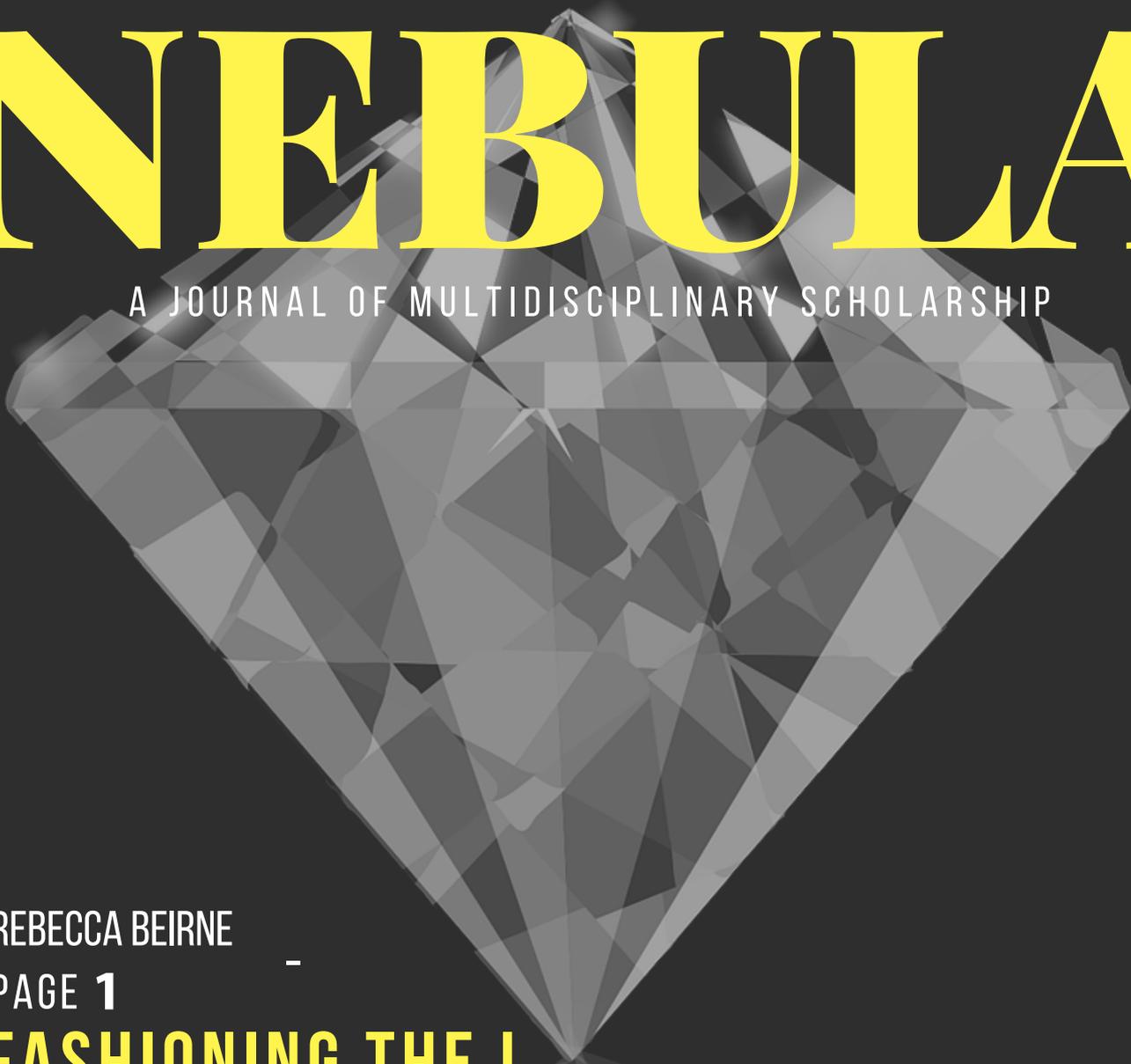


NEBULA



A JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARSHIP

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Note on contributors

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Moses Omoniyi Ayeomoni received his Masters degree from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, and recently completed his doctoral thesis at the University of Ibadan. Ayeomoni is presently acting as lecturer at the Department of English at Obafemi Awolow University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. In this contribution to *Nebula* Ayeomoni shares research findings relating to use of various English registers among Yoruba-speaking Nigerians.

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Jason Gendler

Jason Gendler is completing his Masters in Critical Studies at the University of California’s Department of Film and Television. He is due to appear at the Annual Southwest Conference held in February 2007. He has recently acted as teaching assistant for the American Film History course at UCLA. Gendler is also a member of *Mediascape* (UCLA), “an online journal with an interdisciplinary approach to visual cultural studies...” In his

contribution to *Nebula* 3.4, Gendler is anything but straightforward, but the reader/viewer must be prepared to engage in all sorts of directions if they are to begin to unravel the temporal mysteries behind *Primer*, a Shane Caruth film.

Habiba Hadziavdic

Habiba Hadziavdic was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and finished her high school and university studies in the United States. She was recently awarded her PhD in Germanic Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago. During her graduate work she studied at the Universität Salzburg, Austria and as a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) scholar at the Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany. The issues of ethnicity, gender, and religion, and their representation in German literature and media, as well as their potential in reshaping power structures between the so-called dominant and minority groups are central to her teaching and research interests. In her studies she focuses on tensions between secular and religious, as well as ethnic and national claims to moral and political authority, and how media and film contribute to the two seemingly opposing processes of hybridity and segregation. In her contribution to *Nebula* 3.4, Habiba teaches us about the Sinti and Roma gypsies of Germany, their plight through the holocaust years and their emergence into cultural discourse and historical memory.

Yashar Keramati

Yashar Keramati is a student at the University of British Columbia, pursuing an undergraduate degree in International Relations. Currently he is

on exchange for one year at the University of Cape Town, so as to learn about the history and effects of apartheid as well as to volunteer within the most impoverished areas. Yashar does not write dispassionately in both of his contributions to *Nebula*, nor is he overly theoretical. He writes with both conviction and clarity about the state of Iran and its recent political history.

Warren Steele

Warren Steele is a PhD candidate in English literature at the University of Glasgow (U.K.), where he was recently awarded his Masters degree in English Literature. He has presented conference papers, one at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, in March 2006, and the other at The annual New England American Studies Association (NEASA) Conference held at the University of Southern Maine (Oregon, U.S.). *Nebula* is pleased to publish the paper he delivered at this latter conference, titled "Strange Fruit: Remaking the Iraqi Male at Abu Ghraib," but beware that the material therein may not be suitable for all readers.

Mary Ellen Wright

Dr. Mary Ellen Wright, Assistant Professor, teaches theatre at the University of Texas at Tyler, U.S.A. Dr. Wright received her PhD from Texas Tech and wrote her dissertation on Adrian Hall and his dramatic adaptations. She has directed many productions at UT Tyler including *Seascape*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Pygmalion*, *Eleemosynary*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and *Art*. She also was assistant director for *Lover Letters* at UT Tyles, which starred television and film actress

Katherine Helmond and actor/director Adrian Hall. Her contribution to *Nebula* explores Adrian Hall's adaptations of incarcerated writer Jack Henry Abbot. Wright shares research obtained from personal interviews conducted with Hall.

Fashioning *The L Word*

By Rebecca Beirne

Abstract

This essay discusses the first and second seasons of Showtime's cable television series *The L Word* (2004-). *The L Word* is remarkable in that it is the first major drama series to focus its narrative on the lives of lesbian and bisexual women. This article critically analyses the first two seasons, together with initial responses to the series, in terms of lesbian femininity, masculinity and desire.¹

Introduction

Much has been made of how 'differently' the television series *The L Word*² represents lesbianism. The hype surrounding *The L Word* purports that the series ushers in a new era of lesbian visibility and representation to the mainstream, which presents a fashionable and glamorous image of lesbianism to counter 'the stereotype,' in a curious repetition of the popularised notion of early to mid 1990s 'lesbian chic.' During this period, the visible lesbian subject is claimed to have shifted from the 'mannish lesbian' of modernity, to the decidedly more marketable 'lipstick lesbian.' As Martha Gever remarks in her monograph on lesbian celebrity:

[i]f understated mannish garments and bearing could be said to constitute lesbian visibility in the past, the 1990s witnessed the arrival of a lesbian style that is decidedly more spectacular and, as a result, feminized if not always conventionally feminine – flashy but not necessarily frilly.³

This vision of lesbian style is displayed in *The L Word*, and the marked lesbian body is given significantly less representational prominence. It is even at times explicitly disavowed, most obviously in Alice's (Leisha Hailey) disparaging reference to what she terms a 'hundred footer': "[i]s it her hair? Is it her jog bra? Is it her mandles?" remarking that she can "tell she's a lesbo from across a football field" (1.11). Unlike most examples of lesbian representation on television, the ensemble nature of *The L Word* allows for multiple and differential constructions of lesbians, even if this multiplicity is revealed primarily through contrast, and within a fairly glamorous, standardised spectrum. As Eve Sedgwick put it "[t]he sense of the lesbian individual, isolated or coupled, scandalous, scrutinized, staggering under her representational burden, gives way to the vaster livelier potential of a lesbian ecology."⁴ This lesbian ecology does not spring full-grown from the heads of Ilene Chaiken et al., despite what celebratory media reports might insinuate,

but rather recirculates a multiplicity of understandings (and clichés) of the lesbian subject and lesbian life.

Investigating femininity: Lipstick and Lesbians

The manner in which the femme is theoretically visualised has seen much change in the last twenty years. This owes much to the reclamation of butch- femme cultures engendered by the sex wars, of course, but also as Clark has asserted, “some credit for the changing perspectives on fashion might also be given to the recent emphasis on masquerade and fabrication in feminist criticism and to the more prominent role of camp in lesbian criticism.”⁵ These, and other, influences resulted in an intensified critical engagement with the femme, enabling her to be seen as something greater than a capitulation to and replication of heterosexual and misogynist norms. Such influential essays as Sue-Ellen Case’s ‘Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic’⁶ for example, focused upon the camp masquerade of the femme, whose femininity is performed to the butch, which Case suggests points towards a new possibility for a feminist subject position. However, even in this account, which seeks to re-signify femme as a positive and authentically lesbian subject, she is only visible, and seemingly only *possible* in the presence of the desiring butch. Other writers, notably writing from a more personal perspective, such as Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga⁷ and Joan Nestle,⁸ have articulated both lesbian authenticity and agency in the femme, rearticulating as active and subjective modes of desire previously understood as passive, and reclaiming being objectified as potentially powerful. Danae Clark’s ‘Commodity Lesbianism’ and Arlene Stein’s ‘All dressed up, but no place to go? Style wars and the new lesbianism’⁹ discuss the then-emerging phenomenon of lesbian chic, attempting to ascertain the affirmative and injurious possibilities of this newfound (hyper)visibility. Later accounts, such as those of Inness¹⁰ and Ciasullo¹¹ have further read the significance of 1990s images of lesbians in the mainstream discourse. Others still have focussed on the manner in which the feminine lesbian is presented in contemporary theory and literary practice, notably Martin¹² and Walker, the latter of whom has also performed an analysis of historical literary productions of the femme lesbian.¹³ It is into the context of these obviously intersecting, yet rarely integrated, traditions of celebrating femme cultures within specifically lesbian contexts, and gay and lesbian studies’ readings of feminine lesbians in mainstream culture, that I am attempting to locate my reading of *The L Word*.

The growth in images of ‘lipstick lesbianism’ can be seen as both a by-product of mainstream media attention, which inevitably favours a “consumable lesbian,”¹⁴ and the explosion of femme theory and writing in the 1990s, which could be characterised as the decade in which “the femmes...are finally asserting themselves”.¹⁵ Gevertz has noted that lesbian celebrities must posit “a measure of the acquiescence to gender and sexual norms required for recognition and inclusion to occur peaceably.”¹⁶ Likewise, in *The L Word*, we have images that have been constructed for a heterosexual media and populace, at least in part, which embody these measures of acquiescence for economic and political purposes of peaceable inclusion and integration, which are considered to be particularly necessary for the medium with which they are engaged.

The L Word has an odd approach to and relationship with visibility, simultaneously desiring and disparaging it, announcing and obscuring. It inserts the lesbian into a frame in which she is to this day fairly invisible, notably utilising a lesbian image that is historically invisible from the cultural imagination of what constitutes a lesbian via her frequent in-distinguish-ability from heterosexuality. In doing so the visible lesbian is rendered invisible through closeting, the invisible (though not ‘real’) lesbian is rendered hyper-visible, and lesbianism itself is rendered simultaneously more and less visible. The “visible difference” situated in the butch lesbian¹⁷ has enabled her positioning as the “magical sign” of lesbianism¹⁸ – expressed in multiple texts, from *The Well of Loneliness* to lesbian theory to *Queer as Folk*,¹⁹ as the ‘real’ or authentic lesbian. It is perceived that because the marked (butch) body is “already and always marked as lesbian, she is *more* visible than the femme – and thus, if represented, more “lesbian” than the femme.”²⁰ The formulation that the femme is popular culture’s visible lesbian, and yet by virtue of her ‘sameness’ simultaneously invisible - hence unable to adequately represent lesbians, is a fairly common one. The converse of such arguments views the femme’s ‘likeness to’ (sometimes problematically expressed as proximity to) heterosexuality as rendering her uniquely able to denaturalise heterosexual perceptions of lesbianism, and by extension, heterosexuality itself. The publicity materials surrounding the series further add to this perception, as the theme is to distance the series from ‘old-style’ lesbians – characterised as those who are a little too feminist or a little too butch.

Considering the outward ‘reclamation’ of femininity undertaken by *The L Word*, it is curious that in the first and rare appearance of the actual *term* ‘femme’ in the series, it is used as a synonym for heterosexual. The second episode of the series, ‘Let’s Do It,’ features a lengthy sequence in which the protagonists engage in a mission to find out if the woman (Lara) that Dana (Erin Daniels) is interested in is a lesbian or not. These scenes allow for an examination of issues of visibility, particularly as they relate to courtship rituals. They observe Lara’s (Lauren Lee Smith) garb, movements and her reaction to Bette and Tina kissing, utilising the pseudo-scientific methods of placing her various attributes in ‘lez’ and ‘straight’ columns and assigning them points.

Bette (Jennifer Beals): Well, she’s got some good lezzie points for her walk, and the way she moves that chopping knife. Shane (Katherine Moening): Yeah, but she’s way femme-y on the coiffure tip.²¹

It seems significant that here it is not ‘girly’ or ‘feminine’ that is used as a term that is interchangeable with heterosexual, or at least a marker thereof, but ‘femmey’ – a term seldom used outside western lesbian subcultures, which denotes a particular style of lesbian. It is quite mystifying that in a series that centres on a group of predominantly ‘lipstick lesbians,’ “lezzie” and “femmey” can be placed in such marked opposition to one another. While visual and attitudinal identification of lesbians as lesbians often, if not usually, relies on recourse to signifiers of the marked, butch lesbian, one would think that this group of predominately ‘femmey’ dykes would be aware of other codes, or would least problematise this statement, pointing out that feminine presentations do not necessarily denote unequivocal straightness.

The final scene of this storyline in ‘Let’s Do It’ sees Lara passionately kissing Dana in the locker room.

Her consequent statement “[j]ust in case you were still wondering,” acts to undermine the analysis of Lara as straight based upon visible signifiers, portrayed as definitive by all the characters, reaffirming that a lesbian does not have to be visible as such in order to be one. This functions as almost a cautionary tale about using butch signifiers as the magical signs of lesbian gaydar – allowing for a demonstration of the elasticity of lesbian signifiers, and an affirmation that sexual identity cannot always be read from the body or its ornaments. Despite this message however, there are further implications to ‘mission: gaydar’ than simply undermining the preconceptions of the characters and audience as to ‘what a lesbian looks like.’ These scenes highlight a key facet of *The L Word* that is primarily found in the deeper recesses of the text – that ‘real’ lesbianism is to be found in (implied) female masculinity - and ruptures this message through to the surface in the form of dialogue.

Walker’s assertion that “the feminine lesbian cannot be studied in isolation from the idiom of race passing”²² is of particular resonance to an examination of *The L Word* due to its presentation of and engagement with both the feminine ‘passing’ lesbian, and the light-skinned ‘passing’ African-American. The issue of passing is further explicitly raised in the show via an altercation between Bette and Yolanda (Kim Hawthorne), an African-American single- mother-to-be in Bette and Tina’s therapy group for prospective parents. Whereas in the previous example, Lara’s passing is not an attempt or even desire to pass, but rather a figural tendency to do so, here the question of intentional passing, or what is perceived to be intentional passing, and the ethics thereof, is raised. Yolanda, who has already been characterised as “confrontational” in the episode, criticises Bette for emphasising her lesbianism while never referring to herself as an African-American woman, asserting that “you need to reflect on what it is you’re saying to the world while hiding so behind the lightness of your skin” (1.8). This discussion is ended later in the episode through Bette outing Yolanda as a lesbian. Bette accuses Yolanda of practising a double standard by allowing herself to be mistaken for a straight woman, saying that “you’re not exactly readable as a lesbian, and you didn’t come out and declare yourself.” The writers’ aim in constructing this improbable and quite melodramatic scenario is perhaps to emphasize that one should not judge those who appear to pass, as it is not necessarily possible to announce all identities through bodily markers or overt declaration. When Bette asks “why is it so wrong for me to move more freely in the world just because my appearance doesn’t automatically announce who I am?” it further questions the centrality of visibility to truth, perhaps attempting to counter the emphasis placed on coming or being out by gay and lesbian political groups and individuals. Bette’s statement however also problematically insinuates that light-skinned biracial persons, or feminine lesbians, as the two are somewhat conflated in this story, ‘pass’ because they “wish to move more easily in the world” – that the unmarked body connotes a simple relationship of conforming or desiring to conform. The appearance of the unmarked body is therefore figured as an assimilationist performance rather than a complex expression of identities.

The L Word, while ostensibly advancing the cause of feminine lesbians, appears to reinforce perceptions of the feminine lesbian as inauthentic, or at the very least, to express a deeply ambivalent attitude towards lesbian femininity. Even as it overtly disparages non-feminine women as unfashionable, it is when Dana attempts to dress in a *more feminine* manner that she is disparaged as unfashionable and “geeky” (1.3). When (hyper)femininity is associated with lesbian tennis-player Dana (Erin Daniels), it is seen as

a restrictive force, symbolic of her closetedness - a mask used to demonstrate heterosexuality. The two most significant instances thereof are the dresses she wears to Bette and Tina's sperm-hunting party in the pilot, and when attending her first Suburu party in 'Lawfully' (1.5), which are associated with, and emblematic of, her attempts to pass as heterosexual, and in marked opposition to both her usual casual sporty clothes, and the tailored pantsuits she tends to wear after coming out. In the first episode, her floral patterned, underbust frock is seen as part of her heterosexual drag, available for activation (along with her doubles partner and beard,²³ Harrison) should any straight people show up at the party. In 'Lawfully' her pale pink, extremely tight dress is held together by ribbon lacing all the way up the back. This is of particular interest as in this scene she is taking Harrison out as her official 'date' instead of her girlfriend Lara, who comes over to Dana's apartment, assuming that she had been invited. Having an openly lesbian and very sexual partner makes her attempts to pass more difficult, on a literal and emotional level, and requires more restriction – here presented as more femininity: she is quite literally restrained by pale pink ribbon, and unused and unsuited to such constriction, she can move only her arms and take very small jerky steps, with her corseted chest heaving like a lady from a Regency romance.

There are moments in *The L Word*, however, that do function to undermine this proposition. In answer to the question of what she will wear on her first date with Lara, Dana proposes a 'blue sundress' to howls of disapproval from her friends. Her answer to this chorus of negativity is "but I'm going to a nice place, y'know, somebody might see me" (1.3), stressing both her closetedness and the ability of femininity to disguise obvious lesbianism. This association is almost critiqued once again by Lara, who is wearing a dress, and initially looks at Dana with horror, feeling overdressed in comparison to Dana's (supposedly casual) outfit of a white fitted button-up shirt and pants. Lara asks if she is thereby "a geek" for having worn a dress and Dana responds "no, I'm a geek. For letting my friends tell me what to wear." This could be read as an indication that her friends' constant attempts to make her dress more androgynously, are a source of pressure upon her, and she really *does* feel comfortable in her dresses. The fact that immediately after she does come out her dresses seem to disappear (at least for the rest of the first season) indicates that this is not the case - when she is now required to 'dress up' for formal occasions or simply going out she eschews dresses in favour of pantsuits or jeans with a simple shirt. During season two, when further emphasis of the series was placed upon displaying designer frocks (even struggling-to-make-ends-meet waitress Jenny appears in new designer coats and dresses every week), and under the influence of fiancée Tonya, Dana once again begins to wear dresses, but that does not negate the very clear narrative message of the first season.²⁴

In season two, Jenny (Mia Kirshner), as part of her continued coming out and claiming of her lesbian identity, engages in the classic trope of such claiming: cutting off her previously long hair ('Lynch Pin' 2.4). This move is precipitated by a discussion she has with new (straight) housemate Mark (Eric Lively) as to whether or not she visibly appears to be a lesbian. When questioned as to why he can identify the other onscreen lesbian characters as such, but not Jenny, Mark tries to explain:

[i]t's not that they're masculine, or anything, 'cause actually some of them are pretty feminine. You know? It's... they have these... haircuts. These very cool haircuts – don't get me wrong

– it’s not - more – it’s obviously more than a haircut. But it’s - no, it’s true. It’s this... something that they exude that’s... (thinks) I’m gonna try and put my finger on it.

Although initially expressing disbelief at the limitations of this assessment, Jenny appears to take to heart this appraisal of visible-lesbianism as being the possession of a cool haircut, or at least seems to desire to render her sexuality more visible, as later that night she asks Shane to give her a haircut, saying that “I just feel like I... need to change.” The single tear rolling down Jenny’s face as Shane cuts her hair off is reminiscent of her mourning for heterosexual identity in the death of her alter ego Sarah Schuster. The next time we see Jenny, she is strutting down the street alongside Shane with her new short haircut, looking far more confident than she has before, and even being “cruised” by a female passer-by, as a song whose lyrics repeat “butch in the streets, femme in the sheets” plays (‘Labyrinth’ 2.5). This moment is perhaps a reversal of the Dana storyline, as here Jenny must take on a (slightly) butch persona at least “in the streets” in order to both assert her lesbianism and become empowered, while perhaps her femme side “in the sheets” is portrayed as the deeper, more authentic level of her personality.

The series predominantly, but not solely, associates its feminine lesbians with the ‘normal’ lesbian, the “lesbians’ blank page,” and places this in opposition to the term ‘femme.’ As Leslea Newman notes: “[e]ven in the gay nineties, with lipstick lesbians reigning supreme, some women find it an insult to be called a femme.”²⁵ And, for many femmes, including those who enjoy their lipstick, the ‘lipstick lesbian’ is “a derogatory term that conjures up an apolitical creature... a lesbian who doesn’t want to be a dyke and doesn’t want to be associated with dykes.”²⁶ Despite such antagonisms between the two, they are often conflated, particularly within mainstream discourse. Jetter claims that lesbians in the mainstream “have a few things in common: They’re white. They’re middle class. And they seem to be more interested in makeup and clothes than in feminism. In short, they’re femmes, or what the straight world prefers to call lipstick lesbians.”²⁷ The characterisation of lesbians in late 20th century mainstream culture that Jetter describes is (unfortunately) completely true. The subsequent conflation of the rich cultural history of queer femme identities with the culturally and temporally specific, consumerist and invented-by/for-the-mainstream image of ‘lipstick lesbianism’ is a vast oversimplification, although distinguishing them from one another on the basis of *image* alone is difficult if not impossible. Jetter’s formulation, repeated pervasively in the discourse, completely annexes the central role in femme history of femmes of colour, working class femmes and feminist femmes.

Perhaps this is due to *The L Word*’s attitude to butch-femme cultures. The series’ nod to 1950s butch-femme culture takes place in ‘Liberally’ (1.10), which sees Dana and Jenny meeting by chance in a bar, about which the newly bisexual Jenny in wonderment observes is “like something out of the 1950s. It’s so butch and femme.” The newly out Dana replies despondently that they indeed are in:

the oldest lesbian bar in L.A. Actually, it probably hasn’t changed *since* the 1950s. But really, it’s no different than any other club, you know, I mean, you have a few drinks, and you talk to a few people you have nothing in common with, and realize how unlikely it is you’ll ever meet anyone who’s right for you again.

Later in the episode they are suddenly and somewhat inexplicably shown at Jenny's abode, and what then proceeds to occur is one of the most awkward sexual encounters in the history of television. Although Dana is, as Walker would say "your jock type, not your butch type,"²⁸ in these scenes the discussed context of the bar, together with the contrast between her outfit (she is clad in a white singlet and jeans), mannerisms and attitude and those of Jenny (dressed in a black frock, pink sash and silver heels), indicate that Dana is intended to be read as 'the butch' in this scene.

The awkwardness of the ensuing attempted sex act is engendered by the fact that neither of them appears to know what to do to the other. This is not simply a matter of the sexual inexperience of both parties, but that they are both sexual "bottoms" (or at least have been portrayed as such at this point of the narrative). The scene acts to challenge perceptions of visible difference as sexual difference, and to undermine conceptions of the butch as necessarily top, a theme gradually being promulgated in lesbian culture, but entirely apparent in neither *The L Word* nor in other mainstream depictions of lesbianism. There are many ways this scene can be read. However, a defining sensation thereof is that both parties, and particularly Jenny, are *play-acting* desire. This is expressed by such factors as Jenny's big, pseudo-interested eyes and comments like "wow! That's really interesting," when 'that' clearly is not and her words contrast with the monotone in which they are uttered. This is problematic and troubling, particularly considering that the only other time butch-femme relationships are explicitly discussed, although butch-femme codes are in almost constant implicit use in the series, it is referred to as "butch-femme role play" (Kit 1.13). One cannot help but wonder if *The L Word* is attempting to suggest that such identities are simply imitative and constricting 'roles' that do not work.

It appears that many cultural theorists who seek to view the femme as positive do so in light of the figure's supposed proximity to heterosexuality. Sherrie Inness, for example, in the first chapter of her book *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life* reads two 1920s texts, one of which presents a 'mythic mannish lesbian' and one of which depicts a feminine lesbian. Inness reads the representation of the feminine lesbian as revealing "a greater threat to heterosexual order than does the mannish lesbian" by virtue of her inability to be visually distinguished from heterosexual women, as the femme destabilises "an image of the lesbian as an easily excluded outsider."²⁹ When it comes to lesbians in later mainstream discourse however, even Inness appears to shift somewhat on the point of how radical the feminine lesbian can be, noting that "[a]lthough I agree with Clark and Grocock that lipstick lesbians are too complicated to be viewed as merely a sign of lesbian cooption, I am far more ambivalent about how representations of lipstick lesbians or "designer dykes" are manipulated in the mainstream press..."³⁰

Throughout Ann Ciasullo's survey of various magazine and filmic depictions of lesbianism in 'Making her (In)visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s,' she finds the central trope to be that of the 'consumable' lesbian – "[m]ainstream culture is thus giving with one hand and taking back with the other: it makes room for positive representations of lesbianism, but the lesbian it chooses as "representative," decoupled from the butch that would more clearly signify lesbianism for mainstream audiences, in effect becomes a nonlesbian."³¹ Ciasullo later explicated this perception in relation to *The L Word* when interviewed for a newspaper article on the series:

[m]ost people envision lesbians as butch dykes in sleeveless flannel shirts and jeans — so how to represent lesbians on TV in a politically correct way becomes a quandary. “Think about images of African Americans, and someone like Sidney Poitier, who was seen as changing the image of black men in film but by some critics was seen as an Uncle Tom figure,” Ciasullo says. “The same thing goes for lesbians. The stereotype is the butch lesbian, and to get away from that, you have the feminine lesbian. But as images get feminized, lesbianism gets subsumed.”³²

I am rather discomfited by the analysis that “as images get feminized, lesbianism gets subsumed.” I am concerned here that “[i]n our efforts to challenge forms of gender policing, we run the risk of replicating a kind of gender totalitarianism, even in the form of its deconstruction.”³³ Theorists should be wary of replicating the too easy association of femininity with heterosexuality, even within the loaded discourse of popular culture.

And yet, there is much truth in the analysis of the lesbian representations seen in popular culture as attempts to airbrush the spectre of homosexuality through the disavowal of those that visibly or sexually disrupt normative cultural precepts. In her analysis of 1990s women’s magazines during the first blush of lesbian chic, Inness observed that “[r]eaders are encouraged to look at the stylish, surface appearance of lesbianism, not to seek beneath the surface for a deeper understanding.”³⁴ Similarly *The L Word*, or if not the text itself then at least the discourse surrounding it, focuses upon style and stylishness - surfaces. The deeper layers of signification are not only consequently overlooked, but are frequently in fact activated to counter the meanings produced by the surfaces they have a hand in representing. This is particularly seen in the casting of at least outwardly heterosexual actresses in the central roles, with the exception of one out lesbian actress, who is notably cast as bisexual. Once again this resonates with the earlier depictions, which used “models who look stereotypically heterosexual pretending to be lesbians” in order to provide “titillation without threat as there is an implicit understanding that these are not ‘real’ lesbians.”³⁵

While such writers as Erin Douglas³⁶ feel that the sexuality of the actresses in *The L Word* is not relevant to their performance as lesbians, the seemingly deliberate casting of mostly heterosexual actresses has various repercussions on the signification of lesbianism that the series produces – perhaps most significantly in reinforcing hegemonic perceptions of lesbian sexuality as a liminal, mobile state, easily returned to heterosexuality, via the lesbian performances of straight actresses, who then, in interviews, are at pains to focus discussion as much as possible upon their husbands and boyfriends. For much as we insist on the text itself as being the only producer of meaning, it does not exist in a vacuum, and multiple factors, including previous knowledge of the actresses, and perhaps most particularly the media flurry accompanying the program, can come into play in a viewer’s reading of the series. This is to some degree countered by various insinuations and at times statements that the cast may not be as straight as they seem.³⁷ Whether or not this is true, which it very well may be, one cannot help but feel that this practice replicates the simultaneous giving and withholding of what Clark refers to as “gay window advertising,” in that “lesbians can read into an ad certain subtextual elements.”³⁸ In *The L Word* the audience can read ‘real’ closeted lesbianism into the actresses, thus reading themselves into the frame, thereby becoming “a model of the

new gay marketing strategy” in that they are “believable as lesbians to lesbians – but just barely.”³⁹ Much as scorn has been heaped on the inauthenticity of the feminine cast, *The L Word* has often also been praised for that very feature, as it is seen to re-signify the sign ‘lesbian’ from its popular associations with female masculinity, and thereby demonstrate that there are feminine lesbians (or as some have asserted, that lesbians are ‘just like’ heterosexual women). If *The L Word* is to indeed show its audience that there *are* feminine lesbians, however, is it not then a trifle curious to do so by using mainly heterosexual women to *perform* lesbian femininity?

Is the sense of femininity as heterosexual or imitative masquerade seen in the characterisation of Dana performing femininity as a means of disguising her homosexuality, transferable to the other, more clearly feminine, characters in *The L Word*? Although there are several characters who appear to inhabit an embodied femininity, femininity is frequently presented as intrinsically performative in the series via the links drawn between femininity, manipulateness and duplicity, with the exception of those presented as virtuous wives. Either way, they are almost always presented as ‘less lesbian’ than their counterparts. Walker in her historical study of the feminine lesbian in literature and theory found that:

in general, these women are coded traditionally as either the “wifely partner,” with a woman’s financial and emotional dependence and a burning desire to darn socks, and/or as the wayward heterosexual who returns to men when “the life” becomes too difficult (when the going gets tough, the femmes go straight).⁴⁰

Feminine-coded characters are consistently associated with vanity and narcissism in the text, as well as (often sexual) duplicity. The depiction of feminine woman-desire as less authentic, or somehow less dedicated to women (seemingly by virtue of their femininity) can also be seen in the first season of *The L Word*. That this observation is primarily in relation to bisexually identified women in the series does not negate its impact. Three main examples of just such a ‘return to men’ occur in the first season of the series. The first transpires when Alice (Leisha Hailey) announces to Tina (Laurel Holloman) that she intends to “go back to men” as she has “had enough drama and mind-fucks, and women are fucking crazy” (1.3). Jenny then sleeps with her estranged husband Tim immediately after an awful dinner with Marina (whom she desperately wants to be with but can’t have), afterwards telling him that she is not going to see Marina ever again (1.9). The third example is the married and moneyed Cherie’s (Rosanna Arquette) choice of her husband, and the economic and societal privileges he represents, over Shane. While in the latter example it is indeed the idea of ‘the life,’ that is too difficult, in the first two, it is women themselves and their (apparently inherent) manipulations and inducements to drama that are too difficult. It is of course these characters’ positioning as bisexual which gives them the ability to choose such a thing, unlike those characters who are “really really gay” (1.5), such as Dana, Shane (Katherine Moening) and Bette (Jennifer Beals), who are, significantly, less feminine than the others. The second season shifts somewhat in this respect, with Jenny becoming more lesbian-identified, and Alice expressing her preference for women over men (by choosing a marshmallow breast lollipop over a chocolate penis in ‘Labyrinth’ during an argument over which gender she prefers).

At the outset of the series, Tina's maternal qualities together with her long-term monogamy, low sex drive and dedication to Bette's career, acts to situate her as the "wifely partner" whom Walker describes - a perfect model of a 1950s housewife, a woman who "not only mimes but embodies a version of traditional femininity."⁴¹ It should be noted here that the model of femininity embodied by Tina is accessible to her via her very specific class positioning. Her financially privileged position renders her the mistress of a large house with a referenced but invisible housekeeper without need of a second income. This is in keeping with a more general trend in depictions of lesbians on television in recent times that creates images that harken back to earlier, 'purer' times. Television acts to disassociate these characters from connections between lesbianism and masculinity or 'sexual perversion,' enabling a proposition of lesbians as 'just like' heterosexual women, or perhaps as even more perfect examples of traditional 'womanliness' than contemporary heterosexual female television characters. As Heller argues, the lesbian couple on *E.R.* "are portrayed as more family oriented than any of the heterosexual characters on the show."⁴² In *The L Word*, however, due to the multiple lesbian and bisexual characters, the pressure on a single lesbian or lesbian couple to signify many aspects of lesbian life is not as great, and so the baby storyline does not have the same desexualising effect as it does on, say, *Queer as Folk*.

Also, unlike triumphant narratives involving lesbian conception, which act as a positive affirmation of 'alternative families' such as *If These Walls Could Talk 2*, *The L Word*'s gayby storyline is quite differently coded, for while the series opens with the joyful "let's make a baby," the insemination and pregnancy is fraught with difficulty and heartache. This could be seen as suggestive that the Tina and Bette's aspirations to this model of traditionalized heteronormative life with its firmly ascribed roles (one earns the money, the other picks up the dry cleaning,) is potentially and ultimately destructive to the selfhood of individuals, and thereby relationships. Or perhaps it is simply an element of the narrative drive towards tragedy in *The L Word*. This is then built upon during the second season wherein Tina, once again pregnant and despite certain attempts at manipulation by equally dominant women, is suddenly and rather inexplicably as a result of her separation with Bette in possession of emotional, sexual, and even physical power which she had heretofore never appeared to possess.

