forward, to a world where place is much less fraught with violent displacement, includes a model of politics based on affinity instead of unity, one that allows us to advocate change from coalitional understandings instead of those informed by sameness.<sup>10</sup>

The technologies, or boundaries, of place, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation, are informed by spatiotemporally specific norms that influence our embodiment and the placements of our (plural) selves.<sup>11</sup> From the Hegelian tradition, Judith Butler argues that norms are essential to human life because they facilitate recognition, although we are in a constant struggle with what they deem intelligible which causes them to morph in definition.<sup>12</sup> Such is the concept of performativity, a cybernetic feedback loop consisting of information passed back and forth between humans and our technology. Further, we must recognize that throughout our history, the norms that have manifested in places have been informed predominantly by those who have disproportionate control over the definitions of personhood and less so by those who lack the bargaining power bestowed by positions at the top of social hierarchies. This continues to result in significant violence for persons whose embodiments do not align with hegemonic norms given the inequitable resource distributions that incomplete definitions of personhood produce.

## EMBODIED EXILE

The most basic intuition behind the concept of embodied exile is captured by Mitias's notion that "with time's advance we can never return to the same place."<sup>13</sup> This means that embodied exile has been an unchangeable, or innate, aspect of human life given our inability to manipulate time. One cannot return to past selves, past formations of mind-body, and we are also unable to know a future self. We are perpetually present, although haunted by remnants of the convergences of past embodiments and the places with which they interacted. In addition to time, factoring in places beyond the self amplifies our experiences of embodied exile given the many mutually constitutive dimensions of place that are continually evolving. Thinking of the self and its function as the place through which we experience the rest of the world, we can begin to imagine the complex interaction between space and time that separates us from past selves by considering moments of ecstasy. Affects like passion, grief, and rage set us beside ourselves by taking us to a radically differ-

ent moment from the last and demonstrate the intensely relational nature of our existence.<sup>14</sup>

This uncertainty that stems from the capacity to be undone at any moment is unavoidable but malleable, which empowers us to develop understandings of embodied exile and approaches to reshaping the boundaries that determine it, or our own boundaries of relationality. To establish the participation necessary for this type of a political project, we need to recognize our shared experience of embodied exile and collaborate to reconfigure our boundaries of relationality to be more life-giving. Our boundaries of relationality encompass the vast technologies we have created to exist on this planet together, including language, institutions, organizations, and their inanimate contents. The self is shaped by and reshapes these boundaries as one operates in relation to them, as well as other living matter that exists as and within subsequent places the self experiences. As stated above, we can think of this interfacing between technology and all that lives as a cybernetic feedback loop, with each element continually informing and reforming the other. This entangles us all in complicated webs of cause and effect, of hybridity, with all that surrounds us, making our futures co-determined and difficult to predict.

Throughout time, the uncertainty of embodied exile—at its most extreme, the uncertainty of not knowing whether the self will survive from one moment to the next—has informed significant maldistribution of resources broadly defined, including time, space, information, community, and financial resources, based on historically specific boundaries of relationality. These boundaries continue to result in displacements, the violence of which reverberates at increasing magnitudes in our highly relational postmodern world. Achieving more equitable resource distributions, which here refer to adequate access to the material goods and immaterial experiences that one needs to lead a livable life, depends on our abilities to reshape the boundaries that inform our relations. A livable life provides the self with affirmation that they are valued for what they bring to the world and empowers them to embrace uncertainty as exciting to the greatest extent possi-

ble. Each moment of history possesses unique boundaries of relationality given the vast number of elements involved in the intricate interplay between places and their contents, but social theorists have identified more or less distinct eras of relationality, which are the result of relatively rapid changes in our technologies.

The boundaries of relationality during modernity facilitated the accumulation of unprecedented resources, which derived from and simultaneously reinforced strict hierarchies of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation. Unsurprisingly, the actors that placed themselves at the top of these hierarchies continue to find themselves there, enjoying disproportionate control over the technologies that constitute our boundaries of relationality in postmodernity. Significant aspects of this era that influence embodied exile include the extraordinary frequency with which the self interacts with technologies and other living beings, whether as simulations in media or in their true physical form.<sup>15</sup> This increased frequency of interaction coupled with the hierarchies of power haunting us from modernity, which continue to be vectors of inequitable resource distributions, result in exile from past selves that creates greater contrast from moment to moment and increases insecurity for most, exacerbating uncertainty.

Today we have evolved toward a state of globalized war and capitalism, both dominated by the global Northwest, as well as climate crisis. All of these phenomena are dependent on the feedback between oppressors and the oppressed, although most people have experience occupying both positions. The oppressed struggle with our boundaries of relationality given the inability of places to cultivate them, to affirm their life in that moment, particularly those who are forced out of their physical homes by states aiming to protect and profit based on narrow conceptions of personhood, whether by street sweeps or imperialist force. The oppressed are likewise required to contend with uncertainty that threatens their most basic levels of subsistence, instead of that which holds possibility for personal development from a secure foundation. Whether they are victims of war, poverty, racism, or patriarchy, they must endure this

unnecessarily violent uncertainty, which often incentivizes individualism or tribalism for survival. These alignments among the subjugated and the oppressive conduct of those in power yield conflict over the ability to control uncertainty and obscure our hybridity, reinforcing modern conceptions of the disembodied self that lacks participatory consciousness. Resolving these conflicts requires reverence for our deep relationality and necessitates centering the systemic knowledge produced by experiences of oppressive uncertainty and alternative world-building aimed at their dissolution.

## CONCLUSION

I began this piece with discussion of key insights on exile and embodiment offered primarily by Edward Said and Lara Mitias. The former explains the experience of exile as the inability to return to one's homeland and the characteristics with which this imbues the exiled, including capacities for individualism, tribalism, and alternative world building. The latter argues for the importance of conceptualizing the self as the primordial "place," given the body-mind's continual integration of material, cultural, and natural resources, and our co-evolution with other places. Combining these understandings, I then put forward a theory of embodied exile, which I defined as the experience of being perpetually present in the midst of time's lapse and the ever-changing nature of places. I argued that embodied exile creates uncertainty that is inherent to the human experience, but that the nature of this uncertainty is defined by our boundaries of relationality, or the technology we have created to exist as social beings. In postmodernity, these boundaries perpetuate the hierarchies of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation developed during modernity which create unlivable uncertainty that incentivizes alignment with individualism and tribalism. Given this situation, I argue that we must work to reformulate our boundaries of relationality so that the uncertainty they create ceases to be life threatening and instead cultivates life. Recognizing the extent of our hybridity and identifying oppressive mechanisms based on insights from those forced to embody violent exile is key to this political project.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile & Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Said, *Reflections*, 177-8.

<sup>3</sup> Said, *Reflections*, 181-4.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Lara M. Mitias, "17. The Place of the Body in the Phenomenology of Place: Edward Casey and Nishida Kitaro," in *Philosophies of Place: An Intercultural Conversation*, ed. Peter D. Herschok and Roger T. Ames (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 314.

<sup>6</sup> Mitias, "The Place of the Body," 305-6.

<sup>7</sup> Mitias, "The Place of the Body," 315.

<sup>8</sup> Mitias, "The Place of the Body," 310.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Last Quarter," in *Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination*, ed. Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 585.

<sup>10</sup> Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 586.

<sup>11</sup> Mitias, "The Place of the Body", 305.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Mitias, "The Place of the Body," 316.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (California: Sage Publications, 1976).



# REMITTANCES AND REDUNDANCY:

## *Ireland's Women in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*

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### ABSTRACT

In the latter decades of the 19th century, Irish emigration patterns underwent significant change. Whereas during and immediately following the Irish Potato Famine (1845-52) migrant groups consisted of family units departing the country together, in the century's final decades young women began to comprise the largest numbers of emigrants. This essay pays attention to the psychological effects of Famine trauma and the subsequent economic redundancy of women in an increasingly industrialized and wage-driven world. Engaging with the scholarship of historians like Hasia R. Diner and Janet Nolan, it sketches out the emotional stakes of emigration, as well as the continued attachment to Ireland that influenced women once in America. As women crossed the Atlantic and established lives in the United States, they maintained ties to Ireland through financial remittances and political activity. With their wages, they were able to pay the rent of families left behind, build new churches for communities, and fund nationalist organizations like the Land League. Simultaneously, they experienced prejudice and alienation in new communities which viewed Irish Catholics negatively, thus pushing emigrant women to form social networks almost exclusively with other Irish Americans. Through these experiences, they maintained an attachment to Ireland while forming new cultural institutions in America, thus permanently impacting the histories and cultures of America, Ireland, and the Atlantic world.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1847, the most intense year of Ireland's Great Famine, Eleanor Murray of Sligo fell seriously ill. She was not alone in this; typhus, dysentery, and various other famine-related illnesses were rampant throughout Ireland, compounding the horrors of the potato blight. Murray was luckier than most, in the sense that she survived both famine and fever. However, she was permanently scarred. She developed dementia, and without the robust community support necessary for her care, Murray's mother had to give up the care of her daughter in May 1850, when she was committed to the county jail as a dangerous lunatic.

Soon after, Murray was sent to St. Patrick's Asylum in Dublin. There she joined dozens of

other women—mostly orphaned younger women, middle-aged single women, and older widows—whose presence had become unmanageable for the communities that may have been able to care for them prior to the Famine. Single and unable to financially contribute to family finances in the post-Famine economic structures, women like Eleanor Murray represent an extreme example of the marginalization faced by a large portion of Ireland's female population in the decades following the Famine's end. Marked by their unwieldiness as unproductive women as much as by their mental illnesses, they were confined and alienated from the rest of Ireland.

Like the thousands who sailed to America at the end of the nineteenth century, Murray and others in comparable situations were liminal women: neither here nor there, unable to resume

their ordinary lives after the Famine had released its grip on Ireland, yet equally unable to articulate a new kind of existence under British policies pushing the country towards the colonizer's view of modernity. Drawing on tenant petitions, Boston newspaper accounts, and immigration schemes, this essay argues that Irish women maintained close ties to their home nation while experiencing what many understood as exile. Enduring emotional disruption and alienation, Irish Catholic women's methods for assuaging homesickness resulted in a transformation of American culture which incorporated Irish traditions (i.e. St. Patrick's Day), and helped rebuild post-Famine Ireland to the extent that the Republic of Ireland could be established in the early 20th century. Caught between the nations of the United States and Ireland, emigrant women carved out their own space in the Atlantic world that allowed them to be both American and Irish, permanently binding the two nations together and drastically reshaping the politics, religion, and cultures of both.

## POST-FAMINE IRELAND

During the Famine, most migrant groups consisted of families who left Ireland together. In the decades following, however, the trend for emigration skewed towards young women most affected by the breakdown in Ireland's traditional community culture and economic structure. In northeastern counties, women were able to enter flax mills and earn wages of their own; therefore, they emigrated in far lower numbers. Such statistics make clear that for many poor Irish Catholic women, emigration was not a choice so much as an economic necessity.<sup>1</sup>

As can be seen in the cases of those committed to St. Patrick's Asylum, women were under increasingly intense psychological stress following the Famine. Limited inheritance systems based on male primogeniture took root, reflecting English marriage and inheritance patterns and limiting marriage prospects. The gloom of new marriage patterns is reflected in poetry of the period, which laments the need of a dowry from the point of view of both men and women who wish their love could once more transcend material concerns.<sup>2</sup> For women, emigration seemed

the only way to improve not only their condition, but that of their family and community. What they sought was not necessarily "modernity," which was already being imposed on Ireland with negative results. Rather, they pursued the economic and social fulfillment that remained elusive after the destruction of the Famine.

## WOMEN GOING WEST

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, special efforts were made to help women emigrate so their labor abroad could help the Irish economy recover. Vere Foster, an English philanthropist, worked especially hard to help Irish women emigrate. In an 1855 report on Irish women emigrants circulated to possible donors, Foster explained his fundraising mission was intended to improve the conditions of the poorest families in Ireland by sending to America "one able-bodied member of each family (in most cases a woman)." Foster informed his audience that women in Ireland could only earn approximately 3 to 4 pounds per year (men's wages were almost double, at 6 pounds). Once in America, wages rose to 15 to 40 per year. Ireland benefited directly from the wage increase: out of 91 women sent to America, 71 mailed back 751 pounds, and had "altogether been the means of taking out 86 additional persons." Foster's intention was not only to assist women to procure better employment, but to benefit families struggling without the wages of women's work. As early as the 1850s, the burdens and opportunities of migration began settling mainly on the shoulders of young, able-bodied women.<sup>3</sup>

The future of Ireland depended quite literally on female emigration. Projects like Foster's had significant success. In 1857, the *Boston Pilot* reported on a ship of emigrants composed primarily of women whose passage payment was raised by "laborers and servant girls" in America. Most were coming to America alone, leaving established support networks to take care of their country and family. This particular project, entitled the "Irish Pioneer Emigration Fund," recruited women on the basis of their industriousness in the hopes that, "according to the usual generous practice of Irish emigrants," they would financially assist the recov-

ery of the “poorest districts” in Ireland. Such women were, on average, 20 years old, representing “the cream of the female peasantry.” Respectability and diligence continued to be demanded as the Irish-American community sought to disprove Anglo-American prejudices, just as the Irish at home pushed back against English stereotypes by stressing the purportedly impeccable character of Irish women.<sup>4</sup>

## EXILES AND EMIGRANTS

For those women who made it to America, challenges awaited. Anglo-American contempt for their Gaelic Catholic backgrounds abounded, especially in New England, with its strong Puritan history. As most women entered domestic service, they came into conflict with their supervisors, as cultures and religions clashed under one roof. Yet a strong identification with Ireland allowed immigrant women a means by which they could grant themselves a sense of continuity with their former lives, and maintain connection with their home communities through political action.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible that their very distance from Ireland allowed female immigrants to feel more hope than anxiety at prospects of uprisings against English rule. Without having to face the consequences of violence and disruption firsthand, women generally found news of Fenian risings in the 1860s exciting. Far from the reality of direct Irish poverty and oppression, they could well believe in “the power of America and the decay of England,” and donated to local Fenian circles in dedication to such a vision.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the families they were supporting, working-class Irish women in America were more likely to have enough money, food, and shelter to turn their attention from survival to larger political questions.

This is not to say, however, they entertained visions of a free Ireland flippantly. There was rather a “desperate hopefulness” in the women who poured money into the cause, signifying the strong emotions driving them towards nationalism and an idealized future in which all Irish were ostensibly free.<sup>7</sup> Such actions were a way to maintain ties with Ire-

land, driven by a sense of urgency to transform the conditions which had forced women to leave their parents, friends, and parishes, so that none would be forced to leave again.

Nor did Irish women engage in politics blindly. In 1867 New York, a group of servant girls held a “monster meeting” specifically for the purpose of deciding amongst each other to resist calls for women’s donations to Fenian causes. That working-class immigrant women were active negotiators in political discussions is clear from their resolution against an Irish invasion of Canada, the purpose of which they did not understand. Having spent years investing “most freely of their small means” to aid the cause, they now believed their hard-earned money was going to be “thrown away and wasted by officials on the merest frivolities,” particularly upon ill-conceived and impractical military campaigns. The servant girls thus asserted that they were not willing to provide any further material aid until they could be assured beyond doubt that their money would fund “an army whose objective point would be Ireland and Ireland alone.” The meeting came about as a result of the servant girls creating and issuing a private circular among themselves, until all were in accord regarding a “common understanding” of what they expected of Irish Fenianism.<sup>8</sup>

These women valued their labor and their money, and were shrewd enough to ensure their funds were used as they deemed fit. Understanding the power of Irish girls’ collective wealth, the decision to withhold aid until their political demands were met shows extraordinarily well how astutely working-class women could influence the course of Irish politics, despite the general limitations of the roles allowed them.

## CONCLUSION

Immigrant women faced criticism at home and in America; they left behind communities which had incorporated their families for centuries to face homesickness, alienation, and Anglo-American contempt. Nevertheless, they also left their mark on Irish and American culture. Immigrant women’s insistence on maintaining a distinctly Irish identity through emotional

bonds, religious faith, nationalist commitment, and nostalgia for Irish history is reflected in modern Irish Americans' continuation of an ethnic identity rooted in sentimental Catholicism. The wages which drew them to America were often returned home in the thousands, if not millions, to fund the construction of parish churches, support remaining family members, and donate to nationalist causes in order to keep up a momentum which would have diminished significantly without the financial backing of Irish women abroad. Arguably, Ireland's very independence could be traced back to the support of these women, though their role as Irish patriots abroad has been traditionally excluded from liberation narratives.

Identifying with Ireland allowed immigrant women, living in an unfamiliar location in which traditional supporting structures were absent, a means by which they could grant themselves a sense of continuity with their former lives, and maintain connection with their

home communities.<sup>9</sup> Through their own labor, Irish women financed the spread of Catholic Churches in their communities, formed charitable institutions that countered the inequitable services of their Protestant counterparts, and kept the gates open for further Irish emigrants to arrive in America. This system of chain migration ultimately resulted in a situation where one out of ten American citizens today claims Irish ancestry.<sup>10</sup> Through their work, Irish women solidified a now decades-old relationship between Ireland and America, giving meaning to their exile by using it as motivation to shape what they imagined would be a more just world. Many of these women have slipped into obscurity, leaving no letters or diaries from which we can reconstruct their lives and experiences, but it is fundamental that Irish women's place in Atlantic history be more clearly delineated. Hopefully, this essay marks one step closer to being able to fully elucidate the extent of their historical significance in both Ireland and America.

<sup>1</sup> Pauline Jackson, "Women in 19th Century Migration," *The International Migration Review* 18, no. 4 (1984): 1008.

<sup>2</sup> Tenant Petition of Mary Gartlan to Evelyn Philip Shirley, Esquire, 4 December 1849, PRONI D 3531, CMSIED 9504089, Shirley Papers, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland, Irish Emigration Database. "The Population of Ireland: England's Death System Working Well," *The Pilot* 46, no. 49, 8 December 1883, <https://newspapers.bc.edu/?a=d&d=pilot18831208-01.2.57&srpos=31&e=-----en-20-pilot-21-byDA.rev-txt-txIN-women----->. Jackson, "Women in 19th Century Migration," 1010-12, 1017.

<sup>3</sup> Printed Report on Irish Emigration by Vere Foster, June 1855, PRONI D 3618/10/4, CMSIED 9405095, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland, Irish Emigration Database.

<sup>4</sup> "A Cargo of Irish Girls," *Boston Pilot* 20, no. 25, 20 June 1857, <https://newspapers.bc.edu/?a=d&d=bpilot18570620-01.2.6&e=-----en-20-pilot-121-byDA.rev-txt-txIN-women----->.

<sup>5</sup> Breda Gray, "Irish Women in London: National or Hybrid Diasporic Identities?", *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996): 95.

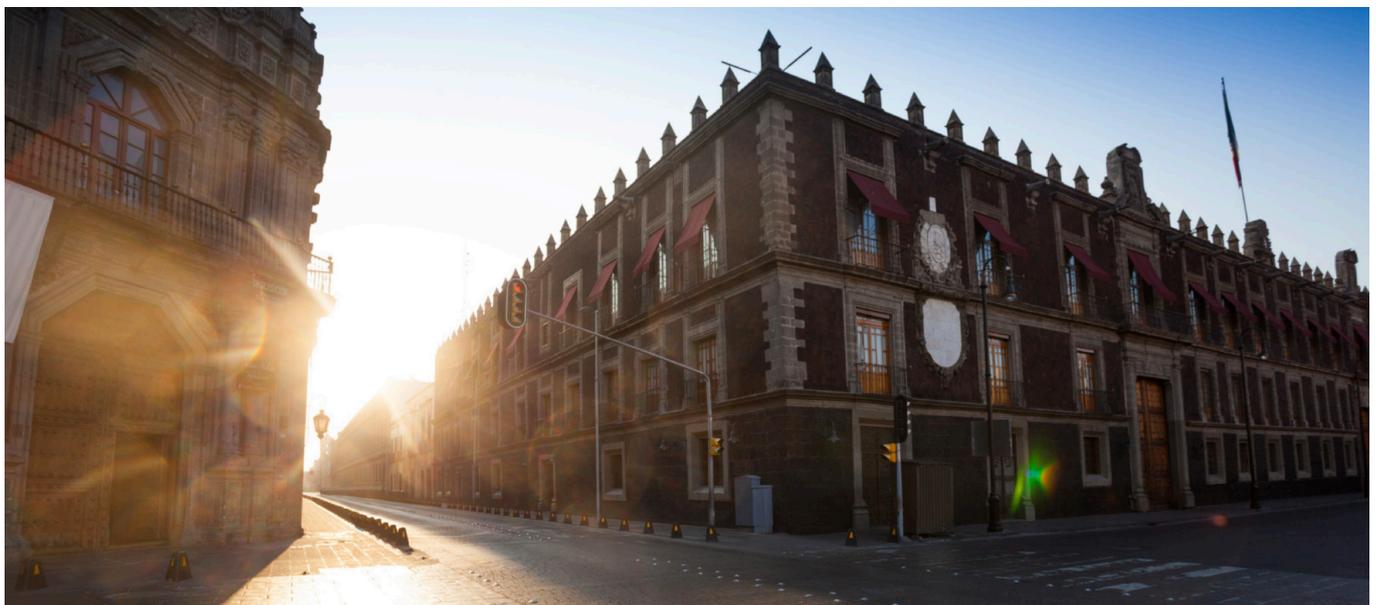
<sup>6</sup> John Francis Maguire, *The Irish in America* (Boston: D. & J. Sadlier & Company, 1868), 615.

<sup>7</sup> Maguire, *Irish in America*, 616.

<sup>8</sup> "The Servant Girls and the Fenians," *The Pilot* 30, no. 38, 21 September 1867, <https://newspapers.bc.edu/?a=d&d=pilot18670921-01.2.28&e=-----en-20-1-txIN----->

<sup>9</sup> Grey, "Irish Women in London," 95.

<sup>10</sup> William Phelan, "The Stalwart Ladies: Nineteenth Century Female Irish Emigrants to the United States," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 92, no. 366 (2003): 189. Derrick Moore, Gerson Vasquez and Ryan Dolan, "Residents With Irish Ancestry Are in All 3,142 U.S. Counties and Make Up 20% of the Population in Some," United States Census Bureau, last modified March 16, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/happy-saint-patricks-day-to-one-of-ten-americans-who-claim-irish-ancestry.html>.



# MARY WHO BREASTFEEDS:

## *Revisioning Sacred Bodies through Places of Religious Pilgrimage*

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### ABSTRACT

The Chapel of the Milk Grotto, located in Bethlehem, is a sacred pilgrimage site for women who are pregnant or experiencing problems with fertility. The Chapel is thought to have healing powers; women mix dust from the Chapel with water to drink in hopes of becoming fertile. By applying a feminist lens on gender, nation, and religion to analyze the Chapel, this paper reveals three ways to consider its function as a symbol in the imaginary of the religiously located citizen. Firstly, the common devotional practice of viewing the Milk Grotto as a place of healing from infertility functions to sacralize the heteronormative and biological nuclear family when considered within Catholic teaching on family and marriage. Secondly, twentieth and twenty-first century Chapel pilgrims encounter themes of borders and belonging that transcend nationality: the pilgrimage site serves as a reminder that religious devotion can, at times, bring oneself beyond one's place of citizenship and into a global church. Thirdly, the images of Mary breastfeeding in the Chapel allow for feminist interpretations of religious symbolism and motherhood that can challenge traditional views of the role of women in society and counter the social stigma of breastfeeding. This kaleidoscopic view reveals how different appropriations of marginal pilgrimage sites such as the Chapel of the Milk Grotto may promote strikingly different visions of church and world. While some interpretations may disempower women and marginalize non-normative, queer views of family and citizenship, others may foster global interconnectedness and new sacred symbols in ways that might be considered cosmopolitan and/or feminist.



### INTRODUCTION

“Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him’” (Matt 2:13).<sup>1</sup> The biblical story goes that, after giving birth in Bethlehem in a manger, Mary and the Holy Family fled to Egypt to protect the life of the child Jesus. According to community tradition that developed around the storied migration journey, the family stopped along the way in a cave of reddish rocks so that Mary could safely breastfeed. While Mary breastfed, a drop of breastmilk fell onto the cave rocks, turning the cave white. Known colloquially to-

day as the Chapel of the Milk Grotto, this cave of white rock, preserved under Catholic auspices and located on the southeast corner of the Church of the Nativity, is a sacred pilgrimage site for women who are pregnant or experiencing problems with fertility.<sup>2</sup> The Chapel is thought to have healing powers; women used to scrape the dust and mix it with water to drink in hopes of becoming fertile. Today, women can buy packets of dust toward the same end.

The Milk Grotto is not the first pilgrimage site that comes to mind when recalling sacred places of the Holy Land: it is no Holy Sepulcher, Western Wall, or Dome of the Rock. In this way, the physical site as well as the symbols and aesthetics that accompany it—the image and story of a Mary who breastfeeds—sit both inside and yet at the margins of the Christian religious tradition of pilgrimage. Located in the West Bank, the community and surroundings of this Bethlehem pilgrimage site portray a different socioeconomic life than the one experienced in Jerusalem. By passing through security checkpoints, the pilgrim must literally confront the reality of the wall that separates these two holy cities in order to access the Chapel. Religious, gendered, and national imaginaries come to bear on the pilgrim who experiences the Chapel of the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem in powerful ways that are often complex, contradictory, and multifaceted.

In this essay, I use a feminist lens on gender, nation, and religion to suggest three ways to consider the function of the Chapel as a symbol in the imaginary of the religiously located citizen. Firstly, the common devotional practice of viewing the Milk Grotto as a place of healing from infertility functions to sacralize the heteronormative and biological nuclear family when considered within Catholic teaching on family and marriage. Secondly, twentieth and twenty-first century Chapel pilgrims in the times of modernity and the nation-state encounter themes of borders and belonging, insofar as the pilgrimage site serves as a reminder that religious devotion can, at times, bring oneself beyond one's place of citizenship and into a global church of which Christians of different nationalities, including Palestinian Christians living in Israel and Palestine, are a part. Thirdly,



the images of Mary breastfeeding in the Chapel allow for feminist interpretations of religious symbolism and motherhood that can challenge traditional views of the role of women in society and counter the social stigma of breastfeeding. In this kaleidoscopic view, different appropriations of marginal pilgrimage sites such as the Chapel of the Milk Grotto may serve very different purposes. While some interpretations may disempower women and marginalize non-normative, queer views of family and citizenship, others may promote global interconnectedness and new sacred symbols in ways that might be considered cosmopolitan or feminist.

## FERTILITY AND THE FAMILY IN CATHOLIC FAMILY TEACHING

Feminist ethicists and theologians have long pointed out that Catholic family teaching has overemphasized the role of reproduction in the family and in the teleology of sex, to the detriment of women's equality.<sup>3</sup> The Catholic view of marriage has relied on a theological anthropology of biological, sexual, and gender complementarity that assumes a primary good of marriage to be the bringing of biological children into the world.<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Lilla Cox writes, "when people experience infertility, they often wonder what is wrong with them, feel the pain of dashed hopes and desires, and question if they are failing at

their marriage duties or if their marriages are invalid.”<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on family and the vocation of women to be fertile and procreate in marriage is an important backdrop both to the modern use of pilgrimage sites in general for the purpose of healing or finding a cosmic cure to fertility challenges, and to the Chapel of the Milk Grotto specifically. Most popular writing on the Chapel in various Catholic media outlets focuses on the fertility miracles that have come out of visits to the sacred site. In 2003, Franciscan Brother Lawrence Brode explained to *National Catholic Register* that “during the past three years—ever since the church began assembling testimonials—170 infertile women had gotten pregnant and given birth to children after praying the daily devotion to ‘Our Lady of the Milk’ and consuming a drink composed of a tiny bit of powder from the stones of the grotto.”<sup>6</sup> Another Franciscan Brother who oversaw the Chapel in 2012 told the Archdiocese of Baltimore in an interview that “[women pilgrims] pray from their heart asking Our Lady of the Milk for intercession in healing.” He went on to note “that he has heard of 1,700 babies born in the last 10 years and has read every one of the 400 letters that have been sent to the shrine, including 60 in the last six months. ‘The joy is immense,’ he said. ‘When you have faith you can move mountains.’”<sup>7</sup>

While feminist Catholics maintain the sacredness of family and motherhood at the heart of the Catholic faith tradition, there is an increasing concern for the religio-cultural pressures that work on women who “fail” certain images of what it means to be an ideal marriage partner or mother. These may be mothers suffering from infertility challenges, mothers who work, or women participating in queer forms of family and motherhood.<sup>8</sup> Feminist theologians in the global Catholic Church see reproductive decisions as individual choices made in the midst of biological, structural, and cultural realities.<sup>9</sup> We must “look further upstream at the cultural ideals related to procreation, family, and labor and the structures of the workplace and reproductive markets that shape women’s goals and cause them to conflict,” writes Emma McDonald Kennedy.<sup>10</sup> From a feminist standpoint, it is in these ways that the Chapel of the Milk Grot-

to, popular narratives of healing miracles from infertility, and religious teaching on fertility and the family remain an issue for women and queer people. The Chapel can provide a pastorally significant space for religious women to pray and hope for family in a traditional manner of reproduction. However, from a feminist lens, the narrative of healing and fertility can also function to reinforce the wider cultural and religious family ethic mentioned here, thereby narrowing the Catholic imaginary of what different types of flourishing in family might look like.

While healing from infertility is the most common understanding of the Chapel in modern devotional practice and popular tradition and media, I will propose two further ways of viewing the influence of the Chapel on the feminist pilgrim, emphasizing its geographic location in the occupied West Bank and its use of the uncommon image of Mary breastfeeding, which comprises the very center of the Chapel’s symbolic force.

## ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

In the Nicene Creed that Catholics profess at the Eucharist each Sunday, Catholics say that we believe in “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”<sup>11</sup> *Catholic* in this phrase is used to mean universal, one. Built into Catholic theology is a sense of universality, cosmopolitanism, and togetherness across cultural and geographic difference. While there is good reason to maintain pessimism about the actualization of Catholic cosmopolitan sensibilities, I argue here that marginal religious pilgrimage sites such as the Milk Grotto increase religious pilgrims’ sense of connectedness to a global religious community. The religious imaginary may compete at times with the national imaginary for claims of belonging on the pilgrim.

Historically, much of what we know regarding pilgrimages has come from the journals and records that pilgrims kept.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the modern equivalent of this is the online travel blog. Patrick McNerney is a Catholic priest from Australia who wrote about his visit to the Milk Grotto in 2014. His reflection highlights his

encounters with the community in the West Bank, vendors at tourist shops, a passing parade, and disparities passing through the border and security checkpoint.<sup>13</sup> When Catholics make religious pilgrimage to marginal sites such as the Milk Grotto in the West Bank, they are inherently situated in (inter)national locations and may experience borders or global belonging in new ways. The passing parade that McInerney observed helped him to realize how young the Palestinian population is. Meanwhile, his response to hearing of struggling vendors is affective: “I feel for their plight.”<sup>14</sup>

In another vein, Gina Hens-Piazza writes about her experience leading contextual education-cum-pilgrimage trips to Jerusalem for Jesuit and lay students in Catholic seminary at Jesuit School of Theology. For Hens-Piazza, “[p]articipatory learning in a context can perform several functions. It can reinforce what one has already learned. It may qualify, amend, and even contradict textbook portraits of a religious practice or belief. More often than not, it complicates the characteristically one-dimensional learning of classroom presentations.”<sup>15</sup> Every pilgrimage has an element of contextual encounter that can serve to reinforce or contradict previously held narratives or beliefs. I agree with Hens-Piazza that, more often than not, genuine religious encounter sits somewhere in between and allows one to have a more complex and empathetic framework for understanding the modern political and economic issues that the community around the religious pilgrimage site may be experiencing.

Sites of Catholic devotion in the West Bank such as the Franciscan-run Chapel of the Milk Grotto serve to remind Catholic pilgrims of the presence of Palestinian Christians and Catholics in the Holy Land. Catholic religious commitments stress the cosmopolitan nature of human dignity across cultures and borders. Religious and national imaginaries perhaps work in productive tension on the pilgrim-citizen, enabling her to approach political situations such as the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, which may be geographically distant, from a place of proximity, humanity, lived experience, and empathy for the suffering at hand, rather than from media narratives.

## MARY WHO BREASTFEEDS

In a qualitative review of womens’ views and experiences of breastfeeding in public, a study found five factors influencing decisions to breastfeed in public spaces: the legal system, structural (in)equality, knowledge, beliefs, and the social environment. In OECD countries of the Global North, breastfeeding rates were low despite the fact that mothers often had the legal right to do so. However, knowledge and enforcement of these rights was usually low. Further, mothers had to confront social and cultural stigmas regarding “the sexualisation of breasts, disgust narratives and lack of exposure among observers to baby-led infant feeding patterns.”<sup>16</sup> For this reason, the experience of breastfeeding in public space was often uncomfortable for women, with increased discomfort for young women, poor women, and women of color. This data shows the pervasiveness of the stigmatization of breastfeeding in public spaces. Contemplated in tandem with these statistics, the image of the Virgin Mary in the act of breastfeeding that sits prominently behind the altar in the underground chapel becomes an interesting pushback to social and cultural stigmas against public breastfeeding and a meaningful symbol of feminist motherhood that takes the reality of mothering tasks seriously.

In a final view on the Chapel of the Milk Grotto, Yolande Knell reflects for the BBC on the image of a breastfeeding Mary. “The painting depicts her cradling Jesus to her bare breast,” she observes. “Nowadays, with a baby of my own, I can’t help noticing that he’s not properly latched on. But for me, the picture exudes feminine power and motherly love.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps a reason why the picture evokes such a strong response is the relative lack of images of Mary that depict the more real, messy, and leaky sides of motherhood. Feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson point to the patriarchal religious symbol production that has served to perpetuate gender roles and female subordination: “The women’s movement in civil society and the church has shed a bright light on the pervasive exclusion of women from the realm of public symbol formation and decision making, and women’s

consequent, strongly enforced subordination to the imagination and needs of a world designed chiefly by men.”<sup>18</sup> Johnson succinctly summarizes her position, saying “[t]he symbol of God functions. Upon examination it becomes clear that this exclusive speech about God serves in manifold ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinates women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women’s human dignity as equally created in the image of God.”<sup>19</sup> The symbol functions. Seen from this perspective, the Chapel of the Milk Grotto retrieves Mary, in traditional feminist method, from images of her motherhood that appear sanitized and un-relatable to real mothers. The image of Mary breastfeeding thus sacralizes the body that breastfeeds and contests religious and cultural stigmas that relegate women’s experiences of motherhood to the private realm.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief analysis of the images, places, and aesthetics at the pilgrimage site of the Chapel of the Milk Grotto, I have attempted to show that the relationships among religious symbols, national borders, encounters with tourism

and socioeconomic life, and gendered stigmas are not so simple. There are ways in which the common reasons for religious pilgrimage to the Chapel and devotion to the sacred site exist in the context of a larger Catholic family tradition that stresses the importance of fertility and the ideal family as one of biological kinship and heteronormativity. But the Milk Grotto also invokes another important Catholic theological principle: the universal, global church. The course of travel to the Chapel and the encounters one has along the way can serve to remind religious pilgrims of their “global citizenship,” placing pilgrims amidst international concerns for peace and justice that they may not have previously considered in empathetic ways. The Chapel may also be viewed as the site of a significant, and powerful, feminist image of a Mary who breastfeeds, one that speaks in a more realistic way to the lived experience and difficulties of mothering in the modern world. Elements of religion and the nation from borders to breastfeeding are invoked, contested, enabled, and reclaimed in various ways by this site of religious pilgrimage. For the hope of peace and the continued presence of pilgrims at the Chapel of the Milk Grotto, *rihlah sa idah. Nesi’á tová*. Have a safe journey.

<sup>1</sup> The Bible translation used here is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Experience of the Chapel of the Milk Grotto is from author field notes, January 2023. Pictures were taken by the author in January 2023.

<sup>3</sup> See Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Lilla Cox, “Infertility: A Lens for Discerning Parenthood in Marriage,” in Jason King and Julie Hanlon Rubio, eds., *Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2020), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Cox, “Infertility,” 49.

<sup>6</sup> Michele Chabin, “The Milk Grotto Church Heals Infertile Couples,” *National Catholic Register*, September 21, 2003, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/the-milk-grotto-church-heals-infertile-couples>.

<sup>7</sup> “Bethlehem’s Milk Grotto brings faith, hope, and babies,” *Archdiocese of Baltimore*, January 19, 2012, <https://www.archbalt.org/bethlehems-milk-grotto-brings-faith-hope-and-babies/>.

<sup>8</sup> For a foundational work on this topic, see Julie Hanlon Rubio, “The Dual Vocation of Christian Parents,” *Theological Studies*, vol. 63 no. 4 (2002): 786-812. See also recent work on infertility from Emma McDonald Kennedy, “Moral Agency in the Reproductive Marketplace: Social Egg Freezing in the United States,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 50 no. 4 (2022): 696-716. And see Barbara Anne Kozee, “Queerness is Integral to Catholic Discussions of Family and *Amoris Laetitia*,” *New Ways Ministry*, October 4, 2021, <https://www.newwaysministry.org/2021/10/04/queerness-needs-to-be-centered-in-catholic-discussions-of-family-and-amoris-laetitia/>.

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Ann Puen, “Reproductive Justice in the Reproductive Health Law and Divorce Bill in the Philippines,” *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, January 1, 2024, <https://catholicethics.com/forum/reproductive-justice-in-the-reproductive-health-law-and-divorce-bill-in-the-philippines/>.

<sup>10</sup> Emma McDonald Kennedy, “Moral Agency in the Reproductive Marketplace: Social Egg Freezing in the United States,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 50, no. 4 (2022): 698, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12412>.

<sup>11</sup> “What We Believe,” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Ridinger, “Nations Shall Come: Accounts of Western Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land,” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 20, no. 3 (2021): 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick McInerney, “The Church of the Milk Grotto, Bethlehem,” *Pilgrim Pat*, July 5, 2014, <https://patmcinerney.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/the-church-of-the-milk-grotto-bethlehem/>.

