



FRAMEWORKS

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in the Interdisciplinary Humanities*

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Applications for the FrameWorks Program open in the spring semester. Rising sophomores and rising juniors are especially encouraged to apply. Students from all colleges are encouraged to apply, regardless of affiliation with the Honors College. Applicants must be registered at the University of Houston. If you are interested in the FrameWorks Program and in publishing research in the interdisciplinary humanities, additional information about eligibility, expectations, and the benefits of the program is available at www.uh.edu/frameworks. All queries regarding the journal or the program should be submitted to Dr. Max Rayneard at mjrayneard@uh.edu.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

We are proud to present the Generation Edition of *FrameWorks: A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities*. This is our 5th issue.

Who knows if half a decade of the FrameWorks program constitutes an actual milestone, or if just feels like one because the last half a decade has been so momentous. We've been awash in events and developments that continue to be unprecedented, world-changing, catastrophic, unparalleled, cataclysmic. Superlatives once reserved for the nigh-unimaginable are now thrown about with alacrity. We live in a post-hyperbolic age.

This is the era that FrameWorks Fellows have had to navigate in their teens and early twenties. These are formative years that will, in some large measure, come to define their outlook on the world. However, if the seven articles in this issue (and the thirty-five articles of the four issues preceding) are any indication, they are not panicking. They are smart, scrupulous, detail-oriented, hopeful, and level-headed.

If ever there was a topic tailor-made for reactive snark and moralizing, it was "Generation." There are few patterns as predictable and unfounded as each generation's claim to the moral high ground over generations before and after. Our Fellows studiously avoided this trap. Rather, their approaches were curious and generative. Alice Nguyen's analysis of the film *Saving Face* (2004), for example, finds hope for resolution in the generational conflict between a first-generation Chinese American and her queer daughter. Kadilo Buzugbe reads Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second-class Citizen* as a bildungsroman to inspire new generations of Nigerian expats to cast off postcolonial shame.

Other pieces carefully contextualize shortcomings and misapprehensions of the past to argue the necessity of better practices in the present. Annfaye Sternberg's careful detailing the 1939 failure by the U.S. to provide refuge for Jewish passengers aboard the M.S. *St. Louis* is a clarion call for the necessity of sensible and agile asylum policies. Usman Azim shows how shifting generational perceptions of mental health allow for less reductive explorations of Edvard Munch's artistic oeuvre, especially his seminal work *The Sick Child*.

Some of our Fellows were inspired by the theme to think about the push and pull that accompanies social change. This is evident in a pervasive interest in revolutionary contexts. Amna Siddiqui compares the role of revolutionary ideology in literary murders committed generations apart

in St. Peterburg and Bangalore. Iyad Chowdhury analyzes Satyajit Ray's *Devi* (1960) and finds a filmmaker and film at odds with the traditional precepts at the heart of post-partition India's nationalist zeitgeist. Maryam Azzawi traces one intellectual's ideological reversal – from secularist to Islamist – in the leadup to and aftermath of the 1952 Free Officers Revolution in Egypt.

Each of these articles was published because it met the rigorous standards of critical thought and writing to which the interdisciplinary humanities aspire. Each is a testament to its author's committed hard work. Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials do themselves a disservice if they underestimate Gen Z. If the world is a storm, they may well prove its eye.

Max Rayneard, Editor

A Ship Without a Rudder?: Munch's *The Sick Child* and "Insanity"

By Usman Azim

Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* (1906) stands as a testament to his reputation as a father of Expressionism. In the painting, a girl sits up against a pillow, her shock of red hair falling onto her shoulders in contrast to the drab green of the blanket over her legs, the deep cyan of her dress. A woman with dark, graying hair, presumably her mother, kneels beside her in a black-blue dress, too harrowed to look into the girl's eyes: the viewer sees only her crown as she slumps forward, resting her head on the pillow, clutching the girl's hands in her own. The girl looks past the woman towards the light of a window invoked by a single flap of breeze-blown, white-blue curtain.

Munch was known for his willingness to imbue his paintings with intimacy and vulnerability (Azeem 51). Parallels between Munch's personal life and his art dominate critical accounts of his work. *The Sick Child*, for example, is commonly interpreted as a depiction of his sister, Sophie, who died as a child of tuberculosis (51). The painting significantly contributed to his reputation as an important figure in the development of Expressionism, a movement that prioritized subjective, emotional expression in art over compositional or coloristic realism (Watson). Few of Munch's pieces better encapsulate the degree to which critics look to understand his art in terms of his psychological trauma.

Munch developed various physical and mental illnesses throughout his life, which has inclined scholars to interpret the significance of his works through this lens. Accordingly, Munch is conceived of as having a unique genius whose creative process was a solitary, therapeutic pursuit largely isolated from the influence of his artistic contemporaries. In this paper, I address the assumptions underlying this critical approach, and by drawing on more recent critical accounts of Munch's work, argue that it oversimplifies and

even misrepresents the relationship between his art, his biography, and his historical context.

This is not to deny the tragedies and hardships that marked much of Munch's life from an early age, nor that these events were deeply embedded in his artistic sensibilities. Munch was born in such a weak condition that his family baptized him as soon as possible in case he succumbed (Prideaux 17). Neither science nor religion could offer solace to his father Christian – a devout trained physician – as he failed to prevent Edvard's constant fevers and aches. Nor could he stop his wife, Laura, from contracting tuberculosis (23, 32, 48). Her eventual death devastated Edvard, just 5 years old (29). During this time, he found special comfort in his older sister, Sophie (32). They grew very close and found an interest in painting together, with Sophie's skill being said to supersede Edvard's (34). She was a tremendous support even in Edvard's dire times of illness – he continued to be a sickly child. He referred to these bedridden periods as *putetiden* [pillow time] and during them came to see Sophie as a “maternal shield” (32, 37).

It is therefore especially understandable that Sophie's contraction of tuberculosis was so devastating to him. In later writing, he described her lying in bed resolutely staring “straight ahead of her” (46), mirroring the gaze of the eponymous figure in *The Sick Child*. The loss of Sophie when he was 14 was one “from which Edvard never fully recovered. A desolate longing for her remained all his life; he had lost his mother all over again” (48).