Tina is also clearly an embodied character in that she is unremittingly associated with bodily functions and activities. As Sedgwick points out "[o]ur intimacy with Tina's body – inseminated, peeing, ultra-sounded, vomiting – continues to be near-total."⁴³ To this I would add the frequent discussion of such unspeakables as progesterone suppositories, and Tina's constant, and usually quite indecorous, eating. These are all unusual to the medium of glossy, thin, sanitised television drama, bringing to mind assertions of the pregnant body as the ultimate expression of the grotesque⁴⁴ or the abject - wherein the "process of 'becoming-mother' is distanced from subjectivity and identity."⁴⁵ This has a dual function. The audience is brought closer to Tina as this focus upon the body renders her the most physically real and least celluloid of the characters. However, by primarily associating her with the body, she is distanced from the audience as a character, as Tina's storylines are funnelled primarily through the baby or Bette, and, unlike the other characters, we gain no back-story on her life prior to her relationship with Bette.

Desire and Relationships in the L World

Lesbian desire is frequently figured as structured alternately by similarity or by complementary difference. In *The L Word* both of these tropes are utilised in presenting the couplings of the series - those relationships that display codes of 'difference' are characterised as more effective or possible, though ultimately these too are ineffective and come undone, while the relationships characterised by similarities - visual, racial or interests-based - are exemplified by unrestrainable desire and beguilement. The primary lesbian relationship in season one of *The L Word* is portrayed as being structured by visual and narrative gendered and racial difference, and it is (arguably) these differences that lead to the disintegration of Tina and Bette's seven-year relationship. Bette is the wage earner, more commanding and involved in a very demanding career, while Tina is depicted as the 'wifely' partner, staying at home to "prepare [her] body for pregnancy" (1.1). The visual association of femmes in general and filmic/televisual lesbians who wish to bear children in particular with blondeness,⁴⁶ is reinforced by this representation, which mobilises cultural associations of 'natural' femininity with whiteness. Their difference is prominently visually coded through their clothing styles, with Bette generally wearing designer suits with tailored men's shirts - these being marks of a necessitated corporate femininity, while Tina predominantly wears casual 'peasant-style' clothes, in keeping with her confinement to the sphere of the home. Even when both the characters are attired in suits, they are generally, and quite amusingly, put in one white suit with a black shirt and one black suit with a white shirt (almost as if one is a photo-negative of the other,) so although Bette and Tina are dressed almost identically, they are still coded as opposite and complementary to one another. Their emotional and communicative styles are also very different - while Bette does not enjoy verbalising her feelings, Tina is very enthusiastic about (and loquacious at) therapy, which seems to render them both completely unable to communicate with one another.

This lack of communication extends to the couples' sex life, which has been less than perfect for three years out of their seven-year relationship. During the first season, the first two of the three Bette/Tina sex scenes depicted are either for the purposes of, or inspired by an attempt at, procreation. The third occurs in 'Limb from Limb' after Tina has discovered Bette's affair. This scene - one of the few incidences of physical violence in the series, is instigated through the 'out of control' anger of the usually fairly passive Tina, who slaps Bette, and Bette's response of restraining her and attempting to have non-consensual sex with her. Tina regains control of the situation, and seizing Bette's hand, puts it inside herself, and proceeds to use Bette's hand to satisfy herself, then collapses on top of her and the scene ends. This scene is not only very confronting, but rather perplexing in terms of its signification. Perhaps it is the culmination of Tina's recurrent casting as the victimised wife, and her victory in this sexually violent power struggle is symbolic of Tina's subsequent move away from Bette (the final scene of the season sees Tina at Alice's, distraught and minus her wedding band). The violence of this scene, or perhaps rather, the violence of domestication, is suggestively prefigured by the presence of Catherine Opie's photographic 'Self-Portrait' (1993) in both the (flashback) scene in which Bette and Tina meet (1.11), and more lingeringly, at the gallery opening at which Tina discovers Bette's infidelity (1.13). The portrait depicts a naked back, upon which a picture is engraved. The razor engraving on the skin is a childlike drawing of a house, cloud, and two girls (delineated as such via their triangular skirts) holding hands. The violence of this image's

inscription at the beginning and (for the time being) the end of their relationship suggests that the childlike dream of perfect lesbian domestic felicity in a traditionalised mode depicted by this image and aspired to in Bette and Tina's relationship requires a certain degree of violence to the self, and Bette and Tina's violent battle for (sexual) dominance in this scene acts to bring the submerged power relations of such a heteronormative relationship to the surface.

Candace (Ion Overman)'s behaviour, race and gender presentation are visually presented as entirely different from Tina. Her most marked characteristics are toughness, assertiveness and desire, together with an impermeability and impenetrability directly contrasted to Tina's softness and fluid boundaries between self and other. These features are reflected in her profession (carpenter), which requires both physical strength and manual skill. Candace is often seen in overalls or singlets and pants, practical, butchy clothes that leave her upper arms bare to highlight her strength. Although she has long hair, she keeps it effortlessly slicked back into a ponytail. In the two scenes in which she is not dressed for work, she displays a somewhat more femme veneer, with more make-up and somewhat more feminine tops, however, the fact that her outfits are in the same style as her usual wear (sleeveless tops with pants) combined with her various mannerisms, and the contrast between Candace and the other lesbians seen in proximity to her in these scenes, still render a certain butch persona. Candace not only aggressively pursues the object of her desires, but takes control from Bette during sex, who has been hitherto seen as both a top, and a control freak. Candace is also figured in relation to Bette's African-American heritage,⁴⁷ particularly through meeting her via Yolanda, and the environment in which they first meet – at one of Kit's performances, which is the first scene in which we see a large group of people composed primarily of people of colour. Interestingly, Bette first looks at Candace with explicit desire after Slim Daddy (Snoop Dogg) expresses his captivation with Candace, and with the idea of her and Bette being together, which perhaps functions to render this narratively illicit desire as being accessed through the male gaze. Douglas argues that "Candace offers Bette some type of authentic racial performance. Their attraction is depicted as almost carnal. Bette's desire is a need to not only consume Candace but also her race as well, which is very problematic."⁴⁸

The other key example of unrestrainable and illicit desire is also structured by similarity as opposed to difference. From the first, Marina and Jenny's similarities are foregrounded - from their interests and tastes, to their hair colour and complexion. That the zenith of their figural correspondence is achieved at the peak of their relationship indicates the significance of notions of similarity to the representation of their relationship. This scene takes place in the short time period between Jenny's separation from Tim and knowledge of Marina's relationship with Francesca, and immediately after a scene in which we see a previously distraught and extremely dirty Jenny curled foetus-style in Marina's bath. The scene displays the only time they openly go out together as a couple, and they are dressed in identically fawn-coloured shirts, with Marina in black pants and Jenny in a black skirt. This lesbian party signals Jenny's 'birth' into a new, lesbian world, into which Marina will shortly abandon Jenny, having "opened up [her] world" (1.7). Such an awakening is, however, depicted as figuratively impossible without a death. This allegorical death takes the form of Jenny's (heterosexual) fictional alter ego Sarah Schuster being drowned at sea (the symbolic and maternally coded *Marina*) shortly after she consummates her relationship with Marina. Together, these metaphoric associations form an expression of Lacanian discourse that "...theorizes homosexuality

as a desire to return to the moment of primary identification, and lesbianism in particular [as evocative of] that primordial signifier of mirroring, the mother-child dyad....”⁴⁹

Not only psychoanalytic, however, but sexological discourse is recalled by the recurrent allusions to lesbianism as vampirism, a “fantastic...demon possession sort of thing.” (Jenny 1.4) Metaphors of vampirism and contagion hold sway in Jenny’s seduction by Marina – from their first encounter; in which the camera pans from Marina’s hypnotic stare, to Jenny’s transfixed one, to extreme close-up shots of their mouths; to the first time they have sex, which is presented as both exquisite pleasure and extreme loss and pain.⁵⁰ Here, the falsely human visage of the vampire that allows it entry into human environments is replaced by that of femininity, which allows the ‘falsely heterosexual’ visage of the feminine lesbian unsuspecting entry into the heterosexual world. With her lesbian identity “obscured by the “mask” or “cover” of friendship,” the feminine woman “can invade even that site of heterosexual sanctity, the home,”⁵¹ thereby being provided with further opportunities for seduction of ‘heterosexual’ women. This is emphasised through Tim’s jealous conviction that Jenny is sleeping with a male friend, which ironically almost leads him to discover her and Marina *in flagrante delicto*. The multiplicity/unplaceability of Marina’s aristocratic cultural background (she speaks multiple ‘foreign tongues’ in her language of seduction) further contributes a vampiric lineage to her depiction. In *Reading the Vampire* Ken Gelder discusses national identity in relation to Dracula and the discourse surrounding it, locating polyphonic abilities and mixed lineages within the characters of Vambery and Dracula. This is then read as an anxiety about reverse colonisation, loss of national identity and the ability to traverse national boundaries, which can be extrapolated in the case of *The L Word* as an anxiety about the bisexual/homosexual woman colonising the heterosexual woman into a state wherein the stability of her sexual boundaries becomes fluid.⁵²

Female masculinity?

Shane is the most cogent example of *The L Word*’s rendition of a butch figure in the group. Despite her much discussed lack of short hair in season one, Shane’s clothes, walk, posture and mannerisms, together with the contrast provided by the other characters, all embody butchness, rendering her the most visible lesbian of the protagonists – as Dana says to her in the pilot “every single thing about the way you’re dressed, like, screams dyke” (1.1). This is seen as integral to her character, as she does not, like Candace, ‘scrub up femme’ for big events. This is despite her job as a hairdresser, an industry not generally associated with butch women, and one in which her clients are depicted as primarily (at least outwardly) straight women. Shane is also extraordinarily stylish, and her very androgyny is portrayed as chic. Despite the aspersions cast by Alice in ‘Looking Back’ upon ‘the hundred footer’ (a lesbian easily identifiable as such from a hundred feet away) in the narrative, here is a hundred (or at least a fifty) footer, who is not marked by the series as undesirable, indeed, she is the much mooted ‘lothario’ of the narrative. Ciasullo, in her analysis of 1990s mainstream images, asserts that mainstream discourse has two quite contrasting ways of representing butch women. She can either be depicted as “masculine and *undesirable*,” or, like Gina Gershon in *Bound* for example, can be depicted as both butch and “simultaneously marked as feminine

with her pouty, Julia Roberts lips, wispy hair hanging in her eyes, and her reputation as an actress.”⁵³ Shane appears to have much in common with Ciasullo’s latter characterisation - she quite literally has the “wispy hair hanging in her eyes.” As far as her reputation as an actress is concerned, Moenning is not, unlike Gershon, usually dressed as a feminine character - previously having played both a transgendered character and a cross-dressing teenager. Unlike Hillary Swank for whom: “[m]edia coverage of Swank’s nomination and subsequent selection by the Academy [for playing Brandon Teena in *Boy’s Don’t Cry*] emphasized her “real-life” femininity in contrast to the boyish Brandon she played on screen,” Moenning is promoted via her *actual* likeness to Shane’s androgynous or tomboyish characteristics, thereby presenting a less clearcut vision of ‘femininity restored.’⁵⁴

The emphasis placed upon the very desirability of Shane, both within *The L Word* and in interviews and reviews, is a significant one. It appears that Chaiken in particular, is making a conscious effort to uncouple the signifiers of ‘butch’ and ‘undesirable’ in mainstream culture. Chaiken declares that Shane/Moenning:

...brings that revolutionary androgyny that confounds. She can pass for a boy, *yet* she’s totally sexy. I think *men respond to her* as much as women do. [My emphasis]⁵⁵

The repeated usage of the word ‘yet’ in articles regarding Moenning and the character she plays is of particular interest, as it acts as both an apology and a celebration, an affirmation that butch women are sexy, and can be to all genders and persuasions, and an insinuation that they are not usually. The more apparent insinuations here of course are that women who can pass for men, are not ‘totally sexy’ usually, and that it is necessary for *men* to be attracted to her in order for her to be attractive. Despite the fact that within the narrative Shane is primarily attractive *to* women, and that these women are gay and “straight” alike (as Tina says in ‘Let’s Do It,’ “the Shane test pretty much works on every woman,”) the emphasis placed upon her attractiveness to gay men (in the series) and straight male viewers, is quite disconcerting in its need to ‘validate’ the masculine woman.

Here we return to Inness and her assertion regarding the enforcement of “the idea of the “correct” lesbian being a consumer and a style maven” in 1980s and 1990s magazines.⁵⁶ *The L Word* formulates a vision of the butch that is a ‘correct lesbian’ in these terms – both consummate consumer and style maven. Shane’s stylishness despite, or rather because of, her look that “screams dyke” (Dana 1.1), is consistently emphasised, and making her an emblem of ‘lesbian as style maven’ (a concept quite rabidly promoted in 2004 in tandem with the release of *The L Word*).⁵⁷ Cherie’s husband Steve (James Purcell) appears to envision Shane as a kind of reverse *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* – a lesbian who can ‘make straight women look hot.’ Her ability to do so is predicated upon her difference, much as the presenters of *Queer Eye* trade upon their campy femininity to lend an edge to straight (and it is thereby presumed masculine) men, that is, they teach/groom them how to perform for their partners. Here the (supposedly) straight woman can be taught/groomed to look effortless, non-performative, far from the primping and ‘artifice’ of femininity. The fact that Cherie is given a tousled ‘just fucked’ hairstyle – i.e. a really messy one - is what makes her look hot. Steve thinks Shane “could be a gold mine” (1.9) and hence invests in her salon, as he believes this is a style or a mode that can be traded upon, giving women ‘looks’ that show that they appear not to

care, even though these ‘looks’ are in fact highly stylised. The joke is of course that Cherie’s hair has not in fact been styled, nor is it the style itself that imparts sexiness upon Cherie. She sports a real “just [almost] fucked look,” as opposed to a synthetic performance of such. That Shane loses her salon as quickly as she acquired it can be seen as recognition of the vagaries of the acceptance of homosexuality as style, fad, novelty and service provider.

Shane and Cherie’s relationship is perhaps the most obvious expression of butch-femme styles in the series, and the mobilisation of figuring lesbian desire as structured by difference. Cherie is a seducing, active bottom, displaying herself in order to be taken, and hence plays with and confuses notions of active and passive sexuality in the manner suggestive of the “actively orchestrating” femme described by such theorists as Hollibaugh.⁵⁸ The power of seduction, and the power of withholding, are firmly placed in the hands of Cherie, and in these hands, the previously uninterested-in- relationships Shane is transformed into the well-known figure of the wounded and manipulated butch. Starting out in the series as an almost compulsive bed hopper, it soon becomes clear that such activities are for Shane not merely a love of sex and women, or an indication of sex-positive queer culture, but are related to her being depicted as emotionally stoned, and deeply wounded. Martin has suggested that “[l]esbian butchness always seems to emerge in the form of a wound or woundedness,”⁵⁹ and Shane’s depiction is in keeping with the “melancholic loner image, which resonates with a whole history of butch representation.”⁶⁰ The culturally inscribed association between masculinity in women and melancholy is not a new phenomenon, and its presence in *The L Word* evokes the spectres of psychoanalytic and sexological discourses of inversion, and the representation of melancholy butches in such classic lesbian narratives as *The Well of Loneliness* or *Stone Butch Blues*.⁶¹

Shane’s womanising is depicted as lack, her desires fulfilled yet unfulfillable. The articulation of desire as lack is a common theme in *The L Word*, and, I conjecture, even a guiding force to the narrative drives of the text. Marina explicitly paraphrases this notion in the final episode as part of her attempted seduction of Jenny’s lover Robin: “[t]he Greek word, *eros*, denotes want, lack. The desire for that which is missing. The lover wants what it does not have. It is by definition impossible for him to have what he wants, if, as soon as it is had, it is no longer wanted” (1.12), quoting from a text by Anne Carson that she describes as “very romantic.” Although this is the case with many of the series’ relationships, this pattern appears to find its ultimate embodiment in the character of Shane for whom

the psychoanalytic notion that all desire is founded in lack seems to solidify in relation to the stone butch as true lack, as real castration, and as the exact place where, to paraphrase Marilyn Hacker, lust tumbles into grief.⁶²

This is marked via the repetitious nature of her one-night stands, which are figuratively associated with the repetitious nature of her drug habit. A further example of links drawn between butchness and melancholy in the series can be found in the character Lacey (Tammy Lynn Michaels), who appears for three episodes as Shane’s stalker. Lacey is the only foregrounded female character during the first season with short hair, and she wears other accoutrements of butchness. Lacey’s obsession with Shane’s abandonment of her turns out to be transference/displacement/projection of her feelings of familial abandonment. Her fixation

upon an inappropriate (unresponsive) object of desire, and consequent grief, is in fact remarkably similar to what Shane experiences later in the season with Cherie.

By the end of the first season, Shane has been fragmented by love, fragmented by the femme who will ultimately always choose the societal/economic comforts of heterosexuality over her lesbian desires. This fragmentation is most markedly performed in the *mise en scène* of their final break-up scene. The scene opens with Shane, and an artwork of impressions of body parts imprinted in what appears to be blood, framed by a mirror which is in itself surrounded by (or framed within) pink and blue neon tube-lights. She then enters the hall of mirrors proper, which contains Cherie. Throughout their interaction, their images are linked, separated, multiplied, distorted, confused and fragmented via the presence of the multiple mirrors. At the beginning of this scene, the camera journeys through what appears to be a mirror into the ‘real’ world. Mirrors thenceforth operate as a symbolic representation of the realms of both possibility and delusion. The scene utilises a “deep surface camera technique” – a technique that, according to photographer Del LaGrace Volcano, uses mirrors to “reveal both the back and front of the body” which has the effect of making “the viewer feel that they are seeing beyond the surface when, in fact, we are just seeing more surface.”⁶³ Due to the multiple mirrors in this scene, there are even further surfaces shown; however, it is difficult to see the surfaces themselves.

The second season sees Shane butching up somewhat. She finally gets a short(er) haircut, and frequently wears the slightly less androgynous wear of ties and jackets. Shane’s personal evolution in this season sees her fall in love and reject it before slowly opening herself up thereto, and she ends the second season on a happy note. Her professional advance is once again offered then removed due to the interest in her by a powerfully controlling woman - the vital shift in this season being that Shane actively rejects being controlled. In ‘Loyal,’ Shane visits a confessional in order to expurgate that “[e]veryone... wants something from me, and... I don’t feel like I have anything left to give” specifying that sex is “mainly what people want” from her (2.8). This confession can be seen as indicative of *The L Word*’s mirroring of Butler’s perception of stone butches “whereby that “providingness” turns to a self-sacrifice, which implicates her in the most ancient trap of feminine self-abnegation,” an argument which Halberstam critiques.⁶⁴

The character of Ivan in the first season appears to further the representation of female masculinity in *The L Word*, and could be said to be the first serious attempt to queer binary notions of gender in the series. Ivan (Kelly Lynch) is first introduced in ‘Locked Up’ (1.12), through a drag act to ‘Savoir Faire,’ where he wears a velvet suit and elaborate pompadour in a parody of and homage to 1970s masculinity (specifically the new wave writer of the song, Willy/Mink DeVille). The increasing popularity of drag kinging, particularly in lesbian communities, and post-Butlerian notions of gender performativity, inform this double presentation, which functions both as an embodied sense of butch/genderqueer/transgender masculinity and a campy deconstruction/celebration thereof via drag – both masculine performance and performativity. Reading Ivan in terms of the drag king categories proposed by Halberstam, Ivan is situated most clearly in relation to the categories of butch realness and denaturalised masculinity, in that: “the category of butch realness is situated on the sometimes vague boundary between transgender and butch definition” within which “masculinity is neither assimilated into maleness nor opposed to it; rather it

involves an active disidentification with dominant forms of masculinity, which are subsequently recycled into alternative masculinities.”⁶⁵

During and after his first drag act, Ivan and Kit flirt and talk, and consequently arrange to meet for coffee the following day. Upon entering the café, Kit does not recognise Ivan, out of drag and now wearing a leather jacket, jeans, a white button up shirt and a large belt buckle, and sporting “a long mane of hair – styled somewhere between a quiff and a mullet.”⁶⁶ Although he is initially unrecognisable to Kit, there are strong visual and behavioural linkages between the two gender presentations, which are suggestive of his drag act being explorative rather than transformative.⁶⁷ There is much debate both on the show and among viewers as to Ivan’s ‘actual’ gender identification. The character only gives us one indication thereof – towards the end of ‘Locked Up,’ Bette corrects Kit on her reference to Ivan as ‘he’, and when Kit apologises for her ‘mistake,’ Ivan states that he is “happy either way.” An exposition of Ivan’s gender identity is most immediately narratively pertinent in terms of Kit’s sexual identity. Bette’s warnings to Kit that Ivan is “courting you old school” and “*she* wants to be your husband” lead Kit to question her (previously seemingly unquestioned, or at least not greatly so) perceptions of Ivan as male. This questioning then leads to Kit clarifying to Ivan that she is a “two-months-from-50-year lifetime heterosexual woman,” and telling him: “If you were a man – you would be the perfect man,” but that under the circumstances, a relationship between the two of them would not work out. The stability of the identity categories of gay/straight and man/woman, is questioned by Ivan’s reply:

Ivan: Do you know what you’re looking for, Kit?

Kit: No. No, not in the big picture sense that you mean.

Ivan: Then how do you know I can’t give it to you?

While there is a tendency on the part of critics to wish to claim Ivan as either butch or transgender, undoubtedly in order to broaden the representational diversity of the show, the character resists definition.

Ivan appears to be an elaborate and somewhat convoluted pastiche of a variety of people and personas – storyteller Ivan E. Coyote, Heather Spear’s drag persona The Gentleman King and Willy DeVille. Ivan’s hair, like Shane’s, has been the subject of much discussion, both due to its proximity to the dreaded mullet, and its length, which acts to feminise Ivan’s appearance. This can be read as a manifestation of Gever’s “measures of acquiescence” discussed at the outset of this paper, with the creators of *The L Word* perhaps perceiving a butch or transgender drag king who could genuinely pass as male to be too threatening for their desired audience.⁶⁸ Interestingly, however, both Ivan’s wig for drag performances and his everyday hair, appear to be inspired by two of DeVille’s hairstyles – perhaps dearticulating the connection between long hair and femininity, and demonstrating Ivan’s portrayal of alternative rather than normative masculinity. The main inspiration for Ivan, suggested by Chaiken herself,⁶⁹ is Ivan E. Coyote, a Canadian “writer, storyteller, tin whistler, lighting technician and performer.”⁷⁰ Coyote has been:

trying to define my gender my whole life, and I'm beyond it now... I don't care about labels or pronouns, I don't identify with 'he' or 'she.' But I don't really like the term 'trans-gendered' either; it sounds like you're moving from one state to another. I just am who I am.⁷¹

Considering Ivan the character in light of Ivan the person can conceivably here lighten the pressure upon Ivan the character to signify a particular gendered identity, instead becoming a character who refuses gendered signification, who is not “reducible to transsexual man, transgendered man, or stone butch.”⁷²

Heather Spear, in her incarnation as The Gentleman King, performed Leonard Cohen's 'I'm Your Man' during the debut of Midwestern king troupe Dykes Do Drag in 1999, a drag act that is repeated in *The L Word*, and acts as the climax of both Ivan's performance of gender and his attempted seduction of Kit.⁷³ The usage of this song creates “an interesting juxtaposition between Spear's androgynous look and Cohen's ultra-masculine baritone voice.”⁷⁴ In an interview Spear remarks that she selected Cohen's song in order to “position the singer as a versatile subject...as a woman I can be that man.”⁷⁵ Cohen's song is used by Ivan as a further response to Kit's assertion that “if you were a man, you would be the perfect man” (1.12) – declaring that not only *is* he a man, but that given the chance he will be the perfect man for her. This scene complicates notions of gender and what it takes to ‘be a man,’ while simultaneously performing a deconstruction of classic models of manhood by articulating masculinity as capable of versatility and passivity. Although the act is ostensibly *about* the interplay between performance and ‘realness’ in constructions of maleness, reactions to Ivan's performance generally hinge upon notions of authenticity. The lyric “if you want another kind of love, I'll wear a mask for you” comes under particular scrutiny (see for example, Malinda Lo), as it is seen to imply that Ivan is ‘really’ a lesbian forced to wear a ‘mask’ of maleness to achieve her desires.⁷⁶ In contrast, it can be viewed as a concurrent assertion and subversion of ‘true’ maleness if gender is seen as always a mask, or, as Douglas sees it, the act introduces at least the “concept of gender performance to mainstream audiences/dominant culture that still might see gender as essential and tied to biological sex.”⁷⁷

The second season of *The L Word*, despite the producers' promises to be more daring in the series' images of non-normative gender presentations, did not appear to seriously attempt to play out the character of Ivan or his storyline with Kit. In the first episode of the second season, Ivan continues to romance Kit, including giving her the keys to his apartment, and she appears to be falling for his charms and/or attentions. When Kit uses these keys and accidentally witnesses Ivan half-dressed, Ivan becomes extremely distressed and angry, manually shoving her out of the room, and later being unwilling to see her. In ‘Lap Dance’ (2.2) Kit manages, with some difficulty, to locate Ivan, during which time we see her refer to Ivan as “she” for the first time. Kit makes little attempt to reconcile with him or discuss the incident, instead the major reason for her effort to locate him is her desire to ask him for investment money, rather than an endeavour to resolve the situation between them, a request to which he eventually acquiesces. Ivan does not reappear in the series, nor is he discussed, with the exception of a brief encounter in episode 9, when Kit goes to him after being stood up by her current (married) beau, and it is revealed that he has been seeing Iris, a burlesque dancer (who interestingly is depicted as having a very low opinion of lesbians – suggesting that her relationship with Ivan is indeed a heterosexual one), for five years, and that monogamy “just doesn't

work” for Ivan. That he had not previously explained this to Kit, nor disclosed his relationship with Iris while attempting to romance her, implicates Ivan as, if not dishonest, then at least not straightforward, and thereby easily dismissed as a potential suitor for Kit. Ivan’s presence in the series, like that of Lisa the lesbian-identified man, appears to have been included more as a sort of gender-freakshow than a serious attempt to utilise the characters to engage in discussion of diverse or multiple gender (and sexual) identities. It remains to be seen whether the purported inclusion of an FTM character in the third series will alter the series’ attitudes to non-normative gender presentations.⁷⁸

Conclusions

For despite the much lauded or criticised new femme visibility the series appears to offer, upon deeper perusal its relationship with lesbian femininity is complicated and at times rather troubled. In *The L Word* it does not appear to be the case that “it is the femmes who are finally asserting themselves” as Clark speculated of late eighties and early nineties lesbian chic, for femmes and indeed, lesbian femininity is not necessarily authenticated by the series, which instead undertakes a strange practice of simultaneously making feminine lesbians both hyper-visible and rendering them less authentic.⁷⁹ The series’ attitudes towards other identities reclaimed by the lesbian sex wars, such as butch-femme relationships appear equally narratively combative. While female masculinity in *The L Word* is presented as more authentically lesbian, the series’ depiction of female masculinity is likewise representative of older conceptions thereof. Butchness is framed in terms of melancholy and woundedness, while drag king Ivan is dismissed in the second season as volatile and dishonest. The perceptions of lesbian relationships in *The L Word* likewise hark back to earlier conceptions thereof. Relationships that are seen to emulate heteronormativity through a clear delineation of ‘roles’ are portrayed as damaging to the selfhood of individuals, reminiscent of critiques of butch-femme relationships during the 1970s. Other relationships are portrayed within paradigms of psychoanalytic and sexological discourse through their metaphoric associations with mirroring and vampirism. Significantly, most relationships in *The L Word* are tinged with melancholy, a sense of lack, and end badly, fitting conclusions for a 1950s pulp novel. Taken together, these elements of *The L Word* offer an encyclopaedia of past lesbian cultural representation, packaged within a contemporary exterior that proclaims to present something new ‘Not Your Mother’s Lesbians’⁸⁰ indeed, but your grandmothers’, perhaps.

Notes

¹ This essay was originally submitted to a journal in December 2005, and I spent the majority of 2006 waiting for my assigned editor to notify me of the details of requested revisions, a contact that never eventuated. Completed in 2005, ‘Fashioning *The L Word*’ does not discuss the third season of the series (screened during 2006), nor does it address the criticism contained in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe’s (eds.) *Reading*

The L Word (2006). My other forthcoming work on *The L Word* includes 'Dirty Lesbian Pictures: Art and Pornography in *The L Word*,' and 'Lesbian Pulp Television: Torment, Trauma and Transformations in *The L Word*,' which explicitly addresses the third season of the series.

² *The L Word*. Showtime 2004-.

³ Martha Gever, *Entertaining Lesbians: Celebrity, Sexuality and Self-Invention* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 39.

⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The *L Word*: Novelty in Normalcy," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 16, 2004, B10.

⁵ Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," *Camera Obscura* 25-26 (1991): 186.

⁶ Sue Ellen Case "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic." *Discourse* 11.1 (1988-89): 55-73.

⁷ Amber Hollibaugh and Cherríe Moraga, "What We're Rollin' around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism," in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (London: Virago Press, 1984), 404-414.

⁸ Joan Nestle "The Fem Question," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance. (Boston, London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 232-241.

⁹ Arlene Stein, "All dressed up, but no place to go? Style wars and the new lesbianism," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle. (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 431-40.

¹⁰ Sherrie Inness. " 'They're here, they're flouncy, don't worry about them': Depicting Lesbians in Popular Women's Magazines, 1965-1995," in *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 52-76.

¹¹ Ann Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s," *Feminist Studies* 27.3 (2001): 577-608.

¹² Bidy Martin, *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

¹³ Lisa Walker, 'How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are,' *Signs* 18 (1993): 866-890 and *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001)

¹⁴ Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)Visible," 584.

¹⁵ Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," 197.

¹⁶ Gever, *Entertaining Lesbians*, 43.

¹⁷ Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 74.

¹⁸ Walker *Looking Like What You Are*, 201.

¹⁹ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928; reprint, London: Virago, 2004), *Queer as Folk*, Showtime, 2000-2005.

²⁰ Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)Visible," 601-2.

²¹ Some of the textual quotations in this essay have been transcribed personally by the author. Others have been accessed via a website that provides transcripts for *The L Word* episodes. Acknowledgment goes to Steph of 'The L Word Transcripts' (<http://www.lword.com/transcripts/transcripts.html>) for providing and hosting these transcriptions, as they form a valuable resource for critics of *The L Word*.

²² Walker *Looking Like What You Are*, 11.

²³ A term utilised by Melissa Hardie in 'Beard' to describe "...a woman or man who disguises the sexual interest of her or his partner" in *Rhetorical Bodies* ed. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999) 276.

²⁴ Ilaria "Urbinati, owner of the hip LA show boutique Satine, joined the "The L Word" team to revamp its image for the second season....Looks like the other L word is luxe" in "'L Word' to fill SATC style gap?," *Fashionweekdaily.com* May 13 2004 <<http://www.fashionweekdaily.com/news/fullstory.sps?iNewsID=206807&itype=8486>>. In an extra ("L word Fashion Extra") on the first season DVD boxset, Urbinati introduces the fashion for the second season, stating that "Showtime wanted to really take the fashion of the show to the next level," and notes that the vision of the new fashion consultants for Dana's character is "a kind of country-clubbish vibe."

²⁵ Leslea Newman, 'I Enjoy Being a Girl,' in *The Femme Mystique*, ed. Leslea Newman (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1995), 11.

²⁶ Walker *Looking Like What You Are*, 211.

²⁷ Alexis Jetter 1993 cited in Ciasullo, "Making Her (In)Visible," 595. The quote is from a *Vogue* article and as such unsophisticated understandings are to be expected, however, Ciasullo leaves it completely unremarked, and the conflation is repeated throughout her argument, as it is in many other texts regarding contemporary cultures, being especially prominent in reviews of *The L Word*.

²⁸ Walker *Looking Like What You Are*, xiii.

²⁹ Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*, 31, 32.

³⁰ Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*, 74. Inness discusses “how women’s magazines operate to “normalize” lesbians by assuring heterosexual readers that lesbians are, indeed, very much like heterosexuals, partially stripping lesbians of their identities” (53) and this is often done through emphasising the physical attractiveness of the magazine’s interview subjects.

³¹ Ciasullo, “Making her (In)Visible,” 599-600.

³² Booth Moore and Ciasullo quoted in Booth Moore, “Dressed-up diversity: On ‘The L Word,’ lesbians go chic, playing against stereotypes but raising issues of identity and acceptance,” *The LA Times* February 8 2004 <<http://www.after0ellen.com/About/Press/latimes-feb2004.html>>.

³³ Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 94.

³⁴ Inness, “They’re here, they’re flouncy,” 63.

³⁵ Inness, “They’re here, they’re flouncy,” 65-6.

³⁶ Erin Douglas, “That’s Not Me: Queer Performance’s ‘Troubling’ of the Desire for Authenticity in *The L-Word*,” *Femme Fem(me)inities: A Performative Queering*, (MA, Miami University, 2004), 48-66.

³⁷ The most marked of these came from Kelly Lynch (Ivan) who announced during an interview in *Curve* that “half of the cast is gay, another third of them are bisexual, another couple of them maybe are confused about who they are but maybe, you know, have some issues.” (Anderson-Minshall 2004: 38/39).

³⁸ Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” 183.

³⁹ Shane Phelan, ‘Public Discourse and the Closeting of Butch Lesbians.’ *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*. Ed. Sally Munt, (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998) 197.

⁴⁰ Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 43.

⁴¹ Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 53.

⁴² Dana Heller, “States of Emergency: The Labours of Lesbian Desire in *ER*.” *Genders* 39 (2004): paragraph 29, < http://www.genders.org/g39/g39_heller.html >.

⁴³ Sedgwick, “*The L Word*,” B10.

⁴⁴ “Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body” and are all emblematic of grotesque imagery according to Mikhail Bakhtin in ‘The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources,’ *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1968): 317.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Grosz discussing Julia Kristeva in “Motherhood” in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1989): 79.

⁴⁶ For further reading on such associations, refer to Walker’s *Looking Like What You Are*.

⁴⁷ Although, as is noted by C Taylor “even if racially, Ion Overman is difficult to read: she has been claimed and championed by bi-racial/multiracial, Hispanic and African-American lesbians alike.” “Candace and Lesbians of Color on *The L Word*,” *Afterellen.com: Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Entertainment and the Media*. April 2004, ed. Sarah Warn. <<http://www.afterellen.com/TV/thelword/candace.html>>

⁴⁸ Douglas, “That’s Not Me,” 58.

⁴⁹ Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, 142. This is also exercised via actual mirrors in the text. For example, in the first episode we see Marina and Jenny in the bathroom, each reflected in two separate mirrors with individual large gold frames. Jenny asserts that she would like to see Marina again (this is before they first have sex), and Marina symbolically pulls her into the frame of her mirror.