<sup>14</sup> McInerney, “The Church of the Milk Grotto.”

<sup>15</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, “From Berkeley to Jerusalem: An Experiment in Contextual Education,” in Deborah Ross and Eduardo Fernandez, eds., *Doing Theology as if People Mattered: Encounters in Contextual Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2019), 241.

<sup>16</sup> Aimee Grant et al., “Views and experience of breastfeeding in public: A qualitative systematic review,” *Maternal & Child Nutrition* 18, no. 4 (October 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13407>.

<sup>17</sup> Yolande Knell, “Faith and fertility at Bethlehem’s Milk Grotto,” *BBC*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55347211>.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, Kindle Edition), Location 830.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 830.

# STATELESS:

## *Considering the Ethics and Legality of Transnational Commercial Surrogacy*

Meghan McCoy  
History

### ABSTRACT

On July 25, 2008, a baby in India was born to three mothers: first the surrogate mother who birthed her; second, the woman who was the egg donor; and third, the woman who, at one time, had been one of the intended parents along with her husband. The factors leading to this complex situation stretched back to November 2007, when Ikufumi and Yuki Yamada from Japan hired Pritiben Mehta, a married Indian woman with children, to carry their pregnancy. Less than a year later, and only one month before Baby Manji (as she was colloquially known) was born, the Yamadas divorced and Yuki Yamada relinquished her claim to Baby Manji. Mr. Yamada and his mother later acquired an identity certificate for Baby Manji that allowed them to apply for a travel visa to Japan and return home, yet the certificate did not mention the baby's nationality, mother's name, and it was only valid for Japan. This article will use the Baby Manji story as a case study to consider questions regarding what factors establish a person's nationality and the legal and ethical quandaries that arise when one cannot lay claim to any one nation-state. What responsibilities, if any, does the nation in which a person resides have towards that person, and what responsibilities do states have towards people who are born within their borders but who do not claim citizenship from any country? I will consider these questions within this article and argue that, given the increasing ubiquity of transnational commercial surrogacy, the world community must continue to re-think what rights and protections are owed to people regardless of their citizenship or parental status.

### INTRODUCTION

On July 25, 2008, a baby in India was born to three mothers. The first was the surrogate mother who birthed her; the second was the woman who served as the egg donor; and the third was the woman who, at one time, had been one of the intended parents along with her husband. The chain of events that led to this vexing situation stretched back to November 2007, when Ikufumi and Yuki Yamada from Japan hired Pritiben Mehta, a married Indian woman with children, to carry their pregnancy. Less than a year later and only one month before colloquially-known Baby Manji was born, the Yamadas divorced and Yuki Yamada relinquished her parental claims, citing that she was biologically,

genetically, and legally unrelated to Baby Manji. Mrs. Mehta also refused to assume care for Baby Manji. And while Mr. Yamada still wanted to raise Baby Manji, Indian law at the time forbade single-parent adoption, while Japanese law did not recognize the legality of surrogacy agreements.<sup>1</sup> After nearly six months of campaigning, Mr. Yamada and his mother acquired an identity certificate for Baby Manji from the regional passport office in India that allowed them to apply for a travel visa to Japan and return home. However, the certificate did not mention Baby Manji's nationality or her mother's name, and it was only valid for Japan. Baby Manji arguably thus had three mothers and even two nationalities at the time of her birth, yet legally she could claim none. Baby Manji,

not even a year old, was an unknowing example of a legally parentless and stateless person.

This article will use the Baby Manji story as a case study to consider questions regarding what factors establish a person's nationality and the legal and ethical quandaries that arise when one in fact cannot lay claim to any one nation-state. What responsibilities, if any, does the nation in which a person resides have towards that person, especially one as vulnerable as an infant or child? Although Baby Manji was thankfully able to later return to Japan under the care of her father and grandmother, it is worthwhile to imagine a scenario where *all* of the adults in question decided to relinquish their claim to Baby Manji. What nationality would then be listed on her birth certificate? Who, or which institution, would be liable for her care? What responsibilities do states have towards people who are born within their borders but do not claim citizenship from any country?

I will consider these questions within this article and argue that, given the increasing ubiquity of transnational commercial surrogacy, the world community must seriously rethink what rights and protections are owed to people regardless of their citizenship or parental status. Although cases like Baby Manji's are thankfully rare, their seriousness suggests that nations must establish new frameworks for thinking about the relationship between physical place and citizenship, what constitutes citizenship, and whether the current legal-political systems for defining these relationships fall short in light of new reproductive technologies. This essay will begin with a brief historical review of transnational commercial surrogacy in India and then discuss the ethics of place, citizenship, and human rights within these new forms of family formation.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCIAL SURROGACY IN INDIA**

When the Yamadas hired Pritiben Mehta to carry their pregnancy, they were participating in a phenomenon known as "fertility tourism" or "reproductive tourism." These terms

describe a situation when an intended parent engages in "the transnational consumption of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs)" that draw upon "the bodies, practices, technologies, and forms of capital that cross national borders" in order to produce a child for someone who is not themselves physically carrying the pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Although gestational commercial surrogacy arrangements have existed for the past forty to fifty years, transnational commercial surrogacy is comparatively new and thus still developing ethical and legal practices.<sup>3</sup>

Surrogacy within India has had an equally complicated and changing history. Legalized in India in 2002, the commercial surrogacy "boom" began in 2004 in Anand, in the western state of Gujarat, and only four years later was valued at an estimated \$445 million. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that India was for years the most popular destination for reproductive tourism. While the landscape has changed over the past twenty years, it remains a potential location for couples to try and realize their hopes of starting a family.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for India's popularity as a top reproductive tourism destination include the fact that intended parents can access low-cost services, the lack of regulatory infrastructure (which is not unique to India), the existence of a sizable population of low-income women, and a thriving privatized medical sector that has allowed for the creation of numerous fertility clinics.<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the most up-to-date information that I could find about surrogacy's legal status states that, since 2015, commercial surrogacy has been banned in India. The country now permits only altruistic arrangements, which is in line with other countries like the United Kingdom and Canada.<sup>6</sup>

While there is no shortage of arguments from scholars and activists who advocate either for or against surrogacy, it is well accepted that transnational surrogacy is only possible because of new technologies and, just as importantly, the deregulated nature of capitalist markets that have been a hallmark of the globalized economic order since the advent of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century. The Baby Manji debacle simply happened to be an unexpected case that underscored the fragile and precarious nature of

citizenship in a world where nations can *choose* to give—or deny—rights and protections to people even if they are born within their borders or have parents who claim a particular nationality.

## THE ETHICS OF PLACE, CITIZENSHIP, AND HUMANITY WITHIN TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCIAL SURROGACY

While it might initially seem counterintuitive, even strange, to look for answers to complicated questions regarding the ethics of citizenship, place, and human rights through a case that centers on an infant, Baby Manji's birth story actually gets to the heart of many issues that concern the intersection of a nation's territorial rights and an individual's own human rights. I stress this point because transnational surrogacy is, in part, a symptom and illustration of the rapid transformation in the geopolitical landscape effected by globalization. Crucially, this development has also been accompanied by a disruption of the very concepts upon which a nation's stability—even its legitimacy—rests. In his book *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging Since 1500*, scholar Charles Maier argues that territory is a "decision space" because the "political rights that came with territory included determination of who belonged and who was foreign, how wealth would be generation and distributed . . . [and] how families reproduced themselves."<sup>7</sup> However, transnational surrogacy makes clear just how much the once assumed certainty of territory—and the socio-political rights and responsibilities that formerly came with it—has changed since the late twentieth century. The once reasonable logic that a baby who was born in one territory was automatically a citizen of that territory is no longer indisputable. Maier describes this phenomenon as a divergence between identity space and decision space. This divergence is illustrated by the Baby Manji case: Baby Manji was denied citizenship in both India and Japan, even though she was born in one territory and had a biological parent from Japan who wanted to claim guardianship of her.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Baby Manji's status as a stateless

person separated her from the *decision* space of two countries' laws and protections while it was decided exactly what her *identity* space would be.

It is not unusual for a person's nationality and identity to be decided upon by the location of their birth and the person who physically births them; that is still largely how it works. A person can of course choose to later change their nationality, but to do so one must go through lengthy legal processes to be officially recognized as a legal citizen by national governments. The fact remains that nations as they are constructed today are not designed to cope well with stateless people. To not have a clear answer to the question "where are you from?" or "to which country do you belong?" is a profound disruption to national systems that derive stability, and legitimacy, from the clear issuance of state authority through such documents like passports, birth certificates, and parental lineage. If it is not clear which state assumes responsibility for a person and grants them their rights, then how do you decide under which criminal or civil code a person is protected or punished? Such questions expose the inherent artificiality of the state, despite its equally undeniable reality in all of our lives. This ambivalent aspect of the state became painfully clear during Mr. Yamada's struggle to secure the appropriate travel documents for his daughter.

In her brief article "Commercial Surrogacy and Fertility Tourism in India: The Case of Baby Manji," Kari Points describes the long and arduous process Mr. Yamada took to try and obtain custody of Baby Manji. He first tried to get Baby Manji a Japanese passport but, given that Japanese Civil Code only recognized the woman who had given birth to the baby as the mother, Baby Manji was considered Indian, not Japanese, and thus not entitled to a Japanese passport. Mr. Yamada then tried to adopt Baby Manji but was unable to do so, owing to a hundred year old Indian law that prohibited single men from adopting baby girls. After failing to either adopt Baby Manji or get her a Japanese passport, Mr. Yamada then tried to file for an Indian passport. Here, too, he was unsuccessful, since it was required that Baby Manji have a birth certificate before she could receive a passport. And since it was unclear exactly who

Baby Manji's mother was, local and national offices refused to issue her a birth certificate and thus denied Mr. Yamada's passport application.<sup>9</sup> Overall it took six months for Mr. Yamada to receive an identity certificate from the Indian government for Baby Manji, and even then the certificate did not mention her nationality, mother's name, or religion; it was also valid only for Japan. Following this debacle, the Japanese Embassy then issued Baby Manji a one-year visa on humanitarian grounds, at which point Mr. Yamada and his mother were finally able to take Baby Manji back to Japan.<sup>10</sup> Baby Manji could thus finally cross various national borders legally, but her crossings remained as provisional and uncertain as her national identity.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCIAL SURROGACY AND THE FLUIDITY OF THE NATION-STATE

Although it is unclear exactly how Baby Manji's legal status played out over the subsequent years of her life, all of the questions and issues raised by her case are indicative of the ways transnational commercial surrogacy disrupts seemingly "obvious" questions of parentage and nationality and highlights the significantly changed nature of territorial place and its connection to citizenship. In his chapter "Being There: Place, Territory, and Identity," Charles Maier predicts

"that a sense of diaspora identity, or at least a sense of multiple homelands, will become increasingly generalized among the affluent of the globe, who can choose it, and among the poor of the world, who must choose it."<sup>11</sup> In this case, Maier is talking about the ever-increasing population of economic migrants and refugees who are forced to assume a diaspora identity and wealthy individuals who can choose a diaspora identity through the privilege of travel. But what about those whose national identity is questioned, even undetermined, from birth? They unknowingly and helplessly find themselves at the mercy of ambiguous and conflicting national laws that are ill-equipped to deal with the rapidly evolving nature of reproductive technology and new forms of family formation. Neither can one blame the intended parents or the surrogates who engage in transnational commercial surrogacy, as there are practical and understandable reasons for each party to do so.

As a result, and despite the perhaps contradictory idea that governments must find new ways to determine a person's nationality even as the entire concept of the nation-state comes under increasing scrutiny, it is crucial that the international community develop transnational agreements that appropriately regulate the business of and engagement in commercial surrogacy. Short of outright banning the entire global practice, developing comprehensive laws that clearly define the national belonging of each pregnancy at the contract stage may be the only way to keep cases like Baby Manji's from happening again.

<sup>1</sup> Yehezkel Margalit, "From Baby M to M(anji): Regulating International Surrogacy Agreements," *Journal of Law and Policy* 24, no. 1 (2016): 48. See also: Kari Points, "Commercial Surrogacy and Fertility Tourism in India: The Case of Baby Manji," *The Kenan Institute for Ethics*, 2015, 1-11. [https://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BabyManji\\_Case2015.pdf](https://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BabyManji_Case2015.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Daisy Deomampo, *Transnational Reproduction: Race, Kinship, and Commercial Surrogacy in India* (New York: New York University, 2016), 5.

<sup>3</sup> In the interest of providing clarification for the reader, gestational surrogacy describes an arrangement where the surrogate mother bears no genetic relation to the fetus she is carrying. This is in contrast to traditional surrogacy (which is quite rare since the advent of ARTs) where the surrogate mother is also the biological mother but intends to relinquish her parental rights once the baby is born. Unsurprisingly, this arrangement carries far more ethical and legal concerns and was in fact the first surrogacy case within the United States that raised the highly complex nature of surrogacy specifically and ARTs more generally. See the case of Baby M in Margalit, "From Baby M to M(anji)," 44-47. The final clarifying point I would like to make is that of commercial versus altruistic surrogacy. Commercial surrogacy describes an arrangement where the surrogate mother is paid an additional commissioning fee, while altruistic surrogacy refers to a situation where the surrogate mother volunteers to carry the pregnancy and is only reimbursed for pregnancy-related expenses.

<sup>4</sup> Eeshan Sonnak and Sanvi Bhatia, "India's New Surrogacy Regulation Bill Falls Short of Protecting Bodily Autonomy and Guaranteeing Reproductive Liberty," *The London School of Economics and Human Rights Blog*, April 21, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2021/04/21/indias-new-surrogacy-regulation-bill-falls-short-of-protecting-bodily-autonomy-and-guaranteeing-reproductive-liberty/> and Deomampo, *Transnational Reproduction*, 39-42.

<sup>5</sup> Miranda Davies, ed., *Babies for Sale? Transnational Surrogacy, Human Rights and the Politics of Reproduction* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bhatia, "India's New Surrogacy Regulation Bill Falls Short", April 21, 2021 and Narayan Gaurang, et al., "The Surrogacy Regulation Act of 2021: A Right Step Towards an Egalitarian and Inclusive Society?," *Cureus* vol. 15, 4, April 20, 2023, doi:10.7759/cureus.37864. In the U.S. surrogacy is regulated at the state-level.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Maier, *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging Since 1500*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016): 3. Emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> Maier, *Once Within Borders*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Points, "Commercial Surrogacy and Fertility Tourism in India," 5.

<sup>10</sup> Points, "Commercial Surrogacy and Fertility Tourism in India," 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Maier, "Being There: Place, Territory, and Identity," 84.

# THE CHALLENGE OF MASS MIGRATION: *A Clough Center Debate*

Danielle Allen, Aziz Rana and Paul Romer

## REMARKS BY PROFESSOR PAUL ROMER (BOSTON COLLEGE)

I want to talk about the prospect of mass migration, which I think raises two interesting questions. The first is: “Why do so many people want to leave the places where they are now?” An estimated 700 billion people in the world right now say they would want to leave if there was some place where they could go. Why do so many people want to leave? The second question is: “Why are so many people in destination countries so fearful about the prospect of mass migration?” I will come back to those questions but before I do, I want to start by saying that this issue of migration is fraught with emotion, and my goal is always to try to be dispassionate. What I can offer as an economist is usually grounded in dispassion, logic, and evidence, but in this topic in particular I want to emphasize that dispassion requires empathy as well.

As economists, we pay a lot of attention to the distinction between what I like to call “what should” questions and “what if” questions. We have professional expertise only in answering “what if” questions: If you do this, then the reaction might be that. “What should” questions are things that all of us have to decide upon, but we draw on other sources besides logic and evidence. We draw on moral notions of right and wrong, but I have no professional experience that gives me any place to speak about that.

Now, what do I mean by empathy? Think about the two groups here. It is easy, I think, to have empathy for a group of people who want to go to



Professor Paul Romer (BC) outlines the challenges of mass migration.

a new place. But I want us to try and empathize as well with the people who say “we do not want migrants.” It is harder to do because they often say that in ways that are ugly. So when I say *empathize*, I do not mean *sympathize*. I mean empathize as in: “We have got to understand what motivates them, what they are thinking, what they are feeling.” Only then might we have some hope of being able to look at a possibility and ask: “What about X? We could try X, would that work?” If we understand the various parties, and how they might react, we can make an assessment about what we might be able to do.

There is a distinction in international law between economic migrants and refugees. One of the side effects of empathy is that it is not a helpful distinction for this purpose. People who are trying to move because they want their kids to have a good education or because they want them to be able to have a job deserve every bit as much as people who are trying to escape from political persecution. But this issue confronts us with numbers that are at the scale of hundreds of millions.

I think the answer to both of my initial questions can be found in culture and norms. People want

to leave the places where they now live because they have lost hope that the culture and norms in those places will evolve in the right direction and become the kinds of cultures in which they want to live, and which they want for their children. People move because they have lost hope that the culture and norms could evolve in the direction that would give them the chance for the better life they desire. People who resist immigrants are afraid that the immigrants will undermine the culture and norms that they want to preserve, that characterize the places where they live now. This suggests that there is a bit of a difference in these perspectives. Why is it that these equilibria of norms and culture are so hard to change, such that some o give up hope about them ever changing? Yet conversely, if they are so hard to change, why are so many other people afraid that they *could* change if new people arrive?

At the equilibrium level of a group, we have this conformist dynamic where, to a large extent, we tend to do what others around us do. So people who are peers—who transmit values back and forth in that way—tend to conform. The other model of norms is parental transmission, though that is very slow: a generational timescale. But when you think about the conformist dynamics, that is the thing which really can generate persistence over centuries of horizontal transmission.

The good news is that this means that when one person moves, if they interact with others, they will rapidly assimilate or integrate into the new set of norms. This mechanism works potentially very well when somebody is moving to a set of norms which are better tuned to fit with the world in which we live. For example, they can go someplace that has notions about pro-social behavior and notions about rule-following and consideration for others. If the technological or economic environment changes, it may be important to have norms and culture that evolve to help guide us towards better outcomes in those new dynamics. Conversely, if we have old norms, we could get stuck in a situation where there is a misalignment between the norms and the opportunities.



An audience member speaks with Professor Paul Romer during the reception after his panel.

The particular dimension that I think most people seek when they move from one place to another is the rule of law. Having a system based on the rule of law is very valuable, and it is grounded in respect for those rules that individuals follow. It is supported by things like police and prosecutors, but if the population does not believe in the system, in some sense it falls apart. It is based on a very valuable set of norms and the culture related to it. Even people who do not feel an attachment to the rule of law still want to move to a place that has it. And then when they move there, they get socialized most of the time. Then they become supporters of this system. A pressure is building for mass migration, and as you scale the numbers up and you have a society which is not good at integrating people, then this dynamic of assimilation may not work. What you may end up with is a subculture that reflects the values where people came from, and the people in the country that receive the new migrants are concerned about this.

Because of this I have made a suggestion that many people think is immoral. Yet I think this crisis is too big to ignore. I think the possibility we should consider is the one case, historically, where we saw millions of people move in and get access to the British system of the rule of law: Hong Kong. Britain set up a jurisdiction and said “You can come in if you want. We’re going to administer the rule of law the way we administer it in Britain. If you want to come in and live under those terms, you can.” People came in, and it took a while, but they eventually established a very strong equilibrium. So I hope there’s a discussion about this question: “Could we start other new cities and run them like the British ran Hong Kong?” There was

a governor who was subject to democratic accountability, but it was not local democracy—which was actually part of why they succeeded.

What was unique about Hong Kong was that when people moved, they got a right to vote. They did not get a passport, so no one in Britain might have been worried about British culture being threatened. I think the huge economic success of Hong Kong is a very optimistic sign of what's possible when you give people the kind of opportunities that something like the rule of law can provide. I think you could tailor the institutions in a place like that and encourage the right kind of assimilation, and then transition to vocal democracy eventually. But one of the things democracies never vote in favor of is mass migration. So if you let one million people into Hong Kong and then turned it over to local democracy, they would have prohibited the next million from coming in. So you have to get up to your target scale of around 10 million even before you try to transition to local democracy.

So this is admittedly a bad idea. But it's better than all the alternatives because no one has an alternative. We can build 70 cities of 10 million people like Hong Kong and take all 700 million people who want to leave where they are. So I hope we at least consider that as a possibility. Perhaps someone can come up with a better alternative. But we need to start taking this challenge seriously. It will overwhelm us if we do not. Thank you.

## REMARKS BY PROFESSOR DANIELLE ALLEN (HARVARD)

This has been a really wonderful and rich conversation and I'm grateful to come after Paul, because it gives me the chance to respond to what has come before. Paul, in opening his remarks, claimed his role as a positivist, someone who answers "if...then" questions. I am a political philosopher so I get to claim the professional right to answer "should" questions. The first few sets of comments all converged on certain questions. Can we have a softer picture of identity and a softer picture of borders and boundaries? And can't we do something about the incoherence of

a global framework where there's a right to exit but no right to enter? With Paul we have started to explore solutions. And it's in that space of solutions that I am also going to spend my time.

The fifth chapter of my latest book, *Justice by Means of Democracy*, is called *polypolitanism*. I generally am not in favor of academic jargon—I tell all my students never invent jargon and don't use jargon! But I figure that since we all learn "cosmopolitanism" it shouldn't be that hard to learn "polypolitanism." From the Greek, it means simply being a member (*polites*) of many (*poly*) places, so you can either have many places or be a member of many polities. Lots of people have been using the phrase "attachment to place." I hope we can replace it with the phrase "attachment to *places*." That, to me, is the beginning of the conceptual shift that we need to address some of the problems we face.

So I want to say a little bit more both about what this concept of polypolitanism is and how it came to seem really important to me as a part of our project of trying to make the case for democracy as foundational to human wellbeing and thriving. That is to say, why is poly politanism part of the solution to the future of democracy? The concept takes its bearings from the insight that each and every one of us is actually already a member of many places. I am a citizen of the city of Cambridge; of the state of Massachusetts; of the United States; of a set of professional associations that span borders, that are transnational; of various kinds of digital associations that also span borders. In all of those spaces I am subject to governance: it is not the case I am only subject to national governance. And I have different packages of rights and responsibilities across all of those spaces. So then the question



Keynote speaker Professor Danielle Allen (Harvard) introduces her proposal for "polypolitanism."

for human well-being is whether or not, across the multiplicity of places that we are members of, we have access to the voice and empowerment that human beings need for well-being.

Now what does that mean concretely? It means, for example, that national voting rights may not be the end-all and be-all of thinking about voice and empowerment. They are fundamental—I'm not saying anything to undermine that—but the point is that when you're thinking about migration it might be reasonable for migrants to have voting rights at the city level and not the national level, as was the case earlier in the 20th century, when they had a long runway before attaining voting rights at the national level. If you could start to think about different layers of jurisdiction, you have many, many more possibilities for how you think about immigrant or migrant incorporation. No longer is everything high stakes, all or nothing membership.

So how did this come to seem so important to me? Sometime roughly 10 years ago, I read an article in the *New Republic* by an economist named Glen Weyl and his colleague, Eric Posner.<sup>2</sup> It made some points that were similar to the ones Paul started with: that you have this problem of misaligned incentives in this space of migration, you have receiving countries that aren't ready to do the cultural incorporation, and you have people who want to exit for economic opportunity. In [Weyl and Posner's] case, their argument was really focused on the question of how to reduce global inequality. Their view was, "the more migration, the more movement we have, the better": that's how you would bring economic equality up in the world. But this runs against the problem of receiving countries feeling cultural breakdown not wanting to support that. And their solution horrified me, in kind of the way Paul's suggestion that colonialism is the answer should be horrifying on first hearing.

[Weyl and Posner's] solution was that people in recipient countries should be able to have the wages of people whom they would sponsor as migrants. Putting it very crudely, in other words, it's like a structure of indentured servitude. This was basically the core idea, so then you'd have an incentive for people in the receiving country

to accept migrants. As I read this, I was furious, because for many reasons I could go into it at too much length, I am committed to the idea that human well-being rests fundamentally on empowerment. So any policy proposal that depended on sacrificing access to political equality was for me a nonstarter from the get-go.

Because I was so angry I invited Glen to The Institute for Advanced Study, where I was a faculty member, for a seminar. (That's what I do when I'm mad: I just want to talk some sense into this person I've never met!). So Glen came, we had a seminar, and we hashed it out. The result has been a very lengthy intellectual collaboration ever since. He's shifted his views in meaningful ways, I've shifted my views in some ways, but the thing that became very clear to me in that conversation with Glen was roughly the challenge of the following problem. I'm making this case that justice and human well-being depends on democracy, which for me means that building a healthy democracy depends on being able to build an empowering economy in that democracy. It requires a rule of law Foundation, like the Marshall Plan after World War II, which provided that for Europe. But the problem in the 21st century is to do that—to build an empowering economy that can support domestic democracy—without exploiting people outside the borders. Very often democracy, popular empowerment, and egalitarian economic foundations have depended on exploitation. Take the American case. You actually had quite interesting commitments to the egalitarian economy in the U.S. in the late 18th early 19th century, with [the state] even, for example, giving out land in equal lots through Georgia's land lottery to widows and husbands (as heads of household). Where did the land come from, of course? [It was] expropriated from Native Americans. So that's been the pattern repeatedly: the kind of egalitarian economy that you needed to hold up healthy democracy depended on exploiting or expropriating from somebody else.

So in the 21st century, having just democracy resting on a healthy empowering economy, without exploitation, requires solving the issue of migration. The first economic fact is the question of how the labor market is structured. The first fact

about how the labor market is structured is how membership and boundaries are structured. So at this point in time, because of the contradiction between the right to exit but no right to enter, we have a very unjustly structured labor market. So the question is: how can you reach a point where you can maximize mobility and migration at the same time as making that compatible with reception internally? I then added the third criteria: *without people losing their access to voice and empowerment*. The result of that set of criteria is this concept of polypolitanism. Practically speaking, it might point towards a sponsorship program; you can think about the Canadian Asylum program as a kind of mini-model of what could happen on a bigger scale, or H1B visas where corporations sponsor people. Then you build a sort of Civil Society expectation *a la* the fraternity model, that people who put their hands up and sponsor migrants receive some kind of compensation for doing that—not the kind of compensation that would indenture people, however; there has to be a bright line. [Sponsors then also] have to have responsibilities to provide voice in the political sphere on behalf of those whom they sponsor. This, coupled with a pathway to full political membership or support for preserving and maintaining actual voice and access to voice in the country of origin, gives you an array of options for thinking about how people would have access to local empowerment as a part of a structure for migration.

So that's roughly the idea. And I'm actually pleased to say that it is in operation in bits and pieces. In the U.S., one could point to New York, which passed voting rights for immigrants, for non-citizens, at the level of the city; that's under consideration in other cities in the US. The H1B Visa program is a model that could be expanded to other sectors and contexts beyond those that currently have access to it. And here in Massachusetts, we too have the challenge with migration that New York and other parts of the country are currently facing. The political strains have not been so severe in Massachusetts, not simply because we are a Democratic state or a blue state that has lots of cosmopolitan souls, but also because the governor went out of her way at the very beginning of this to try to find a network of civil Society organizations all over

the Commonwealth, who would start working with that kind of sponsorship model. It's straining—I don't want to pretend it's not straining because, as others have noted, the numbers are really so extraordinary—but it has given this Commonwealth a little more elasticity than we have seen in some other places. So the question is whether that kind of elasticity can then also be developed in other states in this country and in other countries, building from that small seat of the Canadian model. If it can, perhaps we can start to have the beginnings of the dynamic, flexible system that we need. So that is my suggestion: polypolitanism. Let us all be neither nationalists or cosmopolitans but polypolitans!

## REMARKS BY PROFESSOR AZIZ RANA (BOSTON COLLEGE)

Thank you, Danielle, for those really rich reflections. I have two kinds of questions. I'm very taken with the idea of polypolitanism and the thought of moving beyond the politics of nationalism that so shapes how we think of membership and borders. I also appreciate your focus on thinking about democracy as historically really bound to various practices of exclusion, and your claim that the problem for today, unlike the project for earlier historical period, is the extent to which we can genuinely have a universal framework conceiving of democracy as something that's available to all, and that produces something like equal and effective freedom, *regardless* of one's location within the terms of the political community.

So two things. First, I'd ask you to reflect on an element of your own work that sometimes your scholarship is associated with. This is the idea that one of the ways we deal with the divisiveness that can really compromise rights is through developing rich civic narratives of belonging. In the context of [your book] *Our Declaration*, it's the idea that we can infuse founding documents with a kind of egalitarian spirit that's always in motion and so developing something like a national method. Now versions of that argument can cut in some ways against the focus on attachment to *places*, the

idea of having plural identities. Versions of that argument—for example, Habermas’s constitutional patriotism—say that the way to ensure we don’t have divided and broken societies that are organized through various kinds of exclusion or cleavages is to have single driving narratives of national belonging, built on redemptive stories about the country as not organized through blood and land but instead organized through ideas. That’s a claim about the centrality of a singular type of political attachment.

I tend to be uncertain that the project of constitutional patriotism has actually cashed out in ways that many of its defenders have wanted. But I will note that even in American politics, when you’re thinking about the speeches that somebody like Obama or Biden gives, there’s a real focus on the idea that the thing that can keep us from the nightmare of white nationalism or the breakdown of American society is to just reinvest in singular stories. So I’m curious what you see as the relationship between the idea of having plural attachments in play, so as to have multiple identities that actually diffuse the centrality of any single identity, and the overarching logic of contemporary American, and in a sense global, liberal nationalism, which suggests we actually have to have a single identity.

The second question concerns the relationship between your invocation of plural attachments to place, and the kind of argument you’re making about migration. A counternarrative to the story that we heard about mass migration is the argument that a number of really wonderful scholars in international migration law have been developing, Dan Kanstroom [present in the audience] chief among them. But I’m also thinking of Tendayi Achiume’s work on migration as decolonization and my colleague Shantel Thomas’s on migration colonialism and international law. The argument goes something like this. If we just look at the places where people are coming from and the places where people are trying to get to, it maps almost exactly onto the history of colonialism: it’s imperial metropolises that are trying to keep out folks from previously colonized communities. Hence this is really not a story about the rule of law or culture or norms, this is a story about the long-



standing effects of how empires extracted economic benefits from specific parts of the world and then shut out those communities. It is their capital that continues to be in movement while the actual physical bodies that engaged in hard productive labor are denied access to the benefits. That’s a history of ongoing colonization, and you can see it explicitly right now at the U.S.-Mexican border, where it’s Mexican labor that provides the essential foundations for the material reproduction of our own economy, yet [those doing the laboring] work under conditions in which they are denied any meaningful legal labor rights or political rights, including the vote, in ways that reproduce elements of the old Jim Crow past and forms of colonial control. That would suggest a fairly radical project of thinking of migration as tied to decolonization. For example, in the 1930s and 40s, what folks who pressed for independence in places like Puerto Rico wanted as a condition of independence was the extensive economic provision of resources to Puerto Rico, because of the history of extraction—as well as access to easy movement after independence. In other words, extensive financial support from the US as a form of reparations, and free movement to the US precisely because of the history of colonialism.

Now that’s something that presses beyond potentially the polypolitanism that you’re describing. It has many key elements in common: extensive legal rights, political rights, an idea of plural identities so that you can actually in a deep sense be a member of a community let’s say in Mexico and also in the US. But at the same time, I’d also suggest really extensive reparative obligations to countries and populations that find themselves in movement. The question then is not really a question about the imperial North and how to

house populations in movement, it's about the obligations we owe to those communities not only once they're at our border but also, effectively, in the countries from which they come.

So I'm curious: to what extent is your argument consistent with the migration-as-decolonization argument? Does it push back against it, is it a feasible pragmatic organization of it, or is it something that's fundamentally different? Those are my two questions.

## DANIELLE ALLEN (HARVARD)

Thank you. Those were really wonderful comments, rich and provocative. I don't know Tadayi Achiume's [migration-as-decolonization] argument, so I can't speak directly to the framework. But I think the answer is yes: my argument aligns with hers. In the US right now, for example, we just live in a sort of mythical state when it comes to how we think about migration. The first, most important element of that mythical state is the fact that we have roughly 11 million undocumented workers, which supports the proliferation of wage theft in the country, which means that the 19th century commitment to building an economy based on free labor has been eroded. Yet we just walk around every day completely complicit and complacent about that, and not really attending to it. That is something that I criticize. So in that regard, yes, that's probably consistent.

In general, I do think that there is also work to do supporting the rule of law and its ability to come into existence elsewhere. I take the Marshall

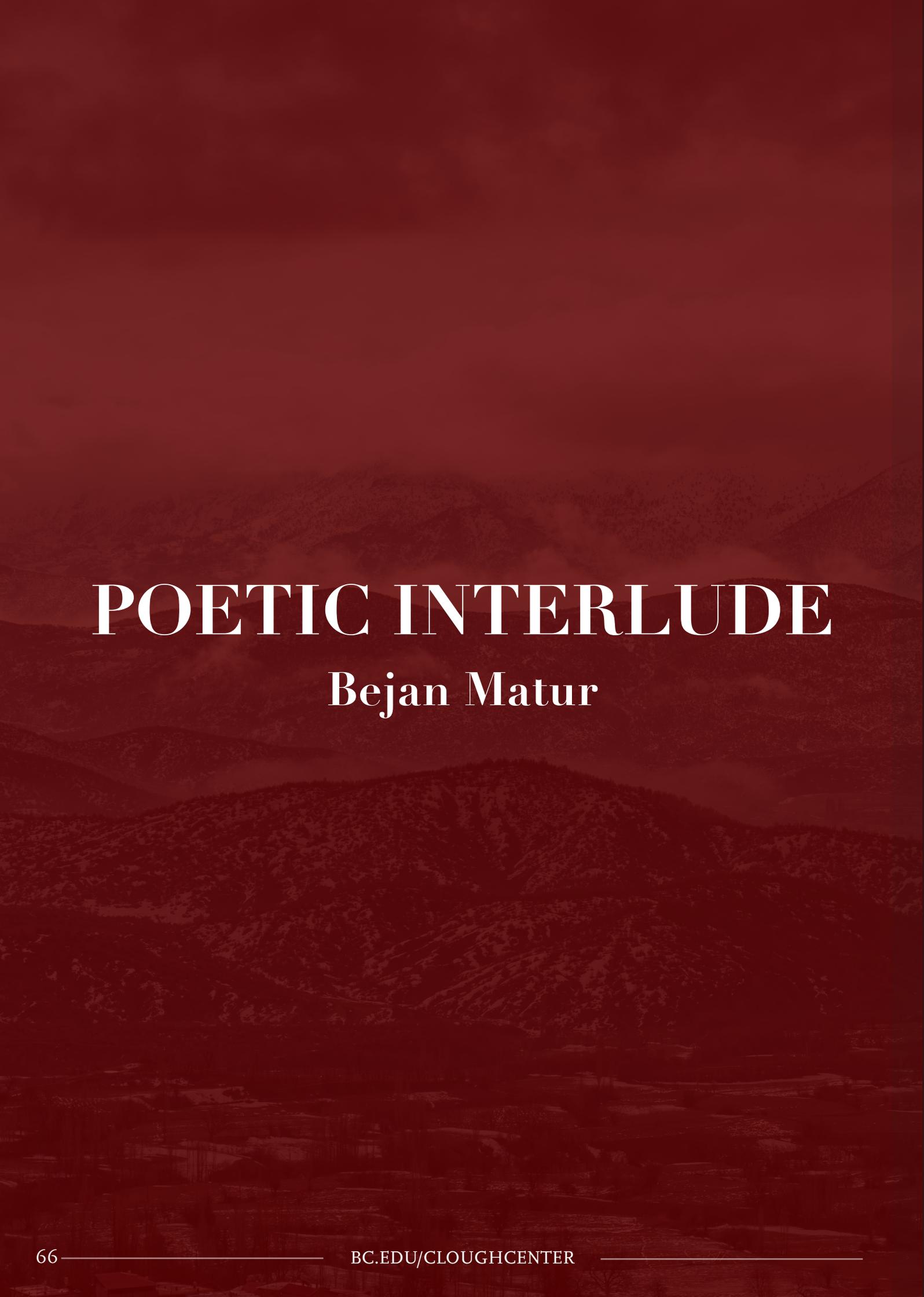
Plan in post-World War II in Europe as a kind of core model for how US foreign policy should be structured, and that does relate to the question of what is owed to Mexico and Central America and so on. So I think that there might be a lot of affinities there, actually, but I need to learn more.

To the first question, I make an argument about the need to cultivate civic identity, drawing on the notion that you can have a kind of thick concept of culture and a thin concept of civic identity. That thin concept of identity then needs to be connected to whatever thick concept of identity all of us bring to the table. This produces a picture of identity where to participate in a democracy means everybody connects their island via a bridge to some sort of shared island, which is that basic set of norms that sustain democracy and the rule of law. Those are kind of minimalist, in fact, and they don't actually define for everybody what their conception of the good is: you can define much of your conception of the good on your own island, as long as it's consistent with universal inclusion, rule of law, nonviolence, dispute resolutions, and a few other basic norms. So that is the mental image that I have in mind: the notion that we're all trying to cross a bridge from our own islands to be in some shared spaces together, but can also go back to our own islands now and then to enjoy our attachment to that specific place. And there's free movement back and forth, psychologically speaking. That's the kind of conception of identity that I think is necessary to sustain this idea of polypolitanism. I've always been interested in how this country could have a plural yet shared narrative, and it's that kind of conjunction that matters for describing where the civic pieces of the national narrative come in.

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<sup>1</sup> Condensed from remarks made at the Clough Center's Fall Colloquium on "Attachment to place in a world of Nations" held at Boston College on October 5, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The article referenced here is Glen Weyl and Eric Posner, "A radical solution to global income inequality," *The New Republic*, November 6, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/120179/how-reduce-global-income-inequality-open-immigration-policies>



# POETIC INTERLUDE

## Bejan Matur



# NIGHT SPENT IN THE TEMPLE OF A PATIENT GOD

## I

You chose your exile among rainswept mountains.  
Where you lingered last night  
was the home of the patient god  
the home where a human is equipped with compassion. No need for  
temples, I said.