A sickly man who had grown up surrounded by infectious disease and death, Munch battled for physical and mental health throughout his life. Sue Prideaux, author of a 2005 Munch biography, suggests that he felt his fall into psychological instability was inevitable. His grandfather on his father's side had died in 1847, showing symptoms of the cognitive decline that accompanies late-stage spinal tuberculosis (24). Munch wrongly attributed his grandfather's insanity to syphilis, a disease that was thought at the time to be passed on from generation to generation through “tainted blood.” Munch's misdiagnosis of his grandfather's cognitive decline “contributed disproportionately towards [his] lifelong conviction that insanity was to be his own inescapable fate” (24).

Munch was explicit in declaring the fundamental role of inner sentiment in his artistic approach. In his 1891 *Manuscript*, he wrote that he did “not believe in art which has not been forced into being by a man's compulsion to open his heart” (Munch 10). Certainly, there can be little doubt that *The Sick Child* was inspired by personal experience. Rhoda Lemlein suggests in “Influence of Tuberculosis on the Work of Visual Artists: Several Prominent Examples” that Munch's color palette invokes tuberculosis through the girl's yellow skin tone and the bilious green bedspread, while the deep reds of her hair, the bedside cabinet, and the fluid in the glass to the bottom right of the

canvas each allude to blood coughed up in the disease's late-stage (115). To Lemlein, this suggests Munch's intimate experience of the disease.

The image clearly had profound meaning for Munch. He returned consistently to *The Sick Child* over a period of 40 years. He completed the first version in oils in 1885-86, and by 1927 had completed a series of six. In each rendition, the composition remained consistent: a kneeling woman clutches the hand of an ill girl staring to her left. While there are color variations between them, each employs similar somber tones. Munch also created a number of lithographs and etchings, all of which serve as evidence of his obsessive reverence for the image (52). He declared the piece as "the inspiration for the majority of my later works," some of which also dealt with themes of grief and mental illnesses (Stang 60).

The intimate relationship between the *The Sick Child* and Munch's biography is undeniable. However, there is a strain of Munch scholarship that tends to reduce his artistic output to his biography, and that interprets his work as an outward expression of inner turmoil. Accordingly, the act of artistic creation is characterized as therapeutic, as a form of psychological venting. Understanding Munch's process in these terms is not entirely without justification. By his own admission, his psychological struggles were foundational to his process.

He wrote in a sketchbook (referred to by the Munch Museum as T 2748) in February of 1930 that "[w]ithout anxiety and illness, I am a ship without a rudder ... My sufferings are part of myself and my art. They are indistinguishable from me, and their destruction would destroy my art." That same year, Munch also wrote that when "he paint[s] illness and misfortune, it is [...] a healthy release" and "a healthy reaction that one can learn from and live by" (*eMunch*).

While it would be disingenuous to completely divorce Munch's emotional state from his artwork, there is a danger of conflating his virtuosity with his psychological struggles, of associating his genius with mental disorders. In this approach, the aesthetics of Munch's work are the result of a feverish, impulsive, therapeutic release. For example, in its description of *The Sick Child*, The Munch Museum interprets his "use [of] a palette knife to scrape the paint and paint over it" as "testify[ing] to the fact that he was in a state of inner turmoil, as though he wished to eradicate his sister's death" (Muncheset). Here, the mechanical acts of scraping and repainting, are interpreted as evidence of emotional processing. The creation process is framed as a curative measure. Art educator Justin Wolf similarly suggests that "the rough brushstrokes, scratched surface, and melancholic tones of this painting all reveal a highly personal memorial" (Wolf).

Even when writers are willing to attribute Munch's aesthetic rather than purely psychological motivations, they conceive of him as grappling with past trauma. John Boulton Smith lauds the visceral quality Munch's scratching of

the canvas affords the piece, before emphasizing that they are actually born from “Munch’s frustration in failing to capture the intense emotion of the original experience” (Smith 42).

Art historian Patricia Berman contextualizes approaches like these against the backdrop of advancements in medicine and psychiatry in the 20th century, which fueled the tendency among scholars to understand art in terms of the artist’s psychology (47). She argues that a critical overemphasis on Munch’s mental health has skewed the discussion of his artistic merit. So, for example, critics have tended to focus on Munch’s work of the 1890s – a period of deep mental anguish – rather than the subsequent 30 years of creative production during which he made great artistic advancement that were not as easily reducible to the perception of him as a traumatized individual (51). She argues that texts considered foundational to early understandings of Munch’s works, such as Rolf Stenerson’s famous 1944 biography, *Edvard Munch: Close-Up of a Genius*, were built on weak psychological approaches that were uncritically expounded upon by subsequent writers (47). Stenerson’s work on Munch’s psychiatric diagnoses was inadequately documented and he was overly reliant on secondary-source literature. He thereby portrayed “contradictory personalities of the artist” which would go on to interfere with readings of Munch’s art (48).

Berman argues against a fixation on Munch’s “‘insanity’ as the locus of meaning for his art” (51), suggesting that it is at odds with the artist’s fine command over not only his medium, but also the way in which he promoted his work. She writes that Munch readily exploited the image of a deeply troubled artist to gain artistic prestige. She describes him as a “spin doctor” who would perpetuate his own reputation as a haunted genius in intimate conversation with the press (57). He was aided and abetted by friends and colleagues who intentionally fed writers faulty information to contribute to this mythologization (Berman 50). Munch’s aesthetic is therefore not simply reducible to his “insanity.” Rather, recognizing its commercial appeal, he consciously crafted an aesthetic that fed into the idea of his insanity.

Munch’s process in creating *The Sick Child* was, in fact, far from a spontaneous outpouring of grief. His use of a model for the painting supports the idea that his priority was the creation of a formally compelling painting. He did not intend to capture the memory of his sister’s passing (to counter the claims of John Boulton Smith), but relied on the likeness of Betzy Nielsen, a twelve-year-old girl whose only immediate similarity to Sophie were her “glittering eyes of illness and poverty” (Prideaux 102). Stian Grøgaard writes that the red hair of the child, the painting’s “solitary coloristic point [...] was taken by Munch from the model observed, not from the Sophie of his memory” (79).

Munch’s confidence in straying from his own recollection suggests his primary commitment to the creation of a powerful aesthetic experience for the viewer, rather than a psychological release for himself. Though, accord-

ing to Grøgaard, he was able to closely recall the scene of Sophie's sickbed, he purposely rejected the minute details of his recollection, and looked only to the "physical composition [of the scene] from which a *genre picture* could easily be made" (85).¹ This refusal of recollected particulars complicated the painting process for Munch, as he superimposed his aesthetic vision over the "facts" of his memory. He struggled as "valuable details central to his intentions, parts of facts and hands, appeared as if by magic and then disappeared again in an increasingly opaque medium" (85).