⁵⁰ That Marina’s love for Jenny destroys Marina’s relationship and business, and causes her to attempt to take her own life (201), which while it doesn’t actually kill her, is the device of her removal from the series (effectively ‘killing’ her by making her cease to exist) furthers the allusion to *Dracula* and many pulp novels.

⁵¹ Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*, 30.

⁵² Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, (1994; reprint, London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 11-13. Where in this literature, it is Eastern Europe in relation to Britain that is posited as the ‘other,’ a polyphonus source of fear and desire, in the case of Marina in *The L Word*, it is Western Europe (we see Marina speaking flawless French and Italian) with its associations with freer attitudes towards sexuality that is the site of cultural anxiety.

⁵³ Ciasullo, “Making Her (In)Visible,” 601, 589.

⁵⁴ Kim Surkan, “Drag Kings in the New Wave: Gender Performance and Participation” in *The Drag King Anthology*, ed. Donna Troka, Kathleen LeBesco and Jean Noble (Binghamton: The Haworth Press, 2002)

167. During a fashion shoot and interview for *Vogue* for example, Moenning is quoted as saying: "I'm a total tomboy at heart. Incorporating menswear into my wardrobe is something that just happens when I dress myself" Irini Arakas, "What Women Want," *Vogue Magazine* September (2004): 400-408.

⁵⁵ Ilene Chaiken quoted in Gail Shister, " "L Word" is good word for series' local star," *Philadelphia Inquirer* February 3 2004, <<http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/entertainment/television/7859765.htm>>.

⁵⁶ Inness, "They're here, they're floucy," 75.

⁵⁷ See for example Guy Trebay's "The Secret Power of Lesbian Style," *The New York Times* June 27 2004, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/27/fashion/27LESB.html?pagewanted=3&ei=5062&en=a2e2e-b5559cce8f4&ex=1088913600&partner=GOOGLE>>.

⁵⁸ Hollibaugh in Hollibaugh and Moraga "What We're Rollin'," 408.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 40.

⁶⁰ Judith 'Jack' Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 227.

⁶¹ Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1993).

⁶² Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 112.

⁶³ Del LaGrace Volcano and Judith 'Jack' Halberstam, *The Drag King Book*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999), 39.

⁶⁴ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss. (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 25. This argument of Butler's is critiqued by Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*, 127-128.

⁶⁵ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 248.

⁶⁶ Stacy Farrar, "The L Word," *Sydney Star Observer* July 1 2004, <<http://www.ssonet.com.au/display.asp?ArticleID=3313>>.

⁶⁷ Halberstam and Volcano, *The Drag King Book*, 131.

⁶⁸ Gever, *Entertaining Lesbians*, 43.

⁶⁹ At a seminar in May 2004 Chaiken stated that the character was inspired by "a lesbian "sexpert" named Ivan...from Vancouver" (Chaiken paraphrased by Kristen n.p.), who ran a seminar on lesbian sex for the

(primarily heterosexual) actors prior to commencement of shooting. Although not anywhere listed as a ‘sexpert’, as far as I can tell, this has to be Coyote, as the intersections between their names, gender definitions, dress and Coyote’s location in Vancouver seem too strong for this to be otherwise.

⁷⁰ Taste This (Anna Camilleri, Ivan E. Coyote, Zoë Eakle and Lyndell Montgomery), *Boys Like Her: Transfictions* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1998) 221.

⁷¹ Coyote interviewed in Joy Parks “Straying From the Gender Pack: An Interview with Ivan E Coyote.” *Herizons* (Summer 2003) <<http://www.herizons.ca/magazine/backissues/sum03/profile.html>>.

⁷² Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam and C. Jacob Hale “Butch/FTM Border Wars: A Note on Collaboration,” *GLQ* 4.2 (1998): 285.

⁷³ Leonard Cohen, ‘I’m Your Man,’ *I’m Your Man*, Sony, 1988 and Surkan “Drag Kings,” 173-176.

⁷⁴ Surkan, “Drag Kings,” 174.

⁷⁵ Spear quoted in Surkan “Drag Kings,” 174.

⁷⁶ Malinda Lo, “It’s All About the Hair: Butch Identity and Drag on *The L Word*,” *Afterellen.com: Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Entertainment and the Media*, April 2004, ed. Sarah Warn, <<http://www.afterellen.com/TV/thelword/butch.html>>.

⁷⁷ Douglas, “That’s Not Me,” 62.

⁷⁸ Beth Callaghan, “‘L Word’ creator Ilene Chaiken atop the Gay.com bus with new cast member Daniela Sea,” *PlanetOut Entertainment* June 2005 <<http://www.planetout.com/content/slideshow/splash.html?coll=569&order=4&navpath=/entertainment/>>.

⁷⁹ Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” 197.

⁸⁰ ‘Not Your Mother’s Lesbians’ was the article which featured *The L Word* on the cover of *New York Metro* prior to its release. Kera Bolonik, “Not Your Mother’s Lesbians,” *New York Metro* January 12 2004 <http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/features/n_9708/>.

Globalization of the media and the challenges of Democratisation in Nigeria.

By Abimbola O. Adesoji

Abstract

Without gainsaying, Globalization has impacted tremendously on the media. One important implication of this development is the revolution in information dissemination. The Print Media, which is the focus of this study, is not left out of this information revolution. With the new wave of democratisation witnessed in Africa in the 1990s, the press became active participant in the tasks of promoting, projecting and supporting the process. In Nigeria where the political landscape became confusing as a result of the ambiguities that characterised the military-supervised democratisation, the press was not found wanting despite the travails of the media during the period in question. It would appear that the ability of the press to play the watchdog role creditably derives from its antecedents, particularly during the period of the nationalist struggle for political independence. However the contention is that the Nigerian Media, if placed in the context of global experience, still has a long way to go in bringing the opportunities of Globalization to bear on its contribution to democratisation. More importantly, this paper contends that the varied nature of the press has affected its response to democratisation. The paper examines the impacts of globalisation on the print media and how the impacted press promoted democratisation. The paper also highlights some of the challenges that Nigerian press has to face as far as democratisation is concerned in a globalised world.

Introduction

The Nigerian Press has remained a vibrant institution since the 1920s. Beginning with the emergence of the *West African Pilot* in 1937, the press has played a pivotal role in promoting political awareness, sensitising the populace and moulding and directing public opinion.¹ Expectedly it was a strong force in the struggle for the attainment of political independence. Not even the long period of military rule and its attendant risks could deter the press from playing its ascribed roles. In fact, more than any other period,

the press became more vociferous and even took to guerrilla journalism, a practice of publishing and circulating newspapers and magazines underground, in order to prosecute a cause that it believed in.

Meanwhile the last two decades or so witnessed tremendous advancement in the spread of the knowledge of information and communication technology. Virtually every segment of society, including the press, has been impacted by these developments. Even though the knowledge spread slowly to, or was latently embraced in Nigeria, its effects have been enormous. Not only has it quickened information dissemination, it has also revolutionised the conduct, method and quality of media practices generally.

Beginning from the early 1990s, Africa witnessed a new wave of democratisation, beginning with the Zambian experience.² Nigeria was not left behind as the military made some half-hearted efforts to democratise. The Babangida regime (1985-1993) conceived and ill-implemented is about the most expensive transition programme in the history of Nigeria.³ The consistent corruption under this regime led to the distinct emergence or revival and proliferation of radical and non-conformist newspapers and magazines, which have been appropriately labelled as the activist press.⁴ The activist press is so called because their emergence, mode of operation and activities went beyond the known and conventional journalism that existed earlier. Reminiscent of the anti-colonial press like the *West African Pilot*, the activist press mounted serious press campaigns on the military and its anti-democratic tendencies.

Meanwhile, press opposition to militarised democratisation reached its peak during the dark days of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Despite the efforts to suppress it mainly through proscription of newspapers and magazines as well as clampdown on journalists, the activist press became more vibrant. It would seem that the revolution in global communication aided tremendously the ability of the Nigerian press, not only to challenge anti-democratic forces, but also to pursue democratisation. Apart from speeding up the access which Africans have had to fast breaking events in other parts of the world, new communication technologies are also eroding monolithic information control within Africa.⁵ This in effect meant that institutions like the Media (that are not government owned) became better placed not only to counter government propaganda but also to popularise views previously suppressed. More importantly, with the citizens better informed, the status quo was challenged while the growing dissent found expression in the mounting opposition to authoritarian rule.

Furthermore, in addition to facilitating contact with other parties interested in the democratic process in Africa, this development also encouraged extensive coverage of the political situation in Nigeria. These developments coupled with the growth of the activist press aided democratisation. Globalization therefore empowers the press to contribute actively to the cause of democratisation.

Globalization, Democratisation and the Media: A Conceptual Framework

Globalization is a widespread concept with a considerable degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity does not

mean that it remains unclear or ill defined. Globalization has been viewed from different perspectives and dimensions particularly in relation to different interests, subject areas and scope. Hence it has been difficult adopting a standard definition. One perspective attempts to define it as a process of reinforcement and extension of the international flux of commerce, capitals, technology and labour force. Another perspective refers to institutional changes, which are brought about in the society by the increase of these flows and the development of the transnational corporations. In this point of view, it stressed the weakening of the regulating function of the national states. In its stronger version, globalisation implies the disappearance of the state in its economic dimensions while a subtler version considers globalisation just as the loss of an important portion of the economic sovereignty. Yet another perspective refers to the growing homogenisation of certain processes and behaviours like the introduction of global standards in the production of goods. However, the most extended idea in this perspective is the existence of a convergence in the demands of goods and services, a homogenisation in the regulation of the capital goods and the technology.⁶

Globalization is also defined as a set of processes changing the nature of human interaction across a wide range of spheres including the economic, political, social, technological and environmental. Furthermore, it is perceived as the process of integration of the world community into a common system either economic or social.⁷

From the foregoing, it could be seen that globalisation conjures up a picture of a borderless world more often than not facilitated by the convergence of information and communication technologies. Although it is a concept that means different things to different people across time and space, it essentially means the growing increase in interconnectedness and interdependences among the world's regions, nations, governments, business and institutions.⁸ It is a process, which engenders free flow of ideas, people, goods, services and capital thereby fostering integration of economies and societies.

Attempts have also been made to periodize globalisation. While some see it as nothing new, some others see it as a modern form of capitalism. It is also seen as the euphemism for westernisation.⁹ Historiographically, some dated it to the birth of the world states system following the end of the Second World War, when new technologies transformed the speed and range of communications allowing globalisation and automation of the industrial processes. To the economists, however, globalisation began in the 1970s.¹⁰ These suggestions notwithstanding, it is clear that globalisation is an ongoing process, with its most visible aspect being the spread of information and communication technologies.

From different perspectives on globalisation, certain features could be identified. These include spread of technology and ideas, development of institutional changes that cut across national boundaries as well as the homogenisation of certain processes and behaviours. The advance in technology has made available computer equipment, facsimile machines, telex systems and satellite communications, to name a few. Apart from facilitating networking among journalists, these facilities have revolutionised news printing, editing and reportage. More importantly, it has aided considerably in news circulation. Generally speaking, Globalization has made possible adequate and timely processing and dissemination of information.

Beginning from its emergence in the 1860s, the press has been varied.¹¹ The circumstances surrounding the emergence of these newspapers, the ideological disposition of the founders/owners and editors, the purpose of their establishment as well as the operating environment, all contribute to the differences in their approaches, method of operation and responses to issues. These differences, however, became more pronounced in the 1920s, fuelled as it were by the growing north-south divide, radical/nationalist versus liberal disposition, as well as national versus provincial orientation or typology of newspapers.¹² Consequently, different sections of the press have responded differently to such issues as nationalism, constitutionalism and state-creation¹³ among others. With the exception of the seeming unanimity of the press in condemning the military era, the press continues to have varied responses to all issues, including democratisation.

A set of interrelated factors explain why democratisation occurs in some countries and not others. These explanatory factors which could be a condition, structure or process include economic development, social divisions, state and political institutions, civil society, political culture and ideas as well as transnational and international engagements including war.¹⁴

Theoretical approaches comprising a set of ideas and explanatory generalization have also been adopted to explain patterns of democratisation. These include the modernisation, transition and structural approaches. The modernisation approach emphasises the centrality of the level of social and economic development to the process of democratisation.¹⁵ Succinctly, it has been summed up as “the more well-to-do the people of a country are on average, the more likely they will favour, achieve and maintain a democratic system for their country.”¹⁶ The transition approach emphasises political processes and elite initiatives and choices as accounting for moves from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy. It contends that certain actions, choices and strategies of political elites are beneficial to democratic transition while others are not. It therefore stresses that democratisation is largely contingent on what the elitist and individuals do, when, where and how.¹⁷

Unlike the transition approach, the structural approach explains the democratisation processes not by the agency of political elite but primarily by changing structures of power. The basic premise of the structural approach to democratisation is that the particular interrelationships of certain structures of power - economic, social, and political - as they gradually change through history provides constraints and opportunities that drive political elite and others along a historical trajectory leading towards liberal democracy. Other such structural interrelationships lead historically in other political directions.¹⁸ This explains why the changing structure of class, state and transnational power could lead in a democratic direction while others could lead to authoritarianism. Its limitations notwithstanding, theoretical generalizations have helped to explain why democracy is in one place and not in another or why democratisation is taking place.

Globalization, the Nigerian Press and Democratisation

The involvement of the Nigerian Press in political activism has, at times, produced landmark results.¹⁹ It would appear that this involvement influenced the press's view of and contribution to democratisation. Meanwhile, the revolution in global communication has brought the world much closer. With regard to the press, it has facilitated networking among journalists. This networking has brought about some developments. These included the recycling of international print media output on the domestic scene, the wide coverage of political issues in Nigeria by foreign magazines as well as the maintenance of contact with democracy and human rights activist and even exiled journalists. These developments became pronounced particularly at the peak of military repression in Nigeria when some print media organisations could not operate freely in the country. Thus news articles and features that were previously being suppressed became worldwide knowledge. In this regard, the *Times of London*, *New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek*, all contributed in different forms and proportion.²⁰ It would seem that the depth and volume of information about the democratic process in Nigeria influenced greatly the response of the international community to political developments in Nigeria. The isolation of Nigeria in the international community is a case in point.

Understandably therefore, the press has not only opposed and exposed antidemocratic tendencies at different times, it has also played the role of a watchdog with a view to promoting and safeguarding democratisation.²¹ In particular, the Nigerian press exposed the dubious democratisation programme of the military governments in Nigeria. It would seem that the democratisation programmes of both Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha were tailored towards ensuring self-succession. This perhaps explains why the programmes were characterised by contradictions, deliberately and carefully designed by the architects to ensure their failure. The several changes of election time-table, the banning and unbanning of certain categories of politicians as well as the encouragement and empowerment of anti-democratic forces like the Association for Better Nigeria (A.B.N) were some of the efforts made to truncate the democratisation process under General Ibrahim Babangida. There was also the manipulated adoption of a single presidential candidate by five different political parties under General Sani Abacha.

Beyond exposing these contradictions, the vibrant press roundly condemned it. Not surprisingly vitriolic attacks were launched on journalists, both foreign and Nigerian.²² It would seem also that the efforts at image laundering in a section of foreign press, particularly by the Abacha government, in which substantial amounts of money were wasted, was a response to the relentless war waged by the activist press on military autocracy and its manipulation of the democratic process.²³

Furthermore, the press through its coverage, reportage and editorials aided considerably, opposition and civil society groups. This was particularly the case with the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election considered as Nigeria's freest and fairest election. Not only was the annulment roundly and consistently condemned, there was also persistent call for the de-annulment of the election. Beyond this, it has been noted that the pressure mounted by the opposition media made up mainly of the activist press, together with other similar developments forced Babangida out of office.²⁴

With the advent of a new democratic dispensation in 1999 the press has continued playing its traditional role of informing and educating. Through this the press has educated citizens on political parties' programmes with a view to influencing people's choice of candidates or voting patterns. The press has also added glamour to the political process by its promotion of political parties and their candidates mostly through competitive advertisements and features with a view to selling their candidatures. More importantly, the press has participated actively in exposing the ills and excesses of *dramatis personae*, which have the tendency of denting, truncating or even negatively affecting democratisation. The certificate forgery case of Salisu Buhari, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives is a case in point.²⁵ Buhari claimed to have got a degree certificate from University of Toronto, which he presented to the Independent National Electoral Commission for screening. This was later found out to be a fake. This discovery, particularly the press exposition on it, led to his forced resignation and trial.

However, despite the aspiration of the Nigerian Press to conform to the international standard, it would appear that the level of response is still very low or inadequate. As such, many challenges are not being met particularly going by the standard established in advanced democracies. The Nigerian press for instance is yet to realise the value and thus the necessity of carrying out credible and well conducted opinion polls on political parties, their programmes and candidates as well as their chances of success or otherwise in elections. In the same vein, the Nigerian Press, with few recent exceptions, is not interested in and has not taken seriously the conduct of opinion polls to assess the popularity or otherwise of democratic governments, leaders and their policies.²⁶

Also, the press has not considered the importance of anchoring or stimulating vibrant debates that could bring political parties and candidates out of their shells and expose their programmes to public scrutiny. Similarly, it has neither considered seriously nor cultivated the habit of digging deep into parties' manifestoes and doing deeper analysis of issues affecting the nation and how the contesting parties intend to address them on assumption of power. It would seem rather that the concern of a significant section of the press has been on the undue promotion and projection of the personality of candidates, perhaps with the intent of image laundering with a view to giving them undeserved edge over others.²⁷ It is not impossible that this was done in return for financial reward.

These developments have a number of implications. In the first place, it could make election rigging possible. This perhaps was the situation in the past where in the absence of any foreknowledge of how elections could go, victory has always gone to the highest bidder. It has also encouraged the emergence of all manners of candidates including fraudsters, ex-convicts and drug barons.²⁸ This was because adequate searchlight was not beamed on candidates seeking public offices. Neither were their personalities adequately x-rayed to determine their suitability for public offices, which requires a high level of morality, probity and transparency. Besides, Nigerians have been left in the dark due to inadequate information on party programmes and candidates. This no doubt has resulted in situations where people have voted based on ethnic and religious sentiment or even blindly in some extreme cases.

Furthermore, by projecting candidates who lack the credibility and moral standing for public offices, the

press distort values, promote mediocrity, wound further the psyche of rational people and contribute to moral degeneracy. In cases where money has changed hands, which was often the situation, corruption has become endemic. This perhaps explains why corruption has been institutionalised in the press with the brown envelope syndrome.²⁹ In the long run, it becomes very difficult to correct or criticize leaders that emerged through such processes particularly by the press that threw them up in the first instance. This development is clearly against the social responsibility theory of the mass media. Simply put, the notion of the social responsibilities of the mass media means that the mass media act as the conscience of the nation by revealing bad things, commending good things and keeping the interest of the citizenry uppermost in their agenda.³⁰

Meanwhile, it would seem that the poor response of the press to the challenges of democratisation particularly in the present dispensation has produced far more serious developments with grave implications. It is not uncommon that in their desire to be part of the system and as a form of compensation, vibrant journalists have secured appointment in government as commissioners, special advisors or special assistants. Some others have become contractors and media consultants to government at different levels. This policy of incorporation, apart from resulting in the incapacitation of vibrant journalists, has more importantly led to the surrender of the press to the state, with the political elite becoming the ultimate victors. One direct fall out of this development has been the watering down of the headlines and content of reports and editorials.³¹ This contrasted sharply with what was obtained under the military when the press, despite its handicaps and the dangerous operating climate, did thorough policing of the elite in government. Not only were the deadlines set by the military to quit government popularised they were also effectively monitored. This was especially the case with General Abdusalami Abubakar's administration (1998-1999).³² More importantly, the military governments particularly of Babangida and Abacha were effectively pre-empted. Not only were the anti-people policies and programmes of the two military governments clearly exposed before they were announced or implemented, the citizenry were sufficiently informed and effectively prepared for what the governments was capable of doing. This perhaps explains the travails of the press under the military characterised as it were by unwarranted arrests, prolonged detention sometimes without trial as well as trial of journalists on spurious charges. There were also seizures of offending newspapers and magazines at different times as well as outright proscription and closure of media houses on flimsy excuses, mostly under the guise of maintaining national security.³³

It would seem also that the capture of the press by the state has affected newspapers' readership generally particularly as discerning readers are becoming more disinterested while the growing club of free readers who were always eager to read the latest exposé on government, have thinned out considerably. This development may not be unconnected with the impression that has been created in the minds of Nigerians that the press had become an arm of the state. With most journalists and editors now threading cautiously, there is the likelihood that the dissents will sooner or later be whipped into line while the uncompromising ones will be branded as extremists. This trend is beginning to emerge.³⁴ The arrest and trial of two journalists who produced a comprehensive feature on the newly acquired presidential jet is a case in point. Gbenga Aruleba of the African Independent Television, (AIT) was accused of describing the recently acquired presidential jet as *tokunbo* (fairly used or second hand), while Rotimi Durojaiye of

the Independent Newspapers Limited raised some questions over the age and cost of the presidential jet. The two journalists were therefore arraigned for allegedly making derogatory statements about the new presidential jet. Arguably the press feature on the jet particularly its cost, age, capability as well as whether its purchase followed due process or not, could no doubt have been seen by the Federal Government as “going too far.”³⁵ The ultimate casualty of this ugly scenario will be the Nigerian people who will be denied robust criticism and assessment of government policies and programmes aimed at keeping the leadership on their toes.

Conclusion

The response of the Nigerian Press to the challenges of democratisation has not been adequate. This could be due to the fact that the Nigerian Press has not taken full advantage of the benefits of Globalization to information dissemination. The implication therefore is that many challenges have either not been met at all or not properly met. While the Nigerian press could be excused on the ground that it is still globalising, it is pertinent to say that there is the need for it to quicken its pace so that it can catch up with the novel developments characteristic of the globalised world. This will not doubt enhance its ability to cope with the growing challenges of democratisation and other developments in the world. Corroborating this position, Sola Oni contends that,

The world as a global village has come to stay. An institution that fails to meet the challenges of globalisation shall remain irrelevant. There is no other lexis. This is the prize of globalization.³⁶

Notes

¹ Fred I.A. Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937*, London: Longman, 1978, 204-240.

² Louise M. Bourgault, *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, 206-223.

³ W. Alade Fawole, “The Military and the Democratisation Process in Nigeria under the Babangida Regime” in *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria’s Democratisation Programme, 1986-1993*. (ed) Nahzeem Oluwafemi Mimiko, Akure: Stebak, 1995, 101-120

⁴ Nahzeem Oluwafemi Mimiko, “From Agitation for human Rights to the Pursuit of Power: The Impact of Human Rights Organisation on Nigeria’s Aborted Democratisation Programme, 1986-1993” in Mimiko, Nahzeem Oluwafemi (ed) *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria’s Democratisation Programme*, 158.

⁵ The increasing number of fax machines and computer based networks in the hands of private individuals, companies and non-governmental organizations has broken the monopoly of governments in Africa over information control and the accompanying censorship. See Bourgault, 207.

⁶ Andres Musacchio, "The Concept of Globalization". Presented at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Oslo, Norway August 6-13 2000. 4-7.

⁷ Layi Erinosh, "Globalization and its Paradoxes" *The Guardian* (Lagos) 16 July, 2004, 9.

⁸ Jacob Ajekiigbe, "Effects of Globalization and Universal Banking in Nigeria". *The Guardian* (Lagos), 7 July 2004, 27&31.

⁹ Erinosh, 9.

¹⁰ Daniella Preda, "Globalization and Regionalization: An Historical Approach". Presented at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Oslo, Norway. August 6-13, 2000. 8-11.

¹¹ Increase H.E. Coker, *Landmarks of the Nigerian press: An outline of the Origins and Development of the Newspaper Press in Nigeria, 1859-1965*, Apapa: Nigerian National Press, 1968, 32-47.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stephen O. Bamiduro, "Press and Politics in Nigeria's First Republic, 1960-1966" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, (JHSN) vol. XI no. 3 & 4 December 1982 – June 1983, 107-125.

¹⁴ David Potter, "Explaining Democratisation" in *Democratization*, (ed) David Potter et al. Malden, U.S.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, 24.

¹⁵ Ibid, 13.

¹⁶ Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered" *American Behavioural Scientist*. vol 35 no. 4/5 pp 450 – 499; cited in Potter, 24-26.

¹⁷ Potter, 17.

¹⁸ Ibid, 18.

¹⁹ See for instance Fred Omu, "Journalism and the Rise of Nigerian Nationalism: John Payne Jackson, 1848-1915" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) vol. VII no 3 December 1974; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Berkeley; University of California Press, 1971; James S. Coleman & Carl G. Rosberg Jr (ed) *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, Berkeley

& Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964; Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria*, Bamiduro, "Press and Politics in Nigeria's First Republic..." 107-125. Olukotun, "At the Barricades..." 229-243.

²⁰ Ayo Olukotun, *State Repression, Crisis of Democratisation and Media Resistance in Nigeria, 1988-1999*, Ibadan: College Press, 2002, 195-197.

²¹ Abimbola Davies, "Coups Against Civilians: My Role My Regret" *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), 17 July 1993, 1,7,11; Arthur Nzeribe, "The Grand Strategy" *Newswatch* (Lagos), 20 December 1993, 9-18; Dipo Kolawole, "The Nigerian Press and the Abacha Transition Programme" in *Political Democratisation and Economic Deregulation in Nigeria under the Abacha Administration, 1993-1998*, (eds) Dipo Kolawole and N. Oluwafemi Mimiko. Ado-Ekiti: Department of Political Science, Ondo State University, 1998, 106

²² Michele Marnogues, *Guerrilla Journalism*, Paris: Reporters Sans Frontieres, 1996, pp 126-127; cited in Olukotun, 204

²³ The Guardian (Lagos) 30 November 1995. 21.

²⁴ Olukotun, 206.

²⁵ *The News* (Lagos), 19 July 1999, 10-18; *Tell* (Lagos), 2 August 1999. 8-17.

²⁶ The Guardian Opinion Poll, "Citizens bemoan state of democracy" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 7 July 2004. 19.

²⁷ Newspapers are usually replete with features on candidates contesting various positions around election periods. One important characteristic of these features is that they are mostly written to promote the candidates and enhance their chances of success.

²⁸ The personality of some political office holders in the present dispensation has been controversial. The case of Maurice Ibekwe, a fraudster kingpin who got elected into the House of Representatives is still fresh in mind. Similarly, Governor James Ibori of Delta State is still contending with an ex-convict case. There are other examples.

²⁹ The brown envelope syndrome describes inducing writers and editors with financial gratification to influence their writings in favour of the givers.

³⁰ Noma Owens-Ibie, "American Media and the Nigerian Press: A Study of Agenda- Setting in the Democratic Process" in *Governance and the Electoral Process: Nigeria and the United States of America* (ed) Oyin Ogunba, Lagos: ASAN, 1997, .469.

³¹ Bankole Ebisemiju, "Combat over, time for the news with human face" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 29

March 1999. 36.

³² See for example the various editions of *Tell* between January and April 1999.

³³ Gbolahan Gbadamosi, "The Many Cases of Human Rights Abuses" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 11 June 1998. 15-17.

³⁴ Sometime ago, President Olusegun Obasanjo accused the press of being too critical of his government. He particularly accused the press of acting like a colonial press. See Usoro Usoro, "Press Singing and Praise Freedom" *Saturday Sun* (Lagos), 8 November 2003. 23.

³⁵ *The Punch*, (Lagos) 27 June 2006. 1, 2 & 9.

³⁶ Sola Oni, "Prize of Globalization" *The Guardian on Sunday* (Lagos), 28 February 1999. 28.

Images of Gypsies, a German Case: Gilad Margalit.

By Habiba Hadziavdic

Sinti and Roma have lived for over six centuries in Europe and, numbering well over eight million people, constitute its largest ethnic minority. It is somewhat hard to estimate the exact numbers of German Sinti and Roma since Germany's Basic Law prohibits the collection of ethnic data. Nonetheless, a 1999 report submitted by the German Government to the "Advisory Committee on Implementation of the Framework Convention of National Minorities" estimated there to be 70,000 German Sinti and Roma. Many Romani leaders put the number between 150,00 and 200,000, mindful that their estimates include all Sinti and Roma living in Germany independent of their citizenship status¹. As a reference year for the first chronicle citation of Sinti and Roma in Germany, authors² point to the year 1417 and to Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* as the first detailed account. Münster was acquainted with Sinti and Roma from Heidelberg, observing and documenting their customs, which is why his chronicle became the most colorful, personal, and creditable account. Historically, German Sinti and Roma have been depicted as nomads and itinerant showmen. Often, the description of Sinti and Roma as non-sedentary or as people having only atypical occupations allows for further discrimination against this ethnic group. Portrayed as *different* from the rest of the Germans, both in their alleged essence (nomads) and means of livelihood (entertainers, door-to-door salesmen, or small circus performers), Sinti and Roma continue to be considered foreign or *Fremde*, although they have lived in Germany for more than six centuries. Sinti and Roma are generally characterized as the eternal Gypsy wanderers who stand outside of the conventional norms.

Although the nomadic lifestyle might be desirable for some Sinti and Roma, as may also be the case for individuals of various other ethnicities, the argument that all Sinti and Roma are intrinsically nomadic is reductive and even at times racially prejudiced. Moreover, the issue of nomadism in relation to Sinti and Roma remains a multifaceted issue that requires a well-balanced approach, even if some Sinti and Roma do assert their nomadic lifestyle. Accordingly, this paper challenges the antiziganistic hegemony that essentializes and others Sinti and Roma, forcing an entire group to morph into a homogenous entity. Particular lifestyles (nomadism or sedentary), types of occupations, and behavioral characteristics are not tied to a single identity of a group as a whole, but rather individually determined. Lastly, it is not one of the goals of German Sinti and Roma to create an artificial so-called "nation state" in which all Sinti and Roma would be granted citizenship based on their ethnicity. Rather, Germany is the nation state of German Sinti and Roma³.

As much as the historical data imparts that German Sinti and Roma have lived in Europe for centuries, the taxonomical description of their culture makes the debate about their nationality and the nature of their cultural production animated and continuous. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, research on Roma continues to be based on observation, collection, classification, and description whereby the researcher's objectivity frequently remains unquestioned. Often, the authority of the researcher is established by an addendum of charts, tables, and other statistical data as an empirical support of their claims. In his book *Time and the Other*, postcolonial scholar Johannes Fabian addresses the issue of the de-temporization of the Other in anthropological writing. In his account, the Other is the object of a researcher's study, ontologically and culturally presumed to be different. Additionally, Fabian maintains that the researcher is allowed to disregard temporal relations when studying a presumably unchanging, primitive culture. The terms civilization, evolution, development, acculturation, and modernization are all terms "whose conceptual content derives from evolutionary time"⁴ (17, footnote added). Persistently referring to the time of the Other as not belonging to the contemporary time, the researcher marginalizes the Other and permanently signifies it as primitive and "not-the-same." Partially borrowing from Levi-Strauss, Fabian argues that the taxonomical description of culture becomes ontological when "it maintains that culture is created by selection and classification." The consequent concept of culture is "devoid of a theory, creativity or production because in a radically taxonomic frame it makes no sense to raise the question of production. By extension we never appreciate the primitive as producer" (62). In cultural texts, the examples of portraying Sinti and Roma as primitive, as gatherers rather than producers, as people completely incapable of relating to modern society and its economically highly structured system, and as borrowers, if not thieves, are myriad.

Moreover, the perpetual discrimination against Sinti and Roma is facilitated by the rhetoric of Gypsies as nationless people, who are first and foremost perceived as not German (or broader "not European"). As there might be individuals or groups of Sinti and Roma who indeed would associate with nationless, my emphasis in this critique will be on the general argument of the inherent nationless of Sinti and Roma as eternal wanderers incapable of relating to conventional lifestyle. It is the homogenizing feature of the discourse about Sinti and Roma that makes it antiziganistic. Similarly, some Sinti and Roma might adhere to the nomadic lifestyle, as do individuals of various other ethnicities across the world, but the contention that all Sinti and Roma are inherently nomadic is racially prejudiced. Additionally, due to the historical circumstances associated with nomadism and Gypsies, such as the anti-Gypsy laws explicitly targeting Sinti and Roma's alleged itinerant way of life and trades, the issue of nomadism in relation to Gypsies remains a multifaceted issue that has not yet been studied in all its dimensions.

In his 1996 article "Antigypsyism in the Political Culture of the Federal Republic of Germany: A Parallel with Antisemitism?"⁵ and his 2002 book *Germany and Its Gypsies*⁶ historian Gilad Margalit characterizes and exploits the cultural construct "Gypsy" (he is only one of many authors who manipulates the construct⁷). By critically engaging with this construct, I will illustrate here⁸ some of the characteristics of the persistent nature of the contemporary discourse about Sinti and Roma that continues to study "Gypsies" as unchanging and primitive ("disregards temporal relations"). The critique of Margalit's marginalization of the persecution of Sinti and Roma, both prior to and in the Holocaust, as well as in post-war Germany, allows me to delineate some of the general misconceptions still circulating within the Romany discourse

(both in German and American scholarship⁹). He portrays Gypsies (his term for Sinti and Roma) as stateless, apolitical, and criminal nomads, and in doing so creates fertile ground for continuous discrimination against Sinti and Roma. His characterization of Gypsies parallels historical, narrative, and ethnographic texts, which in similar fashion typify Sinti and Roma as uncivilized and uncultured Gypsies (outside of terms “derived from evolutionary time”, e.g. “civilization, evolution, development, acculturation, modernization...”) ¹⁰.

One of Gilad Margalit’s central claims is that “racist antigypsyism began in Germany only in the late decades of the nineteenth century and existed on the margins of racist antisemitism.”¹¹ In the article, he characterizes the contemporary as well as centuries-old antigypsyism as “superficial”, “less dramatic in character”, lacking “demonizing characteristics” and “the element of ‘conspiracy’ that was dominant in nineteenth-century antisemitism.” He asserts that the Gypsy within German culture could be categorized as the “known other”, for Sinti and Roma’s coexistence in Europe is six centuries old. “For generations, the Sinti [...] wandered in specific regions and consequently mastered the local dialects. [...] Their fortune-telling skills left its impression in German (and non-German) literature and folklore” (2). Lastly, Margalit contends that antigypsyism “was never a political issue in Germany previous to the Third Reich” and that “...the ‘Gypsy Question’ was a marginal issue on the Nazi agenda; it was part of the so called ‘Social Question’—the problem of the lower and poorer strata from which many criminals supposedly came, and on which most of the public welfare expenditure was spent” (2). He concludes that, “Due to these factors the Romanies and their bitter fate in the Third Reich did not become a central subject in post-1945 German political culture until the 1980s” (3). Although Margalit includes the alarming findings of the 1994 Emnid public opinion poll, according to which “68 percent of the Germans agreed they would not like to have Romanies as their neighbors”, he fails to make an analytical assessment of antiziganism that would satisfactorily explain the continuing sweeping prejudice against Sinti and Roma. The same poll reveals the disproportionate hatred towards Sinti and Roma in comparison to other ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Poles, Africans, Turks, and Jews¹².