This is simply a place.  
The human soul must surely be a temple.  
And rain the river of homelessness  
reminds us of god and childhood.

## II

You chose your exile among rainswept mountains.  
The beauty of making mistakes  
and the peace of pain.  
Everything led you to emptiness.  
And you, you looked at the pale flowers of patience and wept. You slept in  
his arms as though nothing existed.  
There shall be a journey made to the mountain and exile chosen. And a  
human wanted from god.  
We must listen again to that music. That place was not meant for loving.

# CREATION

Listen and look, mountains rise into being. Underground rivers shrink  
to sluggish inner blood.

A lapis-blue vein  
atoms of dust.

Perhaps only a wind knows earth.

The wind touches trees and humans and dies away.



# TRUTH

What Stones know  
Humankind  
Forgets!



## IF THIS IS A LAMENT

They speak of a land that never was, A non-existent tongue.  
There is no utterance,  
No words.  
If we're put on earth  
To understand each other- Who can make sense of death?  
Explain how mountains stole breath, Or translate the darkness  
That has fallen?  
Who can say what burgeons  
In a child's dream?  
Flapping out of an ancient tale,  
Birds' wings bear down  
On me-and skin  
Akin to stone  
As the old women used to say.  
When darkness falls  
Beyond the mountains,  
The people I remember look to me in pain.my words are elegy.  
If this is a lament We haven't even  
Begun to cry.

# REQUIEM FOR SAROYAN

The mountains of Bitlis are covered in snow  
the mountains of Bitlis,  
oh – the past.  
The man looking for his homeland –  
are the stones he finds just stones?  
A woman in mourning  
is carrying a shirt.  
She tells us the shirt is full of pain.  
Look – she says – in the mountains, it’s still cold Look – eagles  
oak-trees  
and deer.  
We haven’t forgotten.  
With the grief from her lament  
still lingering in your breast,  
you belong in our night.  
You belong in the loneliness that grows in our soil. I wait to see you return  
to the mountains of Bitlis, stubbornly, I look  
to the time when the roses  
that dress a father’s bloody head don’t fade.  
And I know  
we can’t use the same words  
to speak of the same mountains and the river of longing will never attain  
the same valleys.  
This morning,  
one music renews everything – history is a man  
sitting in front of a broken stone. The letters are illegible,  
like all broken hearts –  
a stone in pain.  
Do you remember  
the man filling his pockets with stones,  
the desolate man searching for his homeland?  
He’s leaning on the wall.  
He’s looking at the wind.  
When we remember him, he is still gathering stones. When we remember him, he’s still dis-  
mantling stones.  
Because there lies  
ahead of us  
a journey greater than death,  
now I forgive the snows,  
the departure,  
the last breath stolen by winter, – now  
I forgive everything



# III. MEMBERSHIP: WHO BELONGS?

# RELIGION, NATION, AND EMPIRE:

## *Competing Attachments to Place*<sup>1</sup>

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Karen Barkey  
Bard College

### INTRODUCTION

The question of attachment to place and the study of the connection that develops between individuals and/or groups and their significant environment has gained increasing attention with globalization, the intensification of international mobility, and the population movements that arise from ethno-religious conflict and environmental disasters. Historians and social scientists have described the travails of relocation in many instances of war, epidemics, and territorial transitions of social and political kinds. The importance of place cannot be underestimated. Edward Casey, in *Getting Back into Place*, speaks of the need to articulate and engage with the analysis of place in modern times and demands that we give “to place a position of renewed respect by specifying its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us *who* and *what* we are in terms of *where* we are (as well as where we are not.)”<sup>2</sup>

One of the most discussed questions of attachment to place is the unmixing of peoples that occurred after the breakdown of empires. The first iteration of such unmixing was observed in the breakdown of empires after World War I. Both the Hapsburg and the Ottoman Empires were territorially broken apart to allow for the construction of new nation-states. The second iteration of this transition happened in the post-colonial context when colonial empires exited their subjugated territories and encouraged internal division and strife in their colonies. This unpacking created havoc with communities of difference that were either eradicated wholesale or

extricated from their native lands and forced to migrate under conditions of extreme violence.

Attachment to place is important because of the construction of individual and communal meanings around specific places. Social psychology has an elaborate sub-field that tries to understand attachment to place as part of a process that includes both affect and cognition. As a comparative historical sociologist, I am more interested in the macro-global transitions and their effect on the experiences of communities that undergo such change. In that way, macro-historical conditions give rise to processes whose long-term effects have debilitating consequences. The intervening variable, in a sense, is attachment to place. It is because transitions affect peoples’ attachments to their lands that the social outcomes resulting from resettlement, diaspora existence, politics, and violence can be observed. Attachment to place is exacerbated by movement. Often the transfer of populations makes communities realize their attachment to the land that has nourished them.

The lack of movement, being pinned down to a locale, sometimes creates a similar cognition of attachment. Large-scale social change or historical transitions are not necessarily essential to consider the impact of such attachment on people’s lives. The historical ghetto where Jews lived in European societies created boundaries that not only served to separate but also to build affective ties to the space. In a colorful essay, Richard Sennett talks about the Ghetto in Venice as a place where, for the Jews, being Jewish became a spatial experience. The Ghetto-space,

he says, “was idealized as ‘real’ community, as an organic space. The Jews of Renaissance Venice were the first to think of segregation as containing, ironically, this positive virtue.”<sup>3</sup> With the dependence of the Venetians on the Jews for their economic role and the Jews’ own dependence on Venice for their security, place became crucial as a boundary between inside and outside, Jew versus Christian, but also safety versus uncertainty. “Within the confined space of the Ghetto, the Jewish people figured out a way to celebrate themselves as other. It became a symbolic space where a new understanding of the essence of being Jewish began to define itself. Within its walls, they perfected the sense of both belonging and not belonging to the city in which they were always subject to restrictions imposed by the authorities.”<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Albert Memmi recounts his attachment to the Hara, the Jewish ghetto of Tunis. As Margaux Fitoussi explains, “He describes his impasse [a spatial dead end of his childhood memories]—real and imagined—as a borderland between the Arab and Jewish quarters, the European and Tunisian worlds. It’s a familiar place. One can know the crevices of its walls and know *how* and *where* one is situated within it. Belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage can be incredibly affirming. But as Memmi evocatively described in *The Pillar of Salt* (1953), breaking away from the impasse can also be crushingly alienating.”<sup>5</sup> In each scenario, a religiously defined community living in foreign lands found their circumscribed space both intimate and secure, and they thrived despite the pervasive animosity they experienced. And in both cases religion is a metaphorical place in which attachments are created and deepened.

In accord with the theme of this colloquium I would like now to focus on the well-known transformation from empire to nation-state and reflect on the competing understandings of attachment to space in each form of political rule, while also analyzing the impact of demographic engineering that was orchestrated in the transition from empire to nation-state. Even though traditional land-based empires such as the Hapsburgs, Ottoman, and the Russians did not confine their ethno-religious com-

munities into strictly defined spaces, the passage from empire to nation-state wreaked havoc for both the rulers and the ruled. In the wake of World War I, these three empires broke apart to create multiple new nationalizing states. War and nationalism were the root causes of the decline and final demise of these empires. War created the conditions of state weakness, but nationalism provided the agency for the work of various elites in their demand for independence and the establishment of post-imperial states. They were, no doubt, helped by the 1918 Woodrow Wilson declaration that all national communities deserved self-determination. Imperial diversity gave way to national homogeneity. The principle of one people, one land, and one government became the framework within which new nation-states operated. With the ambition to create such simplified ethno-religious nation-states, governments engaged in expulsions, population transfers, and sometimes even genocide, as was the case with the destruction of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire. These disruptions are exactly where we can see the vicissitudes of attachment to place.

More specifically, I would like to make two principal arguments. First, I wish to argue that attachment to place/land in the traditional empires was felt and understood differently than the contemporary experience of nation-states. Attachment to place in the nation-state has become both more emotional (emotionally involved, homogeneous nation) and also made us more contentious against the outside within and without the nation. Losing one’s homeland, being subjected to population exchanges, and the violence of such policies can be seen and understood in the hardship, memory, and nostalgia experienced by displaced communities. Second, and consequently, I will argue that those who remain outside their putative homeland and develop diaspora communities end up being politicized in a variety of ways. They either become strident nationalists and form strong attachments to the land, or they develop ambiguous and ambivalent attachments to the land that does not have the identity they associate with. In the latter, there is a dissonance between what diasporas imagine their country to be and the realities on the ground. Both pa-

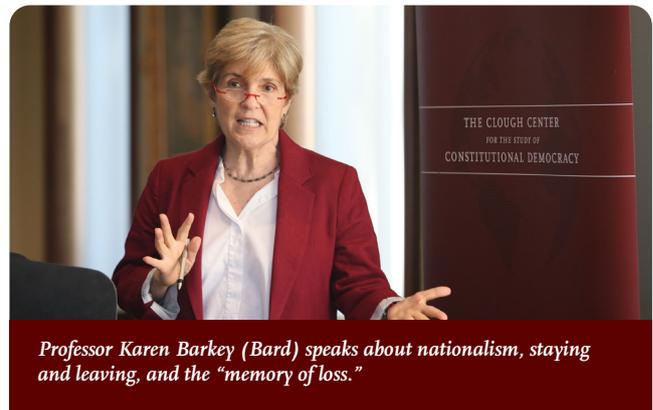
triotism and ambiguity thus stem from a strong attachment to the imaginary of a homeland.

## EMPIRES

Empires were composite polities where ethnic and religious differences were integrated and separated into self-sustaining autonomous cultural communities. At the general level, we can argue that because there was so much movement and fluidity in empires, community was imagined locally, and because empires contained mixed populations, attachment to place did not generate contention. By contrast, we can argue that the nation-state makes attachment to place much more antagonistic. For the large, premodern land-based empires, the concept of frontier evokes the inability to reach the ends of the territory quickly; the *limes* and the *limitanei* in the Roman case, or the frontiers and the *derbentci* in the Ottoman case. Frontiers were far away, and their control required flexible deal-making, privileges for the local populations, or exemptions from taxes to entice them to stay and staff the forts and citadels that marked the boundary. In such areas, state control was low, and imperial states depended on local peoples and nomadic tribes to protect the borders.

Empires also understood that borders were porous and fluid and that crossing imperial borders was relatively straightforward. Most famously, the frontiers between the Ottomans and the Safavids were crossed by Shi'a infiltrators who were tasked with converting Sunni Ottomans, and the Russian-Ottoman border was an open space where Cossacks roamed and parlayed their intermediary position to extract compromises from both sides. Such activities were the rule, not the exception, at the frontiers between empires. Imperial frontiers, therefore, were negotiated products of the state and local social relations. Therefore, when we think about attachment to place we need to consider the degree to which traditional empires incorporated large numbers of tribal and nomadic peoples that had practically no attachment to place.

Groups differentiated by ethnic and religious characteristics thrived in the interstices of imperial frontiers. In such circumstances, attach-



ment to frontiers between empires was neither the state's preference nor that of the local population. Borders moved, and communities found themselves in different spaces under different rules. Such circumstances resulted in frontier lands being less vital to attachment. Empires with significant tribal and nomadic populations had communities of people who were unattached to land. In some empires, these populations were seen as barbarians, but in the Ottoman empire nomads and tribal groups, even though unattached to land, were very much part of the negotiated process of state-making and incorporated as local forces, frontier peoples, and standard bearers of territorial expansion. Resat Kasaba, in his book *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants and Refugees*, shows how the local was affected by this movement: "the very mobility that defined these communities created eclectic lives and practices that were highly fluid and dynamic."<sup>6</sup>

But frontiers are not the only relevant element for understanding how attachment to place "worked" in empires. Pre-modern traditional land-based empires were places where communities were arranged and organized, whether at the level of the village, the small towns, the guilds in urban areas, and other forms of association. These arrangements relate to how place was understood. Knowledge about how such forms of organization based on specific territories constructed place-attachment comes from court records and taxation registers as well as narratives of communities (when available).<sup>7</sup>

In the Ottoman empire, where the imperial state did not engage in building a sense of community association and attachment to place, such communities and perceptions of belong-

ing were forged one village or neighborhood at a time through the relational structures that connected peoples to each other and to the local authorities. Ottoman courts, which negotiated multiple land-based conflicts, referred to the inhabitants of a specific place to give them the necessary information about boundaries and settlements. H. Karakas Demir shows how this kind of knowledge was in “the collective memory” of the community, therefore forging local attachments.<sup>8</sup> In cities the smallest spatial unit was the mahalle, diverse along many dimensions, social and ethno-religious. Most scholars of Ottoman cities agree that these districts brought people together daily and relied on inter-communal cooperation to function and minimize the gaze of public authorities. Even though this picture is quite general and certainly varied across different regions and time periods, we still can speak of an attachment to place that was not, at its basis, identitarian and mobilized along religious and ethnic dimensions. Compounded by the diversity of populations, the complexity of conquest and settlement, and the movement of people, it is hard to imagine attachment to place as anything more than cultural. People knew their religion, they knew the religion of their neighbors, but in the quotidian, this knowledge was not politicized.

Mechanisms of Ottoman social control also created attachment to community and land, sometimes by default. In the Balkans, collective jizya payments were assessed by communities and regional ties made for local attachments. Collective responsibility, where a village or an area would be punished for a crime when the real culprit was not found, created solidarity around place.

## TRANSITIONS: EMPIRE TO NATION-STATES

To say that the effect of the transition from empire to nation-state on settled populations was fraught with difficulties would be an understatement. Especially where empires violently broke apart and emerging nation-states were eager to establish their own unitary rule, the unmixing of peoples played havoc with displaced

communities. Since in empires attachment to land was a local bond of belonging, without an identitarian imaginary as we understand it today, we might think that population transfers at the cusp of nation-building would not be sorrowful and anguished. The numerous narratives of individuals, families, and communities tell a different story. To keep up with the cases already discussed, we can look at the 1923 Greek-Turkish population exchange.

The population exchange between Greece and Turkey was a political agreement between governments who wanted to safeguard harmony by creating ethnically homogeneous nations. They believed such transfers would ensure that ethnic and religious discord would be minimized. However, the population exchange uprooted more than 1.6 million people from their communities and their homes, forced them into lands they did not know, and established them in regions where they did not know the people and shared nothing but a common religion.

Already the War of Independence led by Kemal Atatürk had pushed the Greek armies to the shores of western Anatolia, and the fierce battles and the destruction of Smyrna, the paradise of coexistence, had prompted Greeks to flee to Greece. Meanwhile, Muslims from the Balkan peninsula had also moved to Anatolia, both communities fearing nationalist repercussions. The official population transfers dislocated 1.6 million Greeks and Turks, but the unofficial wartime passage of panic-stricken peoples dislocated another million Greeks and 200,000 Turks. No one has studied these population transfers better than Renée Hirschon, whose *Crossing the Aegean* is a powerful reminder of how war and nationalism led to misery.<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Doumanis’ book approaches the issue by giving us a fine-grained analysis of the Greeks who moved to Greece. Interview materials demonstrate the degree to which the Greeks were attached to their communities, their Turkish neighbors, the land that they occupied; it also reveals the difficulties they faced adapting to a new country. Doumanis highlights the nostalgia for the old country, how the land was described, and how relations of coexistence were crucial to feeling at home.<sup>10</sup>

In a further unmixing of peoples, today's struggle in Nagorno-Karabagh is another example of the last attempts to reconstitute ethnic and religious homogeneity, claim territory, and, in the process, destroy the lives of people established on land who are attached to their communities and their way of life.

## NATION-STATES

In a telling lecture, Harvard economist Dani Rodrik declared in 2012 that the nation-state was the natural unit of political sovereignty and it was here to stay, arguing further that if we studied attachment to the nation-state in comparison to other identities, whether global or European Union ones, the nation-state always prevailed. While he goes on to make a case for the continued vitality of the nation-state in global economic development, we must turn our gaze to its success as a territorial and cultural unit that engenders commitment, emotions, and attachment to the land. Every nationalist movement has a claim to a certain territory, and every nationalist movement imagines a community living on that territory with secure and consolidated boundaries. The transformation from diversity and hierarchy to uniformity and direct "equal" membership promotes the close identification of a cultural community with a territorial domain and the pride in achieving a unique community. There is an emotive power to the fact that identity is defined not just culturally but also territorially. As a result, many have defined nationhood as a cognitive, affective, and discursive category.<sup>11</sup>

The nation-state strives to maintain fixed and secure borders, contain the entry of migrant populations, and remain uniform along ethno-religious dimensions. Attachment to place in the nation-state is experienced at multiple societal levels. On the one hand, since the national unit has a strong territorial base, one form of attachment is perhaps imagined as the nation is imagined. We do not know all our territory, but we have mental maps that anchor us and touch our emotive side. The best national outcome is the perfect match between the

imagined nation and the imagined territory. On the other hand, national identity and attachment to place are lived in the quotidian, with nationalism imprinting itself into the symbols and the rituals of everyday practice. The affirmation of the nation in everyday practice is bound to be experienced in different ways by various populations, especially if the nation-state still holds some minority populations. As Bonikowski argues, these affirmations also emanate from the "perception of national superiority and an orientation towards national dominance."<sup>12</sup> Such emotive expressions of superiority often emerge from state elites' policies of uniformity but are easily expressed by the members of the nation. This kind of belonging also creates instances of othering since the state elites can never eliminate alternative constructions and meanings of the nation from within when communities marked by difference remain in the territory.

Such forms of belonging and othering display themselves at the level of attachment to the land as well as attachment to particular spaces. In the work on shared sacred spaces that I carry out, I have found that one feature of the larger national contestation between majorities who define themselves as dominant national-historical subjects is that these majorities are much more likely to enter the spaces of minority populations to benefit from their resources and "miracles," and to see their participation as the right of nationhood. The reverse rarely happens. The best example is the case of numerous Greek Orthodox churches in Istanbul. Greeks who have remained in Istanbul can be counted in just a few thousand. Yet, they have a vibrant church structure and participation. The churches known to have healing water sources (*ayazma*) are recognized for the miracles of the space. The attachment to the place is interrupted by the participation of Muslims in the church rituals and pilgrimages. While such co-mingling creates some level of solidarity across communities, Sunni Muslim pilgrims always define this sacred space as theirs by association with the fact that they are on Turkish national soil. Such attitudes create discomfort for the Greek Orthodox priests, who are therefore placed in an awkward political space.

Looking outside the nation-state, much work focuses on diaspora communities and their diasporic nationalism. The attachment to the land that diaspora communities experience and the resulting strong nationalism is often more strident than the nationhood felt by those inside the territory. Nationalism at a distance often tends to radicalize the diaspora. Yet, it also produces different attachments, and the diasporic attachment to the homeland can become more attenuated. Helena Lindholm Schultz, for example, shows how the Palestinian diaspora helped strengthen Palestinian national identity and its reference to Palestine as a homeland. Yet, simultaneously, as the byproduct of living transnational lives and settling in different countries, she studies the processes by which the “homeland” identity becomes one among many others.<sup>13</sup> For a diaspora community, attachment to the homeland also varies according to the degree to which they see their homeland as threatened. Homelands riven by conflict or deep divisions will produce stronger sentiments of nationhood and attachment to the homeland. In such cases, the diasporic identity is couched in national terms and tends to become salient in moments of conflict.

The Sikh community in Canada is an example of yet another type of attachment to land, one that is directed toward India, yet with the political claim of an independent Khalistan. For the vocal minority in Canada who have actively pursued the establishment of a homeland on Indian territory, the attachment to the land is complex and entangled across two nations. The first is the nation which they have adopted; the second is their original homeland, where they do not live, but in which they demand a separate state based on a religious marker of difference.

Diaspora communities do not always develop clear cases of identification with their nation-state, especially when, through memory and mythmaking, they have idealized a homeland that does not match the reality on the ground. One such example comes to life in the relationship of diasporic young Armenians to the state of Armenia, which was formed in 1991, and which embodied the hope of independence and liberation from the past trauma of destruction and mass exile of Armenians

from Turkey. Even though it represented the possibility of Armenians living in their own territory, many Armenians living in France and the United Kingdom maintain ambivalence toward Armenia, which in some sense was not their territory (they see their territory as the lands that Armenians inhabited in the Ottoman empire); while they might be “patriots,” they would not want to live in Armenia.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps such ambivalence will be wiped away by Azerbaijan’s recent aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Religion can become a form of diasporic identity-making in the nation-state. Considering the Western European context in which North African immigrants developed less salient national homeland-based identities but instead, religious ones, in contrast to Palestinians or Jews, affords yet another puzzle. In this case, I would like to surmise that North Africans’ inability to form a strong attachment to place in France, for example, together with the hardships they encountered as immigrants, pushed such populations towards religion as an identity marker—one that is transnational rather than territorial. Consequently, the immediate markers of their religious identity, such as headscarves, become visibly politicized symbols.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, these immigrants’ attachment to the land, whether Algeria or Morocco, is perceived through the lens of religion as a struggle they had to undertake to preserve Islam under French rule. More than a desire for return to the old homeland, it is a religious identity that mediates their being in France.<sup>16</sup>

No doubt, such refusal to identify with a larger French territory breaks down when considering immigrants in the urban context. Here, many studies show attachment to the local, to the banlieue, is strong, yet mediated again by religion, ethnicity, class, and other forms of exclusion from the French project. Patrick Parodi accordingly differentiates the forms of attachment to place experienced by young immigrants in Marseille by the kinds of neighborhoods they live in and whether those neighborhoods have small independent housing or not. He shows that this type of construction is an indicator of association with the neighborhood: attachment to place develops when the housing indicates economic upward mobility.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this short paper, I have tried to show that empire and nation-state evoke different forms and practices of attachment to place. By looking at these various cases we can come up with some heuristic distinctions to help deal with the messiness of the experience of attachment to place. We might distinguish between distinct forms, entangled forms, and competing forms of attachment to place. Empire provides

us with distinct forms of attachment, while within nation-states we can have distinct, entangled, and competing attachments. The case of the Canadian Sikhs represents an entangled form of attachment, whereas Algerians in France experience competing forms of attachment. Nonetheless, this way of conceptualizing attachment to place remains provisional. All of the forms of place attachment I have proposed here have to be studied and tested in various settings in order to be refined further.

<sup>1</sup> This piece is a slightly edited version of the opening keynote address Prof. Barkey delivered at the Clough Center's Fall Colloquium on "Attachment to Place in a World of Nations," held at Boston College on October 5, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Casey, *Getting back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), xv.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Foreigner: Two Essays on Exile* (Kendal, UK: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Katharine G. Trostel, "The Poetry of Marjorie Agosin: Writing in Place in the World's First Ghetto." Chapter 8 in Camarda, C., Sharick, A. K., & Trostel, K. G. (Eds.), *The Venice Ghetto: A Memory Space that Travels* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), 201.

<sup>5</sup> Amanda K. Sharick & Margaux Fitoussi, "Metaphor and Memory: A Conversation on the Making of the Movie *El Hara*," Chapter 9 in Camarda, C., Sharick, A. K., & Trostel, K. G. (Eds.) *The Venice Ghetto: A Memory Space that Travels* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), 222.

<sup>6</sup> Resat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that micro-level social organization and sources on subjects' attachment to land differ from empire to empire. Here I take the Ottoman case as an example since it is the one where I have knowledge of the historical documentation.

<sup>8</sup> H. Karakas Demir, "A Matter of Belonging: Place Attachment of Ordinary People in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Society," 2022 PhD Thesis, Bilkent University.

<sup>9</sup> Renée Hirschon, *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bart Bonikowski, "Nationalism in Settled Times," *Annual Review of Sociology* (2016) 42: 427-49.

<sup>12</sup> Bonikowski, "Nationalism in Settled Times," 429.

<sup>13</sup> Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora*. Routledge, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> See the interviews of young Armenians in Leila Wilmers and Dmitry Chernobrov, "Growing Up with a Long-Awaited Nation-State: Personal Struggles with the Homeland Among Young Diasporic Armenians," *Ethnicities* (2020) 20: 520-548.

<sup>15</sup> Caitlin Killian, "From a Community of Believers to an Islam of the Heart: 'Conspicuous' Symbols, Muslim Practices and the Privatization of Religion in France," *Sociology of Religion* 68 (2007): 3015-320.

<sup>16</sup> Jocelyne Cesari, "Islam in France: The Making of a Religious Minority," in Yvonne Haddad-Yazbek (ed.) *Muslims in the West, from Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36-51.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Parodi, "Citoyenneté et intégration: Marseille, modèle d'intégration?," *Histoire géographique et éducation civique* (2002) [http://www.ac-aixmarseille.fr/pedagogie/jcms/c\\_69788/fr/citoyennete-et-integration-marseille-modeledintegration](http://www.ac-aixmarseille.fr/pedagogie/jcms/c_69788/fr/citoyennete-et-integration-marseille-modeledintegration), consulté le 22/04/2014.



# RHETORIC AND TYPOGRAPHY:

## *Literary and Textual Cues of Attachment to Place in Frederick Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"*

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### ABSTRACT

Frederick Douglass's 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" is one of the nineteenth century's most profound and enduring speeches. It can be argued that the speech's longevity owes to two important points that Douglass was keenly aware of as an orator, author, and editor. First, Douglass masterfully employs rhetoric to argue that black Americans were not allowed to experience the same kind of attachment to place that was promised in the nation's founding documents to his white counterparts; this disparity is evidenced by the continuation of the institution of slavery, as well as institutionalized racism. Second, Douglass, having years of experience crafting texts for publication as an author and newspaper editor, understood the importance of heightening and propagating his thoughts by way of the printing press and its unique typographical qualities. To substantiate this interpretation, this essay relies on the work of Kaveli M. Korpela and Marcy J. Dinius. The former offers a useful framework for assessing how Douglass articulates place attachment as an experience constituted by social relations shared between Americans. The latter provides interpretive methodologies to process how the use of print's typographical qualities—like clear italicization and capitalization—are used to heighten rhetoric in Douglass's speech. Taken together, Korpela's and Dinius's scholarship provides a new lens for understanding Douglass's speech, revealing the extent to which Douglass conceived of and articulated an attachment to place in early America.

### INTRODUCTION

On July 5th, 1852 at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York, Frederick Douglass delivered one of the nineteenth century's most profound and enduring speeches, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" In a matter of days, the speech's audience grew exponentially as it was set in type, printed, and published twice. The oration-turned-printed speech is straightforward in its message: Unlike his white compatriots, Douglass and other black Americans were unable to feel or express an attachment to place as Americans because the country had not made good on its founding promises of freedom, liberty, and citizenship. The tenacity

and poignancy that gives the speech its character and, more importantly, allows Douglass to clearly articulate his belief that he is disallowed, as a black person, from feeling an attachment to place in America, comes from two authorial techniques. The first is rhetoric: the abolitionist masterfully makes appeals to his audience's sense of irony, emotion, and logic. Second, however, Douglass uses the advantageous features of print as a medium—namely, its replicability and typographical qualities—to reach as wide an audience as possible and to reinforce the rhetorical power of his speech. This essay seeks to highlight how Douglass's use of rhetoric and the employment of the printing press spread and preserved the speaker's sentiments on at-

tachment to place as a black person in America for his contemporary and modern readers alike.

## **BACKGROUND: DOUGLASS'S UNDERSTANDING OF ATTACHMENT TO PLACE IN EARLY AMERICA**

Before analyzing Douglass's speech, it is crucial to establish an understanding of both what attachment to place is, and what it means for an individual to feel as if they have it. In his article, "Place Attachment," Kaveli M. Korpela explores both the formation and consequences of an individual's experience of attachment to place. "The place aspect of attachment," and here we may otherwise say 'belonging' or 'connection,' "includes not only tangible places of different scale," he writes, "but also *symbolic or imagined places*" (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup> Here, Korpela makes an important—and, for this essay, useful—observation: Inasmuch as attachment to place may stem from a tie to a physical locale, the experience or understanding that manifests as an attachment to place may be altogether abstracted, or non-physical.

Turning to Douglass's noteworthy speech provides one such example of this kind of attachment to place. In the opening salvo to "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" Douglass focuses almost exclusively on his audience's "symbolic or imagined" or, more aptly, nationalistic attachment to America as a place. As the speaker notes, his audience recognizes America, not for its geographic boundaries, but for its distinct "Pride and patriotism."<sup>2</sup> Korpela, in addition to noting the prevalence of symbolic, as well as physical, attachments also observes that an individual's "object of attachment" may be the "social relations that a place signifies."<sup>3</sup> While one should always be cautious of employing modern psychological vernacular to describe the sentiments of historical figures, it is hard not to see Douglass's clear understanding of American 'place,' for lack of a better term, as being constituted by the nation's "saving principles," like freedom from tyranny and oppression, which can be found in the founding

documents drafted by its founding fathers.<sup>4</sup> For the abolitionist, American 'place' has less to do with borders, and more to do with shared history, identity, and principles. However, as Douglass makes evident, the history, identity, and principles that supposedly define America are not felt, observed, or shared by all Americans.

## **RHETORIC: HOW DOUGLASS ARTICULATES A LACK OF ATTACHMENT TO PLACE**

Less than a decade out from the onset of the American Civil War, Douglass took the stage at Rochester's Corinthian Hall to continue the anti-slavery work he was well known for. Despite his popularity in abolitionist circles domestically and abroad, and the successful publication of his slave narrative, Douglass was ultimately fighting an uphill battle in addressing his audience in Rochester and later, his audience in print. Douglass begins by establishing his authenticity while also asking for their grace tackling the precarious subject at hand: slavery. "The distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable," he tells his audience, and the fact that he can address people as a freedman is itself "a matter of astonishment."<sup>5</sup> In a textbook display of ethos, Douglass affirms his personal investment in the abolitionist cause while simultaneously dispelling any notion that he is unaware of the rarity of his character. Then, using pathos, the speaker asks his audience for "patient and generous indulgence" as they hear (or read) him address the tension between the ongoing institution of slavery and the occasion for his invitation to speak by the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Sewing Society: The Fourth of July holiday.<sup>6</sup> Asking for preemptive favors, however, is merely a front: Douglass assuages his audiences' anxieties only to entice them to let their guard down.

Credibility established and appeals made, Douglass jumps into a direct rhetorical deconstruction of his audience's hypocritical attachment to place. The speaker astutely observes that it is his audience's sense of shared history, principles,

and solidarity that accounts for their attachment to place as Americans. In addressing both the occasion of his speech and the audience directly, Douglass commemorates the “glorious patriotism” and “faith in those great principles of justice and freedom” that the holiday represents.<sup>7</sup> However, Douglass is not interested in uncritically genuflecting before his audience and country. Rather, he points out the symbolic social relations that white Americans share to call out the hypocrisy of their attachment to place. “I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary,” he tells his audience; “your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us.”<sup>8</sup> In this charge, Douglass praises the admirable principles that serve as underpinnings for his white audiences’ attachment to place—their sense of unique freedom, shared history, and so on—to highlight the point that he, as a black American, cannot share in the solidarity. The Fourth of July celebration that grounds his speech and is meant to honor the establishment of America’s noteworthy principles, those that serve as the basis for American identity, is sullied by “the mournful wail of millions! whose chains... are, today, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them.”<sup>9</sup> Put another way, Douglass’s emotionally charged imagery finds his audience’s attachment to place at direct odds with, and perhaps even responsible for the disallowance of, their black counterparts’ experience of the same attachment to place. By celebrating their freedom while simultaneously permitting slavery to continue, Douglass suggests that his listeners and readers are, in part, responsible for “the great sin and shame of America.”<sup>10</sup>

But it must also be said that Douglass, having rhetorically lowered the guard of his audience only to prick their conscience, nevertheless leaves them with a path forward: action. There is still room to rectify the situation. As Douglass closes out his speech, he circles back to his opening indictment of America’s founding principles and documents, noting that, while he has painted a “dark picture” with his ethos and pathos, he “do[es] not despair of this country.”<sup>11</sup> The reason: The founding documents, which give white Americans a shared sense of

attachment to place by way of “genius principles” and “long established customs,” can act as a blueprint for creating a more multiracial American identity.<sup>12</sup> With his closing thoughts, the speaker rhetorically pushes aside the dark clouds he has conjured, revealing a lit path forward to a shared sense of attachment to place—for black and white Americans alike.

## **PRINT: HOW DOUGLASS REINFORCES AND SPREADS HIS THOUGHTS ON LACK OF ATTACHMENT TO PLACE**

Based on his experience as an author and newspaper editor, one can reasonably assume that Douglass knew his message would be received in printed form differently than it was in Corinthian Hall. For this reason, the typographical markers in the printed versions of Douglass’s text—namely, its capitalization and italicization—show Douglass reinforcing his rhetoric using visual cues afforded to him by the medium of print. Marcy J. Dinius’s scholarship on the typography of other black authors’ work offers insight on how to read these textual cues. While she focuses primarily on *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, authored by David Walker in 1829, her research nonetheless aids those looking to parse texts broadly authored by African Americans in the antebellum United States. It is Dinius’s insistence that “type in Walker’s *Appeal*...makes the author’s outrage not just visible but also audible – readers can virtually hear... anger in the text’s italics, capitalized words, and multiple exclamation points.”<sup>13</sup> Applying Dinius’s insights to Douglass’s text, one can turn to his printed oration to see how the abolitionist uses the visual dimension afforded to him by print to convey the weight of his conviction that, unlike his white counterparts, black Americans are unable to feel or express an attachment to place.

Beyond an incidental feature of the text, Dinius argues, capitalization “visually distinguishes” and brings to the fore the “most important”

parts of a text for readers.<sup>14</sup> Here, Dinius specifically highlights typography's ability to bring out aspects of an otherwise visually homogeneous work. Douglass employs capitalization towards this end – albeit with the specific goal of locating/pinpointing people and places in mind. Take, for instance, the section of the speech dedicated to calling out hypocritical white Americans—that is, those who turn their backs on African Americans in bondage. In a sea of lower case type, “[t]he LORDS of Buffalo, the SPRINGS of NEW YORK, the LATHROPS of Auburn, the COXES and SPENCERS of Brooklyn, the GANNETS and SHARPS of Boston,” and “the DEWEYS of Washington” stand out.<sup>15</sup> Here, Douglass uses capitalization much to the same effect as modern writers might use bold text, which is to emphasize the information in question. The effect produced by this typography follows his rhetoric: by using print's visual power, the author charges the aforesaid people with “blasphemy” while also singling them out, at an easy glance, for an audience sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, such that they can be located (as on the page) and challenged for their views.<sup>16</sup> Douglass's use of capitalization preserves the force of his searing critique by employing a visual-cum-rhetorical marker: a technique only made possible by print.

If the capitalization in Douglass's speech can be taken to highlight those people or things that stand in the way of his experience of belonging to the United States, the use of italicization in the oration-turned-print works in the same emphasizing direction. As Dinius writes of David Walker's use of italics, the typographical cue “rules out any confusion, deliberate or accidental” about what is at stake, and where, at least in part, to place the blame.<sup>17</sup> Applied to Douglass's speech, this interpretation then leads readers themselves to draw the conclusion that it is their behavior, beliefs, and passivity which enables a pro-slavery regime to thrive. The speech's most damning accusation, for example, is heightened by way of these typographical marks. The author accuses his audience of hypocrisy by calling attention, with italicization, to the fact that the holiday that backgrounds his text is hollow to the core. Douglass proclaims,

famously, “[t]his Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn.”<sup>18</sup> Despite his professed love for the country, Douglass holds his audience accountable for his inability to experience their kind of attachment to place.

That the white part of the country can celebrate the Fourth of July with “joyous anthems” is a “mockery and sacrilegious irony,” as his race is not included “within the pale of this glorious anniversary.”<sup>19</sup> This irony is emphasized further by later italicized passages that serve a similar purpose. The listeners and readers, likely sympathetic to Douglass' views, are wrapped into his later line of questioning: “Must I argue that a system this marked with blood... is *wrong*? [...] Who can reason such a proposition?”<sup>20</sup> These questions are clearly rhetorical: Douglass and his different audiences know that there is not a white person present at Corinthian Hall (or sitting elsewhere with the printed text) “that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him*.”<sup>21</sup> And yet, the author reminds them, black Americans could not likewise enjoy the “national right to freedom” and “liberty” that constitutes their attachment to place.<sup>22</sup> The accusation that his white audience stands in the way of his (and his race's) attachment to place is undeniably serious. In the typeface, it is even more poignant.

## CONCLUSION

Douglass delivered and printed the “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” speech to articulate his position that, so long as slavery persisted and those in his audience permitted it, he and his black American brethren would not be allowed to experience or express the same attachment to place as their white counterparts. In analyzing the rhetorical movements that Douglass carries out in his speech, I have sought to show how the orator masterfully argued in favor of the rightful place of black Americans in the life of the nation. Moreover, by italicizing certain portions of the text, particularly those words and phrases that addressed the audience directly, Douglass implicated the crowd, his readers, and the country itself in his experience of unbelonging. Likewise, by capitalizing other parts of the text, Douglass gave his readers directions for where,

and to whom, to address their anti-slavery sentiments—all while heightening his rhetoric in the process. By closely reading Douglass’s rhetoric alongside his typography, scholars

can see, as shown here, how black Americans understood and communicated their attachment to place, or lack thereof, in early America.

<sup>1</sup> Kaveli M. Korpela, “Place Attachment,” *The Oxford Handbook of Environment and Conservation Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Oration Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester* (Rochester: Lee, Mann, and Company, 1852), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Korpela, “Place Attachment,” 149.

<sup>4</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Marcy J. Dinius, “‘Look!! Look!!! At This!!!!’: *The Radical Typography of David Walker’s ‘Appeal,’*” *PMLA* 126, no.1 (2011): 56.

<sup>14</sup> Marcy J. Dinius, *The Textual Effects of David Walker’s “Appeal”: Print-Based Activism Against Slavery, Racism, and Discrimination, 1829-1851* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Dinius, *Textual Effects*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Douglass, *Oration Delivered*, 19.