Munch had no interest in a mere "physical re-creation of the room," trying instead "to paint the state of being at that moment" (Prideaux 103). He chose to include a grieving woman alongside the girl, recognizing, according to Intrator, that "his mother's death was implicit in the subject" despite the chronological incongruity of the choice (103). A psychological reading might understand this inclusion as his grappling with the loss of both "mother" figures. John Launer understands their coincidence on the canvas as suggesting that "daughter and mother are being symbolically reunited in death" (748). However, it is also undeniably true that the inclusion of a mother figure dramatically shifts the viewer's experience of the image. Even without the biographical detail necessary to render a psychological analysis of Munch's motivations, the image effectively depicts grief in the slumped posture of the mourning mother.

Munch's focus on the affective quality of *The Sick Child* clearly suggests that he prioritized thematic and aesthetic richness over his own history. While critics have typically understood his creation of *The Sick Child* as a feverish, emotional release, the extent to which he deliberated over the image suggests otherwise. Raw impulse alone cannot account for its formal and thematic subtleties, which required Munch's careful consideration of his audience's experience of the piece. To reduce the piece to Munch's therapeutic motivations cannot account for its aesthetic achievement.

That Munch was interested, as Grøgaard suggests, in painting a "genre picture" runs contrary to another trope that has afflicted the critical understanding of his work. This is the notion that Munch's "madness" isolated him from the Norwegian art scene to the extent that his art was without contemporary influence and was purely idiosyncratic. Berman argues that this idea speaks to the popularity in late 19th and early 20th century Europe of viewing artists as tortured visionaries, which was a trope that conflates mental illness with "creative and productive deviancy [...], in short, [with] genius" (48). This trope was premised on the notion that "tortured visionary artists" were capa-

¹ My italics.

ble of unique insights and particular innovation due to their emotional and material distance from everyday middle-class society (48). Certainly, Munch had his struggles, and as Berman shows, he was not above perpetuating the notion of his own “madness” in order to profit from the preoccupations of his age. He was therefore commonly understood to be an aberration among artists of his own time and as “an anomaly in his home country” of Norway (59).

However, Berman writes that his work was “in step” with his artistic generation, and that there are “points of congruity [...] between Munch and other artists from the Nordic countries” (59). This is corroborated by Munch’s own retrospective account of *The Sick Child*, in a letter to the director of Oslo’s National Gallery. He saw it as a genre-picture in line with those of the “many painters [who] did pictures of sick children on their pillows” (Bischoff et al. 10) at the time. Grøgaard notes that this was a common artistic motif owing to the prevalence of tuberculosis and other diseases (77). Examples include Norwegian artist Christian Krohg’s paintings *Sick Girl* (1884) and *Mother at the Bedside of a Sick Child* (1896), both inspired by the artist’s loss of his sister to tuberculosis (Wettrell 3). Carl Wilhelmson, another Norwegian artist, painted a scene that depicts the family members deeply stricken by the illness of a loved one, also entitled *The Sick Child* (1896) (5, 6).

While Munch was in step with broader thematic trends, it should be noted that he also challenged the conventions of his day in ways that would position him as a founding figure of the Expressionist Movement. Krohg, Wilhelmson, and many other Norwegian artists painted their images in naturalistic styles, aiming to represent the scenes as objectively as possible. They painted with a high degree of verisimilitude using fine-tuned technical skills (3, 6). However, Munch did not assume the impassive perspective of an artist attempting to mechanically recreate a scene in near-photographic detail. What distinguished his work was “the addition of the subject, a personal truth or testimony to the genre” (Grøgaard 77). In other words, he made his own subjective, emotional presence part of the scene, evident in the frenzied, layered brushstrokes and the scraping of his palette knife, as noted by the Munch Museum and Boulton Smith.

Recognizing Munch’s rich biographical connection to the work does not, however, require us to reduce his art to the emotionality of the artist. His approach was not that of an isolated visionary, but of a great artist drawing on and challenging a genre steeped in the naturalistic conventions of his day – conventions in which he had training and from which his departure can be understood in terms of external influences. Munch began his formal artistic education at the Royal School of Art and Design and would soon fall under the direct tutelage of Christian Krohg – one of the key naturalist exponents of the “sick child” genre. Munch was, at the same time, an admirer of the portfolio of fellow proto-expressionist Paul Gauguin for its “reaction against realism” (Munch 9). In addition, Munch was inspired by the Norwegian writer

Hans Jaegar to “write his life” through paintings, considering his artistic oeuvre as his “soul’s diary” (Prideaux 83). He would refer to *The Sick Child* as his first “soul painting,” suggesting a clear link between Jaegar’s influence and the piece’s autobiographical implications (100).

Munch was thus not a creatively isolated genius, but an innovator among peers who took inspiration from cultural and artistic influences. His artistic process is not reducible to madness, nor should it be oversimplified as the therapeutic coping mechanism of a tortured artist. *The Sick Child* evidences a carefully cultivated aesthetic born of the desire for subjective expression. While elements of emotion and distress are undeniably present, they are insufficient as explanations of the work’s significance. Instead, Munch incorporated their expression into his more complex and layered aesthetic craft.

Interpreting an art piece as a window into an artist’s state of mind or trying to understand artistic process as a psychological coping mechanism is undeniably tempting. Our increasingly personalized relationship with the celebrities, content creators, and artists writ large, has made this kind of interpretation increasingly common across mediums. The growing prevalence of applied art approaches as part of holistic psychotherapeutic approaches to mental illness seems to further validate this view. However, reducing the significance of an artist’s oeuvre to trauma – as Munch’s was – risks denying their agency. Calling Munch a “mad genius” does not account for the care he put into developing his ideas and creating his artwork. This is not to argue that mental and physical illness cannot be alleviated by artistic expression, nor that they do not contribute to the uniqueness of an artist’s perspective. They should be understood as a part and not the entirety of Munch’s greatness, lest we rob him of his whole personhood, flattening him into a monochromatic silhouette.

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“For Myself Alone”: Revolutionary Violence in *Crime and Punishment* and *The White Tiger*

By Amna Siddiqui

He took the axe out fully, lifted it up high with both hands, barely feeling a thing, and, almost effortlessly, almost mechanically, brought the butt down on her head...always with the butt and always on the crown.

Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

I rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through to his brains.

Adiga, *The White Tiger*

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) belong to distinct times and places: nineteenth-century Russia and twenty-first-century India. Both novels center around an act of murder committed by their main characters, Rodion Raskolnikov and Balram Halwai, respectively. Moreover, the strikingly similar actions both serve as a response to the socioeconomic pressures that exist in their respective societies. However, despite their similarities, the characters face almost contradictory fates: Raskolnikov wrestles with immense guilt and ultimately turns himself in; Balram is never caught and successfully starts his own business.

One method of explaining why the two novels embrace such different endings is to analyze the traces of revolutionary violence that run throughout the background of each. Dostoyevsky wrote *Crime and Punishment* during the growth of Nihilism in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Russia. Nihilism, summarily, was a political and philosophical movement that positioned

itself against tyranny and embraced radical individualism and individual freedoms. *The White Tiger* contains references to the Naxalist movement in contemporary India. Naxalism is the ideology of a violent revolutionary Maoist group based in West Bengal. Since the 1960s, it has claimed to fight for the poor and marginalized against their class-based oppressors.

Both revolutionary movements sometimes employed violence to create political change, and this violence is reflected in and critiqued through the aftermath of Raskolnikov's and Balram's violent crimes. Balram, and *The White Tiger* overall, parody (and thus simultaneously critique) the Naxalist belief that revolutionary violence is a necessary tool for liberation. *Crime and Punishment*, on the other hand, overtly condemns the notion that violence is a means to redemption and power. Instead, it posits that only confession can heal one's soul, which the novel dramatizes this through Raskolnikov's confused internal spiraling after he commits murder and his eventual decision to confess.

The episodic manner of *Crime and Punishment*'s slow release enabled Dostoyevsky to fashion a stark shift in the novel's thematic intent, as a story about a utilitarian, economically-motivated murder evolved into a tale directly condemning the acts of political violence Dostoyevsky witnessed as he was writing. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga likewise engages with both the economic and political motives for Balram's act of murder, but through the lens of a postcolonial society. Adiga's condemnation of political violence is presented in a more nuanced manner that highlights the cycle of oppression that violence perpetuates, a notion given particularly powerful expression in the earlier work of Frantz Fanon.

Surprisingly, there has been little academic work exploring the parallels and divergences between these two well-known novels. They are, admittedly, geographically and generationally distinct. *Crime and Punishment* is a 19th century Russian novel and now a global classic. The Man Booker-winning *The White Tiger* is set in India and is a contemporary exploration of violence. However, a close reading of the parallels between the novels invites their comparison. Thereafter, I will outline the events of *Crime and Punishment* and the impact that Nihilism had on the novel's setting, on its condemnation of Raskolnikov's crime, and on Dostoyevsky himself. Next, I will contextualize the Naxalist movement and its impact on *The White Tiger*'s parody of revolutionary violence and the cycle of oppression it creates. These analyses will support my argument that the divergent endings of the novels evince different modes of critiquing revolutionary violence.

Parallels

The overwhelming parallels between the novels' murder scenes formed the initial impetus for my comparison. Both characters' physical actions invoke and reflect the socioeconomic conditions motivating their decisions to

commit murder. For example, in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov kills the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, with a striking motion onto her head. As she stood with “her back to him,” Raskolnikov “took the axe out fully, lifted it up high with both hands, barely feeling a thing, and, almost effortlessly, almost mechanically, brought the butt down on her head” (72). He repeats this several times, striking her “always with the butt and always on the crown.”

This motion is mirrored in *The White Tiger* as Balram murders his master, Mr. Ashok. Balram works as Ashok’s driver, and he lures his master out of the car in the middle of the road and asks Ashok to check on a ‘bad tire’. Ashok “[gets] down on his knees”, and when Balram “[rises] up over him”, he acts in a way strikingly similar to Raskolnikov: “I rammed the bottle down. The glass ate his bone. I rammed it three times into the crown of his skull, smashing through to his brains” (Adiga 244-245).

Beyond referring to the highest point of their scalps, the mention of both victims’ “crowns” evokes their elevated status (as in *royal* crowns), gesturing towards their wealth and alluding to the palpable class and wealth disparities between murderer and murdered. Alyona Ivanova and Ashok symbolize affluence in the eyes of their killers; the wealthy pawnbroker and the master act as physical representations of the economic troubles the murderers conversely face.

Balram and Raskolnikov are both victims of a broader systemic socioeconomic disparity. Raskolnikov is a former student who drops out because he is unable to pay his tuition, and the novel defines him as “being suffocated by poverty” very early on (Dostoyevsky 3). Balram grows up in a rural village and eventually works as a personal driver and servant for Mr. Ashok. Balram refers to the systemic oppression the working class endure as the “Rooster Coop” (which will be analyzed in more detail later). The murderous acts represent inversions of these economic hierarchies. Both killers loom over their perceived oppressors. Both force their weapons down upon their victims’ heads repeatedly. However, more than simple expressions of rage, both protagonists justify their actions. Rather than passively accept their subjection to economic disparity, they enact an agency of sorts. They *actively fight* against the societal shackles that confine them to their respective socioeconomic standing.

Raskolnikov’s justification is most clearly invoked in an article he wrote about the nature of crime and transgression. As summarized by detective Porfiry Petrovich in his “interrogation” of the murder suspect, the article argues for a distinction between “ordinary” and “extraordinary” people: “ordinary people should live a life of obedience and do not have the right to overstep the law,” but “extraordinary people have the right to carry out all manner of crimes and to break the law as they please, all because they are extraordinary” (Dostoyevsky 240). Raskolnikov, in response, clarifies his position, noting that “an ‘extraordinary’ person has the right ... not

an official right, that is, but a personal one, to permit his conscience to step over... certain obstacles, but if and only if the fulfillment of his idea (one that may even bring salvation to all humanity) demands it" (241). He establishes a sense of autonomy within these "extraordinary" individuals; they are able to act as they desire for a specific cause, even if it involves acting outside the law, because of their will and power.