In order to show that “...hostility toward the Romanies lacked a religious temper and demonizing characteristics” Margalit evokes so-called “romantic” images of Gypsies evident in “centuries of coexistence.” “The romantic aspect of the Gypsy image became a symbol for freedom as early as the seventeenth century. [...] ...depiction of the Romani lifestyle as true, natural, and passionate influenced generations in Germany and elsewhere...” (2). Similarly, Margalit sentimentalizes Gypsies’ “fortune-telling skills” that “left its impression in German (and non-German) literature and folklore.” The same literature generally typified Gypsies (especially women) as deceitful, unscrupulous, and dangerous vagabonds¹³. The antigypsy laws highlight the authorities’ particular disdain for Gypsy fortune-tellers¹⁴. Lastly, Margalit’s assertions that “antigypsyism was never a political issue in Germany previous to the Third Reich” and that “...the ‘Gypsy Question’ was a marginal issue on the Nazi agenda...” are erroneous¹⁵. While evoking alleged romantic¹⁶ images of free-roaming Gypsies that might lead to the conclusion that antigypsyism is “superficial”, “less demonizing”, and “not political”¹⁷ Margalit fails to scrutinize any antigypsy decrees and edicts passed by the German authorities targeting and limiting the movement, settlement, and coexistence of Sinti and Roma since their arrival to Germany. The abundance and evident forcefulness of these laws elucidate the

politically, racially, and culturally motivated exclusion of Gypsies from the rest of German society and Margalit's emphasis on romantic imagery obscures this fact.

In his book *Zigeunerverfolgung in Deutschland mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeit zwischen 1918-1945 (The Persecution of Gypsies: 1918-1945)*, historian Mohammad Gharaati outlines the persecution of Sinti and Roma in Germany. According to Gharaati, between the years 1500 and 1800¹⁸ the German authorities passed 148 antigypsy edicts preventing Sinti and Roma from acquiring permanent residency and employment (32). Decades before the rise of the Third Reich, German police and various government ministries enacted laws according to which all Sinti and Roma residing in Germany were required to register with the police and unemployment agencies in each district, be fingerprinted and photographed, and have their genealogical data recorded¹⁹. From April to December of 1907, a few years after the establishment of the special "Gypsy Affairs Agency" ("Nachrichtendienst in Bezug auf die Zigeuner", 1899) in Munich under the directorship of the criminal investigator Alfred Dillmann, there were 289 criminal cases filed against Gypsies, the majority of which were for such trivial offenses as camping or driving a defective car (59). The antiziganistic vehemence inherent in such laws, as explained in Gharaati's work, coupled with the general literary descriptions of Gypsies as Tatars, Turkish spies, Egyptians, carriers of the plague, traitors to Christendom, and invaders in general, speak against Sinti and Roma as the "known other(s)."²⁰ Gypsies are indeed perceived by the political authorities as "the element(s) of 'conspiracy'" within German society, notwithstanding that their history in Germany is over six centuries long. By considering the historical data that Gharaati presents, we see how Margalit fails to reveal the mendacity inherent in the romanticization of "wandering" Gypsies.

Based on extensive research of the anti-Gypsy laws²¹, the persevering antiziganistic attitudes, and the contemporary literature of the Sinti and Roma political activists, it is my contention (contrary to Margalit) that most Sinti and Roma "traveled" in order to comply with the law and out of necessity to find employment. For example, in his book *Geschichte der Zigeunerverfolgung in Deutschland*²² (*The History of Persecution of Gypsies in Germany*), Joachim Hohmann highlights the immensity of anti-Gypsy laws since Sinti and Roma's arrival to Germany. These ordinances targeted the movement and prohibited the settlement of Gypsies. Hohmann concludes that based on his analysis of the anti-Gypsy laws the image of a free-roaming Gypsy is merely a cultural construct. "Under these circumstances, that there could have existed an unrestrained, free-roaming nomadic way of life is out of question" (80)²³. While some Sinti and Roma choose to lead a nomadic lifestyle (as do individuals of other ethnicities throughout the world), the contention that all Sinti and Roma are inherently nomadic is at best reductive and at worst racially prejudiced.

The extermination of Sinti and Roma resulting in deaths of more than 500,000 Sinti and Roma could hardly be summarized as "marginal" and "not politically motivated."²⁴ It certainly was not due to the lack of antiziganism that the persecution of Sinti and Roma before and during the Holocaust "did not become a central subject in post-1945 German political culture until the 1980s." Contrary to Margalit (and an array of similar authors), I argue that post-war attitudes towards Sinti and Roma, exemplified by the absence of a single Sinti and Roma witness at the Nuremberg trial, the fact that no reparation monies were paid, or the denial, well into the 1980s, of their genocide in the Holocaust, are centered around the construct "Gypsy".

By supporting the unchanging and unchallenged nature of this construct, Margalit's writing furthers this particular discrimination of Sinti and Roma. Surely, the approach of non-Gypsies towards Gypsies was adjusted to the spirit of the era, but the belief in the Gypsy essence, and the prejudiced vision inherent in such a viewpoint, remained the same.

In his analysis of the history of madness, *Madness and Civilization*²⁵, Michel Foucault reminds readers that in order to understand the relationship between the sane and insane in any given epoch one must begin to examine the silence, what has not been said about the changing treatment of those labeled as the insane. The belief in a particular and anomalous essence of the insane, which makes them ontologically different than those categorized as the sane, supports the further belief in a permanent essence of being, and in this case, radically different and possibly dangerous. The idea that there could be an irredeemable Gypsy essence, or what Slavoj Žižek terms the "real kernel"²⁶, that could be qualitatively assessed, led to Sinti and Roma's extermination in the Holocaust.

In summary, as only some Sinti and Roma identify with "mobility" and non-wage labor, it is antiziganistic to characterize an entire group as inherently and uniformly nomadic and communal, particularly due to the generalized, culturally assigned anti-Gypsy connotations that such descriptions generate. The celebrated Gypsy innocence and worry-free lifestyle are presumably what makes them Gypsies. They all dance, sing, play music, and have strong communal relations. The persistence of the belief that all Gypsies create and remain in close-knit communities has had certain detrimental effects, one example of which is the common belief in high rates of incest among Gypsies. Certainly it is not Sinti and Roma's alleged racial inferiority or general inability that pigeonholes them in the role of wedding musicians and traveling salesmen. Instead, a revision and careful evaluation of the autonomy of expression and the necessity of the space for such exhibition is needed. Often forced to be on the move, Sinti and Roma frequently did not have access to education or public life in the past. The children of those Sinti and Roma who would permanently settle in an area faced continued persecution in schools and communities, and the adult Sinti and Roma were often performing menial services for those in power and with prominent positions. Pointing to the paradigm and the predicament of subaltern women, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?"²⁷, asserts that at the crux of the problem is not merely speaking, having nothing to say or that no accounts of the subject-consciousness of women exist, but that she is allocated no position of utterance. Appropriating Spivak's gender-centered critique, it could be said that by ignoring the efforts and achievements of hundreds of organizations and people working for the rights of Sinti and Roma, such as European Roma Rights Center, Roma National Congress, Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, Roma Section, Union Romani, Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Romani Rose, Wilhelm Spindler, Anton Franz, William Duna, and Ian Hancock, to name a few, authors curtail the impact the Roma advocates have had in exposing biased trends and practices towards Sinti and Roma.

Notes

¹ Source: “State FCNM Report”. <http://www.coe.int>

² See Ebhardt, Wilhelm. “Die Zigeuner in der hochdeutschen Literatur bis zu Goethes ‘Götz von Berlichingen’”. Diss. Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen, 1928. p. 17.

³ Romani Rose, the Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and one of the most prominent political figures in the Sinti and Roma discourse in Germany, asserts that “...the reality is that the German Sinti and Roma are Germans and Germany is their own home country. [...] Like the Danes, Sorbians and Frieslanders in Germany, the 70,000 Sinti und Roma in Germany form a historically developed national minority. Rose, Romani. “Sinti and Roma as National Minorities in the Countries of Europe”. *The Patrin Web Journal*. Sept. 3, 1999. <http://www.geocities.com>

⁴ Here, Fabian refers to the notion that non-Europeans were exemplars of the stages of human development that civilized Europeans had presumably passed through long ago. Allegedly, Europeans were far apart (far ahead of) in their propensity for development from their non-European counterparts. Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

⁵ Margalit, Gilad. “Antigypsyism in the Political Culture of the Federal Republic of Germany: A Parallel with Antisemitism?”. *The Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism*. No. 9, 1996.

⁶ Margalit, Gilad. *Germany and Its Gypsies*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

⁷ On the topic of “political unconsciousness” and “wandering (stateless)” Gypsies, see Brearley, Margaret. “The Roma/Gypsies of Europe: a persecuted people”. In: *Research Report for: Institute for Jewish Policy Research*. No. 3, 1996.; an ethnographic account of Gypsies, see Fonseca, Isabel. *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.; the “Gypsy occupations” and “otherness”, see Hermann, Arnold. *Das Fahrende Volk*. Neustadt/Weinstraße: Pfälzische Verlagsanstalt, 1980.; the Gypsy records and research in the Third Reich, see Justin, Eva. “Lebensschicksale artfremd erzogener Zigeunerkinder und ihrer Nachkommen.” Diss. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1943.; For the constructs “Gypsy musician” and “Gypsy being”, see: Block, Martin. *Zigeuner, ihr Leben und ihre Seele: dargestellt auf Grund eigener Reisen und Forschungen*. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institute, a.g., 1936.; on Gypsy police records and persecution, see Dillmann, Alfred. *Das Zigeuner-Buch*. München: Dr. Wild’sche Buchdruckerei, 1905.

⁸ I will concentrate primarily on Margalit’s article; most of his chief ideas from the article were later elaborated in his 2002 book.

⁹ Margalit is an Israeli historian and lecturer in the Department of General History at the University of Haifa, Israel. Some of his scholarship has been published in America (e.g. University of Wisconsin Press);

however, the majority of his writing is specific to Germany, is distributed in Germany, and the majority of secondary literature is German (e.g. Peter Widmann; see footnote 7).

¹⁰ See: Widmann, Peter. "Germany and Its Gypsies: A Post-Auschwitz Ordeal". *Journal of Social History*. Summer, 2005. Widmann, in his review of Margalit's book *Germany and Its Gypsies*, critiques Margalit's "socio-psychological speculations" ("the author relies less on analysis supported by research sources than on [...] speculations") behind the supposedly questionable motivations of Sinti and Roma activists, their supporters, and in general, the political work of the Sinti Civil Rights Movement.

¹¹ "Antigypsyism in the Political Culture of the Federal Republic of Germany: A Parallel with Antisemitism?". p. 1. From his writing, it is not explicitly clear why Margalit chooses to compare and contrast antiziganism with antisemitism, apart from the manifest prejudice and racism inherent in both. Unlike Margalit, in my analysis of the construct "Gypsy", I only occasionally draw comparisons between antiziganism and antisemitism, for my primary study centers around the "Gypsy". As such, his assessment of antisemitism is not a focus of this work.

¹² Arabs, 47%; Poles, 39%; Africans, 37%; Turks, 36%; and Jews, 22%, (Margalit, 4).

¹³ See: Ebhardt, Wilhelm. "Die Zigeuner in der hochdeutschen Literatur bis zu Goethes 'Götz von Berlichingen'". Diss. Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen, 1928.

¹⁴ See: Dilmman, Alfred. *Das Zigeuner-Buch*. München: Dr. Wild'sche Buchdruckerei, 1905.

¹⁵ On March 17, 1982 then Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Schmidt, in front of the special delegation of Sinti and Roma under the leadership of Romani Rose, publicly acknowledged that Sinti and Roma were persecuted on the basis of "race" in the Holocaust ("Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt... anerkannte den Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma aus Gründen der sogenannten "Rasse"; Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma. Home Page. 12 June 2006. <http://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de> More recently, on May 29, 2006, by the invitation of the Prime Minister of Poland, Kazimierz Marcinkewicz, Rose became a member of the International Auschwitz Committee ("Mitglied des Internationalen Auschwitz-Rats").

¹⁶ Although there is no exact equivalent to philosemitism within the Romany discourse per se, it could be argued that the exaggerated positive statements (since overt ziganism tends to be socially unacceptable) about Gypsies are manifestly philoziganism.

¹⁷ See: "Germany and its Gypsies: A Post-Auschwitz Ordeal", book review at *RomNews Network Community*, March 26, 2003. <http://www.romnews.com/de> According to book reviewer, "Margalit's aim [in this book] [...] is less to provoke sympathy for the continued suffering of Romanies, and more to dispute their claims to have been equal victims to the Jews in the Holocaust. Presented as a study of German attitudes towards Romanies, this book is actually a contribution to the disheartening literature of ethnic competition for victimhood status". The reviewer points to Margalit's unfounded claim that "despite

everything, Gypsies, in contrast to Jews, were perceived by Himmler...to be part of the German fatherland and not its foe”, p. 53 of Margalit’s book. Reviewer concludes that regrettably “Margalit’s aim here [from Margalit’s claim that since Roma “had no contact with the German population, it seems unlikely that the extermination of the Roma constituted part of the German attempt to protect the racial purity of the German population”, Margalit p. 48] is to establish a clear difference between the Nazi treatment of the Romanies, on one hand, and the Jews on the other, making it plain that it was the latter who were the true victims of Nazis”.

¹⁸ In addition to the earliest antigypsy edicts (from 1500 to 1800), the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveal intense, politically motivated assimilation policies in both the Austro- Hungarian Empire and the German lands. Thousands of Gypsy children were forcefully taken from their parents’ homes and placed into orphanages or non-Gypsy families for the purposes of reeducation and assimilation. Often the parents were sent to *Arbeitshäuser*, places of forced labor. It is not difficult to foresee the devastating consequences of such actions on Romany families and the generations of unnaturally orphaned Sinti and Roma children. Similarly to the Romany historian Ian Hancock, a professor of Romany Studies at the University of Texas, Austin, I argue that such policies were often attempts to destroy Romany language and Sinti and Roma culture. See: Hancock, Ian. “Chronology”. *The Romani Archives and Documentation Center*. <http://www.radoc.net> Hancock cites the efforts of such assimilation policies in the example of the Nordhausen authorities (from 1830) asserting that such projects had a goal to “eradicate the Romani population by removing the children for permanent placement with non-Romani families”.

¹⁹ Despite the terms of Article 108 of the National Constitution of the Weimar Republic (ratified in 1919 and 1921), which guaranteed Sinti and Roma full and equal citizenship rights, antiziganism throughout the German-speaking lands was widespread and on the rise in the beginning of the twentieth century. The similar registration of Jews in Germany was mandatory during the Third Reich. As non-Sinti and Roma citizens were also required (and still are) to register upon living and acquiring a new address (*Anmeldung* and *Abmeldung*), they were not fingerprinted, photographed, and their genealogies were not recorded.

²⁰ For the chronology of the depiction of the literary figure “Gypsy”, see Ebhardt Wilhelm’s dissertation (cited in footnote 10).

²¹ On February 17th 1906, the Prussian Minister of the Interior (Prussian Law) issued a directive entitled “Combating the Gypsy Nuisance” (“Die Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens”) guaranteeing the expulsion of Sinti and Roma from not only Prussia but the surrounding countries as well. Prussia introduced “Gypsy licenses”, requirements for all Gypsies that would allow them to stay in the region, but not to settle permanently. On July 16th, 1926, the Bavarian “Law for Combating Gypsies, Vagabonds and Idlers” (“Gesetz zur Bekämpfung von Zigeunern, Landfahrern und Arbeitsscheuen”) proposed a year earlier at the 1925 conference, was passed. Firstly, the law reiterated that Gypsies are a different race, secondly that they are by nature opposed to all work, and thirdly that they should be subjected to forced labor. Pre-Holocaust Germany targeted Gypsies by law, classifying them as so-called non-Aryans and those seen as unworthy of living. “The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” was passed in 1933, making

forceful sterilization legal and ordering sterilization of Gypsies, Jews, Germans of black color, disabled, and alleged asocials. On September 17, 1933, “The National Citizenship Law” relegated Gypsies and Jews to the status of second-class citizens, and deprived them of their civil rights. In the same year under the second Nuremberg “Law for Prevention of Blood and Honor” intermarriage or sexual relationships between Aryans and non-Aryans, including the Gypsies, was outlawed. The subsequent internment in the concentration camps and Heinrich Himmler’s signing of the Auschwitz decree on December 16, 1942 authorizing elimination of Gypsies, resulted in murder of 500,000 Sinti and Roma.

²² Hohmann, Joachim, S. *Geschichte der Zigeunerverfolgung in Deutschland*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1988.

²³ “Von einem ungebundenen, freien Wanderleben konnte unter diesen Bedingungen keine Rede sein...” (80).

²⁴ “Antigypsyism in the Political Culture of the Federal Republic of Germany: A Parallel with Antisemitism?”, p. 2 (“Racist antigypsyism began in Germany only in the late decades of the nineteenth century and existed on the margins of racist antisemitism. In contrast to the latter, however, racist antigypsyism had no political character. Furthermore, the *racist* preoccupation with the Romanies in Germany, as in England, was *not solely negative*”; emphasis added).

²⁵ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*. trans. Richard Howard. New York: Pantheon, 1965. p. 3-37 (especially 6 and 7), 66-7, 211 (fear of madness).

²⁶ Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London and New York: Verso, 1989.

²⁷ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. p. 294-297.

Strange Fruit: American Culture and the Remaking of Iraqi Males at Abu Ghraib.

By Warren Steele

On April 28th, 2004 the CBS news program, *60 Minutes*, broadcast a collection of photographs which had been circulating throughout the American military for months prior to their eventual exposure on national television. These pictures, which writer Carolyn Strange describes as “the workplace snapshot-cum-trophy photo”, not only provided the American public with unflinching visual evidence of prisoner abuse at the hands of U.S. soldiers, but also of torture both physical and psycho-



logical at the behest of their commanders.¹ After all, despite Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld’s deliberate avoidance of “The T-word,” and somewhat Orwellian abuse of the English language in order to evade the problematic associations of such a term, the *torture of people by American citizens* is an unavoidable reality. Because despite insistence by the Bush administration that such acts were the work of “a few bad apples,” and that, in the words of Brigadier-General Mark Kimmitt:

The Army is a values-based organization. We live by our values. Some of our soldiers...die by our values, and [that the] acts that you see in these pictures may reflect...individuals, but by God, [they do not] reflect my army.”²

The fact remains that similar acts have occurred—and continue to occur—not only at facilities based in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay, but also in innumerable “black sites” found all over the world.³ Secret prisons in which torture can no longer be seen as an aberration in the midst of a ‘just’ and ‘righteous’ cause, but rather as a systematic, government sanctioned practice, which facilitates the goals of that cause; whatever it may be.⁴

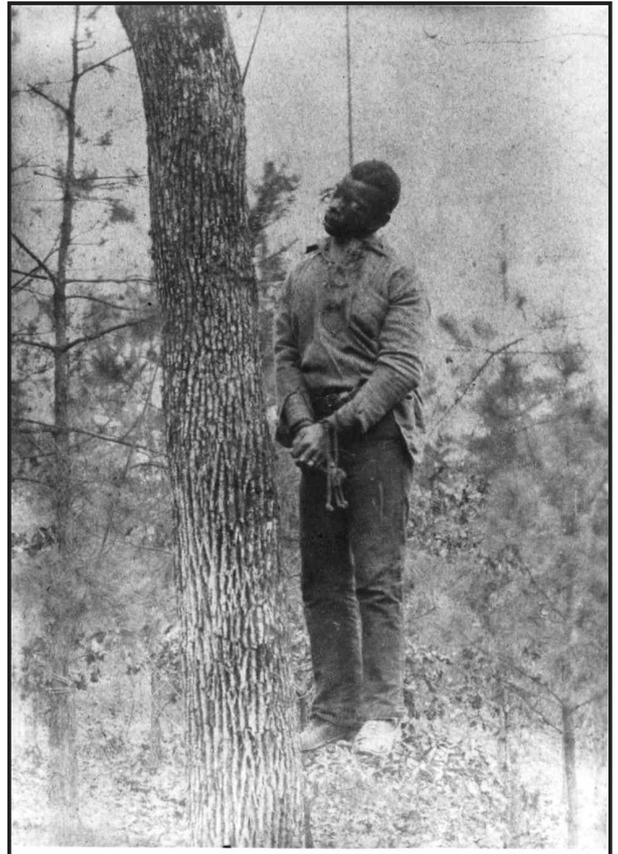
Naturally, the culpability of the American government in the practice of such abuse has revealed a glaring contradiction between the utopian rhetoric of its leaders, and the practical policies of both its military and its intelligence gathering community. Because how does one reconcile the rape, murder, and unlawful incarceration of Iraqi citizens when the pretense for the original Operation (was) Iraqi Freedom? Moreover, how does one find reasons for, and create meaning from, such obvious incongruities—such ironies!—when the production of meaning and the search for context, is either a) confined to the hypocritical actions of one presidential administration, or b) is continually penned in by that great historical barrier—that great beginning and end—known as September 11, 2001: *the* single experience which has served as both the starting point, and the ultimate justification for every event to follow, whether they are related or not. As Carolyn Strange points out:

Most historians, no matter what their field of specialization, find such narrow time-frames for historical analysis inherently dubious; yet historians have hardly dominated the ranks of those who have exposed and criticized human-rights abuses committed in the course of waging the global war on terror. Investigative journalists, lawyers, political scientists, media theorists, [and others] have contributed evidence and provided perspectives that have profoundly challenged the framing of the war according to mainstream media outlets and political administrations, yet [most] have done so without grounding their critiques in history.⁵

Some scholars, however, such as Benjamin Whitmer and Carolyn Strange have attempted to penetrate beyond such narrow time frames by consciously choosing to break away from the temporal brackets created by the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, and thereby place themselves in a far more favourable position historically. Specifically, one which can more accurately trace America's current use of torture to a more substantial root cause, because despite the immense significance of 9/11, the event itself can also be seen as just one more symptom of a much larger social disease. In fact, when placed within its proper historical context, September 11th quickly becomes the most recent catalyst for the subsequent re-emergence of torture and other war-time atrocities as accepted practice among the U.S. citizenry.

For example, both Whitmer and Strange maintain that torture at Abu Ghraib and other U.S. facilities can be traced to accepted practices within the American penal system. While others, such as Susan Sontag have gone further, and stated indirectly that such acts of abuse stem from a sense of inherent racism which has haunted the United States since slavery. After all, much has already been made of the link between Abu Ghraib and the images found in American lynching photography taken from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Sontag writes:

If there is something comparable to what these pictures show it would be some of the [photos]...of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880s and 1930s, which show small town Americans... grinning, beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree. The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib.⁶



Indeed, each set of photos features tortured, humiliated, and castrated ‘others,’ both in the literal and figurative sense. Moreover, each features what writer Hilton Als calls, “a lot of crazy looking white people, as crazy and empty-looking in the face as the white people who stare at me”, and presumably, all those they deem to be non-white.⁷ Yet, despite the many similarities which lie between these two distinct historical points, the links that join them have never been made concrete. Instead, the most recent collection of pictures is only said to recall the other, and as such, evoke only feelings of embarrassment and shame at how little progress has been made since the institution of Jim Crow.

Of course, most scholars are very wary of making such connections, and rightly so, since there is an inherent problem in stating that A is identical to B, that *this* is analogous to *that*, or that one form of hatred is the same as another. In all cases, such absolutes are invariably false, since historical events are never identical. However, as Zillah Eisenstein writes, sometimes comparison is necessary, since the ever-present “racializing of difference...requires that we look through or in-between the horrors of hatred.”⁸ Because even though

racial lynchings do not bespeak the same hatred as do the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, or the concentration camps of Nazi Germany or Bosnia...the slaves who died on the slave ships [do] share a [larger] history of hate with the Jews and the Gypsies of the

holocaust...histories [which] must be recognized, explored, and compared, because these accounts are part of a similar, though not identical ‘otherness.’⁹

In fact, despite the many temporal and contextual differences which constitute and complicate each specific example of hate, all forms of hatred whether racial, religious, sexual, or political all share the same general but closely related characteristics. Namely: the establishment of hierarchy through the inscription of violence on the body of the victim. In this sense, the photos gleaned from Abu Ghraib, as well as all those found in the annals of American history *are* comparable to one another, because each is part of a larger continuum of hate of which Iraq is only the most recent initiate. A continuum in which ‘others’ are produced and purged not only to help “purify” the whiteness of the State, but also to strengthen its resolve against those who would threaten it with difference.¹⁰ In other words, the racist must create, or in the case of Abu Ghraib, *recreate* his inferior.¹¹ Furthermore, he or she must seize upon that newly constructed difference and then remake that which is threatening, into something controllable and familiar, palatable and inferior.

For example, on May 4th, 2004, conservative pundit Rush Limbaugh made the following statement on his syndicated radio show; in an episode he titled somewhat ironically—albeit inadvertently—“It’s Not About Us; This Is War!”:

CALLER: It was like a college fraternity prank that stacked up naked men...

LIMBAUGH: Exactly! Exactly my point! This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation and we’re going to ruin people’s lives over it and we’re going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day...you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of a need to blow some steam off?¹²

Weirdly, and in spite of Limbaugh’s mind-bending hubris, the metaphors used by this ultra-conservative spokesman really struck at the heart of the matter; although again, it was accomplished inadvertently. In fact, Limbaugh’s comments were—and still *are*—so accurate and so telling that scholar Slavoj Žižek would pick up the same metaphor two weeks later when discussing the very same issue. As Žižek writes:

To anyone acquainted with the reality of the American way of life, the photos brought to mind the obscene underside of U.S. popular culture—say, the initiatory rituals of torture and humiliation one has to undergo to be accepted into a closed community. Similar photos appear at regular intervals in the U.S. press after some scandal explodes at an Army base or high school campus, when such rituals went overboard. Far too often we are treated to images of soldiers and students forced to assume humiliating poses, perform debasing gestures and suffer sadistic punishments.¹³

Yet, whereas Limbaugh sees the innocuous scenario of a few soldiers “blowing off some steam,” Zizek frames the rite as something far more sinister. More specifically, he states that America’s use of torture facilitates “a direct insight into ‘American values,’ into the core of an obscene enjoyment that sustains the American way of life.” Indeed, Zizek postulates that in “being submitted to the humiliating tortures [inflicted upon them by U.S. soldiers], the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*” by their captors.¹⁴ Foreign bodies forced to endure a rite of passage which not only demeaned them as people, but as I will argue, also pushed them through the lens of American history, and thus through the events and ideals which have shaped the arc of North America’s racist past, present, and possible future.



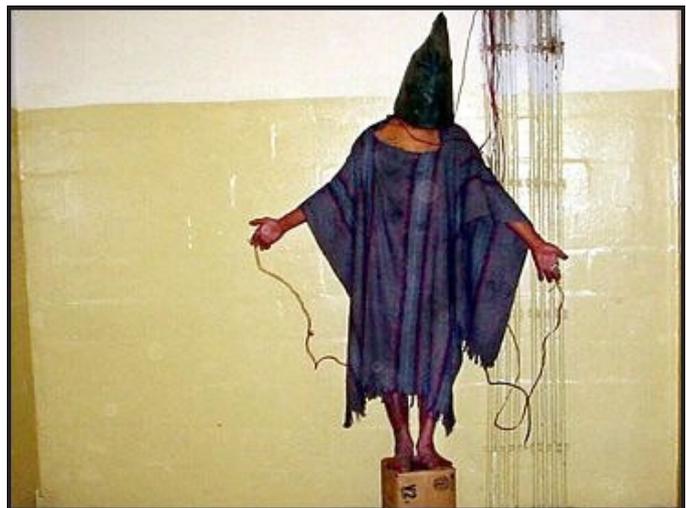
Consider this: Limbaugh’s statements reference two ideas which are not only central to the psychology and cultural significance of the Abu Ghraib photos, but perhaps also to the systematic acts of torture taking place across the world in secret CIA prisons also known as “black sites.” In particular, Limbaugh refers to the concept of initiation, and to the idea of acceptance into a closed community by rite of pain. Moreover—and by implication—he is also referencing the reinforcement of an existing social hierarchy; an element which is often an *invariable* aspect of all closed communities. In this sense, it is enormously appropriate that Limbaugh should refer directly to the secret Yale society known as Skull and Bones, because in doing so, he has not only implicated the current U.S. President and lifetime “Bonesman,” George Walker Bush, *indirectly*, but also established the two poles of the American social order with stunning clarity. Keep in mind, according to Rush Limbaugh both President Bush and the victims at Abu Ghraib are associated with the same practices of the same ‘organization.’ Two members playing two roles that represent the two extremes of the same power structure; namely: a) the role of fraternity president, and b) that of the new fraternity pledge.

For instance, when torture is reframed as a hazing ritual that grants entrance into a closed community, or more specifically, when torture is reframed as a ritual which grants entrance into a community of *increasing closure* such as the United States, the act not only becomes a rite of passage, but also a kind of performance which ultimately seeks to erase the agency and subjectivity of its victims. Consequently, bodies are redefined as their ethnicity is effaced, and subjectivities are remoulded as any existent religious or political convictions are destroyed and replaced by ideologies and dogmas deemed to be more acceptable by the oppressor. In fact, the systematic practice of physical torture and psychological abuse at the hands of one’s “friend” or enemy, actually seeks to inscribe a new tribal identity on the body of the victim. Thereby remaking the person being tortured—a body once considered terribly foreign by the torturer—into a palatable likeness of and for the oppressor. In the case of Abu Ghraib, it is a ritual which not only educates an already “coloured” body on the power and supremacy of American politics, but also on the

racial superiority of white skin, white culture, and white history.

After all, as a new entrant into the community hierarchy, the Iraqi male is now forced to take his 'required' place on the lowest rung of the American social order, since his entire being is broken down, and then remade into something which resembles the abused figure of the U.S. 'nigger.' In other words, he becomes a non-person; a castrated and powerless 'Other'; a parody of humanity; a repository for all that is considered bad or undesirable; and, most importantly, the latest in a series of *black* fields upon which the bright light of *white* identity is defined. However, unlike Skull and Bones, and yet at the same time, in keeping with the sort of socio-political environment that initially conceived the club back in 1832, the possibility of promotion for this latest pledge is absolutely inconceivable as opposed to inevitable. Because like the place occupied by the victim's African-American predecessors during and after slavery, the signs inscribed upon the skin of this new American body also read: "Whites Only." Or at best: "This far. And no further."

Before I continue, I feel it is important to first pause, and deal with my use of the word 'nigger,' because it is, and always has been, such a problematic term. One which continues to hold a great deal of power even today; especially when uttered by the wrong person in the wrong context. There are so many issues which arise when such a loaded racial epithet is applied to people or situations that are so far removed from its original signifier. As such, I want to make it clear now, that I am not equating the so-called "N-word" with the figure of the tortured Iraqi citizen. Rather, I am arguing that Iraqi citizens, and Iraqi male's in particular, are being forced through the lens of 'that word' in a time of American imperialism, for the purposes of American consumption. Indeed, a prime example of such racial remaking is found quite easily in one of the most famous pictures taken from the Abu Ghraib scandal. Specifically, the humiliating image of an Iraqi man standing barefoot on a box; his face and otherwise unclothed body concealed beneath a pointed black hood, and a tattered black robe; his arms forced open and stretched outward, so that his body is not only effaced, but also transformed and remade into something both familiar and inferior. In effect, this victim and others like him, become Muslim men moulded in the image of Christ, and perhaps bodies baptised by fire through wires and electrodes that stream upward from their fingertips into some unseen power source just beyond the camera frame.



Since its original publication over two years ago, this photo of the 'man in the black hood' in particular has become something of an icon for the current U.S.-Iraq war. It has come to represent the reality of

American foreign policy, the intensity of the Iraqi insurgency, and the subsequent brutality of the U.S. military brought on by a careless and/or inept leadership. Most importantly, however—and until now, perhaps unconsciously—it has also come to represent many of the shocking truths embedded within America’s racist past and present. As such, it is a prime example of what Slavoj Žižek refers to rather facetiously as

‘unknown knows,’ the things we don’t know that we know—which is precisely, the Freudian unconscious, [or] the ‘knowledge which doesn’t know itself,’ as [Jacques] Lacan used to say.¹⁵

Because if one looks closely at the image of this unnamed victim, and pays close attention to the way in which he is dressed, as well as the way in which he is posed, a number of startling patterns begin to emerge. Patterns which not only reveal the extent of American mistreatment, but also some startling visual and ideological motifs, which are ultimately inscribed with the history of those who would invade, oppress, and occupy a sovereign country in the name of democracy.

For example, in the context of American history this particular photo is extremely disturbing, because it resonates with over 400 years of slavery and oppression through the amalgamation of two related, and yet totally contradictory racial images—that of the ‘nigger’ and that of the KKK. Keep in mind, the man posed in the photo is a non-white, dressed in a black robe, which bears a striking resemblance to the uniform of the Ku Klux Klan. From a North American perspective, it is impossible to view this trinity without making some alarming mental connections, as this sort of organized racial hatred has had a tremendous impact on the culture of the American continent. An impact which has not only preserved the political potency of the white supremacists and their clothing, but also allowed the soldiers at Abu Ghraib to improve upon the KKK’s particular brand of oppression, by altering their normally iconic costumes to signify the inscription of colour. Or more precisely: to signify the inscription of the word “coloured” on the bodies of their victims. Bear in mind that in being forced to wear the black garment, the prisoner is not only educated on the power of white skin, but in turn, simultaneously kicked into the hierarchy of American culture by being both *racialized* and *required* to assume the role of the Black slave.



What's more, the Iraqi victim's initiation into the U.S. master-slave relationship is even established through many of the same methods employed by the historical figure of the white American slave owner: in the sense that, such a disturbing power structure is continually reinforced by the oppressor through sexualized means. In particular, through the military's blatant re-creation of the BDSM fetish scene, and through acts which not only serve to castrate the prisoners and establish the sexual supremacy of their captors, but also the unquestioned virility of American masculinity, as well as the absolute inadequacy of their foreign victims—who are, incidentally, now classified as 'bottoms.' Indeed, to paraphrase the words of one, Benjamin Whitmer, "Abu Ghraib contains the complete theater of sexual aberration, [including] every form of racial-sexual humiliation and violation endemic" to the colonial history of the United States and its people.¹⁶ All of which are now being "enacted by our uniformed men and women" upon the bodies of these new 'initiates,' just as it was done to their so-called 'Negro' predecessors only decades earlier.¹⁷



In fact, today, it is both justified and appropriate that such acts of physical abuse and racial hatred should take place within walls of a U.S. prison as opposed to the open air of something akin to the Southern plantation. Because if Abu Ghraib is indicative of American violence and American racism, from the time of slavery and emancipation, to the civil rights struggles which occurred after the end of World War II, then it seems only fitting that America's current victimization, and subsequent initiation of another non-white race, should take place not only within their most modern *incarnation*, but also within their most blatant *indication* of a continuing and deeply seeded racism. After all, in a country where one third of the African-American youth will enter the U.S. justice system *as* convicts, and thus as bodies who will eventually be stripped of liberty, robbed of dignity, violated sexually, and forever marked *as* 'niggers' racially, one cannot help but wonder if Abu Ghraib—and all the other secret CIA prisons—are more than just mere "black sites."¹⁸ But rather sites which locate *blackness* in order to purify, strengthen, illuminate, and define the limits of a world which is dominated by whiteness. As one former intelligence official said to writer Seymour Hersh when describing the official commencement of torture at Abu Ghraib:

They weren't getting anything substantive from the detainees in Iraq. [So the Under-Secretary for Intelligence, Stephen Cambone] says, 'I've got to crack this thing and I'm tired of working through the normal chain of command. I've got this apparatus set up [called the *black* special-access program] and I'm going in hot.' So he pulls the switch, and the electricity begins flowing last summer. And it's working. We're getting a picture of the insurgency in Iraq and the intelligence is flowing into the *white world*. We're getting good stuff.¹⁹

Notes

¹ Strange, Carolyn. "The Shock of Torture: A Historiographical Challenge," *History Workshop Journal* 61 (2006). pp. 148.