# COSMOPOLITANISM: *A Citizen of What?*

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Philosophy

## ABSTRACT

This short essay attempts to answer the question “What is cosmopolitanism?” by taking a closer look at the meaning of “world” and “citizenship” within the notion of kosmopolites, or “citizen of the world.” This paper argues, first, that there is a significant gap between moral cosmopolitanism and the political reality of individuals as world citizens in the world of nation-states. While moral cosmopolitanism prescribes that individuals participate in the promotion of the wellbeing of humankind, in reality, individuals lack political citizenship since the power to participate in global decisions is largely reserved for nation-states as the true “citizens” in world governance. Second, this paper contends that a resolution of the gap between moral cosmopolitanism and political citizenship requires a more serious grappling with the inevitability of nation-states in world governance, and the misalignment of state and cosmopolitan interest. Towards the end of the essay, after discussing the idea of a global state and civic nationalism, I propose a solution to this gap. A renewed conception of world citizenship, I suggest, should clarify how individuals can mediate participation in global governance and materialize cosmopolitan values through their representative nation-states.

## INTRODUCTION

In the marketplace of ancient Greece, Diogenes the Cynic was asked the question: “Where are you from?” Had he answered conventionally, Diogenes would have named the polis to which he belonged and, perhaps, his family lineage. Instead, he offered only one word in response: “kosmopolites.” The literal meaning of the term is “a citizen of the world,” with “world” potentially encompassing everything that exists. Diogenes the Cynic’s answer is therefore essentially a non-answer, an answer that is supposed to frustrate the inquirer. It is a refusal to be identified by his lineage and city-state, and an insistence on defining himself in terms of a characteristic that he shares with all other beings. By calling himself a citizen of the world, Diogenes, the same man who introduced himself as Diogenes the Dog in front of Alexander the Great, articulated an identity that focuses on the humanity that we share rather than the ethnicity, territory, religion,

gender, and social class that divides us—originating what we now call “cosmopolitanism.”

This anecdote is important insofar as it sheds light on the intended irony in the idea of a world citizenship, an irony that is typically neglected in our contemporary usage of the term “cosmopolitan”: what is actually expressed by saying one is a citizen of everywhere? This essay examines cosmopolitanism and the relationship between its different facets. It begins with illustrating how the common understanding of cosmopolitanism as moral cosmopolitanism remains inevitably tied to nation-states, before moving on to a reconsideration of cosmopolitanism with a focus on political citizenship. I argue that there is a sense in which the moral cosmopolitan lacks participatory citizenship, while the political cosmopolitan struggles to fulfil moral cosmopolitan values. That is to say, there is a significant gap between moral cosmopolitanism and the political reality of individuals as citizens in the world of nation-states. Towards the end of the

paper, I propose a new understanding of cosmopolitanism that can bridge the gap between the moral intuitions that inform cosmopolitanism and the political reality of nation-states.

## THE MORAL KOSMOPO- LITES AND THE POLITICAL KOSMOPOLITES

Broadly construed, moral cosmopolitanism holds that all persons stand in a certain relation to others and are required to respect other persons as ultimate units of moral concern.<sup>1</sup> The key elements in this idea can be traced back to the 18th Century philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy envisions a shared political realm for all human beings where fundamental qualities of freedom, equality, and independence are to be protected. Nevertheless, in Kant's philosophy, the ideal of universal human dignity—what we call moral cosmopolitanism in this essay—always requires the state to be an active agent in providing the material conditions for promoting that dignity. Such a state would be characterised by a democratic government with an established rule of law, participation in an intergovernmental organisation that seeks to sustain peace, and a respect for the human rights not only of its own citizens but also of foreigners. In the absence of these fundamental conditions for a just political system, no moral cosmopolitan policies can be implemented. Moral cosmopolitan ideals and nation-states are tightly knitted together because we are not citizens of an infinitely open field but a “world” constituted by nation-states.

The recognition of the intertwinement between nation states and the ideal of the “kosmopolites” as a world citizen calls for a closer consideration of the second term inherent in the ideal, namely, citizen. If part of the essence of citizenship consists of the ability to perform political actions that are recognized by the state, I suggest that it is not inappropriate to consider nation-states—albeit some more than the others—rather than individuals as the true citizens of the world. After all, it is the nation-state, rather than cosmopolitically inclined individuals, that can directly participate in the global political realm, by

imposing economic and military orders either directly or indirectly through fighting for representation in intergovernmental political bodies and forging diplomatic ties with their controlling members. Even though the world is not a single political entity like the Greek city-state or the modern nation-state, it has several quasi-state acting bodies setting and enforcing the rules.

The contemporary “world,” in this regard, is determined by the combination of a handful of leading nation-states and several multinational organizations whose decisions are indirectly influenced by them. Indeed, as Kant may have foreseen, world organizations such as the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank started to appear in the aftermath of global warfare and other crises. Multinational treaties were signed and codes and international laws were drafted with the hope of establishing a universal order that protects human rights and realises the vision of moral cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is a multifaceted, multilayered complex that weaves together the moral vision of collective individuals and the reality of nation-state authorities and international organizations.

## COSMOPOLITANISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Recent history suggests, however, that there is a significant gap between the political reality of global citizenship at the nation-state level and the moral ideal of a cosmopolis of individual global citizens. In his 2002 book *Globalization and its Discontents*, former chief economist of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz disclosed the failure of our global economic infrastructure, particularly the IMF, to fulfil the promises of globalisation to developing countries in South America, Africa, and Asia—a failure that fueled broader scepticism against the cosmopolitan promise of mutual flourishing through economic globalisation. Stiglitz succinctly argues that, rather than offering aid and advice that takes into consideration the particular socio-economic conditions of the targeted countries, the IMF has instead imposed its unfounded ideology of a radically free market upon them, caus-

ing chaos, instability, and economic devastation. To add to Stiglitz's observation, the stark difference in economic trajectories between nations that ignored the IMF's policy advice (for example, South Korea, Malaysia, China) and those that accepted it (including Argentina, Russia, and numerous Sub-Saharan African countries, also contributed to the growing distrust of global institutions and governance beyond economic agreements. In response to the imperialist world order that was effectively imposed through these international institutions, concerns for national sovereignty and national interests took center stage, particularly from less developed countries in the global south.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the remarkable growth in state-independent organisations and social movements, the failure of existing global institutions could not be sufficiently overcome because the implementation of universal human rights is still contingent upon individual nation-states, as is obvious in the struggle to extend humanitarian aid in the midst of the recent Russo-Ukraine war. Moral cosmopolitanism, in other words, is an abstract ideal whose actualization occurs only through the concrete political, economic, and even military decisions of the nation state. And insofar as these relations are mediated not only by individual nation states' policy-making, but also by trans-national institutions, unions, and agreements, the discrepancies between nation states and moral cosmopolitan individuals cannot be adequately addressed unless both the nation state and global institutions are taken into account.

This is the reason that the project of civic nationalism, despite its effort to consider a nation beyond the characteristics of ethnography and race, remains insufficient. While it is true that national identity and cosmopolitan ideals are not contradictory, and therefore there is no essential connection between nationalism and ethnocentrism, liberal nationalism remains limited to the extent that the constitutions of current nation-states are imagined with a particular restricted territory.<sup>3</sup> Such a framework thereby struggles to respond to the failures of the existing global political reality. In practice, civic nationalism appears to be inadequate, particularly considering the likely possibility

of global interests becoming subservient to the domestic concerns of a handful of powerful nation-states, the interests of which are highly susceptible to populist manipulation and the control of state media. Cosmopolitan considerations are compatible with civic nationalism, but they do not necessarily grow out of it. To the extent that nation states both participate in and are influenced by transnational institutions and relations, it would be beneficial to go beyond the framework of civic nationalism to reflect on how the gap between moral cosmopolitanism and global political realities can be bridged.

## **TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP**

Beyond the purview of civic nationalism, there has been an ongoing debate about whether a new form of global government would be beneficial. In various forms, theorists have argued for the formation of new global institutions to regulate interstate interactions and policies.<sup>4</sup> Creating such international institutions would require establishing and rebuilding mutual trust between nation states not merely on an ideological level, but also economically and militarily, via strategies ranging from honoring international treaties to undoing the legacy of imperialist economic domination of the Global South. Yet, one can also reflect on global governance without immediately committing oneself to the institutionalisation of a new global government. Various improvements in global governance—here referring to the explicit and implicit global power relations constituted and maintained by nation-states—can be attained whether or not a fully fledged, institutionalised global government or state exists.<sup>5</sup> An equally important and perhaps even more pressing question for moral cosmopolitanism is whether there can be a system that holds the existing structure of global governance in check.

Regardless of the specific forms by which global governance should be instituted, I suggest that the project of global governance can be advanced by democratic reforms that shift the balance of power from a few dominating

nation states to states that are less represented and recognized. Such reforms would also require fostering more clarity and visibility in the decision-making process of global governance, so that the acting international “governors” can be held accountable.<sup>6</sup> To the extent that a cosmopolitan individual has no direct power to effect these changes, the involvement of today’s powerful nation-states, however difficult, remains essential to this project.

The unfortunate divorce of the moral global citizenship of individuals from the political global citizenship of nation-states means that many would be “cosmopolitans” may find themselves in the situation of wanting to act, yet being unable to promote a more truly cosmopolitan world because of the lack of a trustworthy governing body on a global scale. Nevertheless, following Luis Cabrera, I would suggest that global citizenship on an individual level can be reimagined as a mediating, proactive commitment to push one’s own nation-state to engage in building a more just system of global institutions.<sup>7</sup> This robust conception of global citizenship, I maintain, serves as an important supplement to civic nationalism: while compatible with the latter, it also expands beyond it, towards a more globally oriented, authentically cosmopolitan concern. Even though individuals may not be the true citizens of the cosmopolis in the sense of directly participating in it through voting rights, in a functional democratic society they remain important participants (albeit indirectly) in the creation and transformation of global institutions and governance through impacting the decisions of the nation-state. As national citizens, they may nonetheless promote cosmopolitan values by demanding transparency in global institutional decision-making, ensuring the democratic representation of other mem-

ber states, and insisting upon honoring international treaties, to name just a few objectives. The conclusion may be far from comforting, given the threats of populist ideologies, nativist discourses, and other undemocratic practices. Nonetheless, it is preferable to and more conceivable than the available alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

It is true that moral cosmopolitanism does not presume the existence of some actual or potential global community of which each individual is in some substantive way a member.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps to ask what a global citizen is a citizen of is already asking for more than one can hope to answer, given the difference between national and global citizenship. Nevertheless, in the spirit of philosophical questioning, it remains legitimate to inquire whether the ideal of being a global citizen, a “kosmopolites,” should not mean more than holding a universalistic moral concern for the human beings in the world. Nation-states and their international institutions are de facto the dominant political “citizens” of the globe today, and they will continue to play this role whether or not there is a more democratic global regulatory system or body. It is for this reason that the reformation of global and international institutions, despite its apparent difficulties and for all of these institutions’ failed promises, is as pressing as ever. If philosophers like Cabrera are right, acting as a cosmopolitan should mean more than simply having multiple passports and green cards, and even more than having moral concern for other people regardless of their nationalities. Rather, as demanding as it may sound, it implies an obligation to work within the confines of one’s own nation-state to help establish a more just system for democratic global governance.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pogge, “Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty,” *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 49. JSTOR.

<sup>2</sup> Bhupinder Chimini, “International Institutions Today: An Imperial Global State in the Making,” *European Journal of International Law*, 15, no.1 (2004): 1–37. doi:10.1093/ejil/15.1.1

<sup>3</sup> Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Bryan Turner, “Cosmopolitan Virtue, Globalization and Patriotism,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 1–2 (2002): 45–63.

<sup>4</sup> Luis Cabrera, *Political Theory of Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Case for the World State* (London: Routledge, 2004); David Copp, “International Justice and the Basic Needs Principle” in *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39–54; George Monbiot, *The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for a New World Order*

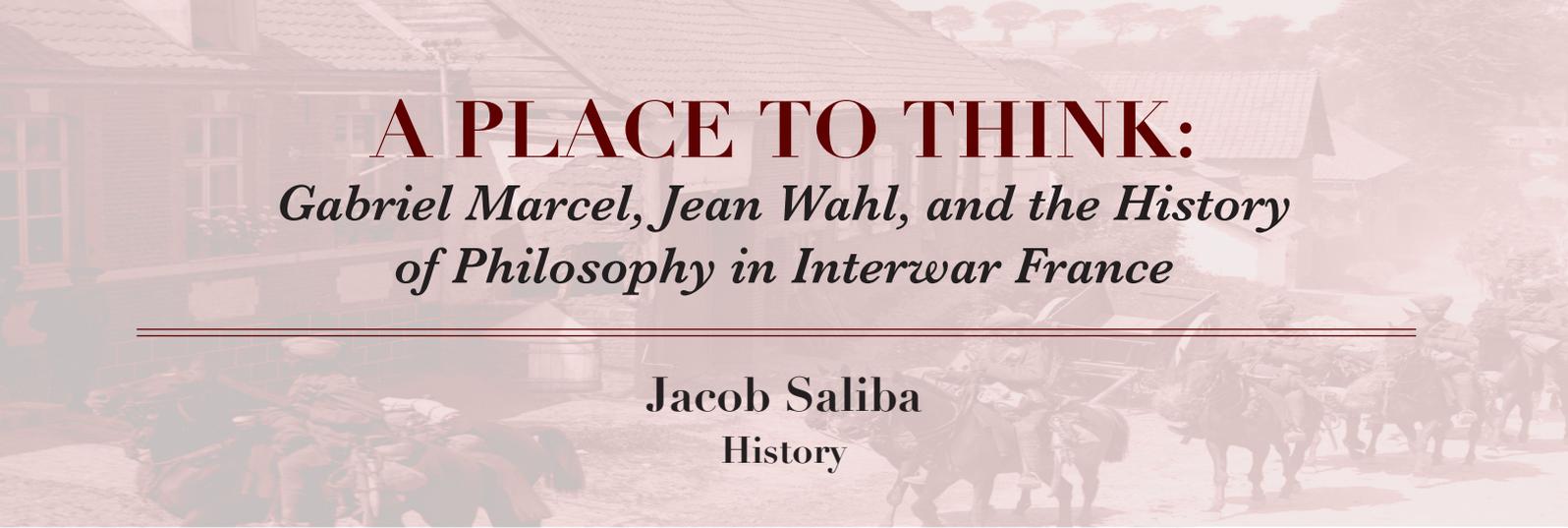
(London: HarperColl, 2003); Kok Chor Tan, *Justice Without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Jinseop Jang, McSparren, Jason & Rashchupkina, Yuliya, “Global Governance: Present and Future,” *Palgrave Commun* 2, no. 15045 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.45>

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Luis Cabrera, “Global Citizenship as the Completion of Cosmopolitanism,” *Journal of International Political Theory*, 4, no.1 (2008): 84–104.

<sup>8</sup> Christien Van den Anker, “Global Justice, Global Institutions, and Global Citizenship,” in *Global Citizenship: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Nigel Dower and John Williams (New York: Routledge, 2002), 158–168.



# A PLACE TO THINK:

## *Gabriel Marcel, Jean Wahl, and the History of Philosophy in Interwar France*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the collective work between the Catholic intellectual Gabriel Marcel and the Jewish intellectual Jean Wahl during the interwar period in France. While scholars today are familiar with the negative impacts of anti-Semitism and extremism throughout this time, they pay less attention to boundary crossings and exchanges that occurred amidst these very tensions. From the 1920s to the 1930s, certain sites of dialogue and community bonds developed between Catholic, Jewish, and secular intellectuals. Gabriel Marcel and Jean Wahl helped to facilitate this social transformation and, as a result, developed a new movement of philosophy in France known today as “phenomenology.” My argument is that religion played a catalyzing role in convening spaces of cross-cultural exchange and animating philosophical creativity. The paper proceeds in four parts. Part one shows that the interfaith friendship of Marcel and Wahl sustained their philosophical experimentation and also cultivated a mutual foundation for future growth in the next decade. Part two shifts to the early 1930s when Marcel and Wahl popularized phenomenology by hosting reading circles in Paris. Beginning in 1931, Marcel’s home became a hub for discussing phenomenology and attracted a wide range of intellectuals on a transnational scale. Part three brings this development to its culmination at the 1937 debate of the French Philosophical Society, showing that the debate’s themes stemmed directly from the Marcel soirées. Finally, part four shows that Marcel and Wahl not only generated new concepts in European philosophy but also built those very places that made this theoretical inquiry possible in the first place.

### INTRODUCTION

During the interwar period, France underwent heavy social and political turmoil. Like the rest of Europe after World War I, it saw the rise of fascism, anti-Semitism, and extremism. While scholars today are familiar with the negative impacts of these forces on politics and culture, they pay less attention to spaces of dialogue and exchange that occurred amidst these very tensions.<sup>1</sup> From the 1920s to the 1930s, certain sites of dialogue and community bonds took place between a range of Catholic, Jewish, and secular intellectuals at a time when these efforts may have appeared historically unlikely

and perhaps even socially unfeasible. In this article, I demonstrate how the Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel and his friend, Jewish philosopher Jean Wahl, helped to facilitate this social transformation and, as a result, developed a new movement of philosophy in interwar France. My argument is that religion played a catalyzing role in not only convening these spaces of cross-cultural exchange but also animating philosophical creativity.

After graduating together from the Sorbonne in 1910 and following World War I, Marcel pursued a successful career as a writer and Wahl became professor of philosophy at the University

of Strasbourg and, later, at the Sorbonne. Their work is generally associated with “phenomenology,” a new movement in European philosophy that studied and described attributes of “lived experience” while suspending pre-conceived concepts based on abstraction. Originating with the ideas of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl on the eve of World War I, and continuing under his student Martin Heidegger in the 1920s, phenomenology soon began to spread in intellectual circles throughout France and the wider European world. Thanks in part to the work of Marcel and Wahl, phenomenology became one of the strongest schools of thought in France.

The formative influence of Marcel and Wahl upon French phenomenology can be periodized in three stages. In their early years, Marcel and Wahl frequently commented on each other’s work as they experimented with various styles of philosophy. Not only did their work animate creative thinking; it also generated interreligious bonds which served as a foundation for future cross-cultural exchange. Later, by the early 1930s, after having settled on phenomenology as their primary method, Marcel and Wahl began to host philosophical soirées at Marcel’s home, reaching new members on a transnational scale. Many of their discussions centered on the relationship between themes of alterity (i.e., “the other”) and subjectivity with regard to religious experience. Finally, in the mid to late 1930s, the two men’s work culminated in a large debate of the French Philosophical Society on the very themes first discussed in the soirées. Marcel and Wahl thus not only generated new concepts in European philosophy, but also created the very *places*—physical, communal, and intellectual—that made this style of theoretical inquiry possible. While the history of phenomenology could be seen as an isolated philosophical enterprise, it can also be interpreted as a surprising yet powerful moment when new places of dialogue and cross-cultural exchange formed and eventually transformed the intellectual culture of interwar France. Ultimately, French thinkers—despite wider tensions in the political realm—successfully created a hybrid place of intellectual exchange with sources deriving from Catholicism, Judaism, and even the non-French world.

## THE EARLY YEARS

More than a philosophical development alone, the origins and early unfolding of the work of Marcel and Wahl represent a unique expression of Christian-Jewish dialogue in the interwar period. Throughout the 1920s, Marcel and Wahl supported each other in searching for a novel and sophisticated approach to philosophy. Despite being rather scattered in their search at first, their efforts nevertheless helped to build a foundation for the intellectual community, and larger democratic ethos, that followed in later years. In many respects, the success of their collective efforts relied on the bonds of their interfaith friendship.

In 1921, when Wahl first began his philosophical career, he published *The Pluralist Philosophies of England and America*. His first major publication in France, it was seen as a rather surprising work within traditional philosophical circles. Rather than building on thinkers canonical to the French philosophical tradition, such as Descartes or Kant, Wahl chose instead to draw on lesser-known “foreign” sources in the Anglo-American tradition of pragmatism. Contesting complaints articulated by older voices in the discipline, Marcel reviewed the book, calling it a “precious contribution” to contemporary philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In 1926, after Wahl made another unorthodox move by publishing a study of Plato’s lesser-known text *Parmenides*, Marcel again reviewed this book in positive terms. He argued that the text provided a firm foundation for understanding how Wahl’s interpretation of human subjectivity challenged and outstripped commonly held opinions in the history of philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

The support from Marcel was reciprocated by Wahl. From 1929 to 1932, Wahl began to integrate some of Marcel’s own concepts into his philosophical project. For example, in 1929, Wahl published *The Unhappy Conscience in the Philosophy of Hegel*, one of the first French texts to examine the dimensions of Hegel’s religious and dialectical philosophies. In order to justify some of his positions, Wahl triangulated Hegel’s argument in relation to the Catholic philosophy of Marcel. By this time, Marcel had

published installments of his diaries in a work known today as *The Metaphysical Journal*. In the *Journal*, Marcel discussed the relationship between philosophy, spirituality, and human existence. Following Marcel's insistence on the importance of religious experience for grasping philosophical meaning, Wahl offered a vibrant interpretation of the lesser-known writings of Hegel's philosophy of religion against standard interpretations of his theory of logic.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, in *Towards the Concrete* (1932), one of his most famous interwar publications, Wahl once again drew heavily from Marcel's work, taking inspiration from its accounts of mystery, divinity, and most importantly "the concrete."<sup>5</sup> The book marked a turning point in Wahl's career. By this time, his earlier investigations of pragmatism, Plato, and Hegel had led to a strong appreciation for the phenomenology of Heidegger, whose works were just trickling into the French world. With the help of Marcel, interpretations of German phenomenology were able to grow at a successful and dynamic pace.

## THE MARCEL SOIRÉES AND THE GROWTH OF PHENOMENOLOGY

In 1932, the same year that Wahl published *Towards the Concrete*, Marcel hosted at his home in Paris the first of many soirées to discuss Heidegger's phenomenology. Marcel's home quickly became a vibrant medium for convening regular reading circles between notable Catholic philosophers such as Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, Jewish philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jean Wahl, and secular philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>6</sup> They built on the already established bonds between Marcel and Wahl, introduced new concepts in French philosophy, and even created a wider space for creating thinking that brought together a rich transnational network of intellectuals.

At a time when the search for "the subject" rapidly expanded into intellectual debates of Heidegger's work, the French philosophers of the Marcel soirées sought to develop a theory of intersubjectivity in which "the other" became a neces-

sary component for understanding foundations of lived experience. Rather than base a theory of human consciousness on the isolated character of subjectivity, they intended to transcend these limits in search of a thicker understanding of social life. For them, Heidegger's phenomenology provided a promising starting point, insofar as it insisted on discerning the underlying metaphysical conditions that makes human existence possible to think about in the first place; it also furnished the conceptual tools to investigate what might lay beyond the normal horizons of subjectivity. Meanwhile, Marcel's soirées offered an empirically rich context in which participants could practice the very ideas about "the other" and intersubjectivity that they theorized.<sup>7</sup>

By the early 1930s, Paris was rapidly expanding as a major international metropole with the arrival of thousands of immigrants from the colonies in Africa, as well as Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union. The Marcel soirées attracted many of these people. Marcel's wife, Jacqueline, carefully recorded the transcripts of the discussions between Marcel and fellow émigré interlocutors. From 1933 onwards, one of the most common names on the list of attendees was Naguib Baladi. An immigrant from Egypt and a largely unknown figure in twentieth-century philosophy, Baladi wrote on themes in ancient and pre-modern philosophy. He was attracted by the diary-like style of writing philosophy Marcel had developed in his *Metaphysical Journal*. Baladi also frequently commented on Marcel's views of alterity, that is, the nature of "the other" and its role in human relations and experience. For Marcel, alterity—and still more, a phenomenology of alterity—necessarily had a religious dimension. And for Baladi, like Marcel, alterity seemed to be an empty concept unless grounded in a tradition of charity in which 'the other' is treated as the concrete expression of a higher divine power (i.e., God). In addition to Baladi, the Marcel soirées included another very active member, Rachel Bepaloff. A Russian Jewish philosopher and close friend of Wahl, she immigrated to Paris in the 1920s. Her presence at the soirées and her friendship with Marcel was felt on a profound level. Bepaloff's experience as a Jewish immigrant influenced her own theory on the relationship between sol-

itude and politics. Seeing that Soviet communism had a tendency for alienating individuals ‘outside the Party’ while also observing the rising tide of right-wing anti-Semitism in France, she struggled to find a sense of hope between these extremes. Besseloff was originally quite skeptical of religion’s potential to be a positive force, given the presence of far-right Catholic organizations such as *Action Française* and *Croix-de-Feu*; for her, opportunities to facilitate inter-faith solidarity seemed slim. At the same time, however, Besseloff was also critical of the Popular Front coalition being formed by the French Left, given its ties with the Communist Party. As a result of these doubts, she stimulated a wide range of discussions at the Marcel soirées on the political and social dimensions of phenomenology. For her, what united philosophical analysis with politics was the problem of solitude and a deep existential concern for transcending it.<sup>8</sup> Like her dialogue partner Baladi, Besseloff recognized the need to better understand the relationship between philosophy and religion, and (if possible) to integrate them in a way that could respond to the political challenges of the day but also paradoxically surpass them.

With regular participation from members such as Baladi and Besseloff, the Marcel soirées continued with great success for nearly a decade. By bringing together a rich blend of French thinkers and other intellectuals from abroad, a new space for creative thinking that transcended previous intellectual—and religious and political—boundaries began to open up in interwar France. Despite the ongoing unrest in politics and culture, the work of Marcel and Wahl saw lasting results, both in theory and in practice. By 1937, the success of their soirées and the growing number of their participants would result in a climactic debate, which established the soirées’ central themes of religion and (inter)subjectivity at the heart of French philosophical conversation.

## THE GREAT DEBATE OF 1937

By the mid-1930s, Marcel and Wahl were becoming household names in French philosophy. It became increasingly clear to their con-

temporaries that the discussions and texts pouring out from the soirées were generating a lively movement in French thought. Recognizing this new tide of intellectual energy, the French Philosophical Society convened a debate in 1937, with Wahl as the principal lecturer and Marcel as his respondent. The debate proved to be a major intellectual event that brought together a vibrant range of thinkers on an international scale from France, Germany, and Russia.

Informed by the discussions of phenomenology and religion at the soirées, Wahl titled his lecture “Subjectivity and Transcendence.”<sup>9</sup> In the lecture, the philosopher argued that “the tensions felt in subjective experience can be explained by the presence of transcendence in the face of our existence.”<sup>10</sup> For Wahl, transcendence expressed itself in two ways: as trans-ascendance (i.e., “God”) or trans-descendance (i.e., “evil”). What is most striking about Wahl’s account of transcendence in the lecture is his suggestion that it may not be a properly *theological* account at all, but rather one of human nature or, more provocatively, an “absolute other.” In other words, Wahl began to depart from Marcel’s own insistence on the religious foundation of phenomenology, instead interrogating that very presupposition. In contrast to Marcel and many of his erstwhile dialogue partners, Wahl proposed that “the other” need not be understood with reference to God; a non-theological account was sufficient to grasp the boundaries and conditions of human subjectivity.

Wahl’s lecture set in motion a flurry of responses that would affect the trajectory of phenomenology and existentialism in France. The most lively disagreements occurred between Marcel and Wahl themselves. Marcel sympathized with Wahl’s attempt to stretch phenomenology into new domains, yet disagreed with his argumentation. Against Wahl, Marcel maintained that if the subject is simply responding to an absolute, transcendent other that comes from beyond their horizons, then they cannot know for certain if that other is good or bad (i.e., God or not God). Trans-ascendance and trans-descendance—“good” and “evil”—could not be so neatly distinguished on natural grounds alone. Rather, Marcel asserted, phenomenology ought

to remain grounded in a model of good spirituality that comes from God alone, the ultimate source of this understanding.<sup>11</sup> For Wahl, by contrast, a phenomenological approach to alterity, while it could rely on religion, was certainly not limited to it. In order to appreciate the depth and breadth of the account of ‘the other’ that had emerged in the soirées, Wahl felt it was necessary to take phenomenology in a new direction, so that its proponents could actually “see the other” in human relations, rather than reduce it to the byproduct of religious speculation.

The debate of 1937 reveals a powerful yet ironic culmination to the philosophical dialogue Marcel and Wahl undertook between the wars. On phenomenological grounds, Wahl drew on but also challenged the very integration between religion and philosophy that had emerged from the soirées—the motor that had first driven the French phenomenological movement in the first place. Nonetheless, though Marcel and Wahl ultimately disagreed on the role of religion in philosophy, they had effectively established this topic as a crucial concern for critical inquiry in French intellectual culture. And although their 1937 debate ended in disagreement, it helped create a common space for thinking that otherwise would not have taken root.

## FINAL REMARKS

In retrospect, Marcel and Wahl had a twofold impact on the evolution of French phenomenology in the interwar period. At one level, they developed new conceptual tools for carrying the project of philosophy forward. At another, they

convened new sites of dialogue and exchange among different communities at a time when boundary crossings and cross-cultural exchange seemed especially unlikely and perhaps even unfeasible. What began as a relatively individual relationship between the two philosophers thus gradually became an effective vehicle for greater transformation. During the early 1930s, when phenomenology began to enter mainstream discourse, Marcel and Wahl built the infrastructure for discussing wider themes in religion and politics through interfaith bonds and transnational connections. And as their ideas evolved over time, so too did their views of religion.

While Marcel and Wahl may have disagreed by the late-1930s on their final interpretation of the role of religion, they nevertheless helped to stimulate conversation at the highest level of intellectual culture. In so doing, they showed that even in the face of fundamental disagreement, there still remained the space to think boldly and share freely. Indeed, thanks to the exchange across cultures, nations, and religions that these thinkers and their colleagues pioneered, the French interwar period saw the emergence of a dynamic and pluralistic form of intellectual space—a new “place to think” across many kinds of boundaries—that remains instructive still today.

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1 This article builds on innovative work by Ed Baring, Sarah Shortall, and Brenna Moore. See Ed Baring, *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); Brenna Moore, *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

2 See Gabriel Marcel, “Les Philosophies Pluralistes d’Angleterre et d’Amérique par Jean Wahl” in *Revue Philosophique de La France et de l’Étranger* 92 (1921).

3 See Gabriel Marcel, “Étude sur le Parménide, par Jean Wahl,” in *Nouvelle revue française*, 1927.

4 See Jean Wahl, “Commentary on a Passage from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit,” trans by Bruce Baugh in *Jean Wahl: Transcendence and the Concrete, Selected Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

5 See Jean Wahl, *Vers le concret* (Paris: Librairie Philosophiques J. Vrin, 2004).

6 See Ed Baring, *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy*.

7 In addition to records held in the Fonds Marcel at the BnF (Paris), the conversations on ‘the other’ stemming from the soirées are reflected in Marcel’s *Being and Having*. See Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. by Katharine Ferrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949).

8 See “Lettres à Gabriel Marcel (1935-1946)” in *Conférence* no. 18 (2004).

9 See Jean Wahl, “Transcendence and Subjectivity,” trans. by Ian Moore in *Jean Wahl: Transcendence and the Concrete, Selected Writings*.

10 Jean Wahl, “Transcendence and Subjectivity,” trans. by Ian Moore in *Jean Wahl: Transcendence and the Concrete, Selected Writings* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 156.

11 See Jean Wahl, “Transcendence and Subjectivity,” 167, 170-171.

# THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN VOTING PATTERNS: *A Micro-Perspective*

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## ABSTRACT

The tenets of modernization theory suggest a direct correlation between increased educational attainment and voter turnout. However, empirical evidence from the 2019 elections in India presents a more nuanced narrative, particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. These two states, markedly divergent in educational levels, offer a unique perspective that challenges the assumptions of modernization theory. This article, anchored by interviews with six families from rural Andhra Pradesh whose children have relocated to Kerala, explores the complex interplay between education, identity, and voting behavior. It reveals that concepts of identity and the sense of “belonging” are dynamic forces impacting voter engagement and are subject to ongoing social and environmental influences. The findings indicate that a predominantly caste-affiliated identity influences voter behavior in Andhra Pradesh, contrasted with an economically driven identity in Kerala. This article raises questions about the validity of modernization theory, highlighting the multifaceted and evolving nature of “belonging” as a determinant in voter participation patterns.

## INTRODUCTION

A core thesis of modernization theory contends that as educational attainment within a populace rises, so too should voter participation.<sup>1</sup> This theory is predicated on the assumption that education endows citizens with enhanced capabilities to engage in the political process, predominantly through voting. Empirical studies have consistently affirmed a positive correlation between educational levels and voter turnout. This relationship has appeared almost law-like within the United States,<sup>2</sup> with further scholarship corroborating the influence of education on augmenting an individual’s likelihood to vote.<sup>3</sup>

However, the rise of Modi and the resurgence of Hindu nationalism have reignited discourses in India concerning the significance of education in determining voter turnout. The 2019 general election in India marked a historic high in voter participation, with a turnout of 67%

across the states. However, a closer examination of this data reveals anomalies when juxtaposed with the predictions of modernization theory. Notably, Kerala—a state distinguished by its high literacy rates—recorded a voter turnout of 73.9%, which does not place it within the top eight states by voter participation. In stark contrast, Andhra Pradesh, despite its comparatively weaker educational infrastructure, witnessed a turnout of 74.5%. Such findings contravene the expectations set by modernization theory and the trends noted in the American context.<sup>4</sup>

This article seeks to unravel the enigma: why does India’s voter behavior deviate from the projections of modernization theory and established notions of voter propensity? The inquiry reveals that in India, voter turnout may not align with educational levels in the way modernization theory suggests. Instead, identity politics, shaped strongly by the communities to which voters belong, plays a more prom-

inent role. Drawing from a series of six qualitative interviews conducted with voters from both Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, this article suggests that voters in Andhra Pradesh exhibit more substantial alignment with caste-based voting patterns, thus influencing higher voter turnout. In contrast, economic identities take precedence in Kerala, which may attenuate the imperative to vote based on caste affiliation.

The article shows the importance of “belonging” in political phenomena and raises questions with respect to the applicability of modernization theory in voting patterns in India. In the next section the article examines current theories to explain the relationship between education and voter turnout. The following section describes the process by which interviews were conducted and the questions this raises for currently accepted broad-strokes theories. The analysis provides a new scope to understand voter turnout in the Indian context.

## CURRENT THEORIES

Understanding the nexus between education and political participation has been a central theme in comparative politics research. This body of literature posits four primary theoretical frameworks to elucidate how education could potentially influence voter turnout and civic engagement.

The first theory revolves around the cultural aspects outlined by Almond and Verba,<sup>5</sup> where civic traits like trust and engagement are seen as long-term predictors of voter turnout. Putnam<sup>6</sup> extends this by suggesting that these attributes are ingrained within a country’s fabric and have lasting impacts on political participation. Secondly, socio-economic theories, pioneered by figures like Powell<sup>7</sup> and Rosenstone & Hansen,<sup>8</sup> explore the direct and indirect ways through which education influences voter participation. These theories encompass a broad spectrum of socio-economic variables, including education, and their interplay with political engagement. However, testing these theories is complex due to the difficulty in isolating and measuring the impact of overlapping socio-economic factors.

The third framework is the institutional approach, where legal structures and voting laws are scrutinized to understand their impact on voter turnout. Powell<sup>9</sup> and Jackman<sup>10</sup> indicate that the design of political institutions and electoral laws significantly shape voting behavior. Lastly, the political theory approach, advocated by O’Donnell and Schmitter,<sup>11</sup> investigates the effects of regime type on political participation, arguing that voter turnout spikes in the inaugural democratic elections following authoritarian rule but then declines in subsequent elections.

Moving from theoretical frameworks to empirical evidence, the direct impact of education on political participation is evident in several studies. Westheimer & Kahne’s<sup>12</sup> research shows that education programs aimed at promoting democratic values can significantly boost political engagement among students. Their findings underscore the notion that prolonged exposure to educational interventions leads to increased political participation. Furthermore, Green & Sondheimer’s<sup>13</sup> trial on the causal effects of education on voter turnout reinforces the positive correlation between educational attainment and electoral engagement.

Exploring the mechanisms behind these correlations, Verba, Scholzman & Brady’s<sup>14</sup> resource model posits that schools can mobilize resources by imparting civic skills, thus fostering political participation. Conversely, Wolfinger & Rosenstone<sup>15</sup> focus on the economic and normative effects of education, suggesting that schools facilitate voting by serving as polling locations and through the socialization process that encourages voting among peers.

However, the direct pathway from education to political participation is not without its challenges. Researchers grapple with issues related to the study environments (such as schools) and the potential confounds that might affect the results. As such, the complexity of the educational impact on political behavior necessitates a nuanced understanding that accounts for various overlapping and interrelated factors.

In summary, education plays a multifaceted role in shaping political participation, with cultural, socio-economic, institutional, and political dimensions all contributing to this relationship. Empirical studies largely affirm the positive impact of educational attainment on political engagement, albeit with a recognition of the methodological hurdles that may obscure the clarity of this relationship. Understanding these dynamics is critical for policymakers and educators alike as they strive to cultivate a more politically engaged citizenry. Despite this, studies have focused almost exclusively on Western countries such as the United States, with limited attention given to countries in Latin America and South Asia that do not follow patterns predicted by macro theories. Yet scholars who constitute the exception to this trend have found that in the global south, where there is vote buying and a lack of trust in the political system, less tangible economic and institutional reasons play a role in the relationship between education and voter turnout.<sup>16</sup> Rather, they are a function of social phenomena such as clientelist networks in Latin America. In a similar vein, we focus on the role of identity in India.

## METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 2022, I was in Andhra Pradesh, a southern state in India. During this time, I met with a family who owned a tea stall along the side of the road. A conversation ensued which led me to ask them if they were voting in the next election, only for them to state that their vote has always been the same. Naturally, I pressed further. *Does everyone in your family always vote for the same party?* They said *yes, except for our sons, who now live in Kerala—they no longer remember who they are and where they are from.*

This chance encounter led me to study the Dalit community located in a rural region of Andhra Pradesh. I interviewed six families living in the Andhra Pradesh countryside with children who had migrated to Kerala. The families in Andhra Pradesh all belonged to settlements that had practiced agricultural farming for generations. The children interviewed in Kerala had left the fields for jobs in the larger cities of Kerala, such as Kochi. The jobs included bus driv-

ers, construction workers, and tour guides. Through these interviews, I find that identity is the crucial characteristic that changes over the transition between Andhra Pradesh and Kerala—defining voter propensity in this scenario.

It should also be noted that this type of interviewing provides a unique opportunity to understand the trends in both Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, while keeping socioeconomic background, education level, and caste identities the same. While I acknowledge that this form of interviewing is flawed, insofar as it is neither diverse in the population surveyed nor random, it can serve a specific and valuable purpose: in this case, it allowed me to hear the story of a small village and to see whether it illuminates a more profound connection that we may have overlooked in larger scale studies such as those mentioned above. The following section provides a summary of my findings from these qualitative interviews.

## ROLE OF IDENTITY

The journey of individuals from Andhra Pradesh to Kerala is not merely a physical relocation but a profound transition that illuminates the intricate relationship between identity and belonging. The narratives of these families reflect a deep-seated connection to their homeland, juxtaposed with their adaptation to a new social fabric in Kerala.

For many from Andhra Pradesh, their home is not just a place of residence but a cornerstone of their identity. It is where familial ties are nurtured, cultural practices are preserved, and social roles are clearly defined. The act of voting, in this context, is more than a civic duty; it is a reaffirmation of their place within the local social order. Their consistent loyalty to a particular political party indicates a broader allegiance to their community and its shared values. In this regard, the homeland of Andhra Pradesh holds immense significance, as it shapes and reinforces their understanding of who they are.

However, as the sons who have moved to Kerala demonstrate, the concept of home and identity needs to be revised. In the city, they adopt new identities away from their village's caste system constraints. Their profession, rather than their

heritage, becomes their new identity badge. This shift indicates that while the homeland is critical, it does not have an absolute hold on their sense of self. The adaptability of these individuals suggests that belonging is not solely tied to the geographical or cultural confines of one's birthplace.

The concept of belonging, therefore, becomes multifaceted. In the context of Andhra Pradesh, belonging is synonymous with conforming to predetermined social roles. However, in Kerala, belonging is more fluid, allowing for personal growth and change. This dual sense of belonging—to both the place of origin and the place of residence—highlights the dynamic nature of identity. Many factors shape it, including social structures, economic opportunities, and personal experiences.

The importance of these families' home in Andhra Pradesh remains evident in how they speak of their political choices: there is a sense of legacy and continuity. However, the divergent paths of their sons in Kerala show that belonging is not static. It is an ongoing process of negotiation and redefinition, influenced by new environments and opportunities. This suggests that the importance of the homeland persists but does not necessarily predetermine one's identity or sense of belonging.

In essence, the stories of these families from Andhra Pradesh tell us that identity and belonging are not fixed constructs but are continually constructed and reconstructed through interactions with the social and physical environment. The home provides a starting point for identity, but the individual's literal and metaphorical journey shapes their sense of belonging. As such, understanding identity in the context of migration requires a recognition of the complex and often contradictory feelings toward both the homeland and the new place of residence.

This narrative of migration and identity redefinition in the context of voter behavior is emblematic of a larger pattern of societal change in India. It reflects the fluidity of identity and the potential for a reimagined sense of community and belonging in modern India, where

traditional ties to land and caste give way to new affiliations based on occupation, economic roles, and personal aspirations. The paradox we began to explore was whether the relationship between literacy and political engagement in India, particularly in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, presents a paradox that challenges conventional wisdom. However, the set of qualitative interviews and accounts suggests that identity should be the focus in explaining voting patterns seen in these two states.

This story shows that caste, though ever-present, in Indian society has its geographical limits. Identities are not categorizable but can change over time and within a country. Perhaps there is no better way to showcase this than to let the voice of those who underwent this migration from Andhra Pradesh to Kerala explain it best: "In the village, we are Dalits, but here [in the city], we are drivers, construction workers, and mailmen. We have a new sense of purpose and value."

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the qualitative interviews conducted in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala reveal a complex portrait of voter behavior that raises questions as to the validity of modernization theory. The traditional linkage between education and political engagement is disrupted by the deeper cultural, social, and economic currents that flow beneath the surface of voter turnout statistics.

The paradox of higher voter participation in less literate Andhra Pradesh rather than the more literate Kerala underscores the limitations of viewing education as the sole determinant of political activity. Instead, this study highlights the profound impact of identity—shaped by caste, economic status, and migration—on electoral behavior. In Andhra Pradesh, the rootedness of caste identity and the sense of societal position it confers continues to drive a higher voter turnout. Contrarily, in Kerala, the emergence of economic identities and the resultant individualism seem to have attenuated the pull of traditional caste affiliations in political decisions.

The narratives of the families interviewed paint a vivid picture of the ongoing negotiation of identity for those who migrate. While their ties to Andhra Pradesh's homeland remain strong, Kerala's socioeconomic opportunities offer a new context in which their identities are redefined, and their sense of belonging is reshaped. The transition from being defined by caste to being recognized by one's profession represents a significant shift in self-perception that has important implications for political engagement.

While limited in scope, this study provides crucial insights into the fluid nature of identity and its bearing on the political agency within the Indian electoral context. It underscores

the need for a more nuanced research of voting behavior and the impact country-context can have on established relationships that we see in the West. In a broader sense, findings from these qualitative interviews raise more questions than answers. While education remains a powerful tool for empowering citizens, the role of social factors, constituting the 'belonging' of citizens, may play a larger role in political participation. As India continues to evolve, with migration reshaping the contours of identity and belonging, the story of its electoral behavior will likely continue to challenge and refine our theories about the relationships between education, identity, and democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Green, Rachel Sondheimer, Kenneth Welch, and Sheheryar Qudus, "Using experiments to estimate the effects of education on voter turnout," *AEA Randomized Controlled Trials* (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.1097-1.0>.

<sup>3</sup> A. Chevalier and O. Doyle, "Schooling and Voter Turnout: Is There an American Exception?" *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2012), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2056729>.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Green, Rachel Sondheimer, Kenneth Welch, and Sheheryar Qudus, "Using experiments to estimate the effects of education on voter turnout," *AEA Randomized Controlled Trials* (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.1097-1.0>.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 4 (2000): 618-619, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657613>.

<sup>7</sup> G. B. Powell, "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (1986): 17-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1957082>.

<sup>8</sup> Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, "Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1993): 771, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944841>.

<sup>9</sup> G. B. Powell, "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (1986): 17-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1957082>.

<sup>10</sup> R. W. Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 81 (1987): 405-423.

<sup>11</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 237-269, <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237>.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Green, Rachel Sondheimer, Kenneth Welch, and Sheheryar Qudus, "Using experiments to estimate the effects of education on voter turnout," *AEA Randomized Controlled Trials* (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.1097-1.0>.

<sup>14</sup> Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (1995): 271-294, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082425>.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bfff>.

<sup>16</sup> Javier Auyero, "The Logic of Clientelism in Argentina: An Ethnographic Account," *Latin American Research Review* 35, no. 3 (2000): 55-81; John D. Martz, "Studying Politics and the State in Ecuador," *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 2 (1997): 170-183; Carol Ann Fornos, Timothy J. Power, and James C. Garand, "Explaining Voter Turnout in Latin America, 1980 to 2000," *Comparative Political Studies* 37, no. 8 (2004): 909-940; Christina Sanhueza Petrarca, "Does Voting at a Younger Age Have an Effect on Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Trust? Evidence from Latin America," in *Lowering the Voting Age to 16*, 103-119, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32541-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32541-1_6)



# BEYOND SOCIAL SORTING:

## *The Transformative Power of Complex Identities in a Diverse Society*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines social sorting, the tendency to affiliate only with highly aligned social groups, in America. Social sorting facilitates the development of homogenous social spaces, exacerbates polarization, limits exposure to diverse perspectives, and intensifies intergroup conflicts. Socially sorted spaces strengthen rigid ingroup-outgroup distinctions and deepen attachments to places which bolster these highly cohesive identities. In response to these challenges, the paper highlights the framework of social identity complexity, which captures individuals' perceptions of the overlap and similarity between their multiple social identities. Those with high social identity complexity affiliate with groups often viewed as non-overlapping, conflicting, or incompatible with one another, challenging the prevailing narrative of social sorting. The paper explores the potential of social identity complexity to reduce intergroup bias and foster more inclusive social spaces. It includes a case study investigating the impact of social identity complexity on intergroup bias, the tendency to judge outgroup members more harshly than ingroup members, in moral judgments. Findings suggest that individuals with high social identity complexity tend to show less intergroup bias in their moral judgments, indicating that social identity complexity could serve as a vital psychological mechanism for mitigating bias. The paper concludes by advocating for a paradigm shift: moving away from the restrictive norms of social sorting toward a celebration of complex, intersecting identities. Such an approach promises to cultivate more dynamic and less polarized spaces, underscoring the need to embrace the rich multiplicity of identities in a diverse society.

### INTRODUCTION

America is more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, rising diversity is paralleled by “social sorting,” the tendency for people to affiliate only with social groups that are highly aligned with one another.<sup>2</sup> In their jobs, friends, viewpoints, hobbies, and place of living, individuals strive for consistency,<sup>3</sup> acting in accordance with social expectations (e.g., as liberals, as Southerners). Yet some people resist social sorting and instead affiliate with complex social groups that have few overlapping members and conflicting norms. In this essay, I argue that embracing social identity complexity is a promising pathway to mitigate the negative effects of social sorting

and foster more inclusive social dynamics. I will first explore the state of social sorting in America, highlighting how it polarizes social space and promotes rigid attachment to place. Subsequently, I will introduce social identity complexity as a counteractive concept which may promote a more nuanced attachment to place, reviewing prior research and original findings in a case study which support the potential of social identity complexity for reducing intergroup bias.

### THREATS OF SOCIAL SORTING

Social sorting fosters environments characterized by homophily, creating distinct and rigid boundaries between ingroups and outgroups.

This is evident in the racial and political homogeneity that characterizes modern relationships. For instance, only half of white Americans have cross-racial friendships and fewer than a quarter of non-white Americans do.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a third of Americans say it is important for them to live in a place where most people share their political views and report that most of their close friends share their views.<sup>5</sup> Social sorting also happens across identity domains. For example, people report Democrat, secular, and Black identities to be highly aligned and Republican, evangelical, and Tea Party identities to be highly aligned.<sup>6</sup> The negative effects of social sorting are profound: reduced exposure to diverse viewpoints and experiences can contribute to increased bias,<sup>7</sup> heightened intergroup conflict, and growing animosity to those perceived as “others.”<sup>8</sup>

The consequences of social sorting extend beyond social interactions, giving rise to distinct spaces. These spaces may be physical as, for instance, people tend to move to areas that reflect their partisan beliefs, reinforcing political echo chambers.<sup>9</sup> Recent evidence suggests that living in politically homogeneous areas tends to solidify an individual’s political preferences, contributing to broader geographic polarization.<sup>10</sup> These spaces may also be virtual, as evidenced by similar patterns of political homophily on social media platforms,<sup>11</sup> which also amplifies political polarization.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the spaces produced by social sorting are highly psychological, shaped by collective experiences, emotions, and beliefs.

Within these spaces, groups are regulated by clearly defined norms regarding what kinds of social group memberships are compatible (e.g., Christian and Republican) and incompatible (e.g., Christian and Democrat). These descriptive norms (i.e., expectations about a group’s dominant behaviors, beliefs, and values) tell individuals which group memberships are synchronous, and which are not (e.g., What kind of religion does a “true” Democrat have? What occupations are acceptable for “true” Republicans?).<sup>13</sup> Based on these norms, individuals can discern which group memberships align with their identities, determining affiliation and identity development.

By facilitating the creation of spaces that are socially homogeneous and norms-bound, social sorting facilitates strong attachment to place. Individuals whose social spaces have largely overlapping members, values, and beliefs derive a strong sense of belonging and self-definition across these spaces, increasing their attachment to places that reflect their cohesive social identities. For instance, an individual whose national identity is more highly aligned with their political, racial, and religious identities will have a stronger attachment to their nation. Yet, while these robust attachments to place may bolster identity, they can also hinder adaptation to divergent social spaces with new challenges and norms. On the contrary, those whose social spaces have fewer overlapping members, values, and beliefs likely have more flexible attachments to place, adjusting to different social environments and integrating conflicting viewpoints more easily. Some individuals identify with groups that are often perceived as highly incompatible, such as Christian liberals and LGBTQ conservatives. In holding such complex social identities, these individuals are powerful exceptions to the pressures of social sorting.

## **SOCIAL IDENTITY- COMPLEXITY**

Existing at the intersections of often-conflicting groups, people who hold complex identities have unique experiences that shape their social cognition in key ways. The exploration of multiple identities has garnered significant attention across various disciplines, underscoring its psychological and societal importance. For instance, philosophers such as Amartya Sen argue that recognizing and embracing multiple identities is crucial for mitigating the divisiveness often plaguing society.<sup>14</sup> Since social conflict often centers around single identities, emphasizing multiple identities can help to highlight common ground and provide alternative sources of meaning and belonging. In the realms of sociology and psychology, several theoretical frameworks have been developed to describe and understand multiple group membership. For instance, intersectionality captures the additive or multiplicative effects of holding multiple marginalized

identities,<sup>15</sup> such as black women or women in STEM fields. Additionally, research on bicultural identity integration captures multiethnic and multinational individuals' perceptions of the compatibility of their two cultural identities.<sup>16</sup> This essay focuses on another influential framework: social identity complexity, which captures individuals' perceptions of the membership overlap and similarity between their multiple social identities.<sup>17</sup> Those who perceive less overlap and similarity between their identities are said to have greater social identity complexity.

While other multiple group membership frameworks often focus on the harmful effects of holding intersectional identities for identity holders,<sup>18</sup> work on social identity complexity has produced evidence of at least one potential benefit of holding intersectional or complex identities: having warmer attitudes toward outgroup members.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, social identity complexity provides a useful lens for examining the potential positive effects of holding a complex social identity for addressing the problem of social sorting.

There are several theoretical reasons why social identity complexity helps to mitigate intergroup bias. First, people high in identity complexity may have a decreased importance of any one identity for defining the self-concept. In preliminary work, I examined the extent to which Christian liberals include Christians and liberals in their self-concept. I found that Christian liberals include Christians in their self-concept to a weaker extent than a comparison group of Christian conservatives and include liberals in their self-concept to a weaker extent than a comparison group of atheist liberals. As a result of this reduced importance, people who hold complex social identities may be less likely to feel identity threat. They may also be more adept at responding to identity threat by shifting their locus of identity to a distinct, non-threatened identity, making them less likely to hold biased attitudes toward those who are different from them.<sup>20</sup>

Second, people who belong to social groups that are often perceived as exclusive may perceive their groups as less entitative, that is, as less of a coherent unit. Groups that are highly entitative have strict boundaries and strong cohesion, pro-

ducing consistency and interdependence among members.<sup>21</sup> People high in identity complexity likely perceive groups as less entitative, seeing them as having more flexible group boundaries and greater independence and heterogeneity. Consequently, people high in identity complexity likely also place less emphasis on group boundaries and expect to have more in common with outgroup members. Perceiving groups as more heterogeneous may also reduce the perceived reliability of the information derived intergroup boundaries, reducing the motivation for bias.<sup>22</sup> For instance, after learning that someone is liberal or conservative, the average person may feel confident that they can reliably infer many of their other features (e.g., their religious beliefs, what kinds of shows they like or jokes they would find funny). However, given their appreciation for the diversity within groups, people high in social identity complexity would likely feel less confident in making such assumptions.

Third, people who hold complex identities may have increased quality and quantity of contact with people from diverse backgrounds, potentially contributing to decreased bias.<sup>23</sup> Multiple group memberships may also contribute to decreased intergroup conflict by providing greater resources for coping with identity threats. Specifically, by accessing a wider, more diverse social network, individuals with complex identities likely have more flexible ways of responding to threats, may feel less lonely, and may derive a sense of collective purpose from multiple sources.<sup>24</sup>

## **SOCIAL IDENTITY COMPLEXITY: A CASE STUDY**

In the following case study, advised by Professor Liane Young, I investigated the potential for social identity complexity to impact bias in moral judgment. Previous research indicates that when people learn that a transgressive act, such as a norm violation or an act of harm, has occurred, their responses are often susceptible to intergroup bias. That is, they respond more harshly to transgressions committed by outgroup members than those committed by intergroup members, judging outgroup member transgressions to be more morally bad and assigning them

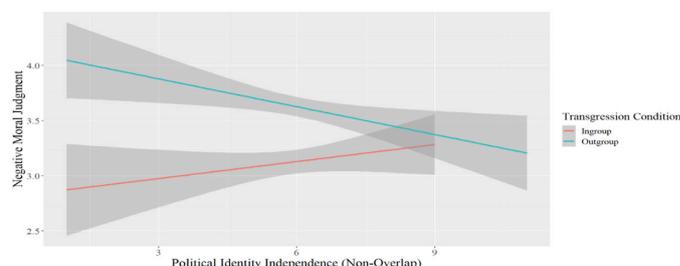
more punishment.<sup>25</sup> Relevant work shows that people with greater social identity complexity, who perceive less overlap between their multiple social identities, are more tolerant of outgroup members,<sup>26</sup> suggesting that they may show less derogation of outgroup member transgressors compared to ingroup member transgressors. Additionally, people with greater social identity complexity tend to display less shame in response to ingroup transgressions,<sup>27</sup> suggesting that they would likely react less defensively after learning about an ingroup transgression, thus showing less preferential treatment toward ingroup member transgressors. Based on this work, I hypothesized that greater social identity complexity will be associated with less negative evaluations of outgroup transgressions (H1) and more negative evaluations of ingroup transgressions (H2). To test these hypotheses, I designed an experiment to examine the impact of social identity complexity on moral judgments in response to a transgression committed by either an ingroup or outgroup member.

In this experiment, participants (N = 709) who were recruited online first completed measures of social identity complexity and then read about a transgression and reported their moral judgments of the transgression and the transgressors. Social identity complexity was assessed using Roccas & Brewer's measure of social identity overlap, which asks participants to estimate how many members of each one of their social groups are also members of each other of their social groups on a 10-pt scale from "None" to "All."<sup>28</sup> In line with standard use of this measure, participants evaluated the overlap between four of their social identities (political affiliation, religion, race, and a fourth social identity of their choice) and these responses were averaged to obtain an aggregate score. Before they read about the transgression, participants were asked to imagine that members of their community who were protesting a controversial speaker who was scheduled to give an upcoming talk had started a riot, resulting in \$100,000 in damages. Participants were randomly assigned to read that the rioters were political ingroup members or political outgroup members. Moral judgments were measured by asking people to evaluate the moral wrongness of the transgression, the moral badness of the transgressors, and how

much punishment the transgressors should receive on 5-pt scales from "Not at all/None" to "Extremely/Maximum." Responses on the three evaluations items were highly consistent ( $\alpha = .867$ ), so they were averaged to create an aggregate score (i.e., Negative Moral Judgment).

To examine the impact of social identity complexity on negative moral judgment, I used a multiple regression model to see if we could predict people's judgments based on their social identity complexity and the ingroup-outgroup status of the transgressors they read about (i.e. whether they were ingroup or outgroup members). Overall, participants tended to judge outgroup members more harshly than ingroup members ( $t = 4.03, p < .001$ ). Importantly, we found that there was a significant interaction between social identity complexity and ingroup-outgroup status ( $t = -2.54, p = .011$ ) such that the gap between judgments of outgroup and ingroup members was smaller for participants who were high in social identity complexity (see Figure 1). This suggests that social identity complexity helps to mitigate intergroup bias in moral judgments.

**Figure 1**  
*Impact of Identity Independence and Group on Negative Moral Judgments of Transgressions*



Next, I conducted a more detailed analysis (i.e., simple slopes analysis) to determine whether social identity complexity had a significant effect on judgments of both outgroup and ingroup members. Supporting the first hypothesis (H1), I found that high social identity complexity was associated with less negative judgements of outgroup transgressors ( $t = -2.26, p = .024$ ). Regarding the second hypothesis (H2), I found that there was a trend such that people high in social identity complexity reported more negative judgments of ingroup transgressors, but the effect was not statistically significant. The findings of this study suggest that social iden-

tity complexity may play an important role in moderating intergroup bias, particularly in the realm of moral judgment. These effects appear to be driven mainly by reduced outgroup derogation rather than reduced ingroup love, although more work is needed to determine the robustness of these findings across different moral dilemmas and social contexts. These results add to a growing body of evidence that holding a complex social identity may foster more equitable and less biased perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

This essay addresses the contrasting realities of America's growing diversity and the prevalence of social sorting, which segregates people into homogeneous groups. The latter process, in turn, leads to more rigid attachments to place, reduces exposure to diverse perspectives, and heightens intergroup conflict. The concept of social identity complexity offers a promising solution to these issues. Individuals with complex social identities, who belong to traditionally conflicting groups, challenge the traditional narrative of social sorting. As a result of their unique identity compositions, these individuals

have access to and experience navigating multiple spaces and places, as well as exposure to people who come from diverse backgrounds and hold diverse viewpoints. Both of these characteristics promote more flexible attachment to place and adaptability in adjusting to new spaces. In this way, people who hold highly complex identities can serve as bridges between disparate groups, as well as connectors of divergent social spaces. Indeed, their very existence demonstrates that the boundaries between groups are often more fluid and ambiguous than commonly portrayed. Moreover, research, including the present case study, demonstrates that social identity complexity can reduce bias, especially in the context of moral judgments. Therefore, interventions which increase the salience of individuals' social identity complexity by affirming cross-cutting identities have the potential to promote more dynamic, less polarized social spaces. When complex identities are normalized, individual attachment to place can expand to encompass broader and more diverse physical, social, and moral circles. In this way, embracing social identity complexity can help foster a more empathetic and unified society.

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<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization in the American Public," *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, June 12, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>.

<sup>6</sup> Lilliana Mason and Julia Wronski, "One Tribe to Bind Them All: How Our Social Group Attachments Strengthen Partisanship," *Political Psychology* 39 (2018): 257-277, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12485>.

<sup>7</sup> Lilliana Mason, "A Cross-Cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2016): 351-377, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw001>.

<sup>8</sup> Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129-146, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>.

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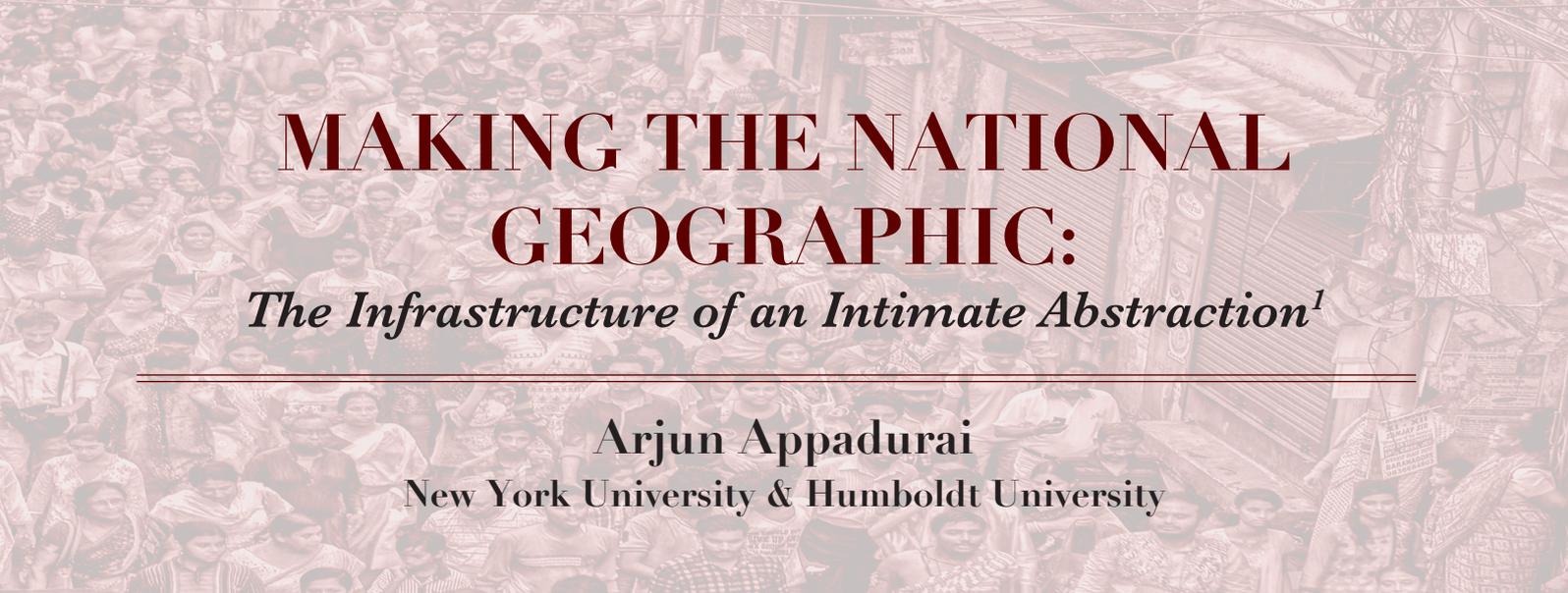
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# IV. NATIONHOOD: WHOSE HOME?



# MAKING THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC:

## *The Infrastructure of an Intimate Abstraction<sup>1</sup>*

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### INTRODUCTION

I am deeply grateful to the Clough Center at Boston College for asking me to deliver this inaugural lecture in the series on “Attachment to Place in a World of Nations.” My lecture builds on my longstanding interest in the role of territory, space and place in the genealogy of nation-states, as well as my interest in India, which became an independent nation-state in 1947, more than seven decades ago. Though I will not make it a major point of my talk, which will be focused on India, I am of the strong opinion that almost no major conflagration in the world today is explicable without reference to contests over space and territory. The heartbreaking current war in Israel-Palestine is a century old story of displacement, territorialization, militarized borders and weaponized historical identities. The war in Ukraine is primarily about the resentment in the Putin regime over the historical shrinkage of the Russian Empire, with its earlier anchor in Kiev, its view of Ukraine as part of this empire, and its concern that the loss of Ukraine brings the West to the very edges of the contemporary core of Russia. Heavily militarized borders also define and divide the United States and Mexico, India and Pakistan, India and China, North and South Korea, and numerous states in the African subcontinent. These examples can be multiplied.

In each case, we can see that attachment to place is a vital factor, whether on the borders, in the domain of refugees and asylum, or in its impact on migration and humanitarian values in modern nation-states and formations like

the European Union. Ever since Benedict Anderson’s hugely influential 1973 work on the nation-state as an “imagined community,” there has been a broad consensus that post-Westphalian nation-states are in some important ways artificial, contingent and mental artifacts.

Yet, it has remained very difficult to explain why the recent, constructed and contingent nature of all nation-states has captured the sense of identity, attachment and affect in a way that no other political formation is able to do. Around the world, ideas of soil and homeland mobilize popular sentiments, and convince armies and civilians to kill, and die, in the cause of the nation-state. Blood, soil and emotion are a potent mix which powers loyalty to the nation-state in ways that few other civic identities are able to do, except perhaps for sports teams in some countries. Why so much faith in a constructed artifact of recent origins?

The production of territorial attachment takes the conjuncture and interaction of many forces over time. Some of these are academic or technical: cartography, historiography, museums, and textbooks are examples. Others are long-term practices involving material life: foraging, cultivation, house-building and the like. These practices tend to foster the identification of groups with the places they inhabit. Yet others are legal and institutional: the prime example of this is the very history of ideas concerned with sovereignty under chiefs, kings and modern states, all of which have elaborate ideas about dominion. Ideologies of many sorts play into conceptions of territory: notable among these are ideas about the link between

human beings and soils and ethno-geographical ideas frequently tied up with group origins, movements and kinship. Yet other ideologies involve the sacred, and come up in cosmologies of center and periphery, earth and heaven, humankind and its others, the civil and the savage.

I cannot do justice to all these elements. The strand which I will focus on involves territory as an idea in the making of postcolonial nation-states. More narrowly still, I am concerned with the production of territoriality in India, which happens to be a case where modern colonialism and the modern nation-state are intimately connected.

## COLONIAL GEOGRAPHY

The period of colonial rule is an important period of change during which indigenous ideas of rule and authority and indigenous systems of control and taxation (largely Mughal) were transformed in important ways. The British encountered a variety of understandings of regional and imperial space, of frontiers and trade-routes, of cosmographies and cartographies, of travel, conquest and linguistic pluralism. The sub-continent that existed before the arrival of the British was in no way a political tabula rasa. But it is important to note that a variety of forms of circulation (of pilgrims, warriors, laborers, and scholars) as well as of various kinds of texts, images and ideologies had produced a large variety of overlapping trans-local ideas of meaningful space in part “sacred,” in part administrative, and in part literary/linguistic, which could be described as complex political imaginaries. In this sense, they certainly belong to the generic forms of political imagining that include the modern nation-state. A teleology leading from the fragmentation of precolonial India to the “unity” of the current nation-states of the sub-continent is clearly too simple. As the events of the period after 1947 in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka suggest, the project of nation-building was not only incomplete, it was in many ways fraught with built-in contradictions that laid the basis for the major ethnic, linguistic and religious battles that have characterized the whole of the subcontinent relentlessly since 1947.

Elsewhere, I have offered a detailed analysis of colonial cartography and railroad building in India in the late 18th and 19th centuries, through which the idea of a national territory was realized. These technologies also blended with the technologies of the census and colonial ethnography to inscribe the sense that colonial India was a coherent, traversable and governable space. Today, for reasons of time, I focus mainly on the period after 1947. In the following section of this lecture I take a close look at a major nationalist text by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India after India gained independence from British rule in 1947.

## NEHRU DISCOVERS INDIA

Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* has a remarkably conceited title. The idea that a major nationalist politician, in jail for his anti-British activities, after at least twenty years of mass nationalism and another forty years of anti-British politics of different sorts, should pretend to “discover India” is so startling as to require attention. Written in 1944 and published in 1946, this text is many things at once: a manifesto for nationalism, a potted history of India, a philosophical meditation, a guide to Indian culture and civilization, and a plea to the world about India’s special place in it, in which the long discussions of India’s history and religions, its philosophies and prospects are a peculiar and narcissistic exercise in self-examination. This book could only have been written by someone who, confident in his leadership of the India about to emerge, sees it as necessary that he “discover India for himself, yet again.” In terms of Benedict Anderson’s general arguments about how the nation becomes imagined, this text is surely an exercise in the link between print-capitalism and nationalism. But it is a peculiar exercise in that it is an effort by the author to mediate India and himself through a printed text. And the text is a text of discovery, and of self-discovery, not in the sense of an autobiography but in the sense of a self-legitimizing narrative of the history of a nation. *The Discovery of India* is written as if India is writing itself through (and to) Nehru.

The exercise is not just self-mediating, it is also pedagogic. The book is in some ways a textbook,

clearly intended to position India in the emergent world system of independent nation-states and to educate its readers into a particular position on what it really means to be “Indian.” This position is filled with interesting contradictions. Driven on the one hand by a heavily secularist, rationalist, modernist vision anchored in science, technology and economics as the key to successful modern nationhood, it is simultaneously obsessed with what is “Indian” about “India.” In this latter regard, in its treatment of Hindu scriptures, Indian cultural history, and Indian philosophy, it is a grand exercise in modernist orientalism, seeking an “essence” in India which is nonetheless progressive and future-oriented.

Why do nationalist histories always seem to demand geographical coherence? One answer is that all human communities seem to require some kind of “pastness” as a trope for their naturalness and thus for their legitimacy. Since nationalisms create something apparently new, it seems especially important for them to create a deep history for the nation, a history which, by definition, has to be discovered, recovered, remembered or restored.

Ernest Renan taught us that nationalist history requires both remembering and forgetting. This observation has been developed by many contemporary scholars, including Anderson, Chatterjee, Das, Nandy and van der Veer, the latter four dealing especially with Indian nationalism. My interest here is not in the logic that relates memory to national amnesia (which determine and complement one another) as such; it is in how the nationalist construction of geography throws additional light on the issue of memory and amnesia. *The Discovery of India* was not by any means the first effort to install the nation in its geography. There were already a host of cartographic images available from British 18th century mapping which in turn was in dialogue with earlier Mughal cartography. Some were military and strategic. Others were cadastral and revenue-oriented. Yet others were cultural and archaeological. The vast apparatus of colonial knowledge-production (under the bureaucracies of archaeology, revenue, foreign affairs, police and railroads) all had their complex maps with very few “holes” and “voids” of



Professor Arjun Appadurai delivering his Clough Distinguished Lecture, “Making the National Geographic: The Infrastructure of an Intimate Abstraction.”

the sort that pioneer British cartographers like Rennell had found worrisome in 1788. In addition, actual atlases and geography books existed in many vernacular languages and taught “Indians” about “India.” The materials for a national cartography did not have to be created: they existed in abundance. But a new geography was required to meet the needs of the project of national independence. For one thing, the geography of India was still part and parcel of the geography of Empire: India was still linked in complicated ways to Sri Lanka, Burma and Afghanistan. It did not have clearcut national boundaries and imperial cartographies did not, of course, anticipate the challenge of finding a geographically coherent India or the worse problem of dealing with the rumblings of a separate state for Muslims in the sub-continent. These considerations were probably on Nehru’s mind as he composed *The Discovery of India* in 1944.

Nehru’s search for the essence that links India’s past and its present, his search for its continuous living *geist*, his yearning to “discover” what makes for five thousand years of deep continuity, begin with the same philological morass in which various earlier colonial scholars found themselves. In circling around the word “Hinduism,” Nehru writes:

In the countries of Western Asia, in Iran and Turkey, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, and elsewhere, India has always been referred to as, and is still called, Hind; and everything Indian is called Hindi. Hindi has nothing to do with religion, and a Moslem or Christian Indian is as much a Hindi as a person who follows Hinduism as a religion. Americans who call all Indians Hindus are not

far wrong; they would be perfectly correct if they used the word Hindi. Unfortunately, the word has become associated in India with a particular script (the devanagari script of Sanskrit) and so it has become difficult to use it in its larger and more natural significance. Perhaps when present day controversies subside we may revert to its original and more satisfying use. Today the word Hindustani is used for Indian; it is of course derived from Hindustan. But this is too much of a mouthful and it has no such historical and cultural associations as Hindi has. It would certainly appear odd to refer to ancient periods of Indian culture as "Hindustani."

Notice the circular reasoning of this paragraph and its deep affinity with a host of colonial texts about the name "India." For all Nehru's resistance to equating the Indian with the Hindu, a vast portion of the text of *The Discovery of India* is taken up with Hindu scriptures, texts, epics and philosophies, which prove to contain much of the "geist" of India that Nehru seeks to discover. So, for all the modernist rhetoric of *Discovery*, its cultural argument about the coherence of India repeatedly proves to turn on Hindu styles and texts. This aspect of the book (worked out in many of its passages) is an ominous precursor of the more radical Hindu modernisms that now inflame India and threaten the very foundations of the Constitution, a topic to which I will soon turn.

The Partition of India and the birth of Pakistan, a separate nation for the Muslims of the subcontinent, must have weighed heavily on Nehru in 1944. Yet it plays a curiously modest part in *The Discovery of India*, occupying little more than ten pages in a text of almost six hundred pages of small print. Yet, writing in 1944, searching for the geist of India deep in its soil, its epics, its peoples and its history, Nehru could not have been as calm about the prospect of Partition as he appears in these ten pages. The explicit argument of these pages is that the era of what he calls small states is over and that only large states are likely to survive in the emergent world after the Second World War. He supplements this view by arguing that small states will have to cooperate in any case, so whether or not Pakistan comes to

exist, it will have to work with "India" to assure its viability in a world of large states. This curious scalar argument against Partition is supplemented by a variety of demographic arguments (most of them quite reasonable, even prescient) that turn on the fact that Hindus and Muslims are simply too deeply interspersed across India for Partition to work on the ground. But there is a tone of resignation in Nehru's discussion of Partition, and he concedes that whatever the rational arguments against it, no group can be forced to enter free India against their will.

These arguments against Partition are of some interest, partly because of their eminently reasonable tone and their pragmatic ground. In addressing the question of the unity of India, in which he believes deeply, he has just one throw-away phrase in the section on Partition, on page 542, to the effect that "...That unity is geographical, historical, and cultural and all that." Yet he has just spent almost five hundred pages explicating the basis of this unity. The unity of India is what Nehru "discovers" in *The Discovery of India*, and like all discoveries, it is not seen by him as an invention. It is my sense that the real plot of the book is provided by the problem of Partition and the horrible dilemma of the book is how to show a deep and continuous geist in the history of the sub-continent which is not explicitly associated with Hinduism. As a believer in the modernist doctrines of science, socialism, high technology and improved material life, Nehru is no Hindu revivalist. Yet, strive as he might, his search for the national geist keeps returning to Hindu themes. Why else would India's most promising leader (apart from Gandhi) spend five hundred pages retelling a history already available in a hundred books (many in his footnotes?). On the face of it, the answer would be: to make this history his own and to rewrite it in his voice so that his history of India can mediate his own printed discovery of it.

But there is another answer, which has everything to do with geography and with politics, and it is the high likelihood of the dismemberment of India in the near future, as Nehru writes *The Discovery of India* in a fort-prison in Ahmednagar. This is why the "discovery" of India as a coherent, continuous cultural space,

and a history that is made to yield the spirit behind its facade of change and diversity, are an urgent project. Nehru wrote this huge and deeply felt book in five months in 1944. Something other than an idle interest in crowding the textbook market must have animated him. My suggestion is that the book is a huge, historically organized answer to a major geopolitical crisis which leads to such a desperate search for national culture and a trans-historical spirit in a man of Nehru's modernist temper.