Later in the novel, Raskolnikov explains his reasons for murdering the pawnbroker to Sonya, a religiously moral woman forced to become a prostitute to make money for her family. In this confession, it becomes clear that his murderous action was a willful effort to ascend to the status of a "extraordinary" person. Raskolnikov argues that "power is given only to the man who dares to stoop and grab," before explicitly adding that he "killed for a dare... and that's the whole reason!" (392).¹ He longed to be "extraordinary," and murdering the pawnbroker was his attempt to gain the power and autonomy he associates with this type of person. Ultimately, however, he recognizes he will never amount to this status:

Can't you see that I must have known that if I'd already started asking myself the question, 'Do I have a right to power?', then it already meant I didn't... And if I'd already tormented myself for so many days wondering, 'Would Napoleon have gone or wouldn't he?', then I obviously knew that I was no Napoleon... It wasn't to help mother that I killed-- nonsense! It wasn't to acquire funds and power that I killed, so as to make myself a benefactor of humanity. Nonsense! I just killed. I killed for myself, for myself alone. (392-393)

Raskolnikov believes that the mere fact of his doubts invalidates the notion that he is "extraordinary." He lacks the clarity of purpose he ascribes to his exemplar of such people, Napoleon Bonaparte. He recognizes that his act of violence did not serve a higher purpose or even a personal escape from real economic burdens. It was, as he now deems it, an act of personal self-aggrandizement. His guilt is evidence that he is unable to allow his "conscience to step over" the moral implications of his action. He lacks the autonomy to do so and must confess his sins. Sonya urges him to repent.

In *The White Tiger*, Adiga presents Balram's obstacles to autonomy – the ability to transcend the moral constraints of his society – through the metaphor of the Rooster Coop. Balram vividly illustrates the tight, hectic space into which "ordinary" people (to use Raskolnikov's terminology) are

¹ My italics.

confined to maintain order, especially in relation to the societal expectations forced upon the servant class:

Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a terrible stench – the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up chicken, still oleaginous with blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. (147)

Despite the horrific conditions the roosters do not attempt to escape or rebel (147). The “roosters” follow the societal rules imposed upon them to an extreme degree, even when nobody is around to hold them accountable. For example, given the opportunity to steal a briefcase full of a million rupees, a servant will “[take] that black suitcase where his master wants. He [will put] it down where he is meant to, and never touches a rupee” (148).

Though more concretely focused on the economic factors that perpetuate servant-master dynamics, Balram clearly mirrors Raskolnikov's idea that hyper-obedience is an inferior way to live, and autonomy must be sought. He, too, conceives of himself as unbound by ordinary constraints and willing to go to extreme lengths. Balram notes that to break out of the Rooster Coop, a servant must be “prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters...That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature” (150).

However, unlike Raskolnikov, Balram does not succumb to guilt. The characters thus face vastly different endings. Both men use transgression and violent crime in order to break out of their economic and societal shackles. On one hand, Raskolnikov's mental state deteriorates, culminating in a religious and legal confession. Balram, on the other hand, steals the money of his former master, changes his name, and begins a new life as a successful businessman – even though he has sacrificed the lives of his family in the process. Arguably, the epistolary style of *The White Tiger* serves as a sort of “confession” that Balram writes to the Chinese Premier, but there is little evidence of the same guilt and shame Raskolnikov clearly feels when he confesses his sins. Rather, Balram boasts about his crime and considers his violent murder justified by his subsequent success.

This crucial divergence arises as a result of the political movements that inspired each novel: Nihilism in nineteenth-century Russia and Naxalism in late twentieth-century India. Each movement engendered distinct ideas about revolutionary violence which shape the differing outcomes for Raskolnikov and Balram.

Crime and Punishment and Nihilism

Crime and Punishment details Raskolnikov's mental decline after his premeditated murder of the wealthy pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna. It is worth noting that he also murders her sister, Lizaveta, but this was unplanned, accidental, and thus not "politically motivated." Besides, in his misguided thinking, Lizaveta's death does not change the moral equation: the collateral damage of an action committed by an "extraordinary man" is justified by the simple fact of his extraordinariness. He initially kills the pawnbroker for her money, but quickly discards the money he steals. For the remainder of the novel, he spirals into a delirious state out of the fear that he might get caught and arrested. His actual intentions for murder become muddled. After his confession to the saintly Sonya, he hands himself over to the police, and, given his "insanity," avoids the death sentence and is sent to Siberia instead. In his communication with Sonya, who he has grown to love, he finally drops his prideful façade and expresses true remorse for the murders.

In order to understand Raskolnikov's change in character following the murder, we must first examine the roots of Nihilism in 1860's Russia and its influence on Dostoevsky's process as he wrote *Crime and Punishment*. The Nihilists were "initially associated with the student movement that had been seeking to advance personal autonomy, sexual liberation and solidarity with the poor masses" (Petrov 76). As a former student, now a victim of systemic socioeconomic oppression, Raskolnikov straddles the line between students and the poor masses with whom they allied themselves. His violence is, at least ostensibly, meant to serve the political cause of socioeconomic liberation.

Raskolnikov's shift from abstract thought to material violence – from writing an article about "extraordinary men" to attempting to *be* extraordinary – mirrors the progression of Nihilism. Initially, Nihilism was a philosophical movement, but eventually some extreme Nihilists began to view violence as a tool with which to enact liberation. One specific event that occurred as Dostoyevsky was writing *Crime and Punishment* was Dmitry Karakozov's assassination attempt against Tsar Alexander II on April 4th, 1866. Karakozov attempted to shoot the Tsar, but missed and was arrested. Claudia Verhoeven notes that,

based on clues pulled out of the pockets of his peasant disguise, investigators concluded there had been a conspiracy [...] Karakazov was said to have been a Muscovite socialist student group, “The Organization,” at the center of which there sat a secret cell of suicide-assassins: “Hell.” “Hell,” in turn, had ties with extreme “nihilists” in Petersburg, exiled political in Siberia ... (8).

Though the exact motives behind Karakozov’s act are muddled, “nihilism and political violence ... became so intimately linked [after April 4th] that now it is almost unimaginable that they ever were not” (101).

This political violence directly affected Dostoyevsky, still in the process of writing *Crime and Punishment*, which was intended to be published monthly in serialized form in *The Russian Messenger* throughout 1866. Dostoyevsky already “approached Russian Nihilism with a troublingly keen perception of the dangers lurking within its seemingly meritorious aspirations – a perception sharpened by his observations of aberrant human behavior during his prison-camp years in Siberia” in 1849 (Frank 100).² Karakozov’s attempted murder also closely resembled the murder Dostoyevsky chose to investigate in his novel. He “nearly collapsed into a hysterical fit, possibly followed by an epileptic fit” upon hearing the news of the attempted assassination, which, he must have realized, would directly impact his readers’ perception of the murder in the yet-to-be-released parts of the novel (Verhoeven 6). He undoubtedly had to rethink his portrayal of Raskolnikov in light of Karakozov’s crime. This is likely why Dostoyevsky postponed the publication of the next part of the novel (89).