² CBSNEWS.Com. "Abuse of Iraqi POWs by GIs Probed," *CBS News*. 28 April 2004. Accessed 21 August 2006. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/27/6011/main614063_page3.shtml>.

³ Priest, Dana. "CIA Holds Terror Suspects in Secret Prisons," *Washington Post* 2 Nov. 2005. pp. A1.

⁴ For more information on the U.S. government's culpability in the practice of torture by their own people please refer to: Greenberg, Karen, and Joshua L. Dratel, ed. *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁵ Strange, Carolyn. "The Shock of Torture: A Historiographical Challenge," *History Workshop Journal* 61 (2006). pp. 135-136.

⁶ Sontag, Susan. "What Have We Done?" *The New York Times*. 23 May 2004. Accessed 12 August 2006. <<http://donswaim.com/nytimes.sontag.html>>

⁷ Als, Hilton. "GWTW," *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Ed. James Allen et al. Sante Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000. pp. 39-40.

⁸ Eisenstein, Zillah. *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized*. New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 13.

⁹ Eisenstein, Zillah. *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized*. New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 13.

¹⁰ Leonard, David J. "The Real Color of Money: Controlling Black Bodies in the NBA," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 30. 2 (May 2006). pp. 159.

¹¹ For more information see: Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967; Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

¹² From "It's Not About Us; This Is War!," *The Rush Limbaugh Show*. Aired 4 May 2004. The quote can also be found on-line at mediamatters.com. Accessed 12 August 2006. <<http://mediamatters.org/items/200405050003>>

¹³ Zizek, Slavoj. "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," *In These Times* 28.15. 21 May 2004. A version is also available on-line at: *Inthesetimes.com*. Accessed 23 July 2005. <http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu>

ghraib/.>

¹⁴ Zizek, Slavoj. "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," *In These Times* 28.15. 21 May 2004. A version is also available on-line at: *Inthesetimes.com*. Accessed 23 July 2005. <[http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu_ghraib/.](http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu_ghraib/)>

¹⁵ Zizek, Slavoj. "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," *In These Times* 28.15. 21 May 2004. A version is also available on-line at: *Inthesetimes.com*. Accessed 23 July 2005. <[http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu_ghraib/.](http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu_ghraib/)>

¹⁶ Whitmer, Benjamin. "Torture Chambers and Rape Rooms: What Abu Ghraib can Tell Us About the American Carceral System," *New Centennial Review* 6.1. pp. 192.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 192.

¹⁸ David Leonard writes: "At present, people of color account for more than 70% of America's prison population, with Latinos representing nearly 20% and Blacks accounting for more than 50% of America's prison population. As of 2004, there were more than 1 million Black people confined to prison. That represents 1 out of 35; if you split that in half, it constitutes 1 out of 17 men; now remove the very old and very young, and this number drops to 1 in 10. Now if you include those on parole or probation, the number is 1 in 4; for those just in their 20s, it is 1 in 3. In America, the land of the free, Black males have more than a 30% chance of doing time at some point in their lives. Compared to Latinos, who hover around 16% (1 in 6), and Whites at about 4% (1 in 24), it becomes clear that the effects of the prison industrial complex are specific to the Black community. Although formal Jim Crow ended with the efforts of activism and organizers through the 1960s, the existence of the prison industrial complex represents a 21st century manifestation of Jim Crow that entails disenfranchisement, family dislocation, virtual enslavement, and forced confinement (Mauer & the Sentencing Project, 2001; Miller, 1997)." For more information see: Leonard, David J. "The Real Color of Money: Controlling Black Bodies in the NBA," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 30. 2 (May 2006). pp. 162.

¹⁹ Hersh, Seymour M. "The Gray Zone: How a Secret Pentagon Program Came to Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker*. 24 May 2004. Accessed online 4 August 2006. <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040524fa_fact>

Adrian Hall's Adaptations of *In the Belly of the Beast.*

By Mary Ellen Wright

Continually pushing back the boundaries of conventional theatre, Adrian Hall, founder of Trinity Repertory Company and its artistic director for twenty-five years, often creates new works dealing with current issues. His ground-breaking play adaptations of literary and documentary sources became theatrical events that have earned him critical acclaim and helped establish Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, as a prominent regional theatre. Hall, one of America's most influential theatre directors for the past thirty years, is well known for his directorial skills and for his ingenious and controversial staging of contemporary and classic drama. However, much of Hall's renown as a director stems from the distinctive productions he stages from his own original adaptations. Hall's penchant for illuminating what he terms "the underbelly of society" has led him to adapt plays featuring fictional and non-fictional anti-heroes such as Oscar Wilde, Charles Manson, and Eustace Chisholm.

Convicted felon Jack Henry Abbott was another such anti-hero and is the subject of Hall's *In the Belly of the Beast* and *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited*. Abbott had been reared in foster homes and juvenile centers before being sent to prison. He was released from prison through the efforts of author Norman Mailer and other literati in New York. Mailer had corresponded with Abbott and was impressed with Abbott's writing style and gift of phrasing. Mailer kept Abbott's letters and approached Random House to publish them in book form. When the book came out, reviewers praised it. Mailer promised Abbott employment in his quest to convince the parole board that this gifted artist should be free. The New York Parole Board released Abbott to a halfway house in New York's derelict Lower East Side in 1981. Less than a month later, Abbott stabbed and killed a waiter in a New York City restaurant over a trivial incident. He fled but was apprehended a few weeks later in Louisiana, where he offered no resistance to his arrest. He was tried, convicted and returned to prison.

In 1983, Hall adapted *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison* from the book of the same title by Abbott.¹ Premiering in Providence in April of that year, it sent shock waves through audiences who were confronted with Abbott's prison experiences depicted in Hall's play. In 2003, Hall revisited the script after Abbott's suicide in prison and crafted *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited*, which was produced in Dallas and New York. He discovered the play still has the power to astound audiences with its arresting, underlying indictment of the American prison system.

When beginning his process of turning the story from the literary genre into the stage script, Hall selected portions of the book that gave insight into the man and his mind. Hall was drawn to Jack Henry Abbott not because the New York literati had been instrumental in bringing about Abbott's release from prison, but because of Abbott's choices or lack of choices in society. Hall explained, "People who are not under some extraordinary pressure, all that you can say is 'that's a very interesting person,' or 'that is a very smart person or very talented person.' So consequently, they don't interest me nearly as much as people on the edge" (Interview, 22 September 1999).

Hall often embarks upon an adaptation to explore a personality or to elucidate the conflicts in the life of a person under stress. He approaches a project, in an effort to understand a particular phenomenon and keeps an open mind. When writers become interested in characters "on the edge" such as Jack Henry Abbott, it is imperative that they refrain from making judgments, since the truth often depends upon one's point of view.

When he began adapting *In the Belly of the Beast* in Providence, Hall employed an unusual process. He asked one actor in the Trinity Repertory Company to read the first chapter of Abbott's book and then asked him to memorize the chapter. At this point, Hall was unsure of the method he would use to adapt the book to the stage. He read parts of the chapter with the actor and together they improvised the action. For nearly a week, Hall worked with the single actor, Richard Jenkins, to ascertain that Abbott's book could be told on stage. Originally, Hall envisioned his play as a monodrama for Jenkins. However, confirming for himself that the story would translate to the stage, Hall decided to expand the work to include other characters. So he added two characters to serve as "readers." Hall recognized that with the addition of readers, he could incorporate court records and trial transcripts from Abbott's case into the script in addition to passages from Abbott's book. The readers would provide informational facts as well as intensify the dramatic conflict by representing jailers, prosecutors, and witnesses as needed to tell Abbott's story on stage (Interview, 27 June, 2003).

Sources for the ninety-minute script included Abbott's book, Abbott's trial transcripts, private letters, interviews, newspaper clippings, and a "60 Minutes" television report on Abbott. Hall also researched prison conditions and visited solitary confinement cells in Rhode Island while preparing to write his adaptation.

Abbott's book consisted mainly of his time while incarcerated. Hall's dilemma was finding a way to successfully connect the audience emotionally with Abbott's sense of violation and frustration. In the play, Abbott relates, "I was twenty or twenty-one-years- old when I was taken to a blackout cell." In Hall's production at this point, the theatre immediately goes dark with one light on Abbott. A door, signifying a jail cell door, closes and the single light is extinguished, leaving the entire audience and stage in total darkness. Although the darkness lasts less than one minute, Hall believes it is necessary for the audiences' understanding of a blackout cell to be plunged into pitch-black darkness. Abbott's voice continues in the play:

It was in total darkness. Not a crack of light entered that cell anywhere. The darkness was

absolute; it was like being in ink. The only light I saw when I closed my eyes. Then there was before me a vivid burst of brilliance of color, like fireworks. When I opened my eyes it would vanish. Once I rose, thirsty, and felt my way to the sink. I felt the cup and I grasped it in my right hand. With my left hand I felt the button on the sink. I pressed it and could hear the trickle of water. I held my cup under it until I judged it full. Then raised the cup carefully to my lips and tilted it back to drink. I felt the legs; the bodies of many insects run up my face, over my eyes and into my hair. I flung down the cup (The audience hears the noise of a tin cup on metal.) and brought my hands to my face in an electric reaction and my eyes closed and the fireworks went off again. I heard someone screaming far away (Act I).

One of the readers screams. Abbott continues, “When I regained consciousness, I was in a regular cell. I had been removed from the blackout cell.” The lights are restored in the theatre, and the audience witnesses Abbott, disoriented and alone in his cell curled in the fetal position. It is at this point that audience members begin to grasp the horrors of prison life as they experience the uncertainty and disorientation while shrouded in blackness. Reviewers called Hall’s play brilliant; however, Eva Wolas noted the play’s unsettling effect on audiences. “There is room for improvement in Adrian Hall’s rather rough selection of this documentary-editorial material; nevertheless, it has a stunning effect . . . It is well worth seeing because of Richard Jenkins’s incredibly marvelous characterization of the lead role, and for the awesome indictment of our 20th century penal system.” Jerry O’Brien reported on the 1983 production and said:

It seems to me that at the heart of this stark and poignant production is the eternal necessity of each of us to come to some understanding of what mercy is. The play does not seek to justify Abbott’s actions, but to explain them, and in so doing to provide us with the means for self-examination . . . Here is real tragedy—not that some faceless system is to blame for the wreckage of Abbott’s life and actions, but that the system is decked with the images of rehabilitation and infused with the false hope of impossible transformations.

The anonymous reviewer for the *Daily News* of Newburyport, Massachusetts stated, “Despite minor flaws, the play is a powerful indictment of a system where the goal is to punish rather than rehabilitate, humiliate rather than help, ignore rather than correct” (“Jack Henry Abbott”). Previously unaware of prison life, audiences are suddenly forced to be an eyewitness to the shocking, inhumane treatment of a fellow human being.

In 2002, actor/director Dan Day approached Hall about *In the Belly of the Beast* script. Day, artistic director of the Kitchen Dog Theatre in Dallas, asked Hall to direct the script with Day playing the role of Abbott. Since Hall continues to search for innovative ways of communicating with his audiences, he could not be satisfied simply to direct his first script. Hall believes that theatre must change to remain vital to contemporary audiences. He stated: “There has to be constant change: new ways of dealing with problems, new ways of communicating with an audience” (Franckling 86). He recognized that the world in general and audiences in particular had changed tremendously since his first production, and that knowledge, along with the fact that Abbott had hanged himself in his jail cell earlier that year, weighed heavily on

Hall's thoughts. He could not conceive of re-staging the original play without incorporating information of Abbott's life after his disastrous parole in 1981 as well as his death.

Stunned by the behavioral patterns and inner turmoil which Abbott's book articulated, Hall said, "I had just never been inside a mind like that before, and I kept looking for things that would give me clues to the person" (Interview 8 July 2003). Hall became intrigued with the thought of "revisiting" his original script. He said, "What I had to do was take the original text I had written nineteen years ago and define for myself what I was trying to do then and what I was trying to do now" (Interview, 8 July 2003). In revising his adaptation, Hall "cast a wide net" as he terms it. In this phase of his process, he researched and gathered information about Abbott written in the intervening years since Abbott had been sent back to prison. Hall revised his script as new facts came to light and new insights occurred to him. He discovered Abbott's second book, *My Return*, as well as copious newspaper articles written after Abbott's death, and numerous additional parole and court records. Hall struggled through the voluminous material as he sought new and vital ways to make the script, with its still current issues, relevant and accessible to a contemporary audience.

Act I was nearly complete when the Kitchen Dog Theatre Company went into rehearsal, since it contained much of his first script. But Act II was far from completion. Hall said:

It was difficult going into rehearsal because I was working with people who hadn't rehearsed with me that much before. So they became very nervous. At the end of the day, they would want to know what we would do tomorrow and I would say, "I don't know. It depends on how much I get done or how much you get done." Or I'd say, "I'm going over to the library to find out this and so maybe tomorrow we'll do that." And then tomorrow would come and we wouldn't do that because I hadn't found out anything or maybe I'd found out something that turned me in the other direction (Interview, 11 July 2003).

Although the lack of a final script never concerns Hall because he often writes and edits as he sees the play unfold in rehearsal, not everyone involved in the production was comfortable with Hall's methods. In fact, Hall wrote Act II in one day when he realized that he was going to have open rebellion if he did not produce an actable version quickly. But even after this crisis, he continued to revise the script until, as he terms it, "the gong went off." He continued, "After you have been in rehearsal four or five weeks, you know where every word is. In the middle of the night I would get up and change words or sentences or thoughts even. Then the next day in rehearsal and I'd say, 'Wait a minute, I want to rework that sentence.' You could just hear the groans" (Interview, 11 July 2003). In this second script, Hall was able to include newly discovered material that shed more light on Abbott's humanity. Hall discussed the difference this addition made to his second script:

In the first script, I think the only reference to his mother was in the line where the prison guard opened Abbott's cell door and said, "Your mother died." In "A Letter to Paul" from Abbott's second book, Abbott related a personal memory (when he was four) of his mother bending

over him and her hair falling around her and his face. I found that so extraordinary. We are told that we remember things the way we would like it to have been. You often can't remember the brutality of an automobile accident. Then when somebody like Abbott, who has never revealed anything that would bring the least whisper of sympathy, suddenly says, "When I was four years old, my mother used to let down her hair, and it would fall all about me and her hair was dark and lustrous." I just find that amazing, and for me, that kind of thing was what humanized this man for me (Interview, 11 July 2003).

Hall added the tender incident to give insight into Abbott, the boy, in order to better explain Abbott, the hardened criminal.

Hall's revision incorporated techniques that helped the audience make an emotional connection to material from which they might otherwise deliberately distance themselves. As he discovered additional information, he experimented with different theatrical techniques to convey it to spectators. For example, he implemented the use of a tape recording that was played from a large, old-fashioned tape machine on the set. The actor playing Abbott announced on the pre-recorded tape that every word here could be verified and documented, again adding to the play's air of almost documentary verisimilitude. Having a predilection for Brechtian techniques, Hall used this tape as well as banners and slides to incorporate new information in surprising ways. For instance, prior to three particular scenes, one reader pulled one of three narrow canvas banners along a wire that stretched the length of the wall. The reader announced from the banner as he pulled it: "State Raised Convict," "Solitary Confinement," and "Moral Strength." Displaying the banners introduced essential data prior to the three scenes. Hall also incorporated slides of photographs during the time period of Abbott's youth. These photographs, while not of Abbott or his family, were striking in their gritty starkness and illustrated the poverty and struggles prevalent in Abbott's early life. Although accustomed to plenty, the audience connected the visuals to the cruel struggle of a child brought up in foster homes as they deciphered the meaning of "State Raised Convict."

Hall reasons that since conflict is the basis of drama, there must be two opposing forces and the stronger the convictions on both sides, the more dynamic the outcome. While Hall wrote the 1983 script for two readers in addition to the Abbott role, he structured *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited* to include the Abbott role, two male readers, and a third female reader. The readers in the new script take many parts including lawyers at parole hearings, prison guards, Norman Mailer, other prisoners, Abbott's murder victim, and Abbott's mother. The addition of the female reader allowed insightful exploration of Abbott's attachment to his mother. The combination of re-enactments, interrogations, memories from Abbott's books, and court proceedings illustrate the contradictions and conflicts in Abbott's life while revealing the dreadfulness of a prison system that does not rehabilitate, but makes those in it—guards and prisoners—more hardened and ill-equipped to adapt to the outside world.

Hall often has what he terms a "clothesline" or thematic storyline on which he "hangs" the events of the play—other playwrights might call this the spine of the play. For Hall, the clothesline for this script was the inefficiency of the prison system. One problem he labored to solve was how to impart the ideas of

solitary confinement and prison beatings truthfully—with intensity and impact to the audience. Hall said:

I've staged beatings, but they are always so fake. I think the thing that I've learned, because I'm so visual and physically so muscular in what I do, really comes from years of seeing things and putting them together somehow. In film I can swing at you, and when they can connect sound with it, it looks like you've been hit when you fall back. Well on the stage, that's always fake--it is closer to dance on the stage. So I've found ways to handle the thing. I had a girl, a boy, and an older man as readers, and they were the ones who beat Abbott. Finally, I just ended up with towels and with their swinging as hard as they could and really beating him. Of course it was big, broad cutting through the air, but it seemed very violent (Interview, 27 June 2003).

Hall was inspired to use violent imagery that rendered the scene utterly shocking when the audience employed their imagination without the limitations of mock blows and bogus falls. Using muscular movement and menacing expressions, the actors advanced physically upon the victim with unerring aggression.

Hall never excused Abbott's despicable actions as he related to Mark Lowry of the *Ft. Worth Star Telegram*, "There's never any justification for killing, but I do feel that [Abbott] was not treated well in prison. [*Belly*] is a wild and almost shocking indictment of our penal system." For Hall and many in the play's audience, Abbott's story—murderer though he was—offers an unsettling insight into the horrors of a prison life.

The Kitchen Dog Theatre in Dallas, Texas, premiered Hall's *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited* in 2003 and it was subsequently performed in New York. Tom Sime wrote in *The Dallas Morning News*:

The ugliest of story is beautifully told in Adrian Hall's revival of *In the Belly of the Beast*. The production began with a startling coup de theatre and never let go. It was a chilly embrace; this tale of life in the maximum-security prisons of the United States . . . Was he in prison because he was violent, or was he violent because he was in prison? This is one of the big questions the play explores, along with this one: How free are we, if 2 million Americans are behind bars? . . . This adds up to one of those evenings where art seems the only redemption.

True to Abbot's writings and experiences, *In the Belly of the Beast Revisited* articulates inner darkness and behavioral patterns that are the product of years in the prison system. If art is redemptive, Hall's art transforms the material of Abbott's art and life into powerful theatre that brings its audience face to face with the complex problems of a harsh world that isolates criminals and often dehumanizes guards as well as inmates. Hall advocates using theatre to enlighten audiences about contemporary and historical issues. He believes that the power of the theatre lies in its ability to pull the audience into the event, and that it always has to happen in the here and now so that the play, however historical, will be interpreted in terms of contemporary experience. While this play exposes and generates awareness of the American prison system's problems, it does not judge or try to resolve they system's problems. In 1983, Mel Gussow writing for the *New York Times* said that *In the Belly of the Beast* "is a devastating indictment of a dehumanizing penal system. When Abbot is freed—on stage as, one assumes, in life—he is like a wild child, incapable

of surviving in a totally alien world.” Adrian Hall revised this work twenty years after its initial production, and it still has the power to remind one that art through theatre can hold a mirror up before society and humanity. But Hall does not seek to indict; he believes judgments are the province of the audience.

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Notes

¹ Cognizant of Hall's reputation for adapting novels, Abbott's producer-agent, Seymour Morgenstern, inquired of Hall whether he would be interested in adapting Abbott's book for the stage. Hall was intrigued and entered into a verbal agreement with Morgenstern without obtaining written legal contracts from him, a decision Hall would later regret. Hall believed he had acquired the stage and television rights, but Morgenstern subsequently maintained that he had never discussed the television rights with Hall.

After the initial production, which opened 19 April 1983, two other productions appeared without Hall's permission. One of those productions belonged to Robert Falls. During a panel discussion in Chicago, Falls heard Hall explain the process he used in writing the play. He telephoned Hall and asked permission to read a copy of the script, to which Hall consented. Falls staged the play at Chicago's Wisdom Bridge Theater on 29 September 1983. The critics praised the production, which ran for five months and later played in Glasgow, London, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Falls admitted that he had used Hall's play as the basis for his script, but included some new material. Although no credit was given to Hall and no royalties were paid to Trinity, Falls explained that he "thought Adrian Hall was getting royalties through Seymour Morgenstern" (qtd. in Gale, "Dramatic").

To complicate matters further, another production appeared in Los Angeles, staged by Robert Woodruff at the Mark Taper Forum. In August of the same year, Woodruff's production transferred to the Joyce Theater in New York. The Mark Taper Forum credited Hall as adaptor of the work, with further adaptation by Woodruff, which infuriated Hall since he adamantly denied giving his permission. Gordon Davidson, artistic director of the Mark Taper Forum, believed that Hall had given permission. When the script won the 1984 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for best literary adaptation, Hall had to share the award with Woodruff. Woodruff acknowledged to that his script was "ninety- five percent of Adrian's text." He commented further that the "basic structure is Adrian's. The lion's share of the credit must go to him" (qtd. in Gale "Feisty").

Woodruff also admitted that he basically "took what Adrian had done, and done brilliantly, and tried to clarify some of the arguments." (qtd. in Koenenn "Mind"). Although Hall wrote the original script, he no longer had sole writing credit for the adaptation. His disinclination to bother with the inconvenience of dealing with lawyers caused him much grief and financial loss. Hall was eventually able to copyright his adaptation, and Morgenstern may use it only with Hall's approval.

One Theocrat's Puppet Democracy, One Nation's Democratic Deprivation.

By Yashar Keramati

Twenty-seven years ago Iranians from all different walks of life packed themselves into small cars, trucks, and buses, doubling or tripling the vehicles' capacities, in order to get to city centers to protest against the Shah's regime. With passion and hope in their hearts and minds, they believed their relentless fighting and protesting against the Shah's government would bring about change in the direction of true equality, freedom, and democracy for Iranians. However, Iranian's quickly realized that not only did they fail to bring about equality, freedom, and democracy through their revolution but rather helped put into power a new regime, compromised of religious elites, which was more suppressive and harmful to their existence than the regime they overthrew. Now, more than ever, Iranians are faced with many obstacles in everyday life due to the lack of democracy. It is this lack of democracy which can be held largely responsible for their woes in their public and private lives. Thus, one has to wonder how such a restraining regime can manage to stay in power even though the people, the very foundation of any regime, largely disapprove of its practices. The following essay will thus discuss what the obstacles standing in the path of democratization in Iran are. This essay will argue that the overwhelming, ultimate, and unchecked powers of the religious elites in absolutely every institution and area of Iranian life are at the root of stalling democratization. Furthermore, it will be briefly argued that foreign involvement in the democratization movement of Iran, namely by the United States, not only halts all and any progress being made by the movement but in fact has a reactionary effect on the movement as it gives the counter-democratization forces ammunition to blast the democratization movement with. These arguments will be proven within the context of Mohammad Khatami's presidency from 1997-2005 which saw the movement's progress, due to courageous opposition, at its climax before ultimately being crushed by the religious elites who control all of the Iranian institutions and freedoms which are needed for change.

Section 8, Article 107 of the Iranian constitution states: "The Supreme Leader is equal with the rest of the people of the country in the eyes of law" (Iranian Government Constitution). The current Supreme Leader of Iran is Ali Khamenei and he is anything but equal with the rest of the people in the eyes of the law, or anything else for that matter. In fact, little justification is needed to say that he is the law. It is this

unmatched status and power that Khamenei possesses which can account as the core problem for the lack of democracy in Iran. However, in 1997 when Mohammad Khatami received majority of the votes for presidency, and ironically was approved and appointed by Khamenei as President, the people believed that this charismatic reformist would bring about democratic change to Iran. After all, this was what Khatami advocated and promised during his campaign. Nevertheless, as Saïd Amir Arjomand puts it in comparison to the late USSR, where Mikhail Gorbachev brought about *perestroika* by introducing *glasnost*, Khatami brought about *glasnost* and moved *perestroika* back decades because of it by the end of his presidency (Arjomand, 2005: 507).

When Khatami came into power there was a new sense of openness in Iran. This was not merely an unexplainable emotion but was rather due to the changes Khatami was bringing about. Before his first presidency Arjomand explains that offices on the municipal level were comprised of elites selected by the Supreme Leader or his pawns, such as the Council of Guardian or Council of Experts amongst others, which serve under him. But, in 1999, at the height of Khatami's reform successes, he announced "the first step in political development is participation, and the most evident channel for participation is the election of the Councils" (Arjomand, 2005: 508). After this announcement, elections were held for the first time since 1979 which elected the municipal officers. Open elections were held and the majority of those who won seats were reformists. It was here, at the height of democratization in Iran and Khatami's reformist movement when Khamenei began to show his unprecedented power.

Before Khamenei began imposing his will, this new wave of reformists holding office brought further excitement into the lives of those who were eager for change. They began to believe that Iran was changing and thus they could be freer to speak their minds. Arjomand described this, which later proved to be a false sense of freedom in practice and reality, by explaining an event which took place in early February 1999: "Hojjat al-Eslm Mohsen Kadivar, a younger but prominent reformist cleric who had written a direct and detailed refutation of Khomeini's theory of theocratic government, delivered a speech in Isfahan in which he declared terrorism forbidden by the Sacred Law." What Kadivar meant by terrorism was intimidation by the religious elite of those who opposed their policies. Arjomand goes on to say that "Kadivar was arrested at the end of February 1999, and his trial by the Special Court for Clerics became a *cause célèbre*." (Arjomand, 2005: 508). Here one can see the might of the religious elite in banning freedom of speech, an essential component of any true democracy. It must also be noted that the Special Court of Clerics, like any other court in Iran, is subject to the Supreme Leader's will and approval. Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner is an Iranian woman who received the Prize for her work in children's and women's rights as a lawyer in Iran. She, like most Iranians, is very concerned with the power of the religious elites in Iran. Ebadi wrote in a publication regarding democracy in Iran that "Democracy has no meaning if citizens are not free to express their opinions without fear of prosecution" (Ebadi, 2006: 50). Although this is a very basic idea, it is truly a fundamental part of democracy. Democracy, at its barest form, is rule by the people, but how can the people rule or even put in their input if they are behind bars for their input if not tortured or killed which is a blatant reality in Iran? Thus, the religious elites are violating a fundamental step in achieving democracy by muzzling dissidents.

But beyond muzzling individuals, the religious elites stifle any other form of opposition to their iron grip over the country. This is prominent in the media which is under the direct control of the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. The media and other sources of knowledge are essential to the necessary freedoms which can bring about democracy. Ebadi writes:

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his father Reza Shah imposed strict controls on the press. Although these were lifted after the Islamic revolution, the new regime reverted to strict censorship in 1981, quashing books perceived as opposing official ideology. Publishing any book now requires a written permit from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Here again one must remember that the Ministry also works under the Supreme Leader (Ebadi, 2005: 50). In 1999 an intelligence officer close to the religious elites was imprisoned by Khatami for unjustified murders of dissidents. Such murders are not uncommon in Iran. The imprisonment of this officer was a move by Khatami which Adam Tarock described as Khatami's attempt to prove he was committed to his platform which included bringing about the rule of law (Tarock, 2002: 453). The intelligence officer, who was named Emami, committed suicide in prison but he did not do this before writing a detailed letter to the reformist newspaper called "Salam". This secret letter, described by Arjomand "provided an outline of the restrictive press law with provisions for clerical censorship" (Arjomand, 2005: 509). Salam published the letter on its front page and, immediately after doing so, was shut down by the Special Court of Clerics which, as mentioned earlier, is a political pawn of Khamenei.¹ Here one can see just how easily the religious elites can kill-off anyone or group which speaks against them. The most horrific aspect of this fact of life in Iran is that such actions go unquestioned due to Khamenei's power. By the end of Khatami's presidency absolutely all reformist newspapers were shut down, the last of which was the newspaper called "Bahar". The Supreme Leader's control is truly the biggest obstacle in Iran's path to democratization as it is the core of all other obstacles. Such undemocratic actions by the Khamenei seem to mirror those of Mussolini who was known to review every single publication in fascist Italy and mark them with either green, meaning they may be published, or red, meaning they may not be. However, in the case of Khamenei, he no longer needs to use the red pen seeing that all of the reformist papers have been shut down.

At this point it must be pointed out the banning of newspapers is just one branch of Khamenei's destruction in the path of achieving true democracy. He also rules directly over all television broadcasts. This is written in Article 111 of the Iranian Constitution (Iranian Government Constitution) so Khamenei does not even have to go around any other organizations to achieve what he wants. William Samii, in his discourse regarding the religious elites and Council of Guardians, wrote that "state broadcast media is more than just a government mouthpiece, under its current leadership it is quite clearly aligned with the most hard-line elements" (Samii, 2001: 645). Direct control over these sources of media stands in the path of democratization in a few substantial ways. Khamenei's control over this institution only exposes the electorate to the views which support the Supreme Leader, his existence, and his policies. Some may ask why the people would vote for conservatives when they disagree with their policies, as they did in 2005 when a landslide victory was awarded to the conservatives. However, the people can only vote for what they have seen and

been told about. Through this direct media control by Khamenei, democratization, as a movement and as an idea, is annihilated because the people are only given a pool of conservatives from which to elect their members of Majlis (or parliament). When the people vote, they are only voting for conservative politics. Furthermore, and more harmfully, they believe that they already possess democracy because they are voting. Even though the people could vote for different candidates, they would still be voting for the same party and thus ultimately the same policies. Moreover, to give the Iranians this false sense of democracy creates another road-block in democratization in that it deprives them of any motivation to strive for true democratization because they believe they already have it. After all, this is what the media is feeding them and deceiving them into. Also, as proven in the 2005 presidential elections, hard-line conservatives receive extremely biased coverage as their agendas play directly into the hands of the Supreme Leader and his pawns. This gives ample explanation as to why conservatives won landslide victories both on the national and local levels in the 2005 election. To be deceived and forced to keep these reactionaries in power sustains in power a regime who's existence relies on the lack of democracy, equality, and freedoms.

But if controlling the institutions within the media which have great effect over the elections does not wound the democratization efforts enough, the Supreme Leader also directly picks and chooses who can and cannot run for positions in the government. This is yet another barrier to democratization created by Khamenei. After 8 years of domination of the Majlis by reformists, Khamenei decided to return the Majlis, which many view as the last reformist controlled institution in Iran, to conservative hands. Azadeh Moaveni explained how this was done by the Council of Guardians which is Khamenei's most powerful and influential puppet by saying "The hard-line Council of Guardians, which reviews parliamentary legislation, suggested last week that M.P.s who failed to show allegiance to Khamenei could be kicked out of parliament." (Moaveni, 2000: 28) Although Khamenei did in fact kick out many members of the Majlis leading up to the 2001 elections, he did even more damage before the 2005 elections to make sure that the Majlis would have absolutely no chance of falling into reformist hands again since it repeatedly did so during Khatami's terms. Although the reformist Majlis of 1997-2005 achieved nothing substantial in regards to pro-democratic reforms, by having a conservative Majlis Khamenei would, and indeed has, saved himself a few minor headaches by not having to go to the trouble to crush their potential efforts towards democratization. Furthermore, as Tarock puts it, a reformist victory in 2005 would have meant "humiliation" for the conservatives and thus their puppet-masters, the religious elites, and therefore namely Khamenei (Tarock, 2002: 451). Before the elections of 2005, as outrageous as it is and may sound, the Council of Guardians had banned 83 of the 125 reformist, pro-democratization members of the Majlis from running again in the upcoming elections. Furthermore, as an act of unity as to protest, other reformist members of Majlis resigned. Arjomand explains "123 of 125 reformist Representatives handed in their resignations. Meanwhile, 12 ministers and some 28 governors and deputy-ministers, representing the lay, 'technocratic' second stratum of the Islamic Republic, were also said to have submitted their resignations in sympathy." (Arjomand, 2005: 503) Thus, not only did Khamenei manage to eliminate the democratization movement without being checked by any institution, but also managed to demoralize the few left in the movement, who he did not arbitrarily get disowned of political freedom, to the point where these few eliminated themselves from running. After all, they had seen that the best of their efforts at the climax of their movement amounted to arguably nothing. No true democracy can exist if one man or a few people

can irrefutably decide who can and cannot represent the people. Free and fair elections are essential to a true democracy and Khamenei has deprived Iranians of this democratic principle on many different fronts.

Some other institutions which are under the direct control of Khamenei are the army, police, and intelligence services. Going back to the shutting down of the Salam newspaper, one could see the best example of Khatami's presidency and democratic ambitions being at the mercy of Khamenei's will. When the newspaper was shut down, students, the same students with democratic hopes who put Khatami into power, took to the streets in a wave of protests at universities around Iran. Thomas Omestad who reported on the protests wrote the following:

The student protesters and supporters who thronged the streets of Tehran last week dashed with security forces and vigilantes, and the scene was repeated in more than a dozen other Iranian cities. Their battle cry was democratic reform of the Shiite Muslim theocracy, but some went further. They denounced the country's spiritual leader as a dictator-an extraordinary act of defiance. Others hurled stones and invective at police in running street battles that left parts of the Capital choked in a haze of tear gas and smoke from burning barricades.

The scene described by Omestad was the biggest protest in Iran since the 1979 revolution (Omestad, 1999: 30). It also marked the summit of the reform movement. Khamenei turned his wrath towards the students who were fighting for the democratization movement, constitutional rights which the religious elites were violating, and freedom of speech which Salam was deprived of. He punished them by releasing the army and police on the students in what turned out to be a bloody and violent confrontation. Later Khamenei's religious goons raided university campuses and beat students, throwing students out of second and third floor windows after shocking them awake from their sleeps. One student was killed according to the government, but other sources claim up to 5 students were killed during the protests (Schmidle, 2005: 29). True democracy cannot come into being if the questions and demands of the people are met with sheer violence and the forcing of the regime's will onto the justifiably discontented. The institution of Iranian armed forces, being completely out of the control of the public and the elected Majlis and president by the decree of the Iranian constitution's 111th Article which grants it to the Supreme Leader, completely unchecked and unaccountable, impedes on democratic desires and actions taking place towards democracy. It was this institution that stopped the students' movement in the direction of democratization. Thus if any group or individual rises against the regimes in the hopes of democracy the religious elites do, have, and will be simply put down the factions by brute force. However, due to their extensive control over all important institutions and branches of government in Iran, they rarely have to mobilize their armed powers. The people are intimidated to a level where hardly anyone stands against the regime anymore. This is a long term blow to democratization as such a problem takes many years to overcome.