*The Discovery of India* shows what has to be remembered and forgotten in the forging of the national narrative, so we are back with Renan's aphorism about memory and amnesia in the making of national consciousness, which is forged in the specific politics of the struggle for nationhood. Where the struggle takes on religious/communal overtones, as it did in India from at least the first decades of the twentieth century, and where Partition on grounds of religious difference was a real prospect, secular historiography faces an impossible task. That task is to find a way to read history off geography and to find culture—seen as a timeless essence—out of history, all the time in the name of science, reason and progress. Little wonder that names and terms for the nation keep evading Nehru's secularism and Hindu faces keep peeking out behind Indian masks on every other page of *The Discovery of India*.

National geography is by definition some kind of sacral geography and the history it demands veers always towards the sacral. Where the sacral meets the people, as it does in the discourse of Nehru's book, religion can never be far away. When, in the course of the last four decades in India, quite other forces erode the optimism about secularism, socialism and cosmopolitanism that sustained Nehru's vision, then what is left is Hindutva, which is religious nationalism on the rocks.

## MODI'S INDIA

Like many commentators, I have been wondering how to understand what is happening in India. I am deeply puzzled by the descent

of a fairly sturdy postcolonial democracy into a tyrannical and corrupt autocracy, sustained by Hindutva rage and high-octane xenophobia. As always, we have a host of explanations available, whose chronology ranges from 2014, when Modi became the strongest of India's strongmen, to 2019, when the Indian electorate renewed his regime, and backwards from 2002, when Modi blessed the decimation of Muslims in Gujarat, as a prelude to his march on Delhi, to 1993, when the Babri Masjid was destroyed. Other chronologies go further back, to the wounds of Partition and to the Emergency of 1975-77, when Indira Gandhi showed how easy it was to strangle Indian democracy, even if temporarily. Other diagnoses are not chronological but tectonic and they point to a global trend towards right-wing authoritarianism.

All these chronologies have something to recommend them. I have another one to offer, which runs against the surface grain of Hindutva and is counter-intuitive to its public profile. This chronology locates the current BJP regime in the middle of the nineteenth century, at the crucial point where the East India Company gave way to the British Empire through the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, which turned India into a jewel in the British Crown. In this chronology, I see the Modi regime, and all its regional satraps, as direct descendants of the high point of British rule in India, which one could place in the 1860s and the decades that followed it. The current BJP regime is the British Empire 2.0.

What justifies this analogy? First, the British worked very hard to demonize Mughal rule in India. They typically regarded India's Muslim rulers as tyrannical, violent, corrupt and devious. They famously regarded the eighteenth century as chaotic, and themselves as the bringers of order to this chaotic scene. This is just the BJP view of India after Partition and under the Congress. The anti-Muslim views of the British were directly inherited by the RSS and by its child, the BJP. Of course, the British also had intense contempt for Hindus, especially for Brahmins, and saw Hindu religion as the pinnacle of superstition, idolatry and obsequiousness. Here we need to recall that the British saw themselves as the true reformers of Hinduism, with their

legal moves against sati, widow remarriage and other exhibits in the Victorian chamber of Hindu horrors. Modi is likewise a Hindu reformer, committed to purging it of its effeminate, anti-technological and tolerant elements to install a patriarchal, developmentalist and masculine version of Hinduism in its place. His regime could be seen as inventing and installing a stereotypically Islamic DNA into the flabby psyche of a soft, feminine and hyper-tolerant Nehruvian Hinduism. Both parts of this invention are a direct mirror of British views of Hinduism and Islam starting in the nineteenth century. As we move into the twenty-first century, Modi and his cronies show contempt for the Congress in both its Nehruvian and Gandhian forms, just as the British did. The British despised Gandhi as the naked Fakir who mobilized Indians into a movement for Swaraj and they did not have much regard for Nehru either, seeing him as a turncoat Harrovian who sold his English masters to inherit Gandhi's mantle. Modi learned his contempt for Gandhi and for Nehru from the British. His totalized view of all democratic dissent could only issue from the British Empire 2.0, a sort of settler colonial regime, coming to rule Delhi from its original lands in Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat. Not since the British in the age of High Empire has the whole of "civil society" been portrayed as a threat to the stability, integrity and legitimacy of the state. This is not the lens of homegrown xenophobia but of settler colonial contempt for the indigenous population.

How could I possibly refer to the BJP regime as a settler colonialist regime? Because their

self-image and lens is that of a newly minted dominant race, defined by its radical Hindutva, which has the full right to subject the excluded, the subordinate, the heterodox and the marginal to their dominion. This settler class may not have arrived from across the mountains or over the sea but their relationship to India's racial, religious, ecological and cultural minorities is one of superiority, biocultural difference and imperial arrogance. Thus, the idea that India has been captured by a sort of Hindu majoritarianism is wrong. What India has been captured by is a small class of settler colonists who wish to exclude and dominate India's true majority, which is constituted of millions of other minorities. In this sense, all settler colonialisms subvert, distort and invert existing demographic realities by claiming to be the only majority among minorities, whereas the truth is that the so-called Hindu majority is an artificial category created by the deliberate propaganda and political fabrication of an identity which has no real history before the nineteenth century. In this perspective, Hindutva completes the fantasy of British settler colonialism, which was constrained by the small numbers of white rulers, and can now be enacted by Indian colonists, speaking in the name of a fictional Hindu majority. Once the national geography is sacralized, it can easily become majoritarian, then ethno-nationalist, then anti-democratic. This lesson from India's story has an uncomfortable resonance with many other places in which the national has become geographic.

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<sup>1</sup> This piece is a slightly edited version of the Clough Distinguished Lecture Prof. Appadurai delivered at Boston College on November 16, 2023, as part of the Clough Center's series on "Attachment to Place in a World of Nations."



# NARRATING CHINA: *Reading Li Ziqi and Fangfang from a Nationalist Perspective*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies the possibility and boundaries of narrating contemporary China, where nationalism is a dominant ideology amidst the global pandemic and superpower competition. It argues that the Chinese general public have normalized and internalized nationalism as state indoctrination, thus determining “China’s image” as the ultimate standard of cultural productions. To develop this point, it closely examines two case studies: Chinese vlogger Li Ziqi, whose videos depicting her life in rural China have gained global popularity, and Chinese writer Fangfang, whose online documentation of Wuhan’s COVID-19 outbreak elicited a challenged reception on Chinese social media. The two seemingly apolitical projects eventually engendered nationalist sentiments among Chinese Internet users, who praised Li Ziqi for promoting traditional Chinese culture to the world and attacked Fangfang for undermining global views of China during the pandemic. The paper argues that the different public responses reflected by the two cases represent contradictory national imaginations of present-day China: an anti-modern, neo-traditional civilization versus a modern, impeccable global leader. It concludes with the argument that the contradictory opinions on modernity in Chinese national imagination are confusions generated by China’s modernization. They are essentially the legacy of the confrontation between historical Sino-centrism and western modernity.

## INTRODUCTION

On Feb 19, 2020, during the critical time of Wuhan’s COVID-19 outbreak, SurplusValue, a pan-cultural Chinese podcast, posted their newest episode, in which the three hosts and the guest, Chinese historian Luo Xin, talked about the epidemic, history, social ills, and the subjectivity of individuals in China.<sup>1</sup> Their discussion of a surprising resurgence of nationalism during the outbreak was especially intriguing. Luo cautioned that while nationalism usually retreated in the face of disasters, this time Chinese nationalists took every opportunity to reclaim their pride while China was busy responding to the public health crisis. Expressions such as “people’s war” and “China speed”

were popular in Chinese anti-epidemic lingo. Perhaps because of the poignant political commentary, this episode was soon taken down from SurplusValue, followed by the complete deplatforming of the podcast itself. As a loyal listener, I was not only saddened by the disbanding of its listening community but also appalled by the ever-shrinking public discussion space on Chinese social media. Luo’s vigilant prophecy about the abuse of public power also seemed to predict the worsening Chinese internet environment. I began to wonder: in the second decade of the 21st century, what are the possibilities and boundaries of narrating China? Who is entitled to do the narration? What language is allowed? And when, and why, did Chinese cyberspace become so nationalist?

In this article, I select two cases to study the freedom and limits in telling the story of China in the digital world. When Li Ziqi, a Chinese vlogger who makes videos documenting her daily life in rural China, became popular on Youtube, her patriotic domestic audience was proud of how well she had inherited and promoted traditional Chinese culture. People extolled her as an “ambassador of Chinese culture” because she introduced “Chineseness” to the rest of the world. However, Chinese writer Fangfang was not as well received as Li Ziqi, suffering internet trolling because of a series of Weibo entries she posted documenting Wuhan’s COVID-19 outbreak. The speedy spread of her daily microblog installments attracted a massive readership that became outraged following her appeals for government accountability, accusing her of being complicit with Western powers to tarnish China’s image. It is not difficult to observe that Chinese nationalist Internet users are especially concerned to label some influencers as “*aiguo*” (loving the country), and others as “*henguo*” (hating the country). How did the idea of *guo*, usually translated in English as “country” or “nation”, take on a pivotal role in online discourse in China? I will first outline the idea of nation in Chinese intellectual history.

## AN EVOLVING IDENTITY: THE IDEA OF CHINESE NATIONHOOD IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Chinese historian Xu Jilin, the traditional Chinese worldview consists of four relational dimensions: individual, family, *guo*, and *tianxia*, which literally means “all under heaven”; *tianxia* is both a geographical concept, referring to the world centered around Zhongyuan, and a cultural idea referring to the ethical system that regulates family and politics.<sup>2</sup> The continuity of the four dimensions first manifested in the rites and music systems that originated from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1045-771 BC). The Zhou feudal system, a hierarchy that stretched from the Son of Heaven to commoners, was based on a bloodline in which official roles in the polity were closely bound

to family ties. Although the feudal system collapsed by the time of the Spring and Autumn Period, the political unity of family and nation was passed down and further developed. The “three cardinal guides” (*sangang*) proposed by the Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) philosopher Dong Zhongshu later became the official ideology of imperial China. This framework dictates that the ruler guides his subject, the father guides his son, and the husband guides his wife: political principles are the permutations of family ethics. Therefore, the governing ideology in ancient China was not based on the rule of law but on interpersonal relationships, which had an everlasting influence on Chinese politics.

In imperial China, *guo*, usually translated as nation or country, was an ambivalent idea. Xu argues that *guo* was closely associated with the dynasty that was centered around the monarch. *Jia* (“family”) and *guo* (“nation”) functioned as the intermediaries between the self and *tianxia*, since the former could only achieve the latter by participating in the daily routines in family and politics guided by Confucian doctrine. The unity of family and nation began to deteriorate in the late Qing and early Republican periods when China was undergoing modernization in all social institutions. The New Culture Movement during the 1910s and ‘20s contributed to the ideological disentanglement of the family and the nation (or politics), separating political participation from family ethics. Likewise, the establishment of a modern Chinese nation-state severed *guo* from *tianxia*. With the introduction of Social Darwinism, the priority of the Chinese nation shifted from building a moral-oriented civilization to “enriching the Country” and “strengthening the Armed Forces” (*fuguo qiangbing*), although the reception of the Western idea of the “nation” was much contested during that time. The birth of the nation-state also brought with it the institutionalization of Chinese national identity and the idea of a “Chinese national.” Theoretically, each Chinese national is born equal in the modern nation. In ancient times, families mediated the relationship between the individual and *guo*, and individuals were embedded in the community of family and clan and guided by Confucian ide-

ology. In modern times, with the severance of family from *guo*, each individual was directly connected to the nation under the rule of law.

This newly emerged nation-national relationship was challenged by the May Fourth Movement that began in 1919, in which cosmopolitanism became the dominant ideology. May Fourth intellectuals argued that family, clan, and nation were illusive idols; the individual was the only real, tangible entity in the cosmos. However, the cosmopolitan ideology of the May Fourth Movement was short-lived. Xu regretfully points out that the nationalism proposed by Sun Yat-sen, which emphasized racial and cultural identity and appealed to anti-imperialist demands and sentiments, became the dominant discourse during and after the 1920s. During the course of the world wars and China's anti-imperial struggle, nationalism was a powerful ideology for all walks of life. It described the common enemies of China and provided a unifying political stance for the masses.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) did not explicitly initiate nationalist propaganda until the early 1990s. In the early days of the PRC, the dominant ideology was communism. Patriotism was not a mainstream ideology until 1994, when the Chinese government first launched the Patriotic Education Campaign to "boost the nation's spirit, enhance cohesion, and foster national self-esteem and pride"—a strategy that was intended to facilitate China's political transition and constructions of foreign relations.<sup>3</sup> Political Scientist Allen Carlson shows how Chinese nationalist propaganda anchored itself in the past. The collective memory of the historic national experiences was essential to fostering public nationalist sentiments. Propaganda also emphasized the CCP's centrality in governance, indicating that any effort to criticize or separate *dang* ("the party"), *zhengfu* ("the government") and *minzu* ("the people") equaled treason. To study Chinese nationalism in the contemporary period, Carlson advocates for an alternative approach that focuses on a broader inquiry into the construction of Chinese national identity as a fluid, on-going production.<sup>4</sup> Building on the cautions of Carlson, I choose to focus on two

major media cases from recent years, the global popularity of Li Ziqi's videos and the internet trolling of Fangfang and her *Wuhan Diary*, to understand the potentials and risks of narrating China online in the era of cyber-nationalism.

## STRETCHING IN TIME: LI ZIQI AND HER UTOPIA

Surrounded by endless mountains with lush plants and crops, isolated from city bustling and modern civilization, and dedicated to land and domestic space, Chinese vlogger Li Ziqi lives an idyllic life that many of her audience, both Chinese and global, dream of. According to the website of Guinness World Records, her YouTube has reached 17 million subscribers (as verified on June 16, 2022), winning Li Ziqi the Guinness World Records title for most subscribers for a Chinese language channel on YouTube. Although she does not offer English translation in her videos, her global audience has no difficulties in understanding and enjoying her beautiful life in rural China.

Li Ziqi's global popularity also receives a lot of attention within China. Many Chinese netizens have praised her for promoting traditional Chinese culture and enhancing China's soft power, which eventually came to the attention of the state publicity authorities. In an article titled "There is not one single word in Li Ziqi's videos that praises China; however, she does a good job of telling the story of China," a media observer accordingly writes:

Watching her laboring in the field and conversing with her grandma in Sichuan dialect, people all over the world could understand the interesting and beautiful traditional Chinese culture and appreciate the smart and hard-working Chinese people. They would then fall in love with this country and the people. Li Ziqi is a miracle of transcultural communication, but she did it without much of an ambition.<sup>5</sup>

Li Ziqi's elegant iteration of traditional Chinese culture, together with her fitting neoliberal subjectivity in the post-so-

cialist era, have made her a perfect example of “cultural output” (*wenhua shuchu*).

By comparison with the cliché narratives of Chinese state propaganda, which associate modern China with high-speed trains, 5G networks, and mobile payments, Li Ziqi’s apolitical lifestyle vlogs are apparently much more welcomed by the global community. The state’s vision of a modern, contemporary China, in other words, loses out to an imagined China from the past: a civilization rich in culture and history that is, at the same time, quintessentially agrarian and exotic to the Western viewer. By video-blogging her utopian rural life, Li Ziqi’s model provides an alternative to China’s soft power expansion, and is celebrated accordingly by Chinese nationalist netizens.

## **STRETCHING IN SPACE: FANGFANG’S STRUGGLE WITH CYBER-NATIONALISM**

When Wuhan’s first lockdown directive was promulgated early in the morning on January 24, 2020, Fangfang, like millions of Wuhan residents, was not allowed to leave the city and required to stay at home. As a writer, Fangfang started to document her quarantine life. Her daily installments voiced her worries, fears, sorrows, and stories she heard from friends and family, alongside calls for government action and accountability, with which many people could resonate in the early days of the outbreak. Then titled “Lockdown Diary”, Fangfang’s Weibo posts accordingly received a great deal of attention and positive feedback in late January and early February in 2020.

However, as the government gradually took more aggressive steps to control the COVID-19 outbreak, the state narrative of “fighting against the epidemic” took authority. As a result, while Fangfang continued her reflection and criticism in her online diary, people’s opinions about her and her daily posts drastically shifted. She was turned from a “patriotic people’s writer” into a “traitor” who disparaged her motherland in her writing. The “traitor” narrative was further corroborated when the online diary was trans-

lated into foreign languages and published by commercial press in the West. Various conspiracy theories and accusations were cast on Fangfang, which eventually devolved into a cyber-attack against her and her translator.

It is worth noting that the language that nationalists used to discredit and punish Fangfang online is generally repetitive and lacks ingenuity. The denigrating expressions of choice, such as “America’s dog” and “collaborator,” evoke earlier anti-imperialist sentiment and contribute to mass mobilization. Due to substantial constraints on political engagement in China, only voices aligning with the state are permitted. The nationalist discourse thus capitalizes on the lack of opportunity to participate in politics; in this environment, it is the safest discourse to employ. By attacking Fangfang on social media, nationalist netizens align themselves with a larger community which stands staunchly with the authority. In his influential work, Benedict Anderson associated the rise of nationalism with that of print media. In our era, it seems, online discourse is another powerful tool to mobilize the nation.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, I have examined two online media representations—specifically, personal blogs and vlogs—in contemporary China, both of which were eventually drawn into the wider discourse of nationalism. As these cases illustrate, nationalism in Chinese cyberspace, while effective in mass mobilization and community building, is easily abused to justify trolling people who have different opinions. Often co-opted by state power, nationalist netizens direct their aggression toward fellow Internet users with the intention to silence criticism and dissent. Recognizing that forms like blogs or vlogs are intimate mediums of an individual’s virtual presence, they take a perverse pride in encroaching on their “enemies’” freedom of online expression. The result is that dissenting voices are silenced, while only people who praise the state are allowed their narrations.

Both of these cases also shed light on the language and logics of nationalist narratives in contemporary China. The national identity

that Li Ziqi's Chinese followers hold on to is embedded in an anti-modern, neo-traditional fantasy, which is quite different from the China that Fangfang's attackers imagine. China in the eyes of the former is an impeccable, modern, global leader whose superiority is subject to no doubt. By contrast, Fangfang's online diary, more critical in its views, is a disgrace to the country—and Fangfang herself is the “enemy of the country and the people.”

What accounts for the contradictory national identities that center around modernity? I would argue that the conflict is reflective of a confusion generated in the current geopolitical moment, when China is eagerly establishing its global narrative. A central point of contention is

how to make self-consistent China's current image, which is characterized by a Sinocentric cultural past and a westernized industrial present. The Celestial Empire prided itself on the superiority of Chinese civilization, but the illusion was eventually destroyed by modern technologies and revolutions. In the era of the nation-state, nationalist enthusiasms were constantly triggered by “the hundred years of humiliation in modern Chinese history” (*bainian zhichi*) and the domination of Western hegemonic powers; the same nationalist sentiments were later co-opted by the CCP's propaganda to unify and mobilize the population. This ideologized nationalism has been well-internalized by the people and it is used against any dissident voices.

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<sup>1</sup> “Plague, Language, and the Individual: A Conversation with Historian Luo Xin,” *Surplus Value*, episode 051.

<sup>2</sup> Jilin Xu. *Jiaguo tianxia: xiandai zhongguode geren, guojia, yu shijie rentong* (translated as: *Family, Nation, and Tianxia: Individual, National, and Global Identity in Modern China*). Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2008): 783–806, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29734264>.

<sup>4</sup> Allen Carlson, “A Flawed Perspective: The Limitations Inherent within the Study of Chinese Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 20–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00376.x>.

<sup>5</sup> Please see: CCTV.com, “Yangshi ping Li Ziqi: meiyou yigezi kua zhongguo hao dan jianghao zhongguo gushi.” (Translated as: There is not one single word in Li Ziqi's videos that praises China; However, she does a good job of telling the story of China.)



# JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU AND THE AMBIVALENCES OF THE NATION-STATE

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## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the ambivalences within Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings on the nation-state and the threat it poses to subnational place. Rousseau was a theorist of the state as it reached its maturity, and much of his thought is given over both to grappling with this new political form and to investigating whether and how it might be redeemed. I argue that there are in fact two sides to Rousseau's thought about the nation-state, which is characterized by a productive ambiguity that enables twenty-first century readers to clarify their own thinking on the subject. On the one hand, the author of *The Social Contract* offers an unflinching account of what conditions and institutions are required for the emergence of a legitimate state in which the freedom of each member is secured. Among Rousseau's most important contributions on this front are his insights into the relationship between forming a people and forming a state; these insights, I will argue, explain much of the logic of contemporary state-building and governance. On the other hand, many of Rousseau's reflections on freedom suggest a necessary withdrawal from or repudiation of the nation-state, in favor of the individual and particular. At the same time, I suggest while there is much to be said for this side of Rousseau's thought, we should not be naive about its challenges—as Rousseau himself was not. Finally, the essay closes by suggesting that the best way to develop Rousseau's insights today consists in a fuller account of subnational, and supranational, institutions and practices.

## INTRODUCTION

The nation-state is a confounding thing. It has been the vehicle for peoples liberating themselves from foreign or colonial domination, yet it also looks to assert its own right to determine the character of the people who comprise it, oftentimes reproducing similar relations of domination. As the nation-state matured, this tension did not go unnoticed by its earliest theorists. Indeed, the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau remains among the best material for thinking through a world organized around nation-states. Rousseau diagnoses the threat that the rationalizing state poses to subnational place, yet he is also unable, except through the nation-state,

to chart a path toward the rejuvenation of political participation and the protection of rights.

Through a look at the nationalistic and the anti-nationalistic sides of Rousseau, this essay will explore this ambivalence at the heart of his political philosophy and contend that a confrontation with his thinking will help us to clarify our own understanding of the nation-state and its pathologies. The first part of the essay will discuss an inescapable danger of state building—the manufacturing of a homogeneous people—that Rousseau both places at the heart of his political philosophy and cautions against. The second part will survey Rousseau's anti-political writings, in which

withdrawing from the political is the means for securing freedom and philosophic insight. Though not without its own difficulties, Rousseau's anti-political side suggests that the way to overcome this pathology of the nation-state is to refuse the state's governing logic entirely. Rousseau urges his reader to embrace the local and the particular, not the national, in order to secure the cosmopolitan and the universal.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that there is an additional reason for returning to Rousseau. The Counter-Enlightenment began in 1750 with the publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. The essay launched a career devoted to an "autocritique" of Enlightenment commitments in politics, morals, and natural philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Rousseau's challenge and prescriptions spawned a host of disciples, a list of whom should cause some perplexity: they included arch-Jacobin Maximilien Robespierre, the preeminent philosopher of Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, and the generation of Romantics who sought to shrug off the Enlightenment's suffocating rationalism. Rousseau's thought is thus susceptible to multiple readings, and its ambiguities concerning the nation-state generated the constellation of positions held by these figures. Together, they span the range of positions one can take toward the nation-state. Insofar as we sit at the end of an intellectual tradition that includes both the Enlightenment and its critics, we too are saddled with these ambiguities and should therefore return to its source.<sup>2</sup>

## THE RATIONAL STATE AND THE MAKING OF A PEOPLE

One question that pervades Rousseau's work is whether freedom, if it can be achieved, must be secured through or outside of politics. His most famous political work, *The Social Contract* (1762), takes up the challenge of how, if at all, a collection of individuals can fashion themselves into a legitimate political community in which all can be free. Rousseau's answer is that the will of the whole, the "general will,"

must determine all the decisions that bind the entire community. Only in this way will each individual will the same law he receives; each individual, and the community itself, thus becomes autonomous and self-legislating. More important for our purposes, however, are the preconditions for such a polity. For a people to decide on the basis of the general will, they must first be *organized as a people*. Rousseau initially assigns this task to a godlike legislator, whose divine qualities will "persuade without convincing" a group of disparate individuals to form into a people (2.7). Far from reasoning with the people with whom he is confronted, the legislator enchants or bewitches them.

That Rousseau sees this process as supernatural—the legislator must "so to speak, change human nature"—suggests he sees the genesis of such a people as unlikely. If a legislator of this kind has ever appeared, the occurrence is exceedingly rare. That does not, however, change the logic of Rousseau's insight. A people must in most cases be *made*; it is not a simply natural entity waiting to be organized under a state. Once made, moreover, a people can be sustained only by a small political unit and a high level of homogeneity reinforced by social institutions like a civil religion (2.3; 4.8). For Rousseau, this serves as the basis for an implicit critique of the expansive, contemporary nation-state: because very few such states satisfy these rigorous conditions, there are grounds to believe them illegitimate. Many factors conspire to frustrate Rousseau's conditions, but the most important of them is pluralism: when many people occupy a territory, their diversity of taste and habit, not to mention any divergence in views of the good life, becomes a serious obstacle to the formation of a general will. Conversely, in the absence of imposing such uniformity on these people, Rousseau's ideal regime is unlikely ever to come into being.

To be sure, Rousseau does adduce exceptions, like Poland or Corsica (2.10), where a people preexisted their institutional arrangements and where their identity as a people, in the former especially, was continually renewed due to their situation between two empires (the Russian

and the Holy Roman). Indeed, Poland or Corsica might be the only nations in the world capable of realizing the vision of the *Social Contract*. Absent such a contingent arrangement and absent a divine legislator, however, the manufacturing of a people must occur in some other way. Historically speaking, most of this manufacturing did happen in these other ways, with the state using the technologies available to it to mold its citizens into a homogenous unit. For Rousseau, this defies the purpose of the state as such, which must be the result of each individual's will and not an alien imposition.

All of these caveats suggest prudence or restraint in deriving implications from Rousseau's thought. For if the purpose of the *Social Contract* is to secure freedom for all under a regime of legitimate laws, an enforced homogenization for the sake of that purpose prevents its realization. The state only enjoys legitimacy under a very limited set of circumstances. Not all of Rousseau's readers, however, were as cautious or nuanced as Rousseau himself. The making (or remaking) of a people via violence is precisely what Robespierre undertook during the Terror, a radical rationalization of society and, in effect, an attempt to create a general will by force.<sup>3</sup> In a typical misunderstanding of Rousseau, he sought "to force [people] to be free" (1.7). Robespierre thus mistook the *Social Contract* as an exhortation to be followed, and not as a meditation on the promises and extreme limitations of making a nation. However, the manufacturing of a people need not always, as in Robespierre's case, entail the physical imposition of a national identity. It can often be brought about through mythmaking or "invented traditions."<sup>4</sup> Otherwise put, the nation can become defined by an idealized or fabricated history. In either case, nonetheless, the particular—whether the local or the individual—is effaced in order to construct a uniform whole.

Oftentimes, a uniform identity for nations was constructed more in thought than in deed. Johann Gottfried Herder, one of Rousseau's Romantic successors, took this route, identifying the particular genius of national groupings.<sup>5</sup> For Herder, who denies the existence of a "favorite

nation (*Favoritvolk*), this diversity of genius was a ground for cosmopolitanism.<sup>6</sup> And yet, Rousseau's challenge looms large. What if the "genius" Herder had identified in thought is not quite there in fact? If a nation must be defined by a particular national spirit, then does that spirit have to be instilled if it does not already obtain among enough of the people? This logic underlies the European nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—think Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* or, in a far more pernicious way, the accusations of subversion lobbed at European Jews. It is also, most ominously, the logic of ethnic cleansing. At the same time, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, the identification with a particular national genius also sustained the more liberatory nationalisms of the postcolonial era.<sup>7</sup>

As suggested, this choice wherein a people must either be formed or discovered is not necessarily reflective of Rousseau's own thought. The *Social Contract* is no blueprint; its author, moreover, is deeply pessimistic about political organization in general, and that text cannot be taken as his final word. A glance at another side of Rousseau, this one far less assertive and far more focused on the sub-national, reveals this tension within his thought. Historically prior to the *Social Contract* stands Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (1755), which depicted political life as such as the source of domination and unhappiness. Much of Rousseau's subsequent writing, including the *Social Contract*, offers ways of redeeming life in common given this fact. Yet given the implausibility of realizing an ideal national community, what is to be done? Some of Rousseau's other works suggest that the answer lies in a retreat from the national into the particular. A quick overview of these texts should make this clear.

## UNIVERSALITY THROUGH PARTICULARITY

Rousseau's own life reveals an unwillingness to embrace national attachments. In part due to the censorship of his writings, Rousseau never spent too long in a single place and detested the metropolises in which national "genius" was best developed. This transiency was reflected in

his writings as well. For Rousseau's hypothetical student Emile, the titular subject of his great treatise on education (*Emile*, 1762), membership in some political community was required but did not take the form of any aggressive national identification. Emile's education is, in fact, thoroughly universalistic; he is taught to embrace mankind, not only Frenchmen. Emile eventually chooses to live in France, but for him France encompasses the site of a particular existence defined by proximity to family, nature, and a small set of acquaintances—far from the Spartan unity needed for a social contract. *Emile* suggests that modern freedom need not take the form it does in the *Social Contract*, and that it may be best secured through an embrace of the individual's immediate surroundings and community. Emile is an individual who is able to embrace both the local and the cosmopolitan without the intermediation of the nation-state. In this way, he is a forerunner to Romantic attempts to accomplish the same ascent from the individual to the universal through philosophy or poetry.

Further anticipating such attempts, Rousseau offers a new philosophy in his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782). Through a solitary, poetic self-investigation, he comes to understand something of both himself and of the whole. It is worth noting how apolitical this work sets out to be: though Rousseau overemphasizes his solitude, he does drive himself to the outermost limits of the community. This philosophic exercise could not take place in Paris; indeed, its proximate cause is the state suppression of Rousseau's writings which drove him from society. Whatever freedom or understanding he achieves during his reveries, it relies on a withdrawal from the national and, perhaps, from the political altogether.

Both polarities are thus found within Rousseau's thought about the nation-state: whereas the *Social Contract* appears to advocate the rationalizing and homogenizing manufacture of a political community, the apparently non-political writings just considered emphasize the particular and individual, over and against the rational and uniform whole. The latter writings eschew struggle against the state and avoid reproducing its logic through that

struggle. Rousseau does not recommend seizing the mechanisms of the state for oneself.

Just as the *Social Contract* cannot be read as a straightforward prescription, however, neither can these non-political works. It is clear that Rousseau does not prescribe Emile's hypothetical upbringing to others, and the experiences of the Solitary Walker may be accessible to Rousseau alone. Even beyond this, there is a still greater problem. Rousseau's "non-political" writings concern the freedom and the completion of the individual, and he claims that such freedom is possible in an imperfect political regime. Yet this is not a direct refutation of the *Social Contract's* claims, because that work argues that the freedom of the individual is possible only through the freedom of the entire community. Insofar as we are all subject to laws that claim to coerce us, we can be free only if those laws are of our own making. This holds true for each member of the community. The state cannot be legitimate for me but not for my neighbor. Neither *Emile* nor the *Reveries* ever answer this challenge, and thus both texts can only be seen to present partial solutions. While an extraordinary individual might achieve freedom in spite of the nation-state, the Rousseau of the *Social Contract* questions whether that freedom is not ultimately chimerical. If Emile is subject to a set of laws over which he had no say, then perhaps his freedom only persists at the sufferance of the state. While Rousseau has argued for the promise of non-political freedom, his life and work thus show the inevitability of a confrontation with the state.

## CONCLUSION

I have sketched two ways of approaching the state. The first is that of the Rousseau of the *Social Contract*. The second is that of the anti-nationalistic Rousseau. That this tension emerges from within the thought of a single figure suggests that it is very serious indeed. The intuition of the *Social Contract* is that, in the modern world, political legitimacy can really only be secured within a state. To this point, we have not yet devised some alternative arrangement to secure broad legitimacy, which is not

to say that most existing states do actually secure it. The state continues to exert a powerful hold on our imaginations insofar as it constitutes the horizon for most of our practical political activity. While Rousseau shared this intuition and teased out all of its difficult implications, his less responsible successors did not.

Confronted by this apparent impasse, Rousseau pursued alternatives outside the state. While he is no theorist of sub- or supra-national *institutions*, he nonetheless embodies the impulse that

leads to the pursuit of those arrangements. The challenge is therefore to make the non-political Rousseau political. It is, in other words, to take the insights that led Rousseau to turn away from the nation-state and to turn them into viable institutional arrangements. If Rousseau is open to criticism, it is on the grounds that he leaves these routes undertheorized. All the same, he gestures toward a refusal of the logic of state-making and governance as a way of avoiding becoming trapped by that same logic.

<sup>1</sup> See Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars have established that our conceptual framework and the background of our own thinking owes its source to the dueling traditions of Enlightenment and Romanticism. See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Jon Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake* (London: Routledge, 2007); Louis Dupré, *The Quest of the Absolute* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> On Robespierre's debt to Rousseau, see "On Political Morality" (1794) in *Virtue and Terror: Maximilien Robespierre* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Tradition* (ed. Hobsbawm and Ranger) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> On Herder's critical engagement with Rousseau, see Eva Pirrimäe, "Rousseau and the Origins of the 'Current Malaise of the World'" in *Herder and Enlightenment Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 63-96, and Nigel DeSouza, "Language, Reason, and Sociability: Herder's Critique of Rousseau," *Intellectual History Review* Vol. 22, no. 2 (2012): 221-240. Herder did not pull the idea of national genius from Rousseau, but he did select one prong of the Rousseauian dilemma.

<sup>6</sup> Herder, *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity in Philosophic Writings* (ed. Forster) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 394).

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2016), 67-8.



# STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY ON THE TORTURED EARTH:

## *Rachel Carson's Silent Spring and the Mass Politics of the Environmental Movement*

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### ABSTRACT

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) has long been recognized for its importance in catalyzing the popular environmentalist movement within the United States. The traditional framing of the text as a work of scientific writing, however, has effectively obscured its democratic import as literary nonfiction. As Carson notes in her acknowledgements, she was inspired by her friend Olga Huckins' letter to the editor of the *Boston Herald* regarding the death of all songbirds in her private bird sanctuary. Informed by this account, the larger narrative told in *Silent Spring* is similarly constituted by testimonies from concerned citizens across the country. Starting from this insight, this article aims to illuminate how Carson's work of environmental nonfiction prefigured and helped create the contentious democratic politics and standpoint epistemology of the national environmental movement. It concludes by considering the abiding relevance of *Silent Spring* today, when anthropogenic climate change has become a defining challenge for environmentalists around the world.

### INTRODUCTION

In personal correspondence from January of 1958, Olga Huckins of Duxbury, Massachusetts opened her letter to famed environmentalist Rachel Carson by recalling how she laughed upon learning that a mutual friend had called up the White House to give them "a piece of her mind" over their policies on pesticide spraying.<sup>1</sup> As long as anyone could call up and yell at their representatives, Huckins argued, democracy was not dead within the United States. While initially told as just a personal anecdote between friends, this letter, held by the Rachel Carson's Papers archival collection at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, offers an entryway into understanding the forms the early popular environmental movement took on within the United States. This story of an individual concerned citizen demanding environmental justice from

their elected officials finds countless parallels in the anecdotes that constitute so much of Carson's foundational work *Silent Spring*.<sup>2</sup>

While Carson's celebrated book is often classed as an example of popular science writing, this article will analyze it as a work of literary nonfiction, using a methodology of close-reading to attend to the literary forms it employs. More specifically, I will begin by contextualizing *Silent Spring* within the larger environmental movement and then proceed to analyze the text in detail, focusing on the origin story shared in the acknowledgements; the opening chapter, "A Fable for Tomorrow"; and the anecdotal evidence employed in the following chapters, as gathered from personal correspondence, fish and wildlife journal bulletins, letters to the editor, and other archival materials. Through studying the actual literary forms that Carson's writing employed, I

aim to highlight the democratic politics inherent to the popular environmental movement as well as the role of standpoint epistemology within environmentalism. Though I take up the American popular environmental movement as a case study, the questions I raise here also have larger implications for global environmentalism. In particular, they invite us to ask how we might reconcile the political divisions drawn by nation-states with the more basic connectivity characteristic of ecology, which refuses to conform to them.

## THE CONTEXT FOR *SILENT SPRING*

The impact of Rachel Carson's seminal work, *Silent Spring*, is hard to overstate. Published in 1962, the book presented the American public with a historical narrative of government pesticide spraying within the United States, beginning in WWII and spanning throughout the 1950s. By the time she wrote the book, Carson noted, nearly five hundred new chemicals were synthesized and coming into widespread use within the U.S. every year.<sup>3</sup> Over two hundred of these chemicals were developed specifically for the purpose of killing "insects, weeds, rodents, and other organisms described in the modern vernacular as 'pests.'"<sup>4</sup> Though Carson discusses many of these pesticides, it is Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, or DDT, an insecticide used commonly in agriculture, that became her major subject of concern.

First synthesized at the end of the 19th century, DDT's utility as an insecticide was discovered during WWII, when it was developed to protect soldiers from malaria, typhus, and other insect-borne diseases. As insect-borne disease was responsible for more deaths than combat at the time, the chemist Paul Hermann Muller was awarded the 1948 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work on DDT, which, alongside the atomic bomb, was credited with being a technological innovation that helped to end the war. Beginning in 1945, DDT accordingly became available to the public as an ag-

ricultural and household pesticide; it was also widely used in aerial spraying campaigns conducted by the Department of Agriculture as part of the "Dutch Elm Program." This governmental program was meant to target the elm bark beetle, an invasive species that carried the fungus responsible for causing Dutch elm disease, which was decimating elm tree populations across the continent. Aerial spraying of poison, however, proved to have far greater and unforeseen impacts upon the natural world. To take a seemingly mundane example, earthworms would not only eat the pesticide-coated leaves falling from the affected elms, but would also store greater concentrations of the poison within their bodies. In this way, the worms served as "toxic time-bombs" for the unassuming birds who would eat them in turn. As a result, birds like the American robin began to die out across the United States in staggering numbers.