More evidence of this rethinking is provided by Dostoyevsky’s letter to Mikhail Katkov, publicist of the literary journal *The Russian Herald*, which precedes the novel’s initial publication. Here, he outlined the plot of *Crime and Punishment* in ways that suggest he intended for Raskolnikov to be motivated largely by economic and morally utilitarian reasons. He describes the pawnbroker as “greedy”, and that he intends for Raskolnikov to “murder her and rob her” (87).³ These plans are reflected in Part One of *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov witnesses a conversation in which a student argues that the death of the pawnbroker and distribution of her money will cause “hundreds, possibly thousands of lives [to be] set on the right path; dozens

² Dostoyevsky was arrested in 1849 for his participation in the Petrashevsky Circle, an intellectual group suspected of antigovernment activity. He was initially sent to be executed, but he was pardoned moments before and sent to a Siberian labor camp for four years, followed by six years of military service in exile.

³ My italics.

of families [would be] saved from beggary, disintegration, ruin, depravity” (Dostoyevsky 61). This argument mirrors Raskolnikov’s utilitarian pretext for murder: “those very same thoughts had just been conceived in his own mind” (62). It is also worth noting, “there is no mention of the “Napoleonic Idea” or the “extraordinary man” in Dostoyevsky’s letter (Verhoeven 88). Given this centrality of this idea in the novel – it features in in the article that predates the murder, the interrogation, and confession – its absence in the letter and early parts of the novel is worthy of consideration.

Raskolnikov’s shift from his utilitarian pretext for the murder to the recognition of his failed attempts to claim individual autonomy might be explained as Dostoyevsky’s reaction to Nihilist political violence contemporaneous with the novel’s writing. As Verhoeven argues, “it is simply important to note that the delayed chapters were precisely those in which Dostoyevsky first thoroughly explicated the novel’s ‘Napoleonic Idea’” (89). Arguably, its description of an “extraordinary” man who lives above the law and acts upon his own will seems inspired by Karakozov’s actions, even if they are exaggerated. As Joseph Frank notes, “Dostoyevsky portrayed Nihilist ideas, not on the level at which they were originally advocated, but rather as they were refashioned by his eschatological imagination and taken to their most extreme (though quite consistent) consequences” (101). For Frank, Dostoyevsky’s novel is a caution against the “growth of a proto-Nietzschean egoism among an elite of superior individuals” (101). The novel’s critique is performed through Raskolnikov, and its conclusion, inflected by the political reality of Dostoyevsky’s day, is a reckoning with the real and imagined consequences of Nihilism (101).

Raskolnikov confesses his sins in a religious manner and condemns his actions. He cries, “it was the devil who had dragged me along then, and only after [the murder] did he explain to me that I had no right to go there, because I’m as much of a louse as everyone else!” (Dostoyevsky 393). Sonya’s role as a religious figure stands in direct opposition to the Nihilist disregard for moral values. Raskolnikov’s private confession to her establishes Christian “redemption” as the route to liberation, as opposed to Nihilist revolutionary violence. Sonya tells Raskolnikov that he must “accept suffering and through suffering redeem yourself” (394). Rather than abandon traditional social morality as Nihilists would have him do, he must move towards it, as represented by the church or God, thereby reintegrating himself into the world of his fellow men and women, sharing in their moral obligations towards each other. Sonya insists that Raskolnikov publicly refute his claims

to “extraordinariness” by humbling himself: “Off you go, right now, this minute, stand at the crossroads and bow down; kiss the earth you’ve polluted, then bow down to the whole world, to all four corners, and tell everyone out loud: ‘I have killed!’ Then God will send you life once more” (394).

Raskolnikov’s ultimate rejection of his “extraordinary man” status can be read as a critique of Nihilism’s idea of individual transcendence of social morality and the law. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov’s failure to get away with murder symbolizes the failure of individualistically motivated revolutionary violence. The novel offers religious morality and collective accountability as an alternative remedy for social ills.

The White Tiger and Naxalism

The White Tiger is an epistolary novel, conveying its plot through a series of letters written by Balam Halwai, owner of a successful taxi business in Bangalore, to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. The Chinese leader is visiting the city to “learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs” and Balam writes so he can “know the truth about Bangalore” (2-3). In the letters, Balam explains how he achieved his lofty position: he murdered his master.

Balam grew up in a rural village in India, which he left to pursue a job. He promises to send money to his family and eventually finds work in Delhi as the driver for his master, Ashok. Though he initially places his master on a pedestal, the dynamic shifts when Ashok attempts to blame Balam for his wife’s hit-and-run. Balam’s growing disillusionment with the master-servant dynamic to which he is subject leads him to plan to murder Ashok and steal a bag of money from him. He is well aware that this murder will result in retaliation by Ashok’s family; his family will be killed once they realize what Balam has done. Regardless, Balam murders Ashok, takes the money, and builds his own taxi service. In his letters, he writes that he will never truly regret his action, as it was the only thing that led him to economic and social freedom.

In his justification of the murder, Balam espouses principles not unlike those on which the Naxalist movement was founded. Here, M.K. Walonen’s summary of the movement’s beginnings highlights the revolutionary sentiments and violence with which the Naxals are associated. In 1967, “a group of peasants, stirred and led into action by a cadre of communist activists and disaffected students, initiated an armed uprising that sought to redistribute land and stock, achieve debt cancellation, and eliminate ‘class enemy’ oppressors” (277). In the years following, government suppression and increasing disparities between the rich and poor led the Naxals to “inspire [many] with its vision of revolution aimed at achieving a just society for those ignored and marginalized in India... despite the continuing violent state repression of the movement” (278).

In *The White Tiger*, Balram forges an inextricable link between political suppression of marginalized groups and the violence he believes necessary to break out of such social shackles. The novel details a corrupt political structure through a character called “The Great Socialist,” the head of a political party, who claims to be a voice for the poor. Balram describes him as “the boss of the Darkness” (Adiga 81). The Great Socialist’s political party has a message that Balram finds inherently contradictory. Its symbol is “a pair of hands breaking through handcuffs—symbolizing the poor shaking off the rich,” yet Balram insists that “the inky finger prints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper” had been bought and sold to add to the Great Socialist’s vote tally. The “hands breaking through handcuffs” represents an empty gesture as the Great Socialist hinders true political freedom for the marginalized group it’s meant to represent.