Similarly, another long term problem which stands in the way of democratization in Iran is the demoralization of the masses after Khatami's eight year presidency. The most disappointing part during Khatami's presidency came after the protests of 1999. It can be argued that the students were the backbone of Khatami's election success. If this is too long of a stretch, it still cannot be questioned that the students

were the most enthusiastic and active of the reformists in trying to bring about true democracy in Iran. Khatami was the closest Iranians had come to achieving freedom and equality. This is why when Khatami failed to support the students during the 1999 protests, the pinnacle of the democratization movement in Iran, the movement began to move backwards. Nicholas Schmidle quotes Khatami speaking shortly after the protests: “‘It [the unrest] was an ugly and offensive incident,’ Khatami said, ‘which marred the image of our dear, patient, rational people. It had nothing to do with this honorable nation or the university students’” (Schmidle, 2005: 31). Khatami’s statement here can very much be seen as the turning point of the modern democratization movement in Iran. Until his statement, the people, feeling as if they had the backing of the president, were vigorously pushing forward with demands of reforms. Their now evident false belief that their president was on their side, through thick and thin, was what gave them the motivation and courage to stand up against Khamenei’s Iran. However, Khatami’s statement regarding the protests proved that not even he himself was brave nor strong enough to stand up to the theocratic bullies. The demoralization of the masses takes a very long time to recover from. This is because their defeat came at a time better than any they had ever experienced: people were speaking out for the first time, Khamenei was getting denounced, the students were standing up against the *Komeeti* which is a branch of the armed forces in Iran infamous for its brutality and corruption, and the president, the person they believed to have tremendous power, was on their side. When one is defeated when they believe to be unbeatable it is phenomenally more damaging than one getting defeated at any other time. This is understandable since the people would logically feel as if their efforts in the future would amount to nothing if they could not even gain an inch when they put all of their efforts forward in the most favorable of circumstances. They even had the moral support of the world’s most powerful nation, the United States.

But this foreign support caused them even more damage. In Iran, any and all association with the U.S is the ultimate ground for disrespect, alienation, punishment, and the most importantly loss of credibility. Iranians may disagree on numerous topics, but one topic which almost all Iranians can find agreement is animosity towards the U.S. Thus, if the U.S supported the students during the height of the reform movement, then the students’ movement itself loses tremendous credibility. Howard LaFranchi puts it in the following way: “outside pressure for change could actually bolster the Iranian regime.” And he also links U.S support to such moves made in Venezuela by adding “US efforts to build an internal opposition to Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez, for example, are widely credited with having solidified support for the populist leader by allowing him to attack his opponents as US stooges.” (LaFranchi, 2006: 3) In fact, this is exactly how the U.S verbal support of the movement was met in Iran. Regarding the protests and U.S comments at the time Thomas Omestad states “Conservatives including Khamenei, apparently looking for scapegoats, blamed the unrest on foreign ‘enemies’ led by the United States.” (Omestad, 1999: 29) Regardless of whether Iranians are for or against democratization, most of them are fiercely against the U.S. Thus, even those within the reform movement may be turned away from their reformist ambitions due to U.S support. Furthermore, because of this great intense contempt of the U.S, comments or involvement by the U.S give the religious elites who fully control Iran an excuse to clamp down on those who disagree with them. They do this under the argument that since those who disagree with them share the same sentiments as the U.S then they must be dealt with very firmly since the U.S is a great enemy to Iran. This theory actually was taken into practice after the U.S comments. While interviewing a student by

the name of Bijan who was one of the biggest student leaders in the movement, Nicholas Schmidle was told the following: “‘We don’t want U.S support,’ Bijan said, becoming angry. ‘Did you know that 4,000 people were arrested the night after those statements were made? It only gives them [the regime] another reason to crack down.’” Even Mohsen Sazegara, a former high ranking member of the post-revolution regime turned dissident living in the U.S has said, directly in regards to democratization of Iran “We would never compromise ourselves by accepting money from a foreign government” (Sazegara, 2005: 67) U.S involvement in the democratization movement of Iran, be it financially, militarily, or morally diverts and wastes the reformist energies from the democratization movement in a few ways. It makes the reformists unite with the religious elites in a bid to oppose the U.S. This can even be seen currently regarding Iran’s nuclear row. Schmidle writes “With Bush’s belligerent rhetoric toward Tehran on the rise, many students have turned to embrace Iranian nationalism, their country’s nuclear aspirations, and, by a twist of irony, the mullahs they have long despised. The population has come to identify the nuclear program [and their support for it] with the folks in charge.” (Schmidle, 2006:31) If not this, it makes them stop their movement for quite sometime due to losing all credibility since they would be linked with U.S policies and desires. If nothing else, those in the movement, the back bone of the hopes of democratization in Iran, will be jailed by the religious elites under the justification of aligning with the U.S which is never acceptable in the regime’s eyes. At this end, the democratization movement is essential to the freedom and thus prosperity of the Iranian people. Therefore, any forces impeding on the movement are truly unacceptable.

Finally, this essay has covered some of the major hindrances in the democratization movement in Iran. Predominantly, most of the obstacles standing in the path of true democracy can be directly or indirectly linked to the power of a few religious elites, namely Khamenei who controls all of them, who controls all of the political and legal institutions. These few religious overlords of the Iranian regime are accountable to no one and have the power to crush all and any forces which act or speak against their policies in many different ways. In fact, they have proven this power to be true most significantly during the recent presidency of Khatami. While Khatami did fail to bring about the democratic reforms he promised and strived for, he cannot come near to being fully blamed for his lack of success. Those behind him believed him to be a counter weight to the theocratic powers of Iran which run the country, but their belief was merely a fantasy. As the religious elites proved, not even the president of the country can come close opposing the theocratic will. Khatami, simply put, did not have the power to stand up to the intimidating colossal shadow which the religious elites cast over him. Those who elected Khatami had yet to experience having such a strongly reform minded president and thus they also had not seen the theocrat’s range of power since they never needed to use such power before. Khatami’s and the Majlis’ failure to democratize Iran proved that even they, what the people believe to be their best front against the religious elites, hold next to no real power. The Majlis of Iran can in some ways be compared the Duma Tsar Nicholas II set up in Russia; although in theory it was democratic and was supposed to wield to the people’s demands, it was, ultimately, at the mercy and under the control of the Tsar. Thus, due to the overwhelming dominance of the Supreme Leader in a closed, unchecked, and unaccountable loop of power invested in the religious elites, and namely himself, true democracy has failed to be established in Iran. Every institution, every tool which is needed for even the baby-steps towards democratization is in the hands of the Supreme Leader and his handpicked assailants. Even the mightiest power in the world cannot overturn these oppressors’ clench of

the freedom of Iranians. Moreover, any attempt or hint of interference by the U.S plays directly into the hands of the religious elites. Thus, with all of this duly and carefully kept in mind, one ought to ask how long will it take the Iranian masses to rise against the tyrants who continuously deliver them lashes? How long will Iranian's allow a few, self appointed, self perpetuated elites tell them what they may and may not do, say, nor think until they gain back their revolutionary spirit and valor of 1979 and impose their will on their subjugators and bring about true democracy instead of living under their subjugators' dictates?

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Notes

¹ As a side note it should be mentioned that all of the ministries, courts, and so on can at any time be over ruled or shut down by Khamenei. This however has yet to happen since their members are picked or

approved by Khamenei or his pawns, and thus they are loyal to Khamenei and align themselves with his beliefs. The first part of the Iranian constitution, in basic translation says that “the Supreme Leader has the final say in all aspects of Iranian affairs (Iranian Government Constitution)

The Odd Couple: Iran and Venezuela's Union Through Anti-U.S. Imperialism and Oil.

By Yashar Keramati

Introduction

Since the events of September 11th which we never cease to stop being reminded of, George W. Bush and Tony Blair have staged a few press conferences, standing at podiums as the heads of two of the strongest forces known to the world today. This is hardly a new sight though. Leaders of world powers have always staged such events: Churchill and Roosevelt held similar events as did Hitler and Mussolini. A few years before these men it was Clemenceau and Wilson. However, today we are experiencing a different kind of unity. It is a unity between two nations which are far from being superpowers. This is union of Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Venezuela and Iran. While in the past superpowers united to push their plans on those which were, at best, of relatively equal strength as themselves, Chavez and Ahmadinejad are more like two ants shouting up at an elephant known as the United States. They are united under a common banner of Anti-U.S. imperialism and hegemony. A vital question which must be asked, and which this essay will attempt to answer, is what accounts for Iran and Venezuela (which are so fundamentally different from each other) being so absolutely in unison in their stance against American imperialism and foreign policy? What drives these two countries to stand against a regime which no other country has challenged in such a manner since the Cold War? This essay will explain that the reason for this phenomenon of similarity, regardless of the vast differences between the two countries, is that they both have a history of receiving lashes at the hands of U.S. imperialistic agendas in their countries. Furthermore, it will be explained that the people of the two nations have an anti-American culture due to overwhelming U.S. support for brutal dictators, which oppressed, victimized, and butchered the masses, in order to maintain leaders in those country who were friendly to U.S. imperialistic ambitions and missions. Finally, this essay will explain that the oil wealth of Iran and Venezuela puts the two countries in a unique position to be able to oppose exploitative American foreign policy given the current political climate.

Dissimilarity

However, in order to truly understand the uniqueness of the Iran-Venezuela alliance against American imperialism and hegemony, one must first become aware of the vast amount of differences between Iran and Venezuela which make their unity unbelievable in theory and, if nothing else, a historical first. The most striking parity between Iran and Venezuela is their regime types. Iran is ruled by a strict theology with the Supreme Leader as the ultimate puppet-master of the state, while Venezuela is an elected democracy. Furthermore, Iran is a firm believer in religious law while Venezuela is quite secular. Adding to this point, Iran is dominated by a strict Muslim way of life and it is this which also defines its publicly seen and allowed cultural practices. Venezuela on the other hand, beyond being secular, also has a rich culture and most of its people are of the Roman Catholic faith. In addition, Iran has shown poor regard at best for the rights of women. While women seem to have some rights on paper, in practice even those few rights are overlooked more often than not. On the other hand, Venezuela has shown much more respect for gender equality and Venezuelan women are more empowered than their Iranian counterparts. Venezuela under Hugo Chavez has pushed very hard towards socialism while Iran cannot be said to have pushed nearly to the same extent. In fact, socialism is a corner stone of Venezuelan policy under Chavez and it is held in the highest level of importance.

These differences between the two leaders' nations compared to those of say Mussolini and Hitler, Clemenceau and Wilson, and Churchill and Roosevelt is vastly different yet their ties, goals, and foreign policy against U.S. imperialism and hegemony is profoundly close-knitted. There are a few factors which both Iran and Venezuela have shared in their history which accounts for this phenomenon.

U.S. Economic Exploitation

Both Iran and Venezuela share an intense history of U.S. imperialism. This exploitation was, of course, due to both of the countries' vast amounts of oil. The best example of the U.S. directly impeding on Iran's oil sector and its ambitions can be seen during the reign of Mossadegh. Barry Rubin explains the situation in the following way:

“In the early 1950s, Mossadegh—a populist nationalist of great personal eccentricity — nationalized the British-controlled oil company in Iran and allied himself with the Tudeh (Communist) Party, among others, to compete with the shah for power. Subsequent British pressure on other countries not to buy oil produced by the nationalized company seriously harmed Iran's economy. Fearing for his regime, the shah and some of his loyalists—along with the British— requested U.S. help in 1952 to bring down Mossadegh” (Rubin, 2003: 2).

However, it must not be forgotten that the U.S. itself had high stakes in Iranian oil. This is a commonly known fact, but an important one nonetheless which mobilized the U.S. to support Mossadegh's overthrow

as to make sure the U.S.'s own investment and interest in Iranian oil remained intact. Joe Stork further strengthens the point that the CIA interfered in Iranian oil affairs so as to keep Iranian oil in foreign, namely American and British hands, as opposed to Iranian hands:

Mossadegh's successful campaign to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company represented the cutting edge Third World economic nationalism. In the eyes of servants of the Seven Sisters like Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and C.I.A. Director Allen Dulles, this was essentially equivalent to "international communism" because of its effect of reducing the global resource based directly accessible to international capital. The demonstrated power of multinationals to neutralize and accommodate economic nationalism make such fears appear quaint today, but at the time, U.S. oil companies, like their British counterparts, feared the "demonstration effect" in the region and beyond if the Iranian takeover were allowed to stand. A British and American embargo of Iranian oil sales prior to the C.I.A. coup "softened up"—i.e., brought close to ruination—Iran's economy and encouraged defections from Mossadegh's National Front (Stork, 1993: 233).

Venezuela too shared a similar experience of imperialistic exploitation in its oil sector at the hands of the United States. Venezuela, according to Harold A. Trinkunas, is of special importance because "Access to large Venezuelan oil deposits across short, secure sea lines of communication undoubtedly provides a strategic asset for the United States" (Trinkunas, 2005: 40). Perhaps this explains why the U.S. was so fierce in making sure that, like Iran, leaders were in power in Venezuela who would support U.S. oil ambitions. Thus, this speaks volumes about why the U.S. strongly supported the likes of Juan Vicente Gomez, a brutal dictator, who gave concessions to American oil companies during his reigns in 1922-1929 and 1931-35. The U.S., according to Trinkunas, was the biggest contributor to the Venezuelan oil infrastructure which began to be constructed in 1914 (Trinkunas, 2005: 41). But U.S. imperialism in Latin America preceded the oil era. At the turn of the early 20th century a Uruguayan literature professor began to challenge the statuesque of American dominance in the region, As McPherson notes:

José Enrique Rodó's book *Ariel*, Arielism challenged positivist thinkers infatuated with Western notions of progress and order. It proposed that the United States was not an exemplar of these values, but rather an inferior other. Rodó personified Latin America and the United States as two characters from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*: Ariel and Caliban, respectively. The former—Latin America—was the quintessence of virtue and taste, heir to the highest European standards of dignity and spirituality. Caliban—the United States—was a reckless materialist: crude and self-absorbed, sumptuous and vacuous (McPherson, 2003: 13).

The reason for such strong resentment is seated in another imperialist American practice: support for brutality, be it directly through U.S. forces, or indirectly through secret operation funded by the U.S. in order to advance its own interest. This notion of U.S. action went beyond robbing the people of Venezuela and Iran simply of their nations' natural resources, but rather their livelihood and humanity. Surely suffering such lashes at the hands of the U.S. gives ample reason to oppose the U.S. to some degree.

U.S.: Support and Cause of Brutality

In Iran the best example of U.S. support for brutality can be seen in the U.S.'s full support for the Shah and his secret police. The fact that the overthrow of Mossadegh was at the hands of the U.S. proves this point fully. The reason for this is that the overthrow of Mossadegh resulted in the Shah having a sudden large sum of unchecked power. Before 1953 the Shah was largely obliged to work with the Parliament; however, after the removal of Mossadegh there echoed the message that the Prime Minister no longer had the freedom to work freely, without fear of persecution and punishment. Rubin writes "Yet, because the 1953 events apparently changed the course of Iranian history—ending the leading role of the prime minister and the independent power of Iran's parliament and setting the foundation for a government characterized by the Shah's direct rule—one can reasonably term the coup as an example of regime change" (Rubin, 2003: 4). Therefore, according to Rubin, it is safe and logical to believe that U.S. action was responsible for the Shah's dictatorship coming to be. This unilateral power which the Shah now had, thanks to the U.S. removal of a populist leader, allowed more easily for brutality through the Shah's secret police called "Savak". Thus, it is understandable that the people of Iran would be anti-American. After all, it was this Shah who was supported and was in power because of the U.S. who was responsible for tens of thousands of deaths. This U.S. sponsored brutality went on beyond the Shah's last days in Iran. Richard Falk wrote profoundly during the revolution of 1979:

Although Sullivan said in mid-January that a 'military' coup wouldn't accomplish much, subsequent indications are that American policy is encouraging the generals to look favorably upon a military solution. How else can one interpret Carter's decision to ship 200,000 barrels of fuel for internal military use, as well as the reports of daily contacts among the Iranian generals, the American Gen. Robert Huyser and the White House? And how else to interpret press reports that high officials in Washington were pleased when the Army displayed resolve by opening fire on unarmed civilian demonstrators, inflicting heavy casualties, several times late in January? The Pentagon, in official releases, has declared that even a neutralist regime in Teheran would affect adversely American interests. Our conversations with a wide spectrum of opposition leaders revealed that these American moves are seen as a continuing intervention in the internal affairs of Iran and are deeply resented because they are believed to be driving the country back toward tyranny or to civil war (Falk, 1979: 135).

Falk, almost *nostradamusly*, also warned against the future consequences of U.S. action by saying "The United States Government should ponder the moral consequences of defying this popular will by encouraging the generals to provoke a civil war" (Falk, 1979: 137). The U.S. did not merely engage in an isolated incident of brutality and injustice in Iran (that being the Coup), but rather continued its wrongdoings to the last days of the Shah (and by this I mean the military aid given to the Army to kill innocent and peaceful protestors.) Such continued help for the oppression brought about by the Shah has caused ill sentiments to linger in the hearts and minds of Iranians to this day.

Venezuelans also suffered harshly at the hands of many dictators heavily backed by the U.S. who sought to promote its own imperialistic ambitions. As mentioned earlier, there was Juan Vincente Gomez, a dictator. Later there was Perez Jimenez who was President from 1952-1958. It is a well known fact that he was a dictator as well, but to further expose his obvious backing by the U.S. one has to think about the fact that he proudly received the Legion of Merit from the United States which is a high ranking military medal given to those who the U.S. holds in exceptionally high regard (Trinkunas, 2005: 39-40).

But what is far more important than the ways the U.S. sponsored brutality in Venezuela and Iran is the long term effect it has had on the two countries. This effect was the same in both countries: people held the U.S. responsible for many of their woes. The logic here in both the minds of the Iranian people and Venezuelans is that since it was the U.S. who brought such brutal leaders to power then they must be responsible for the outcomes those leaders bring about. For example, since the U.S. interfered and did not allow the populist Mossadegh to maintain power and instead concretely established the dictatorial Shah, then by depriving the Iranian people of Mossadegh and imposing on them the Shah then the U.S. was responsible for the outcome of what happened in Iran. It was not the people who chose their fate, but rather the U.S. and this is fair grounds for displeasure and a strong enough argument to pin a large amount of the responsibility on the United States of America. The same principle stands for Venezuela who had the U.S. back brutal dictators. This, especially through the CIA, has been an international norm be it through coups, assignation, or military and financial support. This reality which caused much harm to Iran and Venezuela is admitted to by the former Vice Chair of the National Intelligence Council of the CIA, James R. Schlesinger:

The extent of U.S. global reach--the overseas military installations and complex base-rights agreements that often dominate our relations with small nations, the peripatetic military-command representatives who overshadow ambassadors, a broad variety of active military presences, a worldwide intelligence and strike capability--is well documented. The U.S. global 'footprint'--a revealing word regularly employed by the Pentagon without irony--is massive and backed by the world's most powerful military machine in history (Schlesinger, 1998: 3).

To conclude this point, it is natural and justified to hold one who imposes your fate on you responsible for the hardships which may exist in that imposed fate. However, while the U.S. temporarily tampered with the natural and popular course of these two countries, it is now paying the price of fierce anti-Americanism due to the lashes it left behind on its subjects in Iran and Venezuela.

Rise of Anti-Americanism: a Result of Imperialism and Abuse Perhaps Barry Rubin put it most completely and best when he suggested that the Revolution of 1979 was the revenge for the 1953 overthrow of Mossadegh.

“The accepted narrative goes something like this: The United States intervened against a popular nationalist leader and helped install the Shah's repressive regime. Supposedly resenting both the shah and the behavior of the U.S. government, the 1979 Iranian revolution naturally targeted the United States. To put it bluntly, 1953 made 1979 inevitable and 1979 was revenge

for 1953.” (Rubin, 2003: 107)

Therefore, while the U.S might have believed that their actions would either be forgotten in the near future or that perhaps they would be so successful in their wrong doings that the people would have no choice but to comply blindly, history has now shown that neither of these plans were successful, and logically one can see why. If the Iranian people see that it was the U.S. which forced a dictator on them then it is only natural for the Iranians to be anti-American after suffering brutality and oppression at the hands of the American choice. This idea still partly accounts for anti-Americanism in Iran. Even those who prefer the Shah over the current theocrats still hang on to the Mossadegh case. Therefore, regardless of whether one is pro-theocracy or anti-theocracy one can certainly count on most Iranians to be anti-American because of the suspicions the U.S. has raised in its unilateral foreign policy, especially since the event of 9/11 which shows little to no regard for the well being of others. As Schlesinger puts it:

The unprecedented unilateral character of U.S. exercise of global power was of course a conscious choice, reflecting a strong desire to liberate Washington from wearying, nit-picking and encumbering consultations with other world players. It bespeaks a desire to simplify the decision-making process and to clear the decks for action. Ad hoc allies were to serve primarily as diplomatic window-dressing and hopefully to pick up some of the bills. But the broader backlash to U.S. unilateralism and its resultant isolation and loneliness it has imposed on Washington were not entirely anticipated.”

Venezuela too, under Chavez, has grown weary of American unilateralism. This is exactly why Chavez began civilian militia groups throughout Venezuela; as to guard against an American attack. He blatantly stated that he had a fear of such an invasion taking place (Pitman, 2006: 2). Venezuela and Iran can be seen as the U.S.’s most sought out targets for the same reason that Afghanistan and Iraq were: if not fully, at least largely due to strategic oil reserves. Furthermore, Venezuela, like Iran, has become fiercely anti-American if not for the dictators which the U.S. installed to support its own imperialist agenda, but because of the economic hardships the people of Venezuela see the U.S. being responsible for. The era of supporting leaders in Venezuela to advance imperialist American interests shifted to installing economic policies within Venezuela to advance the same ambitions. This was seen in Carlos Andres Perez’s rule from 1989- 1993 which accepted the Washington Consensus in 1989. But the people of Venezuela were familiar with the economic equality of the sort and thus lashed back quickly, dissolving the consensus. But the cost of this was over 3000 lives which were lost at the hands of Perez’s security forces that attacked civilian protesters. However, the introduction alone untreatably raised fears in the eyes and hearts of Venezuelans who saw that the U.S. was trying to exploit them. Like Iranians who grew anti-American and anti- imperialist after support for the Shah who brought upon oppression and misery, the Venezuelans also faced their own U.S. backed disaster. Therefore, logically like Iran, anti-Americanism grew even largest and less than a decade later gave birth to Hugo Chavez. This most extreme example of Latin American stance against U.S. imperialism is the result of many years of exploitations and pain, like the case of Iran. Jim Dorschner, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired), illuminates this manifestation:

In every case, Venezuela, Bolivia, and potentially Ecuador and Peru, the movements are focused on legitimate domestic social and economic class issues resulting from decades of neglect and corruption by ruling elites who, we must not forget, were often closely allied with the United States. While U.S. short-term memory may relegate our former actions to ancient history, to most Latin Americans our heavy-handed influence peddling was responsible for inhibiting the region's progress toward greater social, economic, and political equity, with the regional economic collapse of the late 1990s regularly cited as a recent example" (Dorschner, 2006: 6).

However, there are many countries which have been victims of American imperialism who have never stood against U.S. hegemony like Iran and Venezuela have. Thus, it is essential to this comparative examination to figure out what makes these two countries different.

Oil Leverage

Iran and Venezuela are in a unique situation because of their great oil wealth. This black gold seems to have more power and value than yellow gold ever did due to almost universal dependence on it, and if nothing else, definite world power dependence on it. While the United States is undoubtedly the undisputed world power today, it still cannot be overlooked that the likes of China and Russia are in close second. While the United States has the power to make Iran and Venezuela the same flattened piles of rubble which are known as Iraq and Afghanistan today, it cannot do so due to competing interests. While China and Russia sat back as the U.S. forced its will on Iraq and Afghanistan, they are not likely to continue such a policy as the U.S.'s gain is more and more everyone else's loss. Robert Dreyfuss explains this point in the following way: "To them, Iran's vast reserves of oil and natural gas make it a natural ally. Both Russian and Chinese oil companies had enormous development and supply contracts with Baghdad under Saddam Hussein, deals that are worthless in an Iraq controlled by the United States" (Dreyfuss, 2006: 5).

Moreover, Iran and Venezuela have the power to speak their mind not only because many countries in the world must back them due to oil reliance, but also because at the moment the U.S. is exhausted from two very internationally condemned wars. Never in history has a war been more globally protested than that of Iraq. Particularly with news surfacing everyday about how blatant lies were told about the war and how it is a complete disaster, shadowing Vietnam, it gives America very little leeway to act unilaterally in this situation. The United States has, for the most part, lost international credibility in its moral fiber regarding foreign policy and thus the world is more likely now than ever to stand against its policies due to at least the Iraq catastrophe. Such an occurrence makes the agendas of Ahmadinejad and Chavez much more appealing since for many countries they show an alternative to U.S. hegemony. Furthermore, Iran and Venezuela have much less to fear now because of this and can act and speak much more liberally. The U.S. will certainly not be able to rally the world, let alone the home team, behind its 3rd war in a little over five years, especially given the dishonest and manipulative nature of the Iraq war, thus, military action

against Iran and Venezuela is ruled out. In fact, these recent American actions have resulted in a major shift in certain countries' opinions according to one poll:

A poll taken by the Pew Research Center in 2005 found that majorities in Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait feared U.S. military action against their countries. As the poll put it, 'People abroad are more likely to believe that the U.S.-led war on terror has been about controlling Mideast oil and dominating the world than they are to take at face value America's stated objectives of self-defense and global democratization'" (Beinart, 2006: 6).

Iran and Venezuela are now being faced with perhaps the best opportunity to make a move for gains in world politics. With a military attack unfeasible and with world opinion quickly turning more and more against the U.S. it cannot get much better for Iran and Venezuela.

Conclusion

However, it is fundamental that one understands why such stances even come to be, and not just accept the fact that these stances exist. As this essay has explained, the anti- American imperialism which exists so strongly in Iran and Venezuela manifested due to a selfish and brutal history of U.S. imperialism in both of the countries. Such a history gave birth to a reaction which today has evolved into firm anti-imperialism and strong nationalism. It would be short-sighted and irrational to think otherwise given the dynamic histories of these two nations.

What is ironic is that the same oil, which began the United States' imperialistic conquests in Iran and Venezuela, turned out to also play a phenomenal role in allowing Venezuela and Iran to oppose American imperialism and domination. Hugo Chavez said it best when he said to a delegation of imperialistically abused African Nations: "'Africa is not a poor continent ... it has petrol, diamonds, coal, it has huge forest reserves, minerals ... *Petrol was used to colonize us, and we are going to use it to become free*'" (Pitman, 2006: 1, emphasis mine).

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I've Looked Deep into the Darkness.

By Jason Cootey

I own twelve copies of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. One is electronic so that I can easily search the text when writing papers. Another is a book-on-tape with narration by John-Boy of the "Waltons." The rest are hard bound, soft bound, paperback, trade paperback. I own some old ones from the 50s and the 60s. Of course, I own other books written by Conrad; some of the books are about him. I bought a book full of research essays just because writing this paragraph gave me the itch—Harold Bloom is the editor; in the spectrum of literary criticism, I suppose no collection is complete without something from Harold Bloom. I have a book with the letters of Conrad, his biography, research books, and the collected works printed in 1926. I bought the books and was disappointed to discover that the five-book set does not include Heart of Darkness. Naturally, I need to watch for something older than my 1952 edition. These are not purposeless purchases; my growing collection has more to do with the experience of reading the book than anything else. The impression Conrad's book leaves in me makes me question the people I meet, and the things I experience. In fact, the impress of darkness on my soul helped me identify an encounter with Kurtz in my own life.

In his book's editorial introduction, Harold Bloom argues that "Conrad's quest to carry impressionism into its heart of darkness in the human awareness that we are only a flux of sensations gazing outwards upon a flux of impressions" (3). This relationship between impressionism, sensations, and impressions might be the only way to counter arguments that Heart of Darkness contains unclear language that really doesn't describe anything at all. Bloom and others claim that the "obscurantism" (3) is the flaw of the novel; however, that same obscurantism is what generates the dream-like quality of both the book and Marlow's narration. The power of the book is when the impressions from that dream sink into the mind and "throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts" (Conrad 11). The kind of light is perhaps a moment of obscurantism; yet, the light is also a way to understand what happens when the dream hijacks the mind.

Conrad's book made my reading list for the first time in 1996 at the age of 21. I was a college freshman. I had just returned from two years of missionary service for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and had started school immediately. When time came for the class to read the novel my instructor cautioned me. She called out to me after class as I left the room and joined me in the hall. The other students in the class filed past us as we stood beside the doorway. The hallway was full of students moving

between classes; there were some students who stood in large clusters that obstructed the current of the corridor. She told me that students who are very soon returned from missionary service often possess a strong value system; she was concerned that my values may be threatened by the book's message. The warm smile she gave me expressed her sincerity more than any of her words. I wondered why I warranted such sensitive preparations. I personally did not believe that I was so morally inflexible that I could not respect or enjoy a work of literature. The offense that I felt didn't show when I thanked her kindly for her concern, nor when I assured her that I would be careful, and not even when I watched her turn and walk away. The sincere smile was still fixed as she left me. She had said she just wanted me to know, so that I could be prepared. I was prepared; I was even challenged.

Heart of Darkness is the tale of Charlie Marlow—a seaman and a wanderer. Marlow describes how he captains a steamboat on the Congo river and tells of the search for the mysterious, legendary ivory-hunter Kurtz. Yet on the way to Kurtz, Marlow begins to understand just how the man gets his ivory, why he is so legendary in the company as a model ivory trader; Kurtz manipulates the godly influence he has over the local natives, raids the countryside, plunders villages, and kills anyone who withholds the ivory. Rather than morally separate himself from Kurtz, Marlow begins to actually understand the darkness of Kurtz. Marlow says, “Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even to explain—I am trying to account to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz” (50). The key feature of the book is Marlow's struggle to fathom Kurtz's savage depravity while he questions his own haunting identification with Kurtz's methods. In the end, Marlow concludes that Kurtz is great because Kurtz acknowledges the darkness; Kurtz does not build up any pretenses to cover the inner truth. I agree with Charlie Marlow; Kurtz was a remarkable man.

I read the book in one sitting.

I moved around quite a bit as I read. The book held me fast; and whether on my bed or seated at my desk I could not free myself enough to stop. Two-thirds through the novel Marlow finds Kurtz at the central station amidst all the evidence of Kurtz's darkness. While I read about the natives' attack on the steamboat, how Kurtz is taken into custody, and how he ordered the attack on the steamboat, I paced my room because I could no longer sit. I was struck by the callous cruelty of not just Kurtz, but all the European men in the book; they covered their cruelty with purpose and notions of civilization. However, their pretenses were only excuses that were not sufficient to hide their darkness: “it was as unreal as everything else—as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work” (27). There missionary efforts to civilize Africa was just exploitation.

In all that night of reading I failed to see the threat to my delicate values; my teacher had been wrong about my moral inflexibility. I suppose other students returning from missionary service were offended because the security of morals is just one more pretense in the book. Those students, so soon home from church missions, must have refused to believe that pretenses like moral inflexibility dress up the truth. Kurtz's last words before he dies, “the horror the horror” (60), are indeed a judgment on his life; however, the words are also an honest evaluation devoid of any pretense. Kurtz doesn't make excuses for his actions. I didn't reject the book; I didn't want to be like the people Marlow identifies when he returns to Europe at the end

of the story: “Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend” (70). I didn’t want to be like those other return-missionaries. Rather, I learned that greatness and evil are not synonymous with good and evil; Kurtz’s evil is capable of brilliance and greatness. I had learned to respect Kurtz as a remarkable man because he has the courage to define his actions as they are, and not as any feeble pretense can paint them.

Marlow points out that a fragile barrier of artificial restraint is all that separates anyone from the darkness within. The pretense of civilization simply conceals the monstrous savagery that constitutes the core of everyone. Marlow stripped away the redeeming values of civilization, as well as all the world’s anchors, to show that any one person is only as great as how they confront the darkness. I try to be honest about what I see in the darkness, irrespective of the garish ways that people try to code the savagery. So I sat in my room after I completed Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. A kind of light was thrown about me; I could see the pretenses in the expectations of a return-missionary. I saw the message of the book in my commitment to school. The fakeness of people began to annoy me, as is the case with Marlow at the end of the novel. That is why everything reminds me of Heart of Darkness.

* * * * *

Two and a half years before July 19, 2004, when Lori Hacking was reported missing in Salt Lake City, I worked with Mark at the University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute—an intensive outpatient psychiatric hospital. I worked at the facility from August of 2001 until April of 2002. My second BA is in psychology, and seeing how my BA in English literature couldn’t conjure up a full-time job for me, I decided on a job at a psychiatric hospital. Mark and I worked together as psychiatric technicians. I knew him before he was arrested for the murder of Lori Hacking on August 2, 2004; I knew him even earlier, before he started pretending that he was still matriculated at the University of Utah. Mark’s trial was set for April 18, 2005. However, he plead guilty at the pretrial on the 15th: “I intentionally shot Lori Hacking in the head with a .22 rifle” (“Mark Hacking Pleads”). I still remember two years ago he was my colleague. I might have traveled the Congo to meet him, just as Marlow met Kurtz.

* * * * *

I had read Heart of Darkness again as a sophomore, in yet another course. That is when I started my collection. I started to memorize a large quantity of lines from the text. Many of the lines I knew by heart were from Marlow’s eloquent descriptions of Kurtz’s extra mortal greatness, as well as the evaluations of Kurtz’s actions. I read the book repeatedly; I could quote my favorite lines. I was a junior when the third college course that focused on Marlow’s “inconclusive experience” ended tragically for me. I spoke up often in class because I was so impressed with Kurtz’s mysterious faculty for articulation and perception, and so excited to share how thoroughly I understood his “last opportunity for pronouncement” (69) at the doors of death: “The Horror, The Horror.” I quoted the text rather than turn to the pages. I energetically voiced my insight into the depth of Marlow’s experience. The professor made concerted efforts to shame

me in class. By the time I got to the fourth course, in my senior year, I was not willing to threaten another professor's authority. I wasn't willing the first time either; but I had no idea what affect my excitement would create. The fourth time I studied Heart of Darkness I never raised my hand. I sat in the back of the room too. I tried to remove myself from those class discussions as much as possible without actually skipping class. I was tortured by the silence because there were so many things my classmates didn't see.