In the face of this mass death of bird populations, Carson began working on *Silent Spring* as a way of retaliating against the misinformation about DDT's safety put forward by the chemical industry and supported by the Department of Agriculture. Upon the book's publication, Carson was met with a personal smear campaign, whose intent was to discredit her work; despite this, however, *Silent Spring* proved catalytic for the burgeoning popular environmental movement. The book went on to become a national bestseller for 31 weeks straight and, in so doing, helped launch a national conversation on ecology. Even more, *Silent Spring* informed both the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and the banning of DDT within the United States in 1972. The significance of *Silent Spring* is therefore obvious to students of both the environment and democratic movements.

Because of its content and impact, the book is usually classified as a work of popular science writing. However, *Silent Spring* is as much a work of environmental literature, and literary nonfiction, as it is a work of popular science. And when analyzed accordingly, with attention to its literary form, new insights into Carson's classic text emerge.

## AN ENVIRONMENTAL FABLE

While comprised mainly of well-researched chapters into the chemical industry and the consequences wrought by pesticide campaigns, *Silent Spring* establishes itself as working within a literary framework through its first chapter, “A Fable For Tomorrow.” Opening like a storybook might, this fable tells of a town in the “heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings.”<sup>5</sup> Everything changes, however, when a “strange blight crept over the area.”<sup>6</sup> This tragedy, Carson is quick to identify, is wrought by mankind, as “[t]he people had done it to themselves.”<sup>7</sup> To tell a fable is to present a short story with a clear lesson, and this fable’s lesson still applies in the present, speaking analogically to the impacts of what we would now term anthropogenic climate change.

The classification of the short story as a fable, however, is more interesting than it might at first seem. A fable is differentiated from a parable principally through the use of anthropomorphism as a literary technique. To anthropomorphize means to attribute human characteristics or behavior to the non-human, including nature. Within the environmental humanities, anthropomorphism is often read as a symptom of anthropocentrism, or the centering of the human within discussions of the environment, which often owes to a correlative belief in the unique value and priority of human life. Carson’s fable, however, does not anthropomorphize nature by imputing human-like action to it. Instead, Carson identifies her work as a fable through its assertion of non-human agencies. In other words, Carson turns the genre categorization of fables on its head by figuring nature as an equal “agent” who acts—whether or not human beings identify with or recognize themselves in it. Likewise, the moral of Carson’s fable, far from being anthropocentric, is in fact a warning about the material consequences of anthropocentrism.

When *Silent Spring* is read as a work of literary nonfiction, its opening fable thus becomes a use-

ful key for understanding the text as a whole. Following this fable, of course, Carson delves into the research on pesticides and assesses their impact, drawing on a wide range of research materials. Yet when viewed through the frame of the fable, each of these chapters may *also* be seen as contributing to a larger narrative in which human individuals come to the same moral realization the fable advances more simply and directly. In fact, each of the book’s subsequent chapters may likewise be analyzed formally, through a similarly literary lens. For present purposes, however, let me turn my focus to another, still earlier section of the text: its acknowledgments.

## WRITING BACK AND STAND-POINT EPISTEMOLOGY

When read through a literary framework, the acknowledgments to *Silent Spring* and the story they tell provide insight into the early environmental movement as a democratic mass movement “writing back” against official narratives. Originating in postcolonial studies, the concept of “writing back” refers to the assertion of new and revisionary perspectives that challenge established normative accounts of social, cultural, and political narratives. It is an inherently political act. And as employed here, writing back in an environmental context is similarly an act of political resistance—in particular, resistance by individual actors against institutional narratives.

As Carson explains it, *Silent Spring* is inspired by two letters her friend Olga Huckins wrote to Carson herself and to the editor of the *Boston Herald*.<sup>8</sup> In the latter of these letters, Huckins shared a personal account of how she came to recognize the harm industries had inflicted upon nature through the silences she heard in her own personal bird sanctuary in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Published as “Evidence of Havoc by Air Spraying” in the *Boston Herald*, Huckins’ letter forges the connection between the personal and the political through levying her own experience against official assurances of the safety of pesticides.<sup>9</sup> Writing in response to the testimony of Mr. R. C. Codman as part

of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts aerial spraying programs, Huckins critiques his claim that the mixture of fuel oil with DDT sprayed over Plymouth and Barnstable counties on Massachusetts' south shore was harmless: "These testers must have used black glasses, and the trout that did not feel the poison were super-fish."<sup>10</sup> She then goes on to recount how she soon observed the death of seven songbirds in the private bird sanctuary she maintained in her yard. The next day, Huckins recalls, she and her husband picked up three more dead bodies of birds they had cared for and fed over the years; the day after, they found another three scattered around a bird bath. Huckins even witnessed a bird drop suddenly from a branch, after which she explains she and her husband grew "too heartsick to hunt for other corpses."<sup>11</sup>

By sharing such a shocking account through the *Boston Herald*, Huckins effectively enabled others to recognize their own experiences in hers and to join a growing environmental movement. Indeed, she concludes her letter with a direct call for action, declaring: "Air spraying where it is not needed or wanted is inhuman, undemocratic, and probably unconstitutional. For those of us who stand helplessly on the tortured earth, it is intolerable."<sup>12</sup> Huckins' letter, in other words, was a (literal) act of "writing back," intended to catalyze further political action on behalf of the environment. And by crediting her friend's letters with catalyzing her own intervention in *Silent Spring*, Carson invites her book to be read as an aligned act of writing back, in the service of the same cause. *Silent Spring* carries Huckins' call to action forward, by similarly summoning its readers to enter into environmental resistance.

In addition to being an act of writing back, Carson's text can also be read as a work that advances a standpoint epistemology. As developed in feminist standpoint theory, a *standpoint epistemology* is an approach to human knowledge that understands it as constituted by subjective experience and constructed through intersubjective discourses. Such an epistemology, I would

suggest, informs *Silent Spring* as a whole. It is especially evident, however, in the chapters "Obligation to Endure" and "And No Birds Sing." In these chapters, Carson draws from a wide array of personal testimonies taken from Audubon Society press releases, bulletin board updates, wildlife journal articles, and nation-wide newspaper coverage of people reacting to birds quite literally falling from the sky. While organized around defined research topics, the chapters move internally from illustrative anecdote to illustrative anecdote. Much like how Carson and Huckins write back against more "expert" metanarratives, in other words, the anecdotal evidence gathered in *Silent Spring* insists upon the authority of lived experience as well as the value of analyzing personal experience for understanding reality. In this vein, for instance, Carson draws on a letter written to her by Harold S. Peters, a research biologist at the National Audubon Society. In the letter, Peters shares the story of an August 1959 "Knoxville incident" first told to him, in turn, by Mr. Sumner Dow, a biologist with the Tennessee Department of Conservation.<sup>13</sup> Dow's anecdote vividly describes families in Knoxville sitting down to eat at picnic tables that were covered in "snow-like granules" of granular dieldrin, another harmful pesticide, spread widely by jeep-mounted blowers.<sup>14</sup>

In the context of the early environmental movement, personal anecdotes (in this case, even second-hand anecdotes) like these take on a great importance for how they directly counter the promises made by both the chemical industry and government authorities about the safety of their spraying programs. Against the claims of official experts and authority figures, they assert the claims of concerned democratic citizens, founded upon their direct personal experience of a problem the former distort or refuse to even acknowledge. By grounding *Silent Spring* in these anecdotes, Carson thus advanced not only a standpoint epistemology, but arguably, a democratic one. In so doing, she helped provide a model for the nascent mass environmental movement that was to follow in the wake of her book.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Silent Spring* broke new ground in American cultural and political life not only by writing back against the chemical industry but also through helping to catalyze the environmental movement as a democratic movement grounded in standpoint epistemology. Carson's framing of her text as a work of literary nonfiction invites a close reading that attends more fully to its character not only as a popular scientific but an inherently political text. And seen through this lens, *Silent Spring* can be understood to write back against institutional narratives through asserting a democratically constructed discourse of lived experiences.

Read today, Carson's call to action echoes beyond the American environmental movement, finding new resonance in ongoing global con-

versations about climate reparations across the power differentials of national borders. In a time of anthropogenic climate change, the right to land as private property and even nation-states' claims to define their borders are both increasingly recognized as problematic, existing in tension with a more basic ecological connectivity that does not heed human borders. As calls for global climate reparations rise, the standpoint epistemology pioneered by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* holds fresh relevance, and potential. It suggests that we must attend ever more closely to the personal experiences of those experiencing the impacts of climate change around the world, especially those who bear the greatest brunt of its burdens.

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1 Olga Huckins to Rachel Carson, 27 January 1958, Box 84, Folder 1473, Rachel Carson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

2 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Mariner Books Classics, 1962).

3 Carson, *Silent Spring*, 7.

4 Carson, *Silent Spring*, 7.

5 Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1.

6 Carson, *Silent Spring*, 2.

7 Carson, *Silent Spring*, 3.

8 Carson, *Silent Spring*, viii.

9 Copy of editorial "Evidence of Havoc by Air Spraying" by Olga Huckins to the *Boston Herald*, 29 January 1958, Box 84, Folder 1473, Rachel Carson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

10 Editorial, Rachel Carson Papers.

11 Editorial, Rachel Carson Papers.

12 Editorial, Rachel Carson Papers.

13 Harold Peters to Rachel Carson, 7 August 1959, Box 43, Folder 812, Rachel Carson Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

14 Harold Peters to Rachel Carson, Rachel Carson Papers.



# RAILROAD VISUAL CULTURE, PLACE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore how the visual identities created by railroads as part of their infrastructure and branding extended the national identities of their governments through applying the concept of “place” at the level of the entire railroad corridor. In two case studies, I analyze how railroads across national and corporate contexts developed consistent visual and cultural references across their public extent, from advertising, to architecture, to branding; how specific design cues elevated long, often geographically diverse railroad lines out of their local contexts into a uniquely experienced and internally consistent place for riders; and how those design cues reflect both direct and indirect connections to (often aspirational) national identities. I first examine the Santa Fe Railroad’s standardized architecture in the early 20th century American West, connecting its stylized Mission architecture to its advertising celebrating Westward expansion. I then look at the British government’s redesign of British Rail’s (BR’s) image as a nationalized railroad, connecting BR’s 1950s rebranding to sweeping government pushes for modernization and rational post-austerity expansion. In comparing these two examples, I highlight the conceptual benefit of understanding railroad corridors as uniform, expansive places for personal interactions with national identity, before expanding on the political, economic, and cultural implications of national identity’s connection to railroad development across both privatized and nationalized systems. Lastly, I consider the possibilities of using place in studying other transportation networks, especially with an eye to the cultural, ideological, and political meanings built both around and within them.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the industrial age, societies have developed and organized railroads for many essential purposes. One symbolic and economic use, often demonstrated through the political influence associated with them, is that of national unity. Across different nations, railroads have inspired national unity by (often violently) providing pathways into new territory, developing economic potential via industrial and commercial investment, and quickening the convergence of urban and rural life from the interior to the exterior.<sup>1</sup> The expansion of both

national claims and *de facto* control over territory allowed by these developments has acted as a projection of state power and often corporate expansion as well. Imbued with identity-laden associations, subsequent mobility options for citizens offered as part of national transportation systems increased access to modernizing spaces, and thus to the nation.

But how have passenger railroads spread national understandings of unity and identity? How railroads have interfaced with their users and produced as a result a “railroad culture”<sup>2</sup> is relevant to not only railroad history but also

to the relationship between national identity and the public.<sup>3</sup> To examine the development of railroad culture, I inspect how railroads crafted their public-facing infrastructure with specific visual identities. I argue that as part of designing their visual identity to be recognizable and uniform, railroads turned their corridors into unified “places” separate from local geography. Within each such “place,” railroads crafted cultural notions of shared identity regardless of local geography which then were used by both the railroad and other actors to further notions of regional and national identity.

After defining “place,” as I borrow the term, I examine this development in railroads across two national contexts. First, I examine railroad expansion in the American West and the creation of standardized station architecture. I then turn to a British example of railroad culture and “place,” contrasting American understandings of the railroad to British visions of railroad management, meaning, and national identity. Ultimately, I show how analysis of railroad “place” may be adaptable to railroads in different national contexts, and I highlight the role of infrastructure in developing personal and cultural connections to national identity.

## **RAILROAD “PLACE”**

Before turning to railroads and their specific histories, it’s worth clarifying what I mean by the notion of “place” crafted by railroads. At first glance, it may appear strange to say a railroad could craft one unified “place” along its line; railroads, especially large ones, tend to traverse distances with large geographical, cultural, and political variations. But within both the fixed and mobile infrastructure of a railroad, where the public interfaces with its architecture, branding, and other visuals, the necessary trappings for the development of “place” emerge.

Working within Thomas Gieryn’s definition of a place as a space bounded by geographic location, structured by material form, and invested with meaning and value, a railroad corridor—here meaning the extent of the railroad’s property along its right of way—can be seen as an in-

dividual place.<sup>4</sup> It has one geographic location, connected by the long, narrow passageway to which the railroad infrastructure extends, with most public interaction occurring at the stations where people enter and exit the railroad’s territory as well as within the train cars. Each station has material form, including the station building, platform, and signage that is extended onto the train car via branding and design language. It is the repetition of these forms in each station and railcar that coheres the corridor into one extended place, not separate individual ones.

Control over these forms and their meanings, from evocative architecture to color schemes, is what I argue railroads have used to inform the significance of their places. Though specific users may invest more meaning in the stations they use than others, each location is broadly imbued with the same types of meaning and value; stations were/are places of social interaction, the possibility of mobility, and experience of technology. Gieryn briefly relates place to transit by pointing to transportation networks forming nodal “places” around transfer points (i.e., where transit lines intersect, places develop). This article, however, explores how transportation corridors inwardly form meaning.<sup>5</sup>

## **STATION ARCHITECTURE AND PLACE ON AMERICAN RAILROADS**

One unique case of railroad place development can be seen in the expansion of various railroad companies westward through the US in the second half of the nineteenth century. As railroads pushed to complete transcontinental routes, railroad stations formed new and important locales in the towns in which they began to appear. Railroad access was economically revolutionary for towns which already existed, and towns often relocated entirely for better, or more probable, connections to railroads.<sup>6</sup> Railroads brought mobility to rural areas, offering new opportunities for both rural settlers and traveling outsiders. As railroads spread, different companies sought out different identities and developed standardized design languages.<sup>7</sup> Such designs served the purpose of making their station recognizable no

matter the local context—recognizable, that is, as an entry to the “place” afforded by that railroad.

The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (ATSF) was one railroad that adopted such repeated designs. In the 1890s, ATSF’s engineering department created standardized architectural plans from which local stations were developed, stretching along the ATSF’s ultimate reach from California to Illinois. From the 1890s through the 1920s, ATSF stations made use of distinctive gabled dormers over bay windows, a unique architectural arrangement usually highlighted with the company logo on the gable’s end. This arrangement was replicated from smaller wooden country stations to brick county seat depots, entrenching a uniformity that made ATSF stations recognizable.

Stations were also adorned with Mission Revival architectural motifs, marking them as places imbued with Western-themed visual culture and history.<sup>8</sup> This cultural identity was continued in ATSF advertisements highlighting symbolic locations, mascots such as “Chico” the Native American boy, and the names of passenger trains such as “Super Chief” and “El Capitan.”<sup>9</sup> In creating stations to be both recognizably different from other railroads and evocative of Western history, the ATSF crafted its “place” as a transportation provider that was representative of both the possibilities of transportation and the appeal of westward national expansion. These stations also reinforced social conformity and standardization efforts that were experienced in gendered and racialized ways by means that ranged from constructing racially segregated station waiting rooms to implementing time zones via the station clock.<sup>10</sup>

Other railroads sought their own identities and often hired architects to maintain consistent visual styles across their territory. Through the turn of the twentieth century, the Boston and Albany Railroad commissioned over 20 Boston metro-area stations in Henry Hobson Richardson’s style, affirming their presence in the Boston area with a local flair that separated them from the numerous other railroads in the area.<sup>11</sup> Though

their creation of a shared place was less extensive and centered on one regional area it served both a practical and commercial purpose and ultimately made it easier for commuters to recognize, associate with, and navigate the railroad.

Ultimately, many railroads in the US developed their own visual identity for their passenger service. Station architecture was constructed to evoke motifs found across the US, reinforcing the dominance of railroads up to the mid-twentieth century. Rail lines developed their own “place” that was reinforced by branding and advertisements, uniformly timetabled service, and staff with recognizable uniforms. While railroads developed their own identities, they still exuded national connections through their culture. In addition to unifying distant, constantly evolving landscapes, railroads like the ATSF reinforced the ideology and apparent successes of Western expansion and American might by drawing on notions of American technological ingenuity as well.<sup>12</sup> By making passenger access to their systems possible, railroads reinforced not only their individual/corporate “place” but also their involvement, and thus the public’s involvement, in the unification and realization of the nation. This connection was made explicit in ads which beckoned the public to explore the nation through the company’s rails. Nationalist appeals grew even more emphatic during periods of wartime (for example, WWII war bond ads) and national celebration (for instance, the “American Freedom Train” tour during the 1976 Bicentennial).<sup>13</sup>

## **BRITISH RAILROADS, VISUAL DESIGN, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**

Whereas railroads in the US prioritized private interests, and thus sought to develop individual identities with their customers, Britain’s railroad history provides an example of railroads, “place,” and the nation converging in a nationalized system. In 1921, Britain’s 120 railroads were grouped into four large companies, each in control of one geographic region. After World

War II, Parliament further consolidated the system, nationalizing the railroads into British Rail (BR) with the Transport Act of 1947. Early branding of BR trains featured a lion that was later placed over a crown, which was meant to symbolize British might and heraldry.<sup>14</sup>

The largest effort to craft BR into a single, accessible, identifiably British “place,” however, came later in the 1960s. Under the lead of Richard Beeching, BR management sought to renew their place in British transportation and culture with a vast modernization of Britain’s rail system. The plan involved closing over 5,000 miles of railway lines while heavily investing in others, as well as replacing Britain’s steam locomotives with modern diesel and electric ones.<sup>15</sup> While Britain’s economy was steadily growing through the 1960s, the railway was suffering from significant debt, staff losses, and a general air of inefficiency. Modernization was intended to not only revitalize the railroad but send a message of triumph and emergence from austerity, reminding the public of the nineteenth century’s “railway mania” while pushing new principles of modernity and rational industrial growth.<sup>16</sup>

One strategy employed by BR was to develop a branding and design language that would unite all aspects of the railroad. According to design historian David Lawrence, Beeching set up a panel with the aim of “[moving] the railway away from a fragmented version of a ... picturesque Victorian plurality, away from the patchy application of regional colours, to a clean and coherent, sober and rational emblem of progress.”<sup>17</sup> The basic design to be repeated across the system featured four elements: a typeface (called Rail Alphabet), a station name plate shape, company colors, and a symbol affectionately named the “double arrows.”<sup>18</sup>

Steeped in emerging national principles of modernity and rationality, the new British Rail identity was applied to every window, wine glass, clock face, truck livery, and carpet. Stations from Northern Scotland to Cornwall all now carried one identity, turning the network into one approachable, predictable “place” in which rail

travel was to flourish again. Many old stations, imbued with local history but abandoned at the whims of the greater network’s finances, were demolished, while new ones were built to standard prefabricated designs.<sup>19</sup>

BR’s corporate identity, which gathered British railroads into a unified “place” imbued with national goals, has had a longstanding impact on British railway culture. While Britain’s railroads reprivatized in the 1990s, the double arrow logo is an immediate identifier of the railroad across Britain and the corporate identity itself has remained of nostalgic interest to the British public. In 2016, a reprint of BR’s Corporate Identity Manual raised £55,102 in crowdfunding, demonstrating a continued interest in the design language that transformed the British rail network into a “place.”<sup>20</sup>

## COMPARISON

Unlike America, where individual railroads sought their own identities and profits and then connected those to grander national imaginaries, British Rail’s design and placemaking was directly connected to, and guided by, a push to modernize, rationalize, and nationalize. Still, regulation tied to key American economic principles (for example the Commerce Clause in the Constitution) and industrial associations which patriotically promoted the railroad industry ensured that throughout the twentieth century private American railroads maintained a place for the nation in their individual identities.<sup>21</sup> The creation of Amtrak in 1971 expanded this relationship by subsuming almost all non-local rail travel into a single national network, yielding a passenger experience that is supposedly uniform from New York to Los Angeles, while at the same time expanding the government’s control over passenger rail funding and planning.

Although railroads in America and Great Britain had different types of ownership and relationships to their governments and users over the course of the twentieth century, that railroads in both countries used national identity as a part of

their place-construction is important. It reveals how infrastructure development has a tendency to promote overarching, nationally oriented identities over local ones, how capitalist systems encourage cooperation between state and corporate identities, and how states have gained influence and power through railroad development. It also begs the question of whether other transportation systems evince similar relationships, both to the state and to the creation of place along transit corridors.

## CONCLUSION

Whether private or controlled by the state, railroads across history have built their public image and crafted their physical reality to create recognizable, navigable, and meaningful spaces in their infrastructure. In crafting these places, railroads have not only appealed to national ideologies and reinforced the link between railroad passenger and nation; they have also created

long corridors of inward physical conformity tying geographical differences together within a unifying “place.”

While railroads across the world have been directly used for national goals, understanding how their cultural impact has linked users to the nation presents new opportunities for transportation studies of both the past and present. Other transportation corridors, from highways to walking paths, contain their own meaning and potential place as well. Meanwhile, understanding railroad corridors as places also presents further questions specifically for railroad history about the interplay between corporate, public, and national culture. Spaces developed by railroads may not have been transformed into places for everyone using their system, but understanding the meanings and memories they sought to create can give us a fresh perspective on their ideological, cultural, and national role.

<sup>1</sup> On railways and the collapse of spatial distance they created: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> A term which I broadly use to mean cultural perceptions of and responses to railroads, and the following relationships developed between users and their transit. For examples see: Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Studies in Popular Culture) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Various historians have connected railroad advertising campaigns to national identity. For an American example, see: Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 464-6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223453>.

<sup>5</sup> Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 472.

<sup>6</sup> H. Roger Grant, *Railroads and the American People, Railroads Past & Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 171.

<sup>7</sup> Charles W. Bohi, and H. Roger Grant, “Standardized Railroad Stations in Kansas: The Case of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe,” *Kansas History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 40. [https://www.kshs.org/publicat/history/1981spring\\_bohi.pdf](https://www.kshs.org/publicat/history/1981spring_bohi.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Bohi and Grant, “Standardized Railroad Stations in Kansas,” 42; Melissa Miers, “The Visual Culture of the Railroad in the Texas Panhandle,” *West Texas A&M University*, 2018, 2-3, <https://hdl.handle.net/11310/209>.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Strein, John Vaughan, and C. Fenron Richards, *Santa Fe: The Chief Way* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> H. Roger Grant, *Living in the Depot: The Two-Story Railroad Station*, *American Land and Life Series*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 17-18; Grant, *Railroads and the American People*, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, “Architecture for the Boston & Albany Railroad: 1881-1894,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 109-31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/990324>.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Ward, “Railroads in the American Context,” *Railroad History*, no. 171 (1994): 5-22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43521751>; Grant, *Railroads and the American People*, 248-289.

<sup>13</sup> On advertisements and national tourism, see Shaffer, *See America First*, 2001. On war advertisements, see Ric Jensen and Christopher Thomas, “To What Extent Did American Corporations Publish “Brag Ads” During World War II?” *Advertising & Society Review* 10, no. 2 (2009) <https://doi.org/10.1353/asr.0.0027>. On the American Freedom Train, an unbiased history has yet to be written. Its official narrative can be found here: Larry Wines, “The Story of the 1975 - 1976 American Freedom Train,” *The Story of America's Freedom Trains*, Accessed November 13, 2023. <https://www.freedomtrain.org/american-freedom-train-home.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Tanya Jackson, “In Search of An Identity,” in *British Rail: The Nation's Railway* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Chris Heather, “The Beeching Axe,” *The National Archives* (blog), March 27, 2023, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-beeching-axe/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Modernisation and Re-Equipment of British Railways,” *British Transport Commission*, 1955, [https://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/documents/BTC\\_Mod001.pdf](https://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/documents/BTC_Mod001.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> David Lawrence, *British Rail Designed, 1948-1997* (Hersham: Ian Allan Publishing, 2016), 108.

<sup>18</sup> Christian Wolmar, “Establishing an Identity,” in *British Rail: A New History* (London: Penguin Michael Joseph, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence, *British Rail Designed*, 82. For an excellent example of the cultural response to rural railway closure in Britain, see the 1953 Comedy film *The Titfield Thunderbolt*.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace Henning, “British Rail Corporate Identity Manual,” *Kickstarter*, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1863728218/british-rail-corporate-identity-manual>.

<sup>21</sup> William D. Middleton, George M. Smerk, and Roberta L. Diehl, eds, *Encyclopedia of North American Railroads* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 149-150.



# AMERICA NEEDS A NEW ORIGIN STORY

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## ABSTRACT

Every nation has an origin story, a narrative that weaves together its historical roots, subsequent journey, and envisioned future. The United States' most prevalent origin story begins with the migration of Europeans and the fight for independence from Britain, then transitions to its divinely sanctioned territorial expansion—a journey believed to elevate the nation to unparalleled greatness. But does this story need revising? This paper critically examines the U.S. origin story, a narrative that is centered on white migration and expansion. It explores how this story has guided beliefs and actions at individual, collective, and policy levels, and the consequent harm it has inflicted on Indigenous Americans. Moreover, it highlights the systemic erasure and whitewashing of Indigenous American history in education and mass media, which have further strengthened the prejudiced misperceptions promulgated by the United States origin story. These misperceptions not only affect contemporary beliefs and policies but also contribute to societal indifference toward the ongoing struggles of Indigenous Americans. To address these challenges and correct these misconceptions, this paper advocates for revising the American origin story, by creating a new narrative that combines factual history with emotionally compelling individual Indigenous experiences. A more inclusive and accurate understanding of American history, it suggests, may encourage policies that prioritize the United States' most marginalized groups and may ultimately lead to an even greater national unity.

## INTRODUCTION

For its entire history, the United States' "origin story," a retelling of the Biblical Exodus, has unified the nation.<sup>1</sup> In this narrative, divine providence enabled Puritans to leave Europe and settle in the "New World."<sup>2</sup> Here, the story goes, they overcame tyrannical rule, the harsh wilderness, and internal conflict to build a nation destined by God.<sup>3</sup> This narrative has instilled extraordinary national self-confidence, with almost half of Americans believing God has granted the United States a special role in human history.<sup>4</sup> And this confidence, in turn, has mobilized public support and guided national policy from Western expansion to the space race.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the same origin narrative has motivated and justified some of the

United States' darkest chapters, including the genocide of Indigenous Americans.<sup>6</sup> With a focus on Indigenous Americans, this piece will examine the significance of an origin narrative in shaping national identity and our attachment to it, the dangers of the United States' traditional origin story, the challenges in revising it, and the benefits of a new, more inclusive narrative.

## THE IMPORTANCE AND FUNCTION OF ORIGIN NARRATIVES

Origin narratives are essential to the formation of a national identity, and to sustaining attachment to it. Even in the smallest nations, most members will never personally know or inter-

act with each other.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, they have a shared understanding that they belong to the same, united political community. Origin narratives are one of the essential connective tissues that bind this imagined community together: they provide all the nation's members with a memorable story that defines its past and future, its values, its relationship with the land, and its distinctiveness relative to its neighbors.<sup>8</sup> By articulating these elements of national identity, origin narratives inspire and rally public support for national policy and action. The United States' traditional origin story, for instance, promoted westward expansion in the 19th century, overseas growth in the 20th century, and intervention in the Middle East in the 21st century.<sup>9</sup>

Such origin narratives, however, do not only shape public policy and collective perception; they also shape people's beliefs and behaviors even at the individual level. In my research at the Social Influence and Social Change Lab at Boston College, I have explored how historical narratives about Americans' pro-environmental actions influence individual beliefs and behaviors. I have found that these narratives motivate contemporary personal actions against climate change (for example, donating to advance emission regulations and joining climate activism organizations). But while origin narratives are pivotal in guiding national and individual actions, they do not always lead to inclusive or positive outcomes.

## THE DANGERS OF THE UNITED STATES' ORIGIN STORY

The United States' origin story, which centers on white Americans and Europeans, significantly marginalizes non-white groups, particularly Indigenous Americans. In this narrative, America's history is often perceived as beginning only with white colonization. Placing the starting point here, however, overshadows the agentic and diverse societies of Indigenous Americans, which are instead portrayed as mere elements of the wilderness that hindered American expansion.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Indigenous

Americans' inclusion in historical retellings is sporadic and typically oversimplified. Indigenous figures are depicted either as passive aides to white protagonists, like Sacagawea, Pocahontas, and Squanto, or antagonistic "savages" obstructing the United States' attempts to inherit its divinely gifted land. Even when versions of the U.S. origin story acknowledge the harms inflicted on Indigenous Americans and justify their resistance to those harms, the harms narrated are typically confined to the 18th and 19th century.<sup>11</sup> This restricted scope enables standard U.S. narratives to admit the country's historical abuse of Indigenous Americans, while designating it a mistake beyond which the nation has since progressed, further demonstrating American excellence.<sup>12</sup> But such narratives ignore the injustices Indigenous Americans experienced in the 20th century, which include the United States government's repeated violation of treaties with Indigenous tribes to take their land, the environmental degradation of remaining Indigenous lands brought on by U.S. infrastructure projects, and the forcible and deliberate breaking up of families and tribes.<sup>13</sup>

The biased and inaccurate portrayal of Indigenous Americans in the United States origin story is perpetuated through the nation's education system and mass media. Over three-quarters of U.S. schools do not cover Indigenous American history following the 19th century.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, more than half of the country's 50 states do not include a single Native American figure in their history education guidelines.<sup>15</sup> The remaining content that is taught primarily focuses on how Indigenous American history is relevant to U.S. expansion. Even when it addresses how U.S. expansion policies displaced or killed Indigenous Americans, it does so with little emphasis on the human impact and suffering caused by the displacement and death of Indigenous people.<sup>16</sup>

Mass media demonstrates similar biases through its lack of coverage of Indigenous Americans.<sup>19</sup> When they are featured in stories, the stories are usually retrospective, focusing on 17th- or 18th-century events and figures.<sup>17</sup> In the few instances where modern Indigenous Americans are covered in contemporary stories, they

are often portrayed as poor, uneducated, and reliant on substances, reinforcing existing negative stereotypes.<sup>18</sup>

This erasure of contemporary Indigenous Americans, which has its roots in the United States' origin story, is reflected in the current beliefs of contemporary Americans,<sup>19</sup> as well as the country's policies. Strikingly, 40% of Americans believe there are no living Indigenous Americans. The remaining majority of Americans, meanwhile, know very little about Indigenous Americans and are ignorant of the culture and diversity of Indigenous tribes in the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Even the country's elected officials are often unaware of tribal rights or the requirements of ongoing treaties that the United States made with Indigenous tribes.<sup>21</sup> Instead most Americans have synthesized contradictory stereotypes about Indigenous Americans. They are perceived as both too impoverished to survive without United States government money and as extremely wealthy from casino money, both connected with nature but also negligent in their care of reservation land.<sup>22</sup> This lack of awareness of Indigenous Americans, their history, and their contemporary experiences continues to shape national policies that inflict environmental, cultural, economic, and physical harm on Indigenous Americans (for example, the Keystone XL pipeline, the reduction of protected national monument land, and the underfunding of the Indian Health Services). Simultaneously, it causes most contemporary Americans to ignore or feel apathetic towards the continued harms Indigenous Americans experience.<sup>23</sup>

## CHANGING THE UNITED STATES ORIGIN STORY

Addressing the misperceptions formed from the United States' origin story is a formidable challenge. The misperceptions from this narrative are particularly ingrained, as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz discovered in teaching Native American studies at the college level. She finds that when she asks her students to draw the United States at the time of independence, they usually sketch the full landmass of the present-day country instead of just the original thirteen col-

onies.<sup>24</sup> It is only when Professor Dunbar-Ortiz draws attention to the scale of the difference between the original territory of the United States and its present extension that her students realize their inaccuracy. Though her students quickly acknowledge their error when called out on it, Dunbar-Ortiz acknowledges that it is merely one of many instances that reflect how deeply ingrained the principles of Manifest Destiny from the U.S. origin story are in Americans' minds.

One potential approach to addressing such an ingrained narrative is through an educational intervention. Addressing the U.S. origin story's factual shortcomings may combat the misperceptions Americans develop through their education and media consumption. For example, both education and media have erroneously taught that the American government conquered and assimilated Indigenous Americans and their land, thereby gaining ownership over both their territory and culture.<sup>25</sup> Yet military conquest played a comparatively small role in the United States' expansion into Indigenous land.<sup>26</sup> An intervention may reveal how national policies and treaties with Indigenous tribes were the primary means of obtaining land and how the United States violated some of these treaties, while also highlighting the ongoing existence of others to this day.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, even educating people about their misperceptions is not guaranteed to change their beliefs if it contradicts the national narrative. For example, white Americans continue to underestimate the size of the wealth gap between Black and White Americans.<sup>28</sup> Ongoing interventions have tried giving white Americans historical information about the wealth gap or about the lack of progress in achieving economic equity between Black and white Americans. Yet, these interventions do very little.<sup>29</sup> Instead, white Americans appear to cling tightly to their belief that the modern United States has achieved economic equity between races, despite exposure to new, contrary information.<sup>30</sup> Educational interventions to reshape the United States' origin story to accurately reflect the historical and ongoing experiences of Indigenous Americans may face similar challenges. How-

ever, there is still hope for correcting the record. Combining emotionally engaging, individual Indigenous experiences with historically accurate information may produce an intervention uniquely capable of addressing misperceptions about Indigenous Americans, and thus fostering a new origin story. In the absence of emotional appeals to individual human experiences, people are usually apathetic to or overwhelmed by the prospect of having to make meaningful changes to their beliefs and behaviors.<sup>31</sup> Research I have conducted in the Social Influence and Social Change lab reinforces this, demonstrating that narratives which blend factual data with personal stories are particularly effective at promoting change. Whether the issue is climate change or traffic safety regulation, we find that combining personal narratives with new educational information facilitates meaningful shifts in individuals' beliefs and behaviors.

Furthermore, there is already preliminary evidence that these kinds of personal narratives are particularly effective at addressing misperceptions about Indigenous Americans.<sup>32</sup> Audiences who receive these narrative interventions about Indigenous Americans are very receptive to the stories and very willing to update their beliefs. Beyond the individual level, exposure to these new narratives has also increased support for policy changes, such as the movement to ban Indigenous American mascots. In all these cases, the employment of personal narratives enables interventions to move beyond mere re-education by emotionally engaging audiences, leading to more profound changes in beliefs and attitudes and showing true potential to reshape public action and, down the line, national policy.

## CONCLUSION

The future well-being of Indigenous Americans is crucially tied to the narratives we hold as a nation. With climate change posing a growing threat, particularly to Indigenous lands, the current American story risks perpetuating neglect and indifference toward their struggles.<sup>33</sup> A revised origin story that acknowledges and integrates the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Americans can foster greater empathy and support, ensuring they are not left behind in national efforts to address these challenges. Changing our origin story is not just about correcting the past; it's about shaping a future where all Americans, including Indigenous communities, are recognized, respected, and included in the nation's progress. This narrative change is a crucial step towards a more just and inclusive America that truly reflects its diverse history and people.

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# THE SOUTH OF OUR IMAGINATION<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

I have always thought that the material that I work on should be delivered in the North, and this is the first time I have had the chance to do that. I took the Clough Center's theme at its word in terms of "attachment to place," so this evening I would like to talk about what I call "The South of our Imagination." The attachment to this place and the consequences of our attachments to the region are both very real but also imagined. The consequences of attachments to the imagined South have often been detrimental to the people who live in the region, but also to American society.

White Americans have long been attached to the South as a place for various reasons, but race tops the list. And when I say that, what I am alluding to is that the South has been conveniently used by non-Southerners for their projections about racism, which much of American society shares with the region. "This doesn't happen here, it happens there." It is not simply that Americans, as Imani Perry writes in *South to America*, have laid the burden of our national sin of racism at the door of the South, but that in doing so, the result has been a mis-narration of history in American identity. What the attachment to race looks like varied over time from slavery to Jim Crow to the civil rights era. We often characterize these projections under the label of Southern exceptionalism, which is its own myth. Yet as the editors of a book of essays titled *A Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Matt Lassiter and Joe Crespino, explained, the belief in an exceptional South has encouraged distortions and overgeneralizations about the nation's otherwise liber-

al traditions, especially by compartmentalizing themes of racism and political conservatism to one section of the country. Now, while the focus of that book is on the post-World War II South, it is still useful to go back in time prior to that war, when white Americans seemed captivated by the myth of the romantic Old South, the stately mansions, the leisurely pace of life, the wealth—and an enslaved workforce.

## THE "OLD SOUTH" AS AMERICANS IMAGINED IT

The fondness for the Old South began with plantation novels of the 1830s and lasted well into the phenomenon of Hollywood films set in the Old South in the 1930s: a full century of attachment to the Antebellum South through the myth-making of popular culture. The key component of this attachment was a vision of Black people as inferior, as individuals who needed the steady hand of a white man, a vision that white Northerners shared with their Southern counterparts. In fact, in the very decade that a more robust abolitionist movement emerged in the North, in the 1830s, Northern publishers began publishing plantation novels and minstrelsy was born in the City of New York, first by Thomas "Daddy" Rice, who played the minstrel character known as Jim Crow, which is a black-face performance of an enslaved African American dressed in tattered clothing.

A more fully fledged minstrel show was developed by the Ohio-born Daniel Emmett, who is also the composer of the song, "Dixie," which we most associate with the South, and his group, the Virginia Minstrels, who also first played in New

York City. The racial caricatures of the minstrel show and interpretation of enslaved people from the South, while meant to entertain white audiences, was a larger statement about how white Northerners regarded these individuals as inferior beings. Minstrelsy maintained its popularity throughout the 19th century. It became popular on the vaudeville stage, and as late as the 1940s was being performed in Hollywood films. A derogatory term was applied to songs that caricatured African-Americans and played in the parlors of Americans' homes, extending those stereotypes into popular music. And while some of them were written by Black artists like Ernest Hogan, white theater owners controlled the kind of music that got played in their theaters. Hogan was a musician of ragtime, and a lot of these songs are done in ragtime. Over 600 of them were published, and this sheet music reinforced negative stereotypes of Black Americans, not only through its lyrics but also in the artwork on the cover of the sheet music itself. This kind of music sold really well and was performed in fabulously popular shows. The soundtrack of many films also included these kinds of songs.