Beyond its description of broad political corruption, the novel hones in on Naxalism, specifically. Adiga “simultaneously parodies and disavows the Naxalite movement,” and Balram’s violent action mirrors the political violence the novel critiques (Majumder 165). Naxals are briefly and casually mentioned throughout the novel, but the movement’s significance to Balram is clear. Balram’s first direct reference of the Naxalites is meant to elicit understanding from the Chinese Premier for their cause: “perhaps you’ve heard about them, Mr. Jiabo, since they’re communists, just like you, and go around shooting rich people on principle” (21). From the beginning, Balram appeals to revolutionary violence associated with this group because, as Majumder notes, “the Naxalites shape his own life and perspective” (168).

Majumder details various other scattered references in *The White Tiger*: “[Balram] seeks employment from his absentee landlord, the latter’s cronies assure the man that [Balram’s] family has ‘no history of supporting Naxals and other terrorists’ (Adiga 56). ‘What are you? A Naxal?’ the landlord asks the boy [Balram] at one point. For his prospective employers, that is ‘a very important piece of information’ (Adiga 66)” (Majumder 167). Such references do not provide explicit historical context or events to cement readers’ understanding of Naxalism. The novel “drops contextual information from its content; it nonetheless encapsulates a precise social history” by decisively identifying the Naxals rather than a vague resistance movement (167). Balram chooses to mention Naxals to the Premier repeatedly, particularly in terms of landlords’ negative views of the movement. Balram clearly connects associates class tensions and political violence with the Naxalites in his letters, and soon embodies their connectedness in his own murderous action.

But Balram is not, or at least not simply, a hero. Instead, his actions are better understood as a parody of revolutionary violence, part of the novel’s critique of the postcolonial political structure and economic system. This is not to suggest that Adiga disdains revolutionary violence altogether. Sara

Schotland reads *The White Tiger* through the lens of political philosopher Frantz Fanon's explanation in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which argues revolutionary violence is necessary to a colonized people's self-determination:

[Fanon] writes that revolutionary violence is a constructive means for the liberation and self-expression of colonized people. Fanon identifies three stages that postcolonial writers go through: the assimilation stage, the adaptation stage, and the fighting stage when the writer produces "une littérature de combat, une littérature révolutionnaire, une littérature nationale" ["a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, a national literature"]. On Fanon's matrix, *White Tiger* is a third-stage novel. (2)

In the postcolonial context in which the novel is set (early 21st century India), Balram's business success is contingent on his murder of Ashok. Without state sanctioned mechanism by which to escape his marginalized existence within the Rooster Coop, he turns to violence. As Schotland writes, "the injustice and corruption of twenty-first-century India is so deep rooted and so pervasive that the only way a poor man can better himself is by an act of aggression, even the extremes of theft or murder" (18). The seeming necessity of Balram's actions forms part of Adiga's critique of the Indian state, situating the novel within Fanon's "fighting stage," in which writers address the complexity of postcolonial national consciousness.

However, as Schotland appropriately asks, "what has Balram's violence really achieved?" She points out that Balram's new position as the head of a business only perpetuates the cycle of master/slave relationships (18). In his letters to the Premier, Balram describes the growth of his business interests after killing of Mr. Ashok, but also models himself on his former master. When encountering difficulties, he asks himself, "What would Mr. Ashok do?" (Adiga 256). His assumption of the oppressor role is made even more explicit by Balram's decision to change his name to Ashok Sharma after establishing his business (258).

This is where the parody of Naxalist violence is most clear. Balram uses the Naxalist language of revolutionary violence to achieve a position of power but accrues benefits only to himself and at devastating cost to his own family, as well as those he subsequently oppresses. The revolutionary precepts of the Naxalist movement of the 1960s, the novel suggest, have been corrupted to serve individual interests and in so doing perpetuates rather than breaks cycles of oppression. For Balram, escaping the Rooster Coop does not mean dismantling it. Rather, the novel concludes with him

as a master rather than a slave, rationalizing (rather than repenting of) his violent actions using the language of revolution.

Conclusion

Crime and Punishment ends with an explicit confession scene and Raskolnikov ends up in prison. Clearly, the novel serves as a condemnation for his violent murder and the nihilist principles with which Dostoyevsky eventually infused it. *The White Tiger's* parody of Naxalist revolutionary violence is subtler. Even if the letters to the Chinese Premier serve as a confession about the truth underlying Bangalorean entrepreneurial successes, it is not to be confused with Raskolnikov's confession. Balram does not repent, but continues to benefit from his murderous action. Ultimately, Balram's individual success, founded as it is on an act of violence justified in terms of Naxalist resistance, perpetuates the very societal injustice that drew Balram to resistance in the first place. Just as Dostoyevsky's use of the "extraordinary man" critiques the notion that any individual can assume moral autonomy without accountability to society, so Adiga critiques violence steeped in revolutionary language through the figure of Balram and his self-interested rationalizations.

Nihilism and Naxalism serve as revolutionary ideological contexts for the murders Raskolnikov and Balram respectively commit. The novels critique their protagonists' hyper-individualized perceptions of revolutionary violence in different ways, as evidenced in their divergent endings. *Crime and Punishment* openly condemns Raskolnikov's murder and attempt to be "extraordinary." His Nihilism-inspired aspiration to act outside society's laws and morals, backfires, and the only way for him to redeem himself is through religious and legal confession and suffering. *The White Tiger*, on the other hand, allows Balram to get away with murder. Ostensibly inspired to kill his master by the revolutionary Naxalist movement, his escape from consequences suggests the entrenched nature of wealth disparity maintained by corruption. Balram assumes the role of the master from the man he killed. Rather than escape the Rooster Coop through his murder of Mr. Ashok, he *becomes* Mr. Ashok and thereby perpetuates the self-interested forces that demand the obedience of the oppressed.