Don't misunderstand me; I know all about the decapitated heads that decorate Kurtz's front yard picket fence (57). I know about the nightly rituals where African natives offer sacrifices up to him (50). I know about the postscript near the conclusion of the article Kurtz writes for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs: "Exterminate the brutes" (51). I know about how he keeps a young lady in Europe, his "intended" (49), available as a backup while he lets the tribes marry him to a native girl. I know that he exploits the innocence of natives, let them believe he is a God (50), and leads them to war against other tribes so that he can ship ivory to Europe (56). I know he kills for ivory (56). I know! I also know about issues with the book itself; I cringe when I read the racism in Conrad's prose. I don't need Chinua Achebe's 1975 lecture on racism in Heart of Darkness (Achebe 254); Marlow speaks of the native who works the boiler on the steamboat: "to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs" (38). I know the Africans in Conrad's book are described as nonhuman. But can't you see the value of Kurtz's insight and vision? He knows too; and he does not hide from the inner truth in his life. I do not embrace, celebrate, or become one with my darkness like Kurtz; however, I know about my darkness.

I drug my little brother Ryan down to my room once. I cannot even remember why anymore. I do remember that he wouldn't tell me what I wanted to know. So I tried to interrogate him like in the movies. But the insufferable brat tried to call my bluff, so I kicked him in the head just like I had threatened. He was too busy crying to tell me what I wanted. There are all kinds of excuses and pretenses I can use to cover up my callous cruelty. Maybe I can say that Ryan and I were young. I can blame the psychic influence of Hollywood on my mind. Perhaps I can validate the kick by recounting all the crazy violence he directed against me. I could lie about my motives and suggest that the kick was an accident; after all, I only wanted to pretend to kick him. However, when I look at the world with Marlow's eyes I cannot avoid the truest, most ugly reason: I really wanted to kick that jerk in the head.

I see darkness in me and everywhere about me. Marlow said his adventure on the Congo "throw[s] a kind of light on everything about me" (11). He said he still bares the shade of Kurtz. I like to think that I do too. So when I say that random things remind me of the Heart of Darkness, I cannot be more serious. I am reminded. I am affected. I admit my affectedness. I see that "kind of light" every day and let Marlow's dream reduce my life to scenes from the novel.

My wife, Karen, loves her new friend Amy. Karen desperately wants me to make friends with Amy's husband—Joseph. I cannot match that level of friendship, where the intoxication of kindred spiritedness is like pollen in the spring air. Karen thinks that Amy is so special that she wants me to benefit from that special friendship through Joseph.

We had dinner. Joseph and I sat in the living room staring at each other, our children running about and pulling all the toys out of the kid's room. Joseph's girls were showing off their belongings, and my girls were showing off their belongings too. We sat there silently trying to figure out how we were supposed to meet the fantastic expectations of our wives. Karen and Amy were so excited that Joseph and I were together—bonding—that they couldn't even sit down. The evening was pleasant, and Joseph and I warmed up to each other. Well ... we talked about school. Once home, Karen wanted to know what I thought of Joseph.

“Joseph reminds me of the Heart of Darkness.”

Poor Karen. She is used to this kind of insight. Of course, the parallel is so obvious. Joseph is balding, but has a beard. The engineer that helps Marlow reassemble the steamboat is also balding, with a beard. Marlow suspects that as the hairs fall from the engineer's head, they gather at the engineer's chin. The engineer's beard is so long that he handcrafts a kind of sack that hooks around his ears with which he can protect his beard as he works on the equipment. Joseph's baldhead inspires thoughts about pretense and darkness. I don't think Karen was very impressed. She laughed though; even if the laugh was a mixture of shock and annoyance.

* * * * *

On the second of August Salt Lake City's KSL news broadcasted, “The man who reported his wife missing two weeks ago, tonight faces aggravated murder charges in her disappearance and death. Salt Lake City police chief Rick Dinse says there's enough evidence to charge Mark Hacking with murder in the death of his missing pregnant wife” (“Mark Hacking Arrested”). Lori Hacking was reported missing by her husband on July 19, 2004. He apparently contacted the police 30 minutes after he purchased a new mattress (“Mark Hacking Arrested”). Investigators suspect Mark tried to replace a blood-soaked mattress found in a dumpster. Lori's body had apparently been disposed in another dumpster, her body was not found until October 1, 2004 in the Salt Lake landfill. That same day, KSL news reported:

The remains were heavily decomposed. Police were able to recover most of the remains, which should expedite their ability to confirm the identity of the individual. Remains were not held intact, but they believe they have a full body. Police say it looks like a petite body, from what they can tell (“Dental Records”).

The forensics lab took nineteen days to verify Lori Hacking's identity by autopsy. As the story developed from a missing woman to autopsy results, I often imagined what kind of thinking and depravity would be needed to kill Karen on our own bed. I would have to dispose of our mattress. I tried to put myself beside a dumpster in some darkened corner of the city as I heaved my wife's body up into the dumpster. The image of numbed heartlessness still makes me wonder at the depths of darkness in Mark's mind. Yet thanks to Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and my likely unhealthy obsession with the novel, I question whether numbed heartlessness is really so specific to Mark.

There is a smaller drama in the case of Lori and Mark, closer to the beginning of the case. In the sixteen days between when Mark reported Lori's failure to return from a morning run in July and when he was taken into custody in August, an elaborate matrix of deceit was unwound. He was matriculated at the University of Utah until 2002, but he continued to inform his family that he was progressing towards graduation (Campbell). He printed his own report cards, bought books every semester, wandered the campus, printed graduation invitations (though he was sick the day of commencement), spent hundreds of dollars sending out applications to multiple medical schools, and flew to various states to non-existent medical school interviews. They had started the steps to purchase a home in the state to which they would move for his medical school education. (I sometimes find myself reassuring Karen that I really am a Utah State University graduate student.) There are some people who speculate that the day Lori found out about the lies was the same day Mark reported her missing. Needless to say, Mark's credibility eroded rapidly. Mark pleaded guilty on April 15, 2005.

* * * * *

When I started at the psychiatric hospital I had come from a student reference-assistant job at the University of Utah's Marriott library and program studies in English literature. The hospital job was easy to get. I had a friend. My first week on the job involved orientation and training. I was not to be allowed near the lock down units until after I certified. The orientation was the first two days of the week and the training was the last three. I had no idea what the patient population was like in the psychiatric hospital and knew that all my library experience would not help me much.

The orientation room had no windows. The folding chairs lined the three walls that faced the dry eraser board. The wall with the board was the same wall with the door. The chairs were almost all full of people talking together. The voices were low enough that I could sort out isolated conversations. The common topic was job responsibilities: "What job were you hired for?" I remember my surprise when I learned that I would orient and train along with the nurses and office HUC's, because for some reason I thought orderly work was only for orderlies.

With the exception of one man, everyone in the orientation room was a new hire. I had started to hear about takedowns and hostile patients. Different people in the room had bits of information that only deepened the confidential mysteries concealed one floor above us. No one really seemed to know what actually happened behind the magnetically sealed doors of the lock down units. Nervous whispers. Uncomfortable laughter. The one seasoned man in the room had been talking casually with an administrator, but when the administrator left the room the seasoned man spoke.

"There was a code white on the adolescent unit last night. The kids had barricaded themselves in the common room. It took hours to get that situation under control."

Those were the first words I heard from Mark. He had said them while we sat together. I had chosen the seat next to him on random chance, but I was already glad I did. I realized that I had a psychology degree,

a stable mind, a desire to serve the patients, and I didn't have to be scared of the patients. I wanted to confront a hostile patient, and see if I was made of the same kind of stuff as the hardened psychiatric technician seated at my side. Mark's legs were stretched out in front of him, and he had slouched so low in the chair that I thought his tailbone might be all that supported him on the edge of the seat. Yet he looked so cool and confident. I had wondered when I would finally be like that, so desensitized by hostility. Desensitization is the last psychic space left for health care workers anywhere. I laughed at the most horrible things, not because I was soulless, but rather because the only other alternative was to cry. However, as I sat in that orientation room I had never faced any patients or any horrors. I had been so anxious about code whites that I respected Mark for his apparent nerve.

Mark attended orientation as one of the orientation staff; he was to be our trainer in the upcoming days. We had training and certifications scheduled for the next two days, and I looked forward to any hints about work on the psychiatric units that Mark could pass on to me.

* * * * *

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention was a standard certification at the University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute. All employees needed to be familiar with the de-escalation techniques necessary to maintain the safety of the psychiatric units. Suicide attempts, drug detoxification, psychotic episodes, medication stabilization, and abuse are all reasons for intensive lockdown treatment. Most patients come in on a stretcher or escorted by officers. Some patients go through the intake department on the first floor. However, admission does not mean automatic cure; the patients still pose a threat to themselves and every other at-risk patient on the unit. Nonviolent Crisis Intervention focuses on verbal de-escalation skills in order to give patients healthy alternatives to inappropriate behaviors. But patients never get admitted to intensive lock down units because they are open to healthy alternatives. They don't typically want to discuss the value of those alternatives either. Most patients are actually offended that they must be on the unit in the first place; there is nothing wrong with them after all. When verbal de-escalation fails, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention certifies personnel with the necessary restraint techniques that minimize harm and injury. However, my main priority was to de-escalate situations without the use of force no matter how suddenly the situation arose.

There was a yell and a crash from the male rooms of the adolescent unit. I was stationed in the hall. The lock down hallway was only 15-25 yards long with five rooms that lined each side of the hall. The male rooms were the first cluster of rooms after the dayroom; the female rooms were just a few steps more down the hall. The assignment of the rooms was designed to avoid the problem of males passing by female rooms on the way to the common room. In addition, psychiatric technicians stationed in the hall were responsible to maintain the invisible barrier so that girls didn't dally in transit and boys didn't detour out of their way. In addition, the hall post was important for the safety of any high risk patients isolating themselves in their bedrooms. So when I heard the yell and the crash I was immediately darkening the doorway of the boy's room.

Federal laws, minority laws, and confidentiality laws guard the boy's identity; yet, this boy saw me at his doorway and threatened me with my life, "Go away. I'll fucking kill you." I was used to that. I gave a nod to a colleague and the adolescent unit was on alert. The therapist with the kids in the dayroom came up with another therapy game to keep the kids distracted longer. The inner magnetic doors were shut to seal off the rooms from the nursing station. The head nurse called a code white.

Despite popular opinion, and Hollywood portrayals of massive orderlies bulging through their white uniforms, UNI (our phallic appellation for the facility) does not have a team of recon marines ready to repel through the tiles of the ceiling at a moment's notice. There is only the psychiatric technicians—like I once was. If verbal de-escalation fails between a staff member and an escalating patient, then the head nurse phones the hospital operator to announce a "code white." The code white is an alert that summons available personnel from around the building. The theory is that with more people present for a take down, the risk of injury reduces with every additional person. Psychiatric Technicians (a gangly bunch of psychology students with a notable absence of raw muscle) from around the hospital gather for the last moments of parley.

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention techniques are very useful for those moments of parley, or non threatening discussions about healthy alternatives; the techniques are also helpful to safely restrain the patient from further self-harming behaviors. The code white often ends with a take down, as a dozen psych techs swarm the patient, and kindly procure safe transportation to the isolation room (the patient face down, hanging like a coffin between pallbearers, screaming a mantra "Someone kill me Someone please kill me" or "I want my mom I want my mom I want my mom" or "you fucking homos don't touch me or I'll fucking kill you put me down you fags I'll kill you").

I went into a male patient's room alone; after the psych techs had gathered for a take down. The patient would have escalated if he knew there were a dozen or more psych techs in the hall outside his room, so only Mark stood by the doorway. Mark would make the signal if the boy melted down on me.

The lights were off, so that only natural light filtered in through the Plexiglas window. The room seemed so dark. The bed was disheveled. His clothes had been thrown around the room. A chair was overturned. He stood in the corner by the window at the back of the room. I could hear him breathing; his respiration was heightened by psychiatric medications. The silhouette of his torso expanded and contracted; his exhales sounded like a rake on concrete. Not only had he lost 30 IQ points because he had been huffing carbon monoxide from a paper bag, but I also knew that the medications turned cognitive processes into very confused moments of profound frustration and anger. I would not be able to rely on the boy to hold his end of our conversation. He could not be expected to see through the thick fog over his mind sufficiently to understand the consequences of assaulting staff. He wouldn't understand healthy alternatives. I would have to guide him and prompt him, without threatening his tenuous sense of independence (a sense long since crushed in the 24 hour lock down unit), to make a positive choice—any positive choice.

"You seem really upset today. Is there something bugging you?"

“I want to see my mom.” He yelled the words like a threat. He was poised for an attack. I wondered if he would throw something or rush me if I didn’t conjure him mother up at that moment. He was a very violent boy. He went to isolation at least twice a day for assaulting staff, peers, or hospital property. If he had skills to communicate emotion before the huffing, he lost them with the 30 IQ points. I was glad that Mark was watching so attentively. I would need him to get all the techs into the room before the boy could attack me.

“I saw you with her yesterday. Is she coming again today?”

“YOU ASSHOLE! I’LL KILL YOU! LET ME SEE MY MOM!” His fists balled up as he screamed.

“I want you to see her. Maybe we should call her and find out if she is coming today?”

“.....”

I wait for a response. Silence is the strongest prompt I have at times.

“Ya.” I can see his body loosen a little.

After some time I walked out of the room with the boy. The patient made an enormously brave choice to de-escalate himself, and his psychologist would praise him when the boy got out of voluntary isolation. He chose isolation so he could calm down before calling his mother. The inner magnetic doors reopened after the boy entered isolation. I took my post at an observation window so I could watch him. The dayroom opened up and the therapist directed the teens back to their rooms. They knew someone was in isolation because I was standing at the door; however, they were never in a position to see if things had gone bad.

* * * * *

My Nonviolent Crisis Intervention certification has Mark Hacking’s signature. Of course, the signature predates the murder allegations by four years. Yet four years later I still have the certification card, and I think back on the Mark I once knew. He was a good trainer. He was a supportive colleague. I could count on him. My memories of Mark are all rather pleasant, but the memories are not what trouble me. The absence of suspicion from those who knew him so much better than me disturbs me the most. Mark’s brother Lance said, “If you wanted someone to be a gentle, loving husband, that was the Mark that we know, that is the Mark that we see every day. I love him and I don’t have any doubts about him” (“Hacking Family”). These words were spoken three days after the disappearance. Even in the face of Mark’s university matriculation deceptions, the family retained their solidarity with their kind-loving brother/son.

Charlie Marlow understands Mark Hacking’s pretense. Those closest to Kurtz adore him too. In fact, Kurtz gives no sign of his darkness until Marlow takes the steamboat to pick the man up from the inner station. (. . . or until Mark calls the police to report his missing wife.) But Marlow also details the way that other Europeans along the Congo cover their darkness. There is the accountant who ignores the death of an agent

in his office because he must keep accurate records (22). There is also the central station's brick maker who spends his time dominating the other men of the camp and doing secretarial work for the station manager because "there was a physical impossibility) (30). Marlow's narrative carefully peels back the artificial restraint of the Europeans as well. Everyone Marlow meets has that same savagery within:

Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend

I cannot help but think of the savagery within myself. Like Mark and Kurtz, the same absence of suspicion figures into my own life. I love my wife and she has no doubts about me. Hard working and faithful husband are ways she might describe me. Yet what assurance are those pretenses? I worked with Mark and had no more cause to suspect him of shooting his wife in the head with a rifle than Karen now has to suspect me. When some random coworker from your past shows up in the news as a killer I would like to see you deal with that without questioning the absence of suspicion in anyone else you know. Or yourself.

* * * * *

Orientation ended only two days before, and this was the last day of Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training. Mark planned to certify me that afternoon. The training room was a simple conference room where all the tables had been cleared away. The open space was sufficient to give the group of trainees plenty of room to practice defense techniques, safe take down techniques, and safe restraint protocols. Mark stood before us all; he was talking about the useful defense technique when a patient bites.

"If a client bites you, feed the bite." Mark said.

He demonstrated how to feed the bite with his wrist and his own mouth. He looked as if his one objective was to stuff his throat full of his own body parts. Though Mark looked rather silly standing with his own wrist in his mouth, in front of a row of thirty trainees, the demonstration was still effective. Mark went on to explain that the patient cannot bite down as effectively with a wrist jammed back against the jaw's temporomandibular joint—a kind of wedge. However, he confessed that he had another technique that was more effective.

"It hurts more, but I guarantee the patient will let go."

He instructed us all to put the tip of our index fingers against the base of the nose, at the nostrils, where the bone ends and the cartilage begins. He told us to apply pressure to the stub of bone, and rub vigorously. We all laughed together, all thirty of us, at the surprise of the pain.

But I didn't laugh when she bit me.

The adolescent unit isolation room was not very big. One person alone can feel the empty space, and bare walls, close around them. But there were a dozen of us in the room. There were four walls, with a solid door. One wall had a one way, Plexiglas, observation window. The floor was concrete with a vinyl mattress (for easy scrub down) and six rings built into the floor around the mattress. The girl was wailing, swearing, and threatening that if we bruised her again she would call her father because he was a lawyer. But she was so malnourished that her bed gave her bruises when she slept. She wanted to starve herself to death and was not going to let a psychiatric lock down unit stop her. She was frail bones, wrapped with thin, cold skin. Her shallow cheeks were pale. The girl would die despite all the interventions of staff, psychiatric technicians, and doctors without nourishment. On doctor's orders we had to put her in full body restraint so that she wouldn't pull out the IV and feeding tube again.

Tori had the bucket full of the restraints. Nancy, the med nurse, had the syringe of Ativan. Once we had her restrained Nancy could inject the sedative. Lindsey had control of the girl's legs. Yet Lindsey couldn't apply restraints until he had someone to control the girl's mule kicks. Lindsey was doing his job, so no one was kicked, but her legs needed restraint. I had her right hand, so she couldn't hit herself, me, or anyone else. Peter was starting to put the first of the restraints on her left wrist, but he couldn't both control the thrashing arm, and apply the restraint. The girl started banging her face against the cement floor. We had placed her on the mat in the first place, but after all her kicking and jerking she had managed to get her face over the edge of the padding. We shifted her, and reset her over the mattress. She continued to hammer her face against the vinyl and her nose started to bleed. I pushed her head down onto her cheek, and against the mattress, to stop her head banging. There was no time to think about what I looked like when I pushed the side of her face into the mattress. Yet, if not for me, her brain would bounce around inside her skull with each time her nose struck the mattress.

I got into this job for people like her. I left for the same reason. To listen to her wails as she laid in five point restraint (the fifth restraint was often put around her waist when she continued to try and beat herself against the floor despite the restraints) was as difficult as watching her ghostly figure pass down the hall. This girl was in an epic struggle to die and I was there to understand her along the way. If my effort to understand changed nothing at all for her, then I could still make her live even if that meant I had to hold her head down against a mat until the help from other units showed up.

Mark, and the adult unit techs, had just arrived. I was so glad to see them because we needed the extra hands. There was only so much so few of us could do without actually causing her pain ourselves. We were simply holding her until more help arrived. Mark led some of them to help Lindsey on the legs. A tech I didn't recognize came to help with the hands. The mystery tech put his hand on the girl's head, so I could use both hands on the girl's wrist restraints. Yet Peter still needed help controlling her left hand while he set the restraint. She was screaming with fright and fighting desperately to keep her arm free of Peter's restraint. After setting her first restraint, I moved to help him. I did not pay attention to where my arm was in relation to her face. She clamped down on my forearm.

“I’m feeding the bite!” I shouted as everyone gave me helpful nonviolent crisis intervention tips.

The girl’s jaws were locked firmly. She looked at me fiercely, and I couldn’t tell if she smiled—my arm was in the way. I continued to feed the bite, but couldn’t pull my arm out because she would clamp down again.

Mark pushed his way in and reminded me of his nose trick. I felt around for the sensitive tip of bone and pushed. She growled in anger, but didn’t let go. Thankfully I was still feeding the bite; though she would not release my arm, she could not bite harder or break skin. I tried the nose trick again with more pressure. She screamed with a wild snarl as she let go and spat. Well, she tried to spit. She had tried that on one of her first take downs at UNI, so Tori was already prepared, and threw a small hand towel over the girl’s head.

My apparent callousness in the commission of such nonviolence against a little, emaciated adolescent female may seem monstrous. However, the staff laughed about that kind of stuff. Well . . .that might seem monstrous too. What do you expect us to do—cry? Protest? I was verbally assaulted every day of the entire full time week at UNI. Physical defense was a daily constant because I could plan on being attacked at least once per shift. If I didn’t do my fifteen-minute check on each patient the kid who microwaved his gerbil and wanted to grow up to be a serial killer would rape the sexually manic girl because the voices insisted he should. Then the kid who thought he was Jesus because some moron slipped LSD into his drink at a party would walk over to the sweating pair in his underwear and forgive the girl for getting violated.

No wonder Kurtz whispered “the horror the horror” into the darkness. The laughter of hospital personal was one of those pretenses. Without some kind of shield I would not be able to serve the patients at all. I would give in to the human drama and help the girl pull out her IV and feeding tubes. You would disconnect yourself too. You would desensitize yourself as fast as possible and then you would laugh with Mark and me in the break room. When you have to take down a suicidal boy because he threatened to cut himself with a crayon you have to go home pleased at a job well done, or admit yourself to the adult unit. The laughter is a survival tool for the people who care too much. Yet, perhaps the laughter is a pretense that hides the callous cruelty.

* * * * *

I haven’t worked at UNI for a long time.

So when I stared in awe and horror at the August 2, 2004 newspaper, two and a half years had passed since I last saw Mark. The police department’s profile picture of Mark featured on the front page. He looked like any other numb face—dark around the eyes and stumps of hair on a baldhead—in any police lineup around the country. That frozen moment of recognition seemed so still and silent in my mind. Sixteen days of a missing woman and this was the first time I had seen the husband’s face. Oh I had heard his name, but I hadn’t seen or thought about Mark, and actually never really knew his last name. He was always Mark;

and there are thousands of Mark's. That face was someone I knew though, and I struggled to resurrect the memories of acquaintances and friends. The nonviolent crisis intervention training, the girl, the nose trick, eight months of nightly code whites at UNI, and Mark Hacking all surfaced from the deep waters of memory.

The big cheeks and small eyes gave Mark away to me. There was something about that squint that I had seen before. I had seen that squint on lunch break and laughing behind the nurse's station. With that squint he looked up at me after he signed my nonviolent crisis intervention certification. That was the squint on his face when he reassured me that he was there to back me up. I trusted that face.

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The first night after removing a bed-ridden Kurtz from his station, Marlow discovers that Kurtz is no longer onboard the steamboat. Marlow leaves the boat and quickly discovers Kurtz's trail through the grasses. Kurtz is so sick that he must crawl back to the jungle and his loyal African natives. Marlow heads Kurtz off. He stands between Kurtz and the bomb fire of the tribe further off in the woods. Marlow says of that moment:

but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. . . We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. . . 'if he makes a row we are lost,' I thought to myself. (64-65)

Marlow manages to say the right things, and Kurtz returns to the steamboat. However Marlow goes on to express how impossible is an appeal to such a supernatural being of impenetrable darkness. There is nothing in the pretense of civilization that can appeal to Kurtz's frank savagery and therefore nothing insures that Kurtz will not set the natives on the steamboat again. Marlow writes that he must trust Kurtz to insure the safety of the steamboat's crew.

Of course, I did not think about Kurtz and fire pits when I worked with Mark. He was a nice colleague with whom I had fun at work. Yet, as I think back on the trust I placed in Mark I feel a great deal of discomfort. To what did I trust? What possible restraint can I expect from a man potentially capable of the murder of his own wife on their bed? Mark confessed in a court of law that he shot Lori in the back of the head while she slept. I'm not the only one who trusted Mark though. The absence of suspicion got the better of a lot of people he knew very well. Obviously Lori trusted him quite a bit when she fell asleep, but Mark's father, Douglas Hacking, had a lot of trust even three days after Mark reported Lori as missing. Douglas Hacking said, "I confronted my son yesterday morning, I looked him in the eye, and I said 'I need you to tell me if you had anything to do with Lori's disappearance.' I have to tell you that he looked me in the eye, and he said, 'No'" ("Hacking Denies"). Lori's family wiped Mark's name from Lori's tombstone in December of 2004. Lori's mother explained the family's decision: "We just felt that Mark obviously didn't want her anymore" ("Hacking' denies"). I suspect the family no longer trusted Mark like before the arrest. Yet all this terrific hindsight serves no real purpose because everyone trusted Mark's at-face-value when

the absence of trust would have made the greatest difference for Lori.

The boy had lost 30 IQ points, had a hostile affect, and had a history of daily violence on the unit. I remember the confidence I felt in my colleagues as I entered that room. I knew that if I failed I could trust Mark to get everyone into the room. Whether or not Mark will murder his wife two and a half years after he watched me walk into the violent boy's room is rather meaningless, except for the notion haunts me. Perhaps at that time Mark had no idea about his darkness. Only later did he maybe confront his darkness, and cover it up with layers of pretense and deception. But he must have gone mad with the savagery in his soul.

Marlow's narration provides a lot of detail about how the shade of Kurtz haunts him. The shade haunts me too. I once attended the parental delinquishment case of a father in which I was the witness representing the state of Utah. I didn't work for UNI anymore; I worked as a caseworker for the Utah Division of Child and Family Services. The father failed to show for the trial and refused to make contact with his attorney. The judge ruled on the lack of natural parental interest in the child and severed every single one of the man's parental rights. As the judge reviewed all her findings against the man—taking a good twenty minutes of time—I thought about my own daughter and how I loved her so much; I also thought about Kurtz. I nearly cried as I listened to the product of my casework and testimony. That was way too much counter-transference; however, I was reminded of Heart of Darkness. Marlow indicates the most disconcerting aspect of his memory of Kurtz:

Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery. The utter savagery had closed round him. . .But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself and, by Heavens I tell you, it had gone mad . . . No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. (10, 65)

Inside Marlow, inside me for that matter, is utter savagery. Both Mark and Kurtz look inside and their soul goes mad. I sat there in that trial, testified against a father like myself, and contemplated my relationship with my own infant daughter.

I wondered at what the absence of fatherly connection would look like with me. I looked past all my pretenses at the frank possibility in each of the findings the judge ticked off. There had been so many times where I let my unpreparedness for fatherhood temporarily convince me that I didn't want my child. I would think of ways I could be free of the responsibility and then immediately come to my senses. My senses: yet another pretense. Whether or not I am strong enough to resist the madness really isn't the point. The point is there is something to resist. When I go through the ordeal of looking deep within myself I see the potential for heads on pikes, and my wife in the landfill. So what is my restraint? Why don't I go mad with the utter savagery? The answer to that question is the scariest part of everything I am trying to tell you.

* * * * *

I was in church on August 22, 2004 preparing to teach Gospel Doctrine: an adult Sunday school class. I still like to teach at church. In fact, I make a habit of approaching the Bishop and requesting a teaching assignment. I go into the scriptures in true English-literature-scholar style. Words and text are explicative whether or not the author is divine. The more intricate the web of interpretation and cross-textual references the more excitement I feel. Those who attend my Sunday school classes speak openly of how much they enjoy my scriptural approach. While I prepared for my lesson that afternoon there was a People magazine article that lingered in the back of my mind. I had read the article six days previous.

I actually didn't think much about the article in those six days. However, I woke up that Sunday morning, opened up the lesson manual, and a specific passage from the magazine invaded my mind. The People article stunned me and made me look into myself at my own savagery. In fact this was the moment where Kurtz, Mark, savagery, and me all came together. Since the 2nd of August I was horrified that I knew Mark; but I wasn't actually reminded of Heart of Darkness until that Sunday morning. The People article detailed Mark's own church activity:

At his Mormon congregation, where he sometimes taught Sunday school, Mark charmed kids and parents alike with his sunny disposition and evident faith. 'When he taught class, you could tell he knew a lot about gospel doctrine,' says one congregant. 'He was real insightful and enthusiastic too.' (Campbell)

Marlow and I are not mad, but we have the honesty to see that there is nothing that securely separates us from either Kurtz or Mark. Mark taught Sunday school, impressed those in attendance, and left an impression of deep commitment to God. Talk about the pretense of artificial restraint. Forgive my arrogance, but I do all those Sunday-school-teacher things too. If I question the flimsy pretense that hides Mark's savagery, then I must question my own flimsy pretenses. What is my restraint? What stops me from shooting Karen in the back of the head and dumping her body in the dumpster?

Nothing!

Teaching Sunday school reminds me of Heart of Darkness and teaches me about the potential absence of my own restraint. After Marlow returns to Europe he meets a journalist acquaintance of the deceased Kurtz in the street. The acquaintance describes Kurtz's genius as a public speaker: "how the man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith—don't you see?—he had the faith." Apparently Mark and I electrified the Sunday school classes. We could talk; we were eloquent. We had the faith—don't you see?

"But you're not like that Jason." Karen said as I prepared for the Sunday school lesson. I heard Mark echoing Kurtz's whisper in the air about me: "The Horror The Horror." Karen's red hair and curls trembled as her head shook vigorously. I think she was angry that I would dare consider identification with Mark. She thought I was bad enough identifying with the fictional Kurtz. We stood alone in the classroom as I wrote scripture references on the chalkboard. I had told her about how Mark was such a nice, spiritual man who taught Sunday school. People trusted and respected him. He taught them about God and challenged them

to develop their prayerful relationship with Heaven. Then he shot his wife in the back of the head with a .22 rifle while she slept. Karen was insistent that I was different and I wanted to believe her. I bet Lori Hacking would have been insistent too. “Jason, you don’t just one day become a killer. You have to really be different inside.” Am I so different inside—deep down with the savagery and darkness? Deep inside is where my soul can go mad with the desire for “abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions” (70). I’m not convinced that I’m very different inside.

The first time I read Heart of Darkness again after the tragedy of Lori Hacking in August 2004, I made a discovery. One passage stood out like never before; I had never actually noticed the significance of Marlow’s observation. I listened to the tape narrated by Richard Thomas—John-Boy Walton—as I unpacked boxes after our recent move. The passage focuses on how Kurtz, as well as Mark Hacking, is vulnerable to the darkness:

there was something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can’t say. I think the knowledge came to him at last—only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. (57)

I listened to the words and then rewound the tape to listen again. I don’t even know where I put down the moving box I carried. Mark hovered like a phantom in my mind; I was struck with a new level of insight into Kurtz’s last words: “the horror the horror.” There is some kind of restraint that is not in him; and the freedom of the wilderness exploits him with a vengeance before he finally sees his weakness.

I say that nothing separates me from Mark Hacking because I’m not sure whether I know my weakness. For all I know, beyond my thin layer of pretenses I am as naked to savagery as Kurtz. I don’t think that Marlow knew his deficiency either. That is why Marlow and I agree that Kurtz’s final words are a victory. Kurtz knew at last, and he spoke in judgment on the savagery of his life. I wonder if Mark will discover his deficiency before his own “last opportunity of pronouncement” (69). However, I hope that I can find mine before the wilderness exploits my own lack of restraint.

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Primer: The Perils and Paradoxes of Restricted Time Travel Narration.

By Jason Gendler

A man, Aaron, is eating breakfast in his kitchen. For the sake of clarity, he will be referred to as Aaron1. Aaron1 begins to feel tired and soon passes out. He passes out because a future version of Aaron1, who will be referred to as Aaron2, has traveled back through time and drugged Aaron1's milk before Aaron1 entered the kitchen to eat breakfast. After Aaron1 passes out, Aaron2 drags Aaron1 upstairs and stows him in the attic. Aaron2 then goes back downstairs and enters the kitchen, at which point he is attacked by Aaron3, who is a future version of Aaron2 that has traveled back through time once again. Confused? The above is rather straightforward when compared to the film from which it came, Shane Carruth's 2004 film *Primer*, in which it is not easy to discern which version of Aaron is performing certain of the above actions, nor the motivation behind the actions of Aarons 2 and 3. Furthermore, the above scene is presented not in a unified, contiguous representation of space and time, but in a series of jump cuts and temporally repetitious inserts that fracture both space and time, further complicating a reading of the action and narrative.

Primer is a puzzling film about the perils and paradoxes of time travel. The narrative is conveyed through a restricted (and unreliable) narration that elides many crucial scenes, and is peppered with only the faintest of clues as to the broad scheme of the fabula. These clues come by way of hints dropped in the mise-en-scene, in the form of dialogue or a character's actions, or the location of scenes, or the presence of props, and also by way of the film's cinematography, through certain camera movements. Furthermore, the film also plays with editing patterns to create a fractured experience of time that is potentially analogous to the altering of reality carried out by the characters in the narrative. These editing patterns can also be read as additional hints about the restriction and unreliability of the narration. While it is possible to parse out a coherent timeline for the film upon repeated viewings and much deliberation, in some ways the film remains quite enigmatic; in certain instances, the narration accommodates multiple readings of the syuzhet that are not mutually exclusive.

Reduced to its most basic premise, *Primer* is a film that details what can happen if causality does not affect

the reality of people or objects that are once-removed (or twice-removed) from time. In other words, in the theoretical scenario known as the grandfather paradox,¹ where person A goes back in time and kills their grandfather (preventing the birth of one of A's parents and thus the birth of A him/herself) does not make the time-traveling person A disappear from existence (as almost happens to Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*, and as happens to old Biff in *Back to the Future II*)². Instead, killing person A's grandfather *does* prevent person A from being born in the now-altered reality, but does *not* prevent the person A-who-has-returned (or time-traveling-A, or A2) from existing as they are in the now-altered reality. Person A has altered the chain of causal events that leads to his/her birth, but this new chain of causality/reality is one from which he or she is once-removed and immune.³ These are the laws of cause and effect as they work in *Primer*, albeit with a few more caveats that shall be explained below. While no one in the film travels into the past and kills anyone, the repercussions of the actions of the time-traveling characters in *Primer* still have huge narrative consequences that are only partially enlightened or hinted at by a very restricted and unreliable narration.

The film's treatment of the grandfather paradox allows for some interesting consequences. Just as in Raymond Queneau's *Exercices in Style*, where there are almost endless permutations of the kinds of different styles one might use to describe the same scenario,⁴ so "the permutations are endless" in *Primer* as well, as Aaron2 says in voiceover. The permutations are endless in that the potential exists for there to be an unlimited number of ways one could alter reality, or in the number of iterations of the same person that exist (Aaron1, 2, 3..._) at the same time. If person A keeps returning to the past and altering the ability or desire of his or her previous iteration(s) to do the same, then there really can be an infinite number of copies the same person existing simultaneously.

In *Primer*, there are eventually three contemporaneous versions of Aaron who will apparently go on to live separate lives. Such a concept is similar to Jorge Luis Borges "The Garden of Forking Paths," in which a fictional novelist Ts'ui Pen envisions a universe in which all possible actions coexist simultaneously.⁵ In *Primer*, almost the opposite is true; only one reality exists, but there is room for all possible actions to take place *within* that one reality, given enough duplicates of a person or persons. For example, at the end of the film, Aaron3 and his onetime friend Abe2 are at odds with one another, and it is not a stretch to say that they have become enemies. However, their contemporaneous counterparts, Aaron1 and Abe1, remain friends, due to their never experiencing the realities that now exist only in the memories of Abe2 and Aarons 2 and 3 (however, the phone call Aaron2 places to Aaron1 that serves as the film's voiceover clues in Aaron1 on the events experienced by Aarons 2 and 3, and thus the extent to which Aaron1 will remain friends with Abe1 is perhaps called into question). Similarly, it is easy to imagine a scenario in which iterations of Aaron and Abe (AaronX and AbeX) do not know each other, in the sense that AaronX and AbeX might be unaware of each other's existence, and live a large portion of their lives separate from one another. After all, Abe2 warns off Aaron3 at the film's end, telling him never to return, and one of Aaron's iterations – it is not clear which one – is shown giving orders in a large space, perhaps an airplane hanger, somewhere in France in the film's denouement.