This attachment to the imagined South expressed how white Northerners felt about freedmen and women and aligned with their own racism and the rise of Anglo-Saxon supremacy that raged across the country in the late 19th century, alongside social Darwinism. Why, for example, is a plantation recreated in Brooklyn, New York in 1895? The ad for it refers to "Black America," but everything about it speaks about Southern people. They have recreated a plantation along with slave cabins and have performances for people living in Brooklyn to pay 25 cents to see. Then there are the Tin Pan Alley songs of the early 20th century, most of which were written by immigrants to the US who had never traveled South and who made Dixie songs popular. In these songs, the imaginary South becomes a region where Black Americans know their place, and those who may have migrated up to the North still long for Dixie in these lyrics. There is a series of "mammy" songs as well. In fact, Carolina Mammy was portrayed by an Italian-American actor from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania named Tess Gardella, who also played "Aunt Jemima" on the radio and in short films and was a cast member of "Show Boat."

All of this attachment to ideas of the Old South is full-blown in *Gone with the Wind*. It is painful to watch, but *Gone with the Wind* has everything about the Old South that people thought was real. It has the large plantation house, the Southern belle, the Black mammy and the oafish characters played by Black actors. All of that is in the first few minutes of that film and sets the stage for everything else that will follow. It was the first real blockbuster film and there were all sorts of commercial tie-ins: *Gone with the Wind* dresses, Rhett Butler's writing pen—Macy's in New York even decorated the windows with *Gone with the Wind* items. It was very much part of our national imagination about the South in the 1930s, even though this was a view of the South from before the Civil War. Black scholars and journalists criticized these media stereotypes and pleaded for the media to change how African Americans were portrayed. Claude Barnett, who was the founder of the Associated Negro Press, observed that while there was plenty of work in Hollywood for Black actors and actresses, most were still being offered parts, as he said of, "servants, comedians, chicken thieves, razor wielders, believers in ghosts and the supernatural." He argued that such stereotypes were detrimental to Black morale across the nation because they sustained an image of African Americans as inferior. Those kinds of Southern stereotypes had a negative impact on a nascent civil rights movement. How could a civil rights movement make any kind of headway when the most influential form of popular media did not allow Black men and women to be seen as anything other than servants, slaves, or entertainers?

These images not only helped to create an attachment to the Old South but drove a tourist industry to the South in the 1930s, even during the Depression when people from the North and the Midwest went in search of what one travel writer described as "the land of Uncle Remus." Founded in 1932, the Natchez pilgrimage promoted the pilgrimage to antebellum homes. Though the "pilgrimage" has only recently attracted the historical scrutiny it deserves, at the time it was hugely popular. During its first year, it attracted 4,000 people, and by the time of the *Gone with the Wind* craze, 50,000 people from across the country were going to this little, tiny town on Mississippi River to get their glimpse of the Old South.

## JIM CROW, THE “LOST CAUSE,” & THEIR ABIDING LEGACY

There is also an attachment to the South in terms of how Jim Crow operated. In the imagination of many Americans living elsewhere, “it happened ‘there’ and not here.” Television news reels and other media certainly contributed to this idea, in part, even through the images they circulated of white Southerners harassing (or worse) civil rights activists. To be sure, the South was much more violent in terms of trying to preserve segregation in the region. But similar images from the North are also to be found. We can look at these images [refers to slides], for instance. If you did not know that you were looking at a White Castle restaurant in the Bronx, you might think that it was a place in Alabama, with a Confederate battle flag in the window. White Americans’ attachments to the mythical, exceptional South in popular culture and plantation tourism—and even the way they imagined the modern civil rights movement—reinforced the blinders they were wearing about what was going on in their own backyard. And just as had happened in the South, this did untold damage to racial progress.

White Southerners and their attachments to their own history and to the Old South became part of the region’s larger mythology known as the “Lost Cause.” In the post-Civil War era, white Southerners held tightly to the belief that compared to the North, the Old South had had the superior civilization, and that military defeat during the war was simply a matter of being outnumbered and lacking the war material that had supplied Northern armies. They refused to concede anything more than military defeat in the end of slavery. They linked their defeated calls for independence to that of the American Revolution, and believed that secession to form a separate Confederate nation was both a just and sacred cause.

Edward Pollard, who was a Richmond journalist and editor, made very clear what the war did not determine for the White South. “It did not decide negro equality,” he wrote, “it did not decide negro suffrage, and it did not decide state’s

rights. The Southern people—meaning white people, of course—still cling to their old views in these areas,” he insisted. Pollard was essentially making the case for white supremacy. White Southerners’ attachment to place was always tied to slavery, but in the aftermath of war it was essential to maintain white supremacy by any means necessary, including violence. And the Lost Cause narrative was essential in its implementation and perpetuation in the culture of the South.

The Lost Cause mythology, like other mythologies, is made up of many myths: the myths of states’ rights, not slavery, being the reason for the war, for instance. And these myths not only functioned to revise the narrative of defeat into a noble cause—literally placing it on the pedestal, in the case of Confederate monuments—but also pedaled in falsehoods about faithful slaves and about the Ku Klux Klan as some savior of the South from “Negro rule.” Since the Klan was mainly made up of former Confederate soldiers, the war-torn violence that was inflicted on freed men and women during Reconstruction became a means by which they could claim a bastardized victory of sorts. The Confederate monuments are the most tangible expression of the Lost Cause mythology. The vast majority of them, of course, went up during the period of Jim Crow as Southern states reduced the 15th Amendment to words on paper and excised Black men and their right to vote from the political sphere. The Confederate monuments that appeared during that period served white supremacy, especially since most of them were a presence on the grounds of courthouses, which are the local seats of democracy. Black citizens



Professor Karen Cox delivering her Clough Distinguished Lecture, “The South of Our Imagination.”

in these communities were (and in many places, still are) relegated to second class status in the very buildings where they ostensibly register to vote, forced to pass by this symbol of white supremacy as a reminder of that status.

The first public challenges to the monuments came with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and especially the Meredith March in 1966. When the March arrived at a Confederate monument on the grounds of a courthouse or in the center of a town in Mississippi, the marchers circled the monument and placed an American flag, reclaiming the space for civil rights and democracy. Throughout the region there were an estimated 800 monuments, of which maybe 100 or so are now gone. But that means almost 700 are still sitting in the places they always have been. In more recent years the issue of Confederate iconography has taken center stage in our national conversations, first in 2015, then in Charlottesville in 2017, then again after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and once more after January 6th, 2021. By then it was no longer just about the South. Since 2017, Americans have turned their gaze inward to their own communities, no longer just looking at the South as the one place where violent racism happens, but also scrutinizing their own communities for monuments that are problematic in terms of what they represent. Communities around the country have been looking behind the curtains, shaking out their carpets to see what they had. To take a local example, there was a Confederate monument on an island in Boston Harbor until 2017. On university campuses, the question was asked whether campus buildings named for slave holders should be renamed. The answer at several Ivy League schools has been “yes.”

In the South, however, the response to this re-examination of the past has been to double down on the attachments to Confederate monuments and the Lost Cause by passing monument laws that prevent removal. These so-called Heritage Protection Acts were passed in direct response

to the activism that emerged after Dylann Roof’s murderous rampage in a Charleston church. Then the pressure falls on each community to decide how they want to respond. Confederate monuments are very much local projects, so everything is taken up on a case-by-case basis. The reality is that a lot of people in the community who do not want to give up their monument will wage a battle. If laws say you cannot replace or remove monuments, what do you do? People have to be creative. Near Asheboro, North Carolina, local authorities spent \$38,000 to build a fence around their monument to protect it. In response, the NAACP there printed out a big banner that stretched the length of the courthouse grounds, with long lists of slave names, accompanied by prices and ages. They only had it up for a brief moment, but the list took the attention away from the monument and put it somewhere else, where it better serves the community. The Mellon Foundation has recently promised \$500 million to fund projects that will help create a different narrative, with programming and counter-monuments.

## CONCLUSION

The story of attachment to place in “the South of Our Imagination” is complicated. For most of our nation’s history it has been an attachment with real world consequences for people of color, an attachment infused with white supremacy and, even now, a desire to control Black lives. I acknowledge my white privilege as a white Southerner living in the South, which protects me from that experience, from that kind of hatred. But as a white Southerner, I also feel a responsibility to expose it for what it is. That is something I have tried to do in my public writing, through my public speaking on the subject of Confederate memorialization, and lastly through my work to assist plaintiffs in their efforts to remove Confederate monuments in their community. My own attachment to the region is to write truthfully about its past, to reckon with the history of racism, and to be an ally in the effort to make it a better place for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> This piece is a slightly edited version of the Clough Distinguished Lecture Prof. Cox delivered at Boston College on December 7, 2023, as part of the Clough Center’s series on “Attachment to Place in a World of Nations.” Note that Prof. Cox used slides to illustrate some of the examples to which she refers; they are not reprinted here.



# V. EXPLORING ATTACHMENTS TO PLACE

## Reflections on a Field Visit to Mexico

A delegation of twelve Boston College graduate students and four faculty members — from political science, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, law and theology — had the opportunity to spend part of the semester break on a field visit to Mexico, through a Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy initiative that examines political geography and its impact on contemporary democracies.

Over the course of one week in Cuernavaca and Mexico City, they explored this year's Clough Center theme of "Attachment to Place in a World of Nations" through historic site visits and expert interviews with a range of interlocutors from Mexican civil society, academia and politics. This initiative was made possible through the support of the Office of the Provost and Dean of Faculties.

# 1. FIRST ENCOUNTERS

## AN INTRODUCTION TO MEXICO

Trystan Loustau  
Psychology

An opening briefing with Prof. Antonio Ortega Ayala provided a comprehensive review — a *coyuntura* lecture — of Mexican history beginning with the political and cultural life of Indigenous people before the Spanish conquest of the 1500s and continuing until the present day. The overview underscored two key themes that we would see reflected again and again throughout the rest of our trip. The first was *mestizaje*, the mixing of pre-Hispanic Indigenous peoples and cultures with Spanish people and culture, which has shaped Mexican identity over centuries. The second was the incredibly complicated history of colonization, revolution, and transfers of power



*Trip leader Antonio Ortega Ayala walks the Clough delegation through the history of Mexico in his opening “coyuntura” lecture.*

that paved the way for strong cultural pride in Mexico, yet also revealed deep cynicism about government and rampant economic inequality.

## WALKING THROUGH HISTORY IN CUERNAVACA

Stephen de Riel  
History



*The Chapel of Santa María is the simplest of the three historic churches in the Cathedral Plaza of Cuernavaca, which dates back to the 1520s.*

A walking tour of Cuernavaca gave us the opportunity to explore how the themes of Mexican history we had learned about in the morning briefing were visible in the city’s built environment. The first site we visited, the **Cuernavaca Cathedral**, gave us the opportunity to reflect on the history of Mexico’s colonization, as well as the evolution of Catholicism within Mexican culture and politics. We noted the church’s colonial-era defenses and location away from the main square, signifying the

long history of hostility between Catholic and indigenous worldviews. Yet today the remodeled cathedral reflects its more recent history as one of the most important sites of liberation theology, where Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo fought for social justice and human rights.

Later, at the palace of Cortés, we explored how the meaning of place has been physically rewritten and layered through Mexican history. Built from the stones of an Aztec tribute center destroyed by colonizers, **Hernán Cortés's castle** literally em-

bodies the history of invasion and Indigenous destruction. At the same time, it also presented us with questions about how Mexico ought to represent the undeniable Spanish influence upon its past—and present—identity. Inside the Palace, Diego Riviera's massive, and controversial, mural offered one answer to that question. It provided us with an evocative visual representation of how Mexico's colonial and indigenous cultures came to form a Mestizo, uniquely Mexican identity through colonial violence, religious expansion, and modern state building.

## 2. SITES OF COMMUNITY, ANCIENT & MODERN

### A VISIT TO XOCHICALCO

Yinan Xu

Sociology

The visit to the **pyramids of Xochicalco** offered a profound exploration of the historical and sociocultural dimensions of Mesoamerican civilizations, as well as the religious meanings embedded in the ancient architecture. The site's architectural grandeur and strategic placement on a hill reflected the intricate power structures, cosmological beliefs and religious practices of the builders' civilization. Xochicalco's urban layout, characterized by massive pyramids, ball courts, and residential complexes, was organized vertically, to reflect the social hierarchy that governed society: elites literally at the top, and largely out of sight from the masses at the bottom. The precise alignment of the city's buildings with celestial events, meanwhile, suggests a spiritual connection to the cosmos, emphasizing the role of celestial bodies in religious rituals and the delineation of sacred time.

At another level, Xochicalco's historical time-

line, marked by influences from the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, and Mayan civilizations, helped me cultivate a broader understanding of cultural diffusion and assimilation. As a sociologist, I was inspired by the amalgamation of architectural styles and cultural elements to reflect more closely on the processes of cultural exchange, adaptation, and the construction of a collective identity over time. The site also moved me to think about how religion and politics each foster a sense of collective identity, and how both interact with each other.



*The base of a pyramid in the central plaza of the ancient city of Xochicalco.*

# A TRIP TO THE MARKET

Marcus Trenfield

Psychology

On the second day of our itinerary, we visited a **large market in Cuernavaca**. Initially, the market's size was overwhelming. It was a massive collection of merchants in stalls, mats, and on foot selling a wide array of goods that needed to be negotiated for. Yet our guide, Professor Antonio Ortega, explained that this market wasn't just a commercial space but a social hub. It's common to see sellers' children playing in arcade areas, and people weren't there solely for shopping; they also came for the barbershops, salons, meeting spaces, and prayer shrines.

Professor Ortega also spoke to some of the threats facing these markets. Many of Mexico's poorest people work in informal sectors like the marketplace, where financial exchanges are untaxed and minimally monitored by the government. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic hit these markets particularly hard. And even as the pandemic waned, globalization continued threatening the market as a community

social space. For example, Walmart's presence in Mexico continues to grow. While Walmart provides fixed prices and a cleaner storefront to purchase goods, it offers a marketplace focused on profit rather than being a community-centered space. Interestingly, the same forces of globalization are threatening more communal marketplaces in the United States. Though starker in Mexico, the decline of physical marketplaces as community hubs is a worldwide phenomenon brought on by globalization.



*A traditional marketplace (mercado) in Cuernavaca.*



# 3. THE PAST IS PRESENT: MEXICO CITY

## CHAPULTEPEC CASTLE & MUSEO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA

Ophelia Wang

English



*One of the beautiful patios in the Castillo de Chapultepec.*

After three days in Cuernavaca, our group traveled to Mexico City. Our visit there began with visits to the **Castillo de Chapultepec** and the **Museo Nacional de Antropología**. Today, Chapultepec castle is home to the National Museum of History, showcasing various exhibits that highlight Mexico's history, art, and culture. It was home in the 1860s to the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I, whose living quarters have been preserved for view from the wraparound marble terrace. The National Museum of Archaeology, meanwhile, houses an extensive collection of archaeological and anthropological artifacts from pre-Hispanic civilizations that inhabited the region now known as Mexico. Its exhibits span thousands of years and showcase the cultural achievements of civilizations such as the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, Zapotec, and many others.

While going through these exhibits, I found many items interesting to the extent that they are almost “memeable” to modern eyes. At first I felt bad for finding some of these historical artifacts funny, but then I reflected further. We of-

ten think that the lives and cultures and rituals of people who lived centuries before us were noble and mystic, but is that all they were? Looking at the daily objects that they had touched and used, I felt a weird sense of vicinity that connected all of our lives together, even though they are centuries apart. It reminded me of the continuous influence of pre-Hispanic culture and civilization in Mexico, the brutal interruption of colonial invasion, and the subsequent struggles of independence. Modern Mexico derived from all of these events, not just one single moment. It also reminded me that research in the humanities, in the end, is about humans. And as humans, even though we might live in different temporalities, we might not be that different.



*The spectacular Aztec sunstone, recovered from the historic center of Tenochtitlan, is perhaps the most famous artifact at the Museo Nacional de Antropología.*

# THE HEART OF MEXICO, THEN AND NOW

Casey Puerzer

Political Science

Our walking tour of Mexico City's historic center began at the **Museo del Templo Mayor**, the pyramid which was once the religious heart of the Aztec empire. As our guide, Carlos Sánchez Gómez, pointed out, it was built "onion-style," that is, layer by layer over a period of hundreds of years. But Templo Mayor is now only a ruin; it was dismantled by the Spanish early in their conquest of Mexico. And the stones that Aztec priests and emperors once climbed now adorn the southern façade of the **Metropolitan Cathedral's Tabernacle**. After exploring the Cathedral and the other buildings in the Zócalo, Mexico City's massive central plaza, we explored Avenue Cinco de Mayo, ending our tour at the magnificent **Palacio de Bellas Artes**.

The narrated walk through downtown revealed the remarkable plurality of human experiences that Mexico City has hosted. **The Zócalo**, home to the Templo Mayor and the Metropolitan Cathedral, has been the site of Aztec cer-

emonies as well as Catholic ones and political protests both of the left and right. It is the proper home of Mexican Nationalism, but its government buildings have flown Spanish, American, and French Flags. Places are not singular; they are vessels for meaning that are filled by those inhabiting them. And meanings are not random; they are the consequences of history and politics, as much as personal experiences.



*The Palacio de Bellas Artes, a masterpiece of neoclassical architecture.*



*The original Sanborns restaurant and department store, with the Torre Latinoamericana looming above.*

# 4. VOICES FROM THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

## NACHO RAMÍREZ

Kelvin Li

Philosophy

On our third day we met community leader Ignacio “Nacho” Torres Ramirez in the **Indigenous land of the Nahua** to learn about their struggles for land and conflicts with the Mexican government. In several ways, Nacho’s talk highlighted the points of tension between the indigenous Nahua peoples and the Mexican government. For example Nacho emphasized how land in the Nahua community is considered communal, which sharply contrasted with the developmentally driven, capitalistic conception of land as privately owned, economically exchangeable, and easily exploited. The Nahua, in his account, have long sustained a symbiotic and even spiritual relationship with their land, water, and forests, but this relationship has been severely damaged by national and global development projects, in which they were denied the right to participate in the decision process.

Another theme that emerged from his talk was the discontinuity between the Nahua’s identity and that of the modern Mexican state. Nacho, who started the talk by describing his Spanish name as the “slave name”, repeatedly emphasized the wish of some indigenous communities to gain greater autonomy from the Mexi-

can government. The underrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Mexican government has contributed to this problem, but it is also a more complex issue, because of the accumulated historical injustices that have been done to indigenous communities. As Mexico’s election season looms, it is uncertain whether these issues will be addressed in a way that encourages the incorporation of indigenous communities into the Mexican national project - or not.



*The Clough delegation poses with Nahua community leader Ignacio “Nacho” Torres Ramirez (second from right).*

# DON LÁZARO RODRÍGUEZ

Alexa Damaska

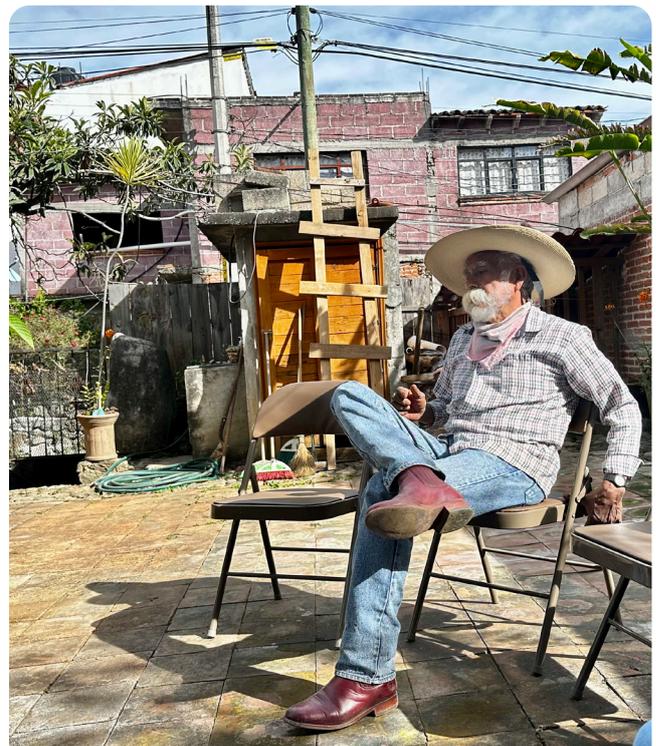
Sociology

On Wednesday morning, we had the opportunity to visit the home of Don Lázaro Rodríguez, the founder of **Los Tejones** (“**The Beavers**”), a **grassroots environmental group** which he founded decades ago. There Don Lázaro spoke to us about the organization’s work protecting the land in his town, Tepoztlán, from cooptation and exploitation. Efforts to develop the land, he explained, involve a complex (and often conflictual) negotiation among various stakeholders, including community members, churches, tourists, government, and business, and disproportionately tend to benefit the latter groups. Ultimately, he maintained, the community wants development but is opposed to that which destroys traditional ways of life and benefits only the powerful few. He accordingly described how Los Tejones have responded to various potential threats, from golf course and highway development projects to negligent campers, organized crime, and the loss of communal lands to wealthy outsiders.

Many of the readings we have discussed in the Clough Doctoral Seminar this year have centered on the variety of stakeholders vying for the ability to define place. Our conversation with Don Lázaro about the history of his activism in Tepoztlán grounded these ideas in concrete reality. The opportunity to learn about how these dynamics play out in a specific place, from an advocate for the stakeholders with the least leverage in development decisions, illuminated the unwavering effort required to pro-

tect local communities from predatory investment that displaces long standing residents.

Learning about the history of Los Tejones also shed light on the practical aspects of organized resistance, especially the challenges of cultivating communal participation. Today, Don Lázaro worries that young people in the community feel less rooted to place, because of their disinterest in the community’s traditions and the churches that often sustain them.



*Don Lázaro Rodríguez, founder of Los Tejones, a decades-old environmental group in Tepoztlán*

# 5. CENTERS OF POWER

## LA MAÑANERA

Jonathan Laurence

Director, Clough Center

The pomp of the **Palacio Nacional** is overwhelming, seeming to extend temporally and spatially in every direction. Time and place are tightly intertwined in the executive offices of any elected president, but especially here. Built from Aztec ruins in colonial style, its façade runs two soccer fields, commanding over the largest public square in the hemisphere. If the trappings of chief executive office are intoxicating, however, a constitutional term limit sobers its occupant. The immensity of presidential power is fleeting: the voters' message self-destructs on cue.

A window of opportunity to observe the current inhabitant of the national palace came during the *mañanera*: an early-morning audience with the charismatic President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Known as AMLO, he spends the first two hours of each day basking in the attention of the national press corps. After multiple military checkpoints, lengthy credentialing and clipboard wrangling, one suddenly sits unencumbered, on pandemically-spaced chairs. A few meters of empty stage separate him from the assembled journalists, with no visible security aside from a velvet rope. Entering the ballroom, the silence is striking. In this hushed sanctum at the center of the megalopolis of Mexico City, journalists neither bustle nor hustle.

AMLO sets the tone for the desired coverage: "With eight months and ten days left, we're going to end this well." He holds forth for two hours, stopping only a handful of times to solicit a formal question. Aware his days in the national palace are numbered, he ruminates



aloud about his place in the gallery of Mexican chief executives. The spotlight would fade soon but for now, there was plenty of room to fill with presidential communications.



# THE NATION IS FIRST

Elijah Rockhold

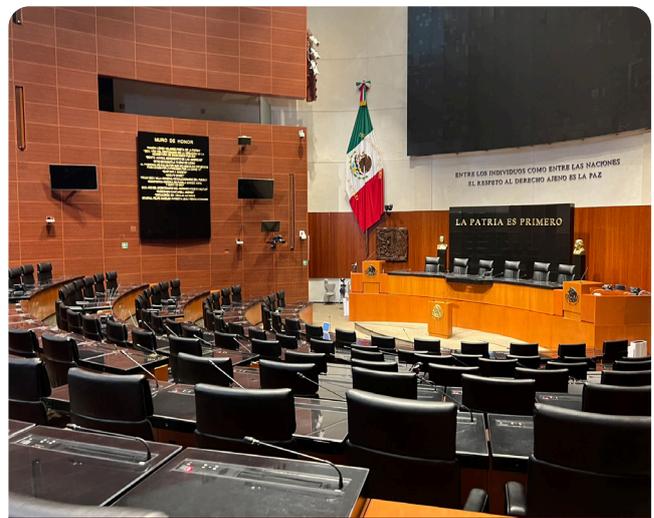
Law

As part of the Clough Center’s annual theme, we have investigated the spaces and places of political power. How does a government, particularly a powerful government body like the Senate, place itself within the narrative of its nation—and how is that narrative reflected in the physical spaces it occupies? Through our private tour of the **Cámara de Senadores del Congreso de la Unión**, home to Mexico’s national Senate, we were able to explore that question up close.

The Senate building is beautiful. It is a modern building, built in 2011 after the Senate outgrew its older, 19th-century trappings. It is the only building expressly constructed for legislative purposes in the country. The new campus comprises several buildings for offices, committee rooms, and the main Senate chamber, where we spent most of our time. In the chamber, the 128 members sit facing a podium where people stand to speak on issues before the entire body, with a Board of seven officers sitting, elevated, behind them. Looming above the entire chamber are the words “The Nation is First”—a reminder, our guide told us, of where the Senators’ loyalties should lie.

The seal of Mexico is also conspicuous throughout the chamber, in large, bronze plaques flanking the bench where the Board sits, and on the front of the podium. The seal of Mexico is also visible throughout the chamber, in large, bronze plaques flanking the bench where the Board sits, and on the front of the podium. The seal, a Mexican Eagle eating a rattlesnake atop a cactus, comes from Aztec legend and holds significance for the nation’s identity, representing the blending of the country’s ancient, Indigenous roots with traditions from its Spanish colonizers.

A slim skylight on the ceiling yields a view of a massive Mexican flag, flying atop the building and over the entire Senate square. It is the first thing the speaker addressing the Senate sees when he or she looks up: a further symbolic reminder, embodied in the building’s very architecture, that the nation is first.



*The central chamber of Mexico's new Senate building, where the country's highest legislative body meets.*



# 6. A PLACE FOR THE PLACELESS

## FINDING HOME ACROSS BORDERS

Meghan McCoy

History

Toward the end of our stay in Mexico, our group visited **Casa Tochan**, a temporary shelter for migrants stopping in Mexico City for rest, shelter, and care as they planned the next stages of their journey from their home countries to wherever they hoped to later settle. Tochan, which means “Our House” in Nahuatl, has hosted people from all over the world, including the Caribbean, Central and South America, and even Afghanistan. Guests at Tochan receive not only three meals a day and a place to sleep but also access to medical care, social and legal services, and psychological care. I was particularly glad that these services were available when we spoke to one young man - only eighteen years old - who explained that he had fled from his home in Honduras after fearing for his life. He had traveled alone - he’d had to leave his mother behind - and his goal was to apply for asylum in the United States. Although he spoke calmly and didn’t seem too perturbed by his experiences, I could only imagine the hardships he’d been through to reach this point. And after three months at Tochan, he hadn’t even ventured to the United States yet.

After we left Tochan, I kept thinking about how all of our lives are structured and maintained by borderlines both invisible and very real. For this young man, he had been forced to run away from a politically bordered community that had defined his childhood and still contained his mother, a person I imagine he loved very much. And now, as he resided within the borders of Mexico City and waited to hear about the status of his asylum application, this young man had joined one of the most vulnerable and transient populations in the world. His day-to-day



*The Clough delegation at Tochan, with guide Daniel (far left). The Clough Center delegation (L-R): Kelvin Li, Stephen de Riel, Yinan Xu Casey Puerzer, Ophelia Wang, Shaun Slusarski, Prof. Angie Picone, Barb Kozee, Elijah Rockwell, Alexa Damaska, Dr. Fernando Bizzarro, Dr. Nicholas Hayes-Mota, Prof. Jonathan Laurence, Meghan McCoy. (Not pictured: Marcus Trenfield & Trys Loustau).*

fate depended upon whether another bordered community would recognize him as an asylum seeker or an illegal immigrant and treat him accordingly. If the U.S. rejects his application, which border should he turn to or stay within? Where exactly would he be expected to go?

It is a beautiful feature of the human spirit that it will always fight for its own survival and flourishing, as well as that of its loved ones—even if that means crossing countless borders. Governments and societies are mistaken if they think that making themselves as unwelcoming as possible will somehow stop people fighting for life from trying to cross their borders. Our visit to Tochan showed me that while shelters like this may not be able to solve these global-level problems, they do have a plan for ensuring that, at least within their walls, people who have been forced to leave the places they once called home have all place to stay that recognizes and affirms their human spirit.

# 7. PLACES OF MEMORY & PILGRIMAGE

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF A PEOPLE

Barbara Anne Kozee

Theology

*“Heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtemoc, cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortés. No fue triunfo ni derrota. Fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo que es el México de hoy.”* Heroically defended by Cuauhtemoc, Tlatelolco fell to the power of Hernán Cortés. It was neither victory nor defeat. Rather, it was the painful birth of the mestizo people that represent the Mexico of today.

In the corner of the **Plaza de las Tres Culturas** reads this sign that offers an almost poetic, even pastoral understanding of Mexican history and the tragic conflicts that have marked the birth of the modern Mexican nation-state. The Spanish built the Iglesia de Santiago de Tlatelolco in the same place where Cuauhtemoc was captured. Pre-Hispanic pyramids are visible alongside modern housing projects, where a student uprising was violently suppressed. As a highly symbolic and affective “place” in the Mexican national imaginary, the Plaza de las Tres Culturas could be easily forgotten. Its history is difficult to package into a neat narrative of diversity and multiculturalism where peace has always prevailed. Rather, the Plaza tells a story that is much more painful, that holds difficult truths.

In the Plaza, we remember the deaths of Indigenous peoples who defended their identity and belonging. We remember students who protested unequal economic growth and state



A monument to the students massacred at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in 1968.

investments that came at the expense of the Mexican people and the working class—students who were tragically massacred in 1968. And yet amidst these struggles for survival, for land, for voice, we remember that this is what it means and has meant to be modern Mexico. Questions of dignity and justice, power, and political economy rightly define the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Rather than an ethic of forgetting or telling simple stories, the Plaza retains memories that challenge all those who witness it to consider what the Mexico of yesterday and today means for the people of tomorrow.

# THE MOTHER OF A NATION

Shaun Slusarski

Theology

One of the most famous images in the world is the *tilma* of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The image is located in the **Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, at the foot of Tepeyac Hill**. As our guide, Prof. Carlos Sánchez Gómez, informed us, long before the arrival of the Spanish, the hill had been regarded as a sacred site where worship of the mother goddess Tonantzin took place. It has since become a sacred site for Catholics from across Mexico and beyond, with the distinction of being the most visited Catholic pilgrimage destination in the world.

The syncretic dimensions of Guadalupe, who is supposed to have appeared to Chichimec peasant Juan Diego in 1531, reflect the reality of *mestizaje*, the fusion of Indigenous and European cultures that has animated Mexican society since the time of colonization. The reality of *mestizaje* is visible in the mingling of



*The original Baroque Basilica of Guadalupe (left), alongside its massive modern counterpart (right), which dates to the 1970s.*

the Aztec mother goddess with the Christian mother of God in the woman, Guadalupe. It is also visible in the design of the Guadalupe image itself. As we learned from the Guadalupe missionary sisters who hosted us for dinner, one of the virgin's hands is brown and the other is white, symbolizing the joining of European and Indigenous Mexican cultures.

Indeed, beyond her religious significance, Guadalupe is a potent symbol of Mexican identity, whose image has been mobilized in support of various political, cultural, and religious projects throughout the centuries. Don Miguel Hidalgo raised the banner of Guadalupe in the 1810 Mexican War of Independence. Emiliano Zapata raised it as well during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Meanwhile, for the Guadalupean missionaries, the image is more than a symbol. It represents a living, divine reality, who beckons its beholders towards greater solidarity with the marginalized of society.



*The iconic image of the Virgen de Guadalupe.*

THE CLOUGH CENTER  
FOR THE STUDY OF  
CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

# Attachment to Place in a World of Nations



CLOUGH COLLOQUIUM • FALL 2023

[CLOUGH.CENTER@BC.EDU](mailto:CLOUGH.CENTER@BC.EDU) | [WWW.BC.EDU/CLOUGHCENTER](http://WWW.BC.EDU/CLOUGHCENTER)



# Clough Center • Fall Colloquium

October 5 • 4:00 - 7:00 PM  
McMullen Museum of Art • Boston College



## Part 1: Religion, Nation & Empire: Competing Attachments to Place

Welcome • 4:00 PM

Jonathan Laurence, Director of the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy



Session 1: Opening Keynote • 4:05 PM

*The Vicissitudes of 'Attachment to Place': Nationalism, Staying and Leaving, and the 'Memory of Loss'*

Karen Barkey, Bard College  
Discussant: Chandra Mallampalli, Clough Center



Session 2: Panel • 4:45PM

Charles Maier, Harvard University: *"Two Forms of Attachment: Territory and Place"*

Mohammed Hashas, LUISS University: *"Islam, Europe, and the West: Narratives around the Mediterranean"*

Discussant: Natana Delong-Bas, Boston College, Theology



*Coffee Break • 5:30 PM*



## Part 2: Citizenship & Rootedness in Place

Session 3: Faculty Dialogue • 5:45 PM

Paul Romer, Boston College, Carroll School of Management: *"The Prospect of Mass Migration"*

Discussant: Paulo Barrozo, Boston College, Law School



Session 4: Closing Keynote • 6:15 PM

Danielle Allen, Harvard University

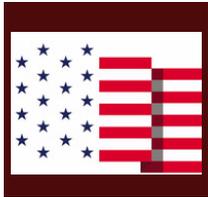
Discussant: Aziz Rana, Boston College, Law School



*Reception • 6:45 PM*

THE CLOUGH CENTER  
FOR THE STUDY OF  
CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

**FALL 2023**



The 2nd Annual

**What the Constitution Means to Us**

Special Guest: **Sarah Lunnie** ('08) of the original  
What the Constitution Means to Me

Thursday, September 14th | 5:00PM  
Gasson Hall 100

**Aziz Rana** (Law)  
**Daniel Kanstroom** (Law)  
**Thibaud Marcesse** (Politics)  
**Kay Schlozman** (Politics)  
**Natana Delong-Bas** (Theology)  
**Paolo Barrozo** (Law)  
**María de los Ángeles Picone** (History)  
& Student Speakers

**Colloquium on the Clough Center's Annual Theme**



Attachment to Place  
in a World of Nations

Thursday, October 5th | 4:00PM  
Gasson Hall 100

Keynote Speakers:  
**Karen Barkey** (Bard)  
**Danielle Allen** (Harvard)  
  
Featuring:  
**Charles Maier** (Harvard))  
**Paul Romer** (BC GSOM)  
**Mohammed Hashas** (LUISS Rome)

**The Unfinished Decade: Protest Tactics, Revolutionary Situations**



**Vincent Bevins**

Journalist and Author, If We Burn

Thursday, October 12th | 5:00PM  
Stokes Hall S195

Discussants:  
**Fernando Bizzarro** (Politics)  
**Mohammed Ali Kadivar** (Sociology)

*A Clough Distinguished Lecture*



**Making the National Geographic**

**Arjun Appadurai**

Humboldt University in Berlin

Thursday, November 16th | 5:00PM  
Yawkey Center - Murray Room

*A Clough Distinguished Lecture*



**The South of Our Imagination**

**Karen Cox**

University of North Carolina

Thursday, December 7th | 5:00PM  
Devlin Hall 101

**SAVE THE DATE • SPRING SYMPOSIUM • MARCH 14-15, 2024**



**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
 THE CLOUGH CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
 OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

# Attachment to Place in a World of Nations

## *Spring Symposium 2024*

**Thursday, March 14**  
 8:30 AM - 5:45 PM  
 2101 Commonwealth Avenue  
 McMullen Museum

**Friday, March 15**  
 8:30 AM - 1:45 PM  
 Murray Room  
 Yawkey Center

***Featuring***

**Boston College Faculty  
 & Special Guests**



**Fabio Benincasa**  
 Duquesne University Rome



**Salim Cevik**  
 SWP Berlin



**Melanca Clark**  
 Hudson-Webber  
 Foundation



**Tiziana Dearing**  
 WBUR



**Ronald L. Davis**  
 United States  
 Marshals Service



**Everett Fly**  
 Everett Fly  
 Associates



**Amanda Frost**  
 University of Virginia



**Mona Hassan**  
 Duke University



**Bejan Matur**  
 Poet



**Roberta Micallef**  
 Boston University



**Madeline Ostrander**  
 Journalist & Author



**Bish Sanyal**  
 MIT



**Priya Satiya**  
 Stanford  
 University



**Anina Schwarzenbach**  
 Institut für Strafrecht  
 und Kriminologie



**Timothy Snyder**  
 Yale University



**Jonathan Wyrzten**  
 Yale University



QR Code for Schedule

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# FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS 2023-24

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## Clough Postdoctoral & Visiting Fellows



**Nicholas Hayes-Mota**  
Clough Postdoctoral Fellow  
Assistant Director of the Clough Center



**Chandra Mallampalli**  
Clough Visiting Fellow

## Clough Doctoral Fellows



**Justin Brown-Ramsey**  
English



**Alexa Damaska**  
Sociology



**Stephen de Riel**  
History



**Emily Dupuis**  
History



**Junwoo Kim**  
Political Science



**Barbara Anne Kozee**  
Theology



**Kelvin Li**  
Philosophy



**Trsytan Loustau**  
Psychology



**Meghan McCoy**  
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