Before attempting to quickly detail the plot of *Primer* and the means by which one can solve the film's

time travel-hinged puzzle of a narration, first a few of the film's ground rules about time travel must be laid out. In *Primer*, time travel is possible in two directions: forward through the normal progression of minute-to-minute, second-to-second time, and backward through the use of the film's time machines. One cannot use a *Primer* time machine to leap forward into the future. Furthermore, one can only travel backward through time as far as back as the time machine exists. Essentially, all of time that existed before the creation of time machines is inaccessible. This is a condition of the way time machines function in the film; one does not enter the machine, immediately exit, and instantaneously emerge in the past. Instead, one must stay inside the machine for as long as one wishes to travel into the past. For example, if person A wished to travel from 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM of the same day, he or she would have to lie inside of the machine for twelve hours as the time machine moved the person backward through time. Thus one can only travel backward through time for as long as time machines have existed, because once the time-traveler has completed their journey, there must be a time machine in the past from which the time-traveler can emerge. One cannot emerge from a non-existent time machine. Inversely, if person A decided to exit after eleven hours in the time machine instead of twelve (not recommended, due to the complicated nature of the machine's construction), he or she would emerge at 9:00 AM, an hour later than their original destination time of 8:00 AM.

As to the caveats mentioned above, altering reality so as to make it impossible for the time-traveler to travel back in time (A2 preventing A1 from traveling back into the past to become A2) does have some detrimental effects for the temporally dislodged person; people once-removed from time who shouldn't exist, but do, start to experience bleeding ears and degenerative handwriting. These symptoms presumably get worse the more removed the time-traveler becomes from their original reality (i.e., the more instances in which a time-traveler travels backwards through time and alters reality from their original reality, the more they become dislodged from reality, and the worse these symptoms get. Either that, or simply traveling through time causes such symptoms by itself; the film is unclear on the exact cause). One last note: the time machines are collapsible, and it is possible to take one inside of another and emerge with it in the past.⁶

Now that the mechanics of *Primer* time travel have been laid out, the next task is to give a synopsis of the plot as briefly as possible. Due to the Byzantine nature of the film's narration, such a summary is necessary in order to make clear the analysis of the hints dropped by the restricted narration. Furthermore, by simultaneously differentiating between what occurs in the fabula but not in the syuzhet, one can clearly see the truly restricted and unreliable nature of the narration. In the following synopsis, events occurring in the film's syuzhet are written in **bold**, while events that occur in the fabula but not in the syuzhet are left in regular type. Events written in *italics* are included in the syuzhet, but do not occur in the chronology as written here; they are related through montage-flashback and explained in a voiceover later in the film.

In their spare time, engineers Aaron and Abe invent a small device that partially blocks gravity and makes objects lighter. They don't understand how it works, so they sit on their discovery while plying for funding. Abe figures out that the device is a time machine. He builds two versions big enough for a human to fit inside. One is the machine he intends to use, the other is a "failsafe" machine that will

allow him to go back and fix any potentially negative changes in causality he might inadvertently create. Abe travels back in time and tells Aaron of the device. The two build another machine for Aaron to use. That night, Rachel, a friend of Abe and Aaron, is threatened at a party by an ex-boyfriend with a shotgun. Abe and Aaron are not in attendance, but learn about it after the fact.

Unbeknownst to Abe, at some indeterminate point Aaron discovers the failsafe machine, uses it, and takes another time machine with him, in the process becoming Aaron2 (there are now two versions of Aaron in one reality: the non-temporally displaced Aaron, or Aaron1, and the Aaron who has traveled back in time, or Aaron2).⁷ He sets up his own failsafe, and modifies the first failsafe (Abe's failsafe) so that it is only operable after Aaron2 has set up his own failsafe, and thus Aaron2 gains control over the ability to change causality (only he has the ability to travel the farthest back in time), insuring that he will always keep the memory of Abe telling him about the time machine (should Abe decide that to tell Aaron was a bad idea), and allowing him the chance to play the hero and save Rachel at the party. Aaron2 then drugs Aaron1 and replaces him. He relives his day with Abe as Abe tells Aaron2 about the time machine (for what seems the first time to Abe). Aaron2 records his conversations as he goes along. Aaron2 attends the party and stops the dangerous ex-boyfriend with a shotgun, but in such a way that the ex-boyfriend does not go to jail (thus Rachel is still in danger, potentially).

To “fix” the party a third time, Aaron2 travels back through time again, becoming Aaron3 (there are now three versions of Aaron in the same reality: Aaron1, the non-temporally displaced Aaron; Aaron2, the Aaron who travels back in time and drugs Aaron1, and Aaron3, the Aaron who returns once again, becoming twice-removed from reality). Aaron3 waits for Aaron2 to drug Aaron1, *and then Aaron3 attacks Aaron2. Aaron3 loses because he is exhausted from so much time travel. However, Aaron3 convinces Aaron2 to leave, as Aaron3 has already accomplished all that Aaron2 was intending. At an indeterminate time, Aaron2 places a phone call to Aaron1, informing him of all the actions of Aarons 2 and 3, thus atoning for drugging Aaron1 and stowing him in the attic for a number of days (this manifests in the syuzhet through a reoccurring voiceover). Aaron3 then replaces Aarons 1 and 2, and relives Abe telling him about the time machine for a third time, this time with the aid of the recorded conversations from his second trip through time (although for the audience and for Abe, it appears to be the first time, as the previous two times are completely elided). Aaron3 is then able to “fix” the party so the ex-boyfriend is sent to jail and Aaron3 becomes a hero.*

Aaron3 and Abe begin reliving their days in order to buy stocks that they know will go up. Abe learns about Aaron3's party exploits secondhand, and chastises Aaron3 for risking his life because he has a family to think about. Aaron3 lies and provides Abe with a false motivation for his actions in order to conceal the fact that he reverse-engineered the events of the party. Abe and Aaron3 then encounter Thomas Granger2, father of Rachel, who somehow learned of the time machines and traveled back in time. Concerned over his lack of control, Abe uses his failsafe machine, the one with which Aaron2 tampered, in order to regain control of causality, and in doing so becomes Abe2. Abe2 gasses Abe1 and stows him in closet, and meets Aaron3 (whom Abe2 thinks is Aaron1), intending not to tell Aaron3 about the time machine, but collapses due to exhaustion. Aaron3 then reveals himself

as Aaron3, and explains all of the previously italicized events (with the help of Aaron2's voice-over-narrated phone call to Aaron1). Abe2 then reluctantly helps Aaron3 go about the events of the day, engineering the encounter between Rachel and the ex-boyfriend, sending the ex-boyfriend to jail once again. Abe2 sees Aaron3 off at the airport, warning Aaron3 never to return. Abe2 is intent on preventing either Abe1 or Aaron1 (who are now recovering from their drugging and gassing) from ever discovering time travel, while Aaron3 is intent on getting rich and living as he sees fit. An indeterminate iteration of Aaron at an indeterminate future time (it could be 1, 2 or 3) is shown in France, constructing a giant time machine.

As this paraphrasing of the fabula indicates, roughly only one third of the total fabula is actually narrated in the syuzhet, and many absolutely crucial plot points are elided entirely. As such, this is an extremely restricted narration. It is also unreliable in the sense that the audience and Abe are fooled into believing Aaron3 is Aaron1 for much of the narrative. However, the story is discernable, thanks to a number lines of dialogue and actions on the part certain characters, namely the voiceover of Aaron2 and the actions and dialogue of Aaron3. For instance, although it is initially unclear that the syuzhet's first representation of Abe telling Aaron of the time machine is actually the third time it has occurred in the fabula, numerous hints are given that allow one to retrospectively discern which iteration of Aaron is being depicted.

The most important of these hints is Aaron3's earpiece. When Abe first approaches Aaron3 to tell him about time travel, Aaron3 is wearing the earpiece through which he is listening to their conversation, which he recorded as Aaron2. Thus the title of the film; Aaron3 has a primer of the day's important conversations, or a script to follow, telling him how to correctly react to people to engineer the reality he wants. Aaron3 can be seen wearing this earpiece intermittently numerous times throughout the course of the day, and the recorded dialogue can even be heard early on at one point (at approximately 24:33), even though it is unclear at that point in the film that it is recorded dialogue. Other hints include Aaron3 pointing out to Abe which U-Haul storage locker to open to access the time machines (they keep them at a U-Haul storage facility to prevent tampering), and Aaron3 being the first in the film to bleed from the ear, despite Abe supposedly being the one with more time travel experience (although it is only revealed later that bleeding ears are a side effect of either time traveling or of altering the reality from which one came so as to prohibit a person's past-self from becoming their present, time-traveling self).

However, it needs to be noted that this is but one reading of the film. Another distinct possibility is that the scenes between Abe and Aaron in which Abe tells Aaron about his discovery of time travel (the scenes where Abe takes Aaron to the different lab technicians) alternate between Aaron1's experience of them and Aaron3's experience of them, the deciding factor being whether or not Aaron can be seen to be wearing the earpiece. Such a possibility arises because oftentimes when Aaron is not wearing the earpiece he seems to react rather genuinely to Abe's revelations. Two readings arise. The first is that Aaron3 is simply not wearing the earpiece at certain times; he is a good enough actor to fake surprise, shock, enlightenment, etc, when he must (such as when Abe shows Aaron his double entering the storage facility), and certain portions of the day aren't as crucial as other portions and thus Aaron2 didn't record them. The other possible reading is that the film methodically intercuts between scenes of Aaron1 living through Abe's revelations

and Aaron3 reliving it for the third time. Neither possibility is ever definitively ruled out; the film presents such a labyrinthine fabula-syuzhet dynamic over the course of the rest of narrative that this second reading, while not very transparent, is entirely possible.

For instance, early in Abe's revelation of his discovery of time travel, Aaron3 makes a joke about "What they do with engineers when they turn forty." ("They take them out and shoot them"). In the next scene (which occurs across a possible flashback-dissolve to Aaron1), Aaron (3 or 1) hears a lab technician tell him the joke, and this Aaron reacts as if he hasn't heard it before. Two possible readings arise: the Aaron in this scene is Aaron1, reacting to hearing that joke for the first time, or the Aaron in this scene is Aaron3, who simply forgot that that he's not supposed to know this joke yet, until he hears it told to him. Thus the look on Aaron3's face when he hears the joke is not one of wonder at hearing the joke for the first time, but one of panic over the possibility of Abe becoming suspicious upon realizing that Aaron3 just told that joke himself (of course, Aaron3 might also have just said, "Yeah I know that one," but doesn't, which lends a slight amount of credence to the reading that it is Aaron1 shown in this scene). Such potential shifting back and forth between times is discussed by Seymour Chatman in his *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*: "sometimes it can be difficult to tell whether a given cut signals a flashback, a flashforward or simply an ellipsis followed by the next (spatially removed) event in the story."⁸ This statement applies so well to *Primer* that the film can practically be defined by it (just place "In *Primer*," at the beginning of the sentence).

The scene in Aaron's garage/workshop that begins with an excerpt of recorded dialogue at 24:33 drops a number of hints as to the identity of the Aaron present in this scene (Aaron3). Not only is Aaron3 wearing the earpiece, but he also appears visibly impatient; the scene begins with him incessantly clicking a pair of pliers as he glances at a wall clock. He is impatient because this is the third time in which he's had to live through this conversation. Yet another hint in this scene is the rapidity with which Aaron3 supposedly performs some quick number conversions in his head. He converts 22 hours and 27 minutes into 1347 minutes, and Abe responds, "Man, you got that fast."

The above is an important scene, not only for the hints as to which Aaron is in the scene, but also because this is the scene in which Abe explains the time machine and time travel to Aaron3 (and the audience). Without going into any technical details, the gist of time travel in *Primer* is that the time machines allow a person to simultaneously experience time moving in two directions: forward in standard progression, but also in reverse, in a progression into the past. It is explained in the film that probability dictates that normally, one always experiences the forward progression of time, but that the time machines allow one to emerge from them when it is least probable to do so, in the past. Abe explains the above to Aaron3 in the form of a diagram that looks something like this:

The A end of the diagram is the point in the past, in which it is typically least probable for someone to exist (or experience existence), and the B end of the diagram is the present, where it is normally most

probable for a person to exist. Time machines allow one to cycle around two parabolic curves forward and backwards through time and emerge when it is least probable to do so, which in the above diagram would consist of traveling from the B point (the present) to the A point (the past). Whether or not this explanation adheres to logic and the laws of physics, the important part of it for the purposes of this paper is that time travel is described by the characters as a parabolic process. “Parabolas are important,” Abe explains to Aaron3. Such a statement should be taken to heart by the audience. If time travel can be read as occurring across a parabola of time, then one can look to the numerous manifestations of parabolas within the film as subtle (or not so subtle) hints at the unreliability and restriction of the narration.

For instance, after Abe and Aaron3 work out the above diagram together, Aaron3 and Abe walk onto Aaron’s driveway to further discuss the possibilities of time travel. Aaron3 is carrying a basketball, and in an a close up of the basketball, he begins twirling it around his torso; he repeatedly and rapidly passes it from his left hand to his right hand in front of his body, and then he passes it from his right hand to his left hand behind his back. The effect is that the basketball appears to be traveling along a parabolic (or doubly parabolic, or elliptical) path around Aaron3’s body. Moreover, he stops moving the basketball and tucks it under his right arm, or what would be the A point of the above diagram, if one were to superimpose the diagram over the image of Aaron3 and the basketball. A music cue also helps to highlight the moment when Aaron3 stops twirling the basketball. Aaron3’s actions can be read many ways: as pure coincidence; as yet another hint as to the identity of Aaron3; as a reference to the diagram, or as a reference to the fact that both Abe and Aaron3 have already traveled through time in this scene, although only Aaron3 knows it. Another manifestation of parabolas within the *mise-en-scene* is a scene between Aaron3 and Abe when they are searching for a runaway cat, in which the characters pause for an argument in the midst of a large, elliptically (or parabolic)-shaped public fountain.

Parabolas also manifest in the cinematography. In the (rather crucial) scene in which the importance of parabolic manifestations are highlighted, when Abe explains time travel to Aaron3 with the use of the A point and B point diagram, shortly after the basketball twirling another parabolic manifestation occurs; in a close up of Aaron3, the camera arcs around his face as he simultaneously turns to face the camera. Just as with the basketball, the camera travels from right to left, or in terms of the diagram, from the B point to the A point (i.e., backwards through time). This parabolic camera arc is perhaps the most obvious of many such camera arcs in *Primer*. Another occurs just prior to the aforementioned fountain scene, when Abe learns of Aaron3’s actions at the thus far elided party (where he saves Rachel from her ex-boyfriend, which is also the subject of the argument in the fountain scene). Abe learns of Aaron3’s actions, and as he does, the camera arcs around Abe from right to left in yet another parabolic movement reminiscent of the time travel diagram. One more important camera arc occurs during the pivotal scene in which Abe approaches Aaron3 with the intention of explaining time travel. Abe stands before Aaron3, who is sitting on a park bench, and the camera travels in a parabolic arc from left to right as the scene concludes (this happens both times the *fabula* event is narrated in the *syuzhet*). Much like the fractured editing, these camera movements can be read as references to time travel, and as subtle hints as to the elided scenes and actions of the various iterations of Abe and Aaron. The A point B point diagram, and the camera arc that occurs almost immediately thereafter, specifically marks them as such.

Another aspect of the play with time at work in *Primer* is an intermittent yet consistently fractured editing pattern that manifests at various points in the film. *Primer* is littered with segments containing numerous jump cuts, and there are even a handful of sequences in which a single shot is cut up and the pieces rearranged in a different order (although the audio track remains unified).⁹ For example, during the scene in which Aaron³ and Abe make the time travel diagram, the depiction of the drawing is conveyed in series of jump cuts. An extreme close up of the paper on which they are writing shows hands with pens appearing and disappearing while they continually and uninterruptedly talk as the diagram becomes fleshed out. Similarly, there are more jump cuts immediately prior to this when Abe first uses the A point and B point analogy. There are so many instances in which the film employs jump cuts that listing them is rather difficult (and indeed eventually they become harder to notice; one becomes accustomed to them as the film progresses), but not including the previous two examples, there are at least eight other instances in which the film employs series of jump cuts in concentrated portions of individual scenes.

However, more bizarre than the segments of jump cuts are segments in which a single shot is cut up and reordered into a new sequence (these segments also consist of jump cuts, but are distinct from the eight described in the previous paragraph. The difference is that the jump cuts described above occur in chronological order, whereas the following jump cuts do not adhere to a linear progression). The first of these occurs just after thirteen minutes into the film. Aaron¹ calls Abe and wakes him up, and what was originally a single shot is cut up into fifteen different shots (again, as with the jump cuts, the audio track remains in the correct chronological order) that are rearranged chronologically. If the order of the original shot can be described as 1, 2, 3... 15, then the order of the rearranged sequence is as follows: 1, 3, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 7, 9, 11, 12, 10, 13, 14, 15 (see accompanying captured images, in which the figure numbers correspond to the order in which the shots appear in the film). In this reordered sequence, numbers that appear next to one another chronologically (such as 4-6 and 13-15) represent shots that follow one another in the correct chronological order, but because action between them has been edited out they appear as jump cuts. Other such scenes include a rooftop scene where Aaron³ gets his first ear-bleed, and the scene in which Abe² approaches Aaron³ and collapses due to exhaustion, as well as the scene in which Aaron³ and Abe chase after Granger², in which there are brief flash-forward inserts of Abe running after Granger². What is the purpose of such temporally fractured segments? It should be noted that the first of these reordered sequences (Aaron's waking Abe up with a phone call) occurs immediately after the first time Aaron¹ and Abe activate their miniature time travel device, when they do not yet know what it is that they have created. The other sequences mentioned above have similar associations. Thus the significance of such sequences, and by extension any sequence with a series of jump cuts, could be read as an allusion to time travel, and can function as yet another type of (albeit abstract) hint as to the unreliable and restricted narration.

While there is a considerable amount of temporal fracturing in the film, there is also a lot of temporal mending through dialogue hook-laden montage sequences. The film frequently depicts completely coherent discussions between two or more characters as carried across wide spaces and disparate times, almost to the opposite effect of the jump cutting and shot reordering sequences described in the previous two paragraphs. For instance, when Abe brings Aaron³ to a lab to meet with the lab technician who tells them

what kind of protein had been building up on the weevils upon which Aaron and Abe had been experimenting, the scene occurs over multiple spaces, and by logical extension, multiple times; the characters might possess the ability to travel through time, but no one in the film has invented a matter transporter ala *Star Trek*. It takes time for the characters to move into the new spaces, and the cuts conceal this time while never breaking too drastically with the flow of the conversation. Another example occurs earlier in the film, when Aaron and Abe complain to one another about their after-hours business partners. Like the sequences with jump cuts, it is difficult to list all of the dialogue-hook montage sequences that occur in the film. It is enough to say that they represent one more cinematic way in which the film plays with the concept of characters being able to overcome time.

Primer is a confusing film about the perils and paradoxes of time travel that elides many crucial scenes, although upon repeated, close viewings one is able to parse the various scenes and make sense of the fabula. This can be accomplished primarily through clues implanted in the syuzhet through dialogue or a character's actions, and through the more abstract semi-clues such as editing patterns and certain camera movements. However, the film will forever remain enigmatic in certain respects, as the narration accommodates multiple readings of the syuzhet that are not mutually exclusive, and offers up other conundrums that are open to multiple interpretations. In short, *Primer* offers new and interesting ideas about the possibility of time travel, although one has to work hard to arrive at those ideas.

Figure 1



Shot 1 shows Abe sleeping on the floor.

Figure 2



Shot 3 shows Abe answering the phone...

Figure 3



...while Shot 2 shows Abe being awoken by the phone's ringing.

Figure 4



Shots 4 through 6 are jump cuts occurring in chronological order. The above frames are near the beginning of each shot.

Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Shot 8 shows Abe getting up off the floor...

Figure 8



...while shot 7 follows after, showing the beginning of the action; Abe's turning to rise.

Figure 9



Shot 9 shows the action that continues after shot 8.

Figure 10



Shot 11 shows Abe walking toward the door.

Figure 11



A jump cut to Shot 12; Abe standing at the door.

Figure 12



Shot 10 shows the beginning of Abe's move toward the door.

Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Shots 13 through 15 also occurring in chronological order, and are distinguished as separate jump cuts.

Notes

¹ René Barjavel is credited as the first to write of the paradox in his *Le Voyageur Imprudent*, Paris: Denoel 1943.

² In fact, old Biff, who fades into nothingness upon returning to what Doc and Marty reference as the

future, should never have been able to return to that future in the first place. Biff changed the past (quite drastically), so the future from whence he came would no longer exist. Another conundrum: if the laws of causality in the *Back to the Future* series dictate that changing the past leads to cessation of the existence of time travelers who are dependent upon that past, then Biff would have simply ceased to exist on the spot (at the moment in which he altered the past), and would not have been able to return to the future in the time machine only to cease to exist there (regardless of which future he was returning to, his original future or the alternate future he created). A similar problem arises in the first film in the series; why, one might ask, do Marty and his siblings (as seen in a photograph) *gradually* cease to exist? Would not Marty's altering his parents' meeting simply eliminate him from this plane of existence instantaneously, never giving him a chance to re-induce their romance? Such causality-related questions remain unanswered in the *Back to the Future* series, but are dealt with in quite a different manner in *Primer*.

³ Indeed, such a sentiment toward time paradoxes is actually expressed by a character in *Primer*. Aaron³ says "I really don't believe in any of that crap," that crap being grandfather paradox-type conundrums. He continues, "It has to work itself out somehow." He clearly has cause for such a headstrong attitude, because by this point in the film, Aaron³ has already altered the reality of both Aarons 1 and 2.

⁴ While Queneau demonstrates over 100 of these, but he stopped at a certain number relatively arbitrarily, and could have continued with more. NY: New Directions, 1981, p 4.

⁵ As discussed in David Bordwell, "Film Futures," *Substance* # 97, v 31 , 2002, and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, New York: Cornell University Press 1978.

⁶ However, the earliest point to which one can travel into the past remains the time at which the first, original time machine was activated, as the time machines seem to be inert in collapsible form.

⁷ Throughout most of this paper, Abe will be referred to as only "Abe" and not "Abe1" or "Abe2" because he has not yet interfered with himself when traveling back through time, as Aaron² will do shortly to Aaron¹.

⁸ New York: Cornell University Press 1978, p 63.

⁹ The effect might be considered similar to that of the phenomenon of the human ability to read sentences in which all of the letters of the words are reordered, except for the letters beginning and ending the words. Our brains recognize the pattern of letters within each word and the sentence is readable. For example: "The olny tnihg to faer is faer iestlf," or "*Periemr* is a puzuznilg flim auobt the peirls and praodaxes of tmie taverl."

Language Use in a Yoruba-Speech Community.

By Moses Omoniyi Ayeomoni

Abstract

This study investigated the pattern of language use in the multilingual setting of a Yoruba speech community. Towards this end, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to fifty Yoruba English bilinguals in a Yoruba speech community. After the analysis of the data, it was discovered that the adulterated form of English is usually used in a situation where the informal variety of Yoruba language is required. On the other hand, Standard English is used in formal or official situations, or with strangers regardless of where they are met. They make use of Yoruba mainly in the family setting, but also in very formal occasions like village or tribal meetings that are purely Yoruba cultural life. Consequently, the current wave of linguistic diffusion threatening Yoruba language could eventually lead to emergence of diglossic situation where Yoruba will be relegated and restricted functionally to a few selected tasks, while the adulterated form of English-Yoruba will perform speech functions that Yoruba is used to perform in informal settings.

Introduction

The term diglossia has tended to be defined in a number of ways. Fishman (1967), for example, distinguishes it from bilingualism, which refers to an individual's ability to use more than one language. He sees diglossia as the distribution of more than one language variety to serve different communicative functions in the society. This implies that he differentiates the two concepts on the basis that bilingualism relates to an individual's linguistic ability to control or command two different language varieties, and diglossia, the functional distribution of more than one language variety.

Ferguson (1959), however, restricts the term diglossia to cases in the middle range of relatedness. Gumperz (1968) shares the same view as Fishman's (1967) that diglossia exists not only in multilingual society which officially recognizes several languages, but also in societies that employ several dialects, registers, and functionally differentiated varieties of whatever kind.

Gumperz (*ibid*) focuses on the study of language diversity, and Fishman's use of the term refers to any

degree of diversity right from the most subtle stylistic differences from or within the same simple language to the most complex form of diversity like two totally unrelated languages so that we can be talking about multilingual and bilingual diversities. Fishman further claims that the criterion for identifying diglossia is the degree of individual bilingualism found in a society, in such a way that the linguistic differences must be functionally distinguished within the society.

Based on the foregoing, diglossia could be used to refer to the functional distribution of *High* and *Low* varieties of a language within the society. It is on the basis of this definition that Ferguson (1959) observes that there are four types of diglossic relationships:

1. A situation of diglossia and bilingualism
2. A situation of diglossia without bilingualism.
3. A situation of bilingualism without diglossia.
4. A situation of no diglossia and bilingualism

Fishman (ibid) discloses that it is difficult to find the kind of community described in (4) because in this situation, there is only one linguistic variety that exists, and no differentiation of any form either functional, stylistic or dialectal.

Ferguson (ibid) goes ahead to show a distinction between diglossia and the relationship that exists between standard language and regional dialects. Fishman, however, is silent over the issue of regional dialects. He bases his own concept of diglossia on the totality of existing languages. However, both of them (Fishman and Ferguson) recognize the functional distribution of varieties of two languages on the bases of H and L varieties. Fasold (1984) raises the question of functional issue by trying to verify and identify the exact nature of the social function which H and L varieties are associated with. This question raised by Fasold has an answer in the view of Fishman and Ferguson since the two of them jointly agree that there is functional distribution of two varieties or two languages in the society, suggesting that they both agree on the existence of H and L varieties. They both view that the H-V is used for formal purposes while the L-V is reserved for less formal purposes.

Fasold, (ibid) however, still raises other questions. These include:

- i. What happens in a multilingual setting where more than two languages exist?
- ii. What is the extent of relatedness of the language?
- iii. What is the relationship between standard language and dialects?

It is commonly assumed that language often develops varieties used to carry out different functions language is meant to perform; it is also an assumption that a bilingual in a speech community usually shares the same pairs of language which often results in the evolution or development of a new system of communication by means of hybridization of the hybridized or the newly evolved mode of communication in Yoruba speech community that I refer to as “Yoruglish” Ayeomoni (1990, 2004). Milroy (1980), for instance, describes the situation in which an indigenous vernacular like Yoruba is mixed with English as a kind of personal vernacular. On the other hand, Beardsmore (1982) refers to it as an inter-language which Yoruba-English bilinguals usually use in spontaneous speech and in conversation for intra-group interactions.

Language Use in a Multilingual Setting

The present study was designed to find out what happens to the pattern of language use in a multilingual setting like a larger Yoruba speech community. For this purpose, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to fifty Yoruba-English bilinguals within Ondo township, one of the Yoruba speech communities. The selected respondents have qualifications equivalent to the first University degree, and they are mainly civil servants within the town. They make use of both English and Yoruba languages everyday.

The ratio of male to female respondents was put at 3:2, and this is due to the fact that there are more male graduate civil servants than female graduate civil servants in the particular area in which this study was conducted. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were designed to find out from the respondents the kind of languages spoken or used at different periods, occasions and the various functions the languages were meant to perform vis-à-vis the factors motivating the chosen codes at a particular period.

The analysis of information gathered from the questionnaire was undertaken by means of a simple statistical method. In doing this, the investigator ensured that the questionnaire was properly filled out by the respondents.

An attempt was also made to get recoded spontaneous conversations of Yoruba – English bilinguals. The information was transcribed using simple orthographic conventions.

After transcription, the results obtained were compared and correlated with the already analyzed respondents from the questionnaire in order to show how the respondents use all the languages they control and the purposes and functions to which the languages are put. The findings are discussed in the following sections.

Language Use in Informal Setting

The focus here was to find out the language used by the respondents in informal situations like home, club house, market, restaurants, motor part, etc. In the home, as expected, the language mainly used is Yoruba. 80% of the respondents indicated that they used Yoruba mainly at home with their nuclear family, while 20% of the respondents indicated that they used English to communicate with their nuclear family. This means English performs a subordinate linguistic function in the home.

The situation however differs when non-family members are present in the family or in other informal settings outside the family circle. In this context, most of the respondents indicated that they would use English to talk to the stranger. This finding implies the following:

- The type of social relation existing among members of nuclear family is strong as to instantly determine code-choice and language use.
- The educated Yoruba-English bilinguals are also members of other social networks other than the family which also determines or influences the choice of other codes.
- Language use and code-choice co-vary with social networks and each network imposes a norm on its members about language and codes to use.
- The choice and use of a particular variety of a language in a social context could be an unconscious one or a determined choice, and the extent to which an individual can appropriately do this, is a measure of what Hymes (1974, 75) refers to as a person's "Communicative competence".

The dominance of English in the adult life of the educated Yoruba bilingual accounts for his use of English even in formal situations, regardless of the fact that he has spent the greater part of his life in Yoruba speech community. It is the high level of educational attainment vis-à-vis the social network structure that has conditioned his language habits (especially in English Language use).

Language Use in Formal Settings

The finding suggests that the educated Yoruba bilinguals use Yoruba mainly with members of his family, and when he runs into non-family members who are either intimate friends or mere acquaintances, Yoruba and English are used in equal proportions regardless of the meeting place or social set-up. However, if the meeting place is home, Yoruba is preferred. The following deductions could be offered:

- The educated Yoruba-English bilingual speaks Yoruba as his LI; he has competence in the use of the language. However, the acquisition of formal education, job experience and social interaction of all

sorts have equally made him to acquire higher communicative competence in the use of English. This is attested to by the fact that he often uses English in situations where the use of his first language will be appropriate.

- In his bid to acquire education and to gather work experience in various urban centres, he is then automatically removed from his Yoruba cultural setting where only Yoruba is spoken. This then exposes him to various social networks in which the use of English to him becomes inevitable.
- The nature of some of the networks to which these educated Yoruba-English bilinguals find themselves is such that the topics for discussion are not within the Yoruba cultural life of experience, and the only language of interaction shared by every member of the group is English.

Literacy and Code-Usage

It is discovered from the data that there is a gradual increase in the level of code-mixing of Yoruba bilinguals' speech as they progressively move up in the academic ladder. Those with little or no education use mainly loaned words that consist of single lexical items. The grammatical class of such words or lexical items is always a noun. Examples are **Motor, Fan, Electric, Table, Beer, Hotel Pail, College, University, Television, Fridge, Football, Field, School** and so on.

Their phonological shapes have already been adapted and assimilated into Yoruba phonological structure. In a situation where such loans have local alternative names, there is always a vacillation between the use of the foreign and local words. The younger people with good education prefer the foreign words, while the older monolinguals prefer the local or the Yoruba alternative as in:

English	Yoruba
Motor	Oko
Bed	Ibusun
Mirror	Jigi
Cup	Ife
Plate	Awo
Table	Tabili

Field	Papa
Biro	Kalamu

The predominance of single lexical items and of a certain category of words could be indicative of cognitive processes involved in incipient bilingualism. It could also help to show that efficient switching of codes in the two languages involved a possession of a grammar that is a fusion of the grammars of the two linguistic codes.

At a higher level of education, the phenomenon of code switching in English and Yoruba is observed to be restricted to the major constituents of a sentence. Such as word groups of two or three lexical items like a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP) or an adjectival complement.

Similarly, in a local setting during the giving away of a young girl in marriage, Yoruba language is often selected and exclusively used for performing certain communicative functions, such as prayers with cola, presentation and exchange of gifts, giving or offering words or advice to the suitor, bride and so on.

But now with a rise in the level of literacy, it is likely that more and more people would be getting involved in code-mixing use in Yoruba speech community which will consequently lead to the emergence of inter-language that will override the original form of Yoruba to the extent that Yoruba as it was originally spoken would eventually recede to a position of diglossic function as a language of purely cultural and religious purposes.

Conclusion and Prospects

An interesting finding of this study is that the adulterated form of English is usually used in a situation where the informal variety of Yoruba language would have been used if the respondents had been Yoruba monolinguals. These situations are mainly informal in type. In an occasion like this, the language use of our subjects is neither English nor Yoruba. The name I give to this language is 'Yoruglish'; its grammar has the surface features of blending of Yoruba and English syntactic components.

On the other hand, our subjects make use of Standard English in very formal or official situations, or with strangers, even though the stranger is met in informal settings. They also make use of Yoruba mainly in the family setting, but also in very formal occasions like village or tribal meetings and during church prayers. Yoruba is also used during events or activities that are purely Yoruba cultural life such as naming ceremonies, traditional marriages, burials or funerals.

These research findings will help in the areas of language and culture to create the awareness that the Yoruba language as it is now spoken in rural areas is threatened with linguistic diffusion, and if this

happens, it means in effect that the death of at least parts of the values and culture which Yoruba is used to express is imminent. This can then consequently lead to the emergence of a diglossic situation where Yoruba will be gradually relegated and restricted functionally to a few selected tasks such as religious sacrifices, child-naming ceremonies, burials, incantations and traditional marriage speech making. On the other hand, the just evolved “Yoruglish” will perform speech functions that Yoruba is used to perform today in informal village settings. This is made obvious by the fact that more and more people are ascending the educational ladder, and the phenomenon of code-mixing is spreading to the nooks and crannies of our villages.

Moreover, more and more rural areas are becoming urbanized. If this type of linguistic situation is developed fully, it would eventually lead to the emergence of ‘polyglossia’ in the larger Yoruba speech community.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction: Please, kindly fill this questionnaire completely by ticking the space you select for each number. Where the information demanded does not apply to you, leave the spaces for the number blank (i.e. unticked).

1. Sex: Male..... Female.....

2. Please to which of the age-groups do you belong?

1-20.....	21-30.....
31-40.....	Over 40.....

3. What language(s) do you often speak?

Yoruba.....	English.....
Pidgin.....	Others.....

4. What language did you first learn to speak before school age?

Yoruba.....	English.....
Pidgin.....	Others.....

5. In what language do you normally use to communicate with your nuclear family (wife and children)?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

6. What language do you normally interact with other members of your immediate family (father, mother, brothers, sisters)?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

7. What do you use to reach non-members of your close family (uncle, cousin, nephew, aunt)?

8. In what language do you interact with your colleagues (friends)?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

9. What language would you normally use if a colleague visits you in your place of work or if you visit such a colleagues in his/her?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

10. What language would you use in speaking to a non-colleagues or a person not familiar with you, if you visit or happen to come across such a person?

(a) In his office or place of work?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

(b) In his Home

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

(c) In an informal setting (like a party, club house restaurant, market, football field, etc)?

Yoruba..... English.....

Pidgin..... Others.....