Both characters are driven by individual interests; motivations seemingly at odds with the idea of political revolution and revolutionary violence espoused by Nihilist and Naxalist movements of the mid-19th century Russia and mid-to-late 20th century West Bengal. The novels critique the appropriation of these ideologies to the ends of individual rather than collective freedom. Raskolnikov's "extraordinary man" was an

egoist's fantasy, a corruption of Nihilist revolutionary intent, a way to rationalize a discontented individual's right to break the law and disregard conventional morality even if at the expense of others. Dostoyevsky saw Nihilism's empowerment of such egoist "lone wolves" as a danger of the movement, and counters it with religious morality. Balram, too, draws on revolutionary ideology to achieve selfish ends. And though his murder of Mr. Ashok results in the retributive killing of his own family, he does not, as Raskolnikov does, express remorse. This seeming incapacity is part of the novel's satire of postcolonial India and speaks to the calloused disregard of the economic elite for the impoverished communities they leave behind.

Both novels critique egoistic misperception of revolutionary violence by gesturing towards moral and collective responsibility: Raskolnikov humbles himself before them; Balram holds himself apart. Revolutionary violence ought to create systemic, societal change. By misconstruing it as the key to individual success, both Raskolnikov and Balram fail to be revolutionary.

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The Rejection of the M.S. *St. Louis*: The United States, Refugees, and Bureaucratic Apathy

By Annfaye Sternberg

On May 13th, 1939, the M.S. *St. Louis* departed from Hamburg, Germany, and sailed toward Cuba, carrying 937 passengers, half of whom were women and children, and almost all of whom were Jewish. Families boarded the ship to escape Nazism, but when the *St. Louis* reached Cuba two weeks later, they were refused permission to disembark. Havana's harbor became the momentary epicenter of international politics and a feeding ground for discourse on refugees, immigration, and humanitarian obligations. The attention it garnered seemed both torturous for its futility and painfully inadequate. Extensive negotiations with Cuba still resulted in rejection, but many of the passengers placed their hopes on the United States. Why did the passengers believe the United States would accept them? Was their faith delusional, a product of their desperation? Were their hopes justified given the much-touted tenets at the base of the Statue of Liberty and America's tightly-held idea of itself as a bastion of democracy and freedom? Regardless, the United States, too, declined them entry. Then Canada declined. The *St. Louis* was forced to make the return voyage.

The story of the M.S. *St. Louis* puts a microscope to bureaucratic indifference and paralysis in the face of atrocity. It also implicates bureaucracy as a cloak under which xenophobia, racism, isolationism, and nationalism persists. It is an ongoing, intergenerational, challenge to learn from past injustices in order to avoid them in the present. But bureaucratic indifference remains pervasive today, a testament to skewed priorities and the systematic failure to live up to self-declared moral imperatives. The *St. Louis* is emblematic of this point. It was battered by salt water and rough tides, but also by a fatal injustice perpetrated by three national bureaucracies. Of these, the United States, a

supposed beacon for the huddled masses, a “melting pot” of religion, race, and ethnicity, is especially galling. It ignored 937 refugees pleading at its? doorstep and sent them back to suffer persecution and unadulterated horror.

Impending war in Europe (which broke out four months later in September of 1939) served as context for the passengers’ plight, but the antisemitism of Nazi Germany had metastasized long before Germany’s threat was adequately acknowledged (“Great Debate”). The United States government’s slow reaction to the developing crisis in Europe was at least in part attributable to its isolationism, a popular response to economic crises, unemployment, and pervasive currents of anti-Communism and “100% Americanism” in the wake of the Great War. These factors, as will become apparent, had a hand in the United States’ failure to provide shelter for the *St. Louis* passengers.

Germany, too, was reeling from the exorbitant death toll of World War I and, plagued by economic depression, soon became a hotbed for fascism. The Nazis rose to power by harnessing widespread discontent in their favor and blaming the Jewish minority for social and economic ills with vicious antisemitic rhetoric (Bressel). On September 15, 1935, Germany passed the “Nuremberg Laws,” terminating Jewish citizenship and relegating them to “second class” citizens (“Beginning of Persecution”). On November 9-10, 1938 (about six months before the *St. Louis* left Hamburg), Nazis plundered and destroyed thousands of Jewish homes, schools, businesses, and synagogues, killing nearly 100 people. Kristallnacht, or the “Night of Broken Glass,” marked a dark and perilous point in the persecution of the Jews.

Nazis intensified their efforts to force the Jewish population out. By 1939, Germany’s persecution of the Jews was indisputable to most of the world, so when Jewish passengers boarded ships to countries like the United States, it was evident that they had no option but to seek refuge. 937 people boarded the ship on May 13th. Some had been permitted to leave concentration camps with the stipulation that they permanently leave Germany (Loeb 5).¹ The United States was aware of this mass, forced emigration. Within days of the *St. Louis*’s departure, *The New York Times* wrote: “all German Jews who have been released from concentration camps on conditions that they emigrate – and their number runs into the thousands – have now been notified that they must leave the Reich within the next two months or face return to the camps” (Tolischus 10).

¹ Prior to the start of World War II, and the eventual genocide perpetrated in these concentration camps, some of the interned were allowed to leave if they presented proof of emigration plans and/or if their families could successfully bribe authorities (“Releases from the Camp”).

One passenger, Sol Messinger, recounted that his parents “heaved a sigh of relief” as the ship departed Hamburg (Lawlor 28). A journalist’s depiction of some on board included a “former Vienna lawyer” who showed “his false teeth adding that when he was imprisoned in Dachau, a member of the Gestapo [secret police] had knocked him down and stamped on his face, breaking every tooth. His present fortune is \$4, although once he was worth 100,000 marks” (Axelsson). Another passenger remembered watching his aunt wave goodbye from the docks and said, “In my ten-year-old heart, I knew, I knew—I felt I may never see her again.” And he never saw her again (Loeb 18).

Once on board, the *St. Louis* became a momentary refuge for the passengers. At least during the voyage to Cuba, the 16,000-ton vessel seemed to be a sort of parallel world governed by the laws of international waters and beyond the reach of inhumanity, prejudice, and hate. Built in 1928, the *St. Louis* was part of a fleet operated by a company called Hamburg-America. The ship’s historical legacy preceded its ill-fated crossing to Cuba. Its maiden voyage was the first by a diesel-motorized transatlantic liner.² As was the convention for such vessels, the *St. Louis* subdivided passengers into “first class” and “tourist class” designations. First or “cabin” class passengers paid approximately 800 marks, while tourist or “third class” passengers paid 500 marks. Both were required to pay an additional 230 marks in case the ship needed to return. As a luxury ocean-liner, it offered eight deck levels, deck pools, social halls, and dining rooms, along with shuffleboard (Ogilvie/Miller 15). On board, the refugees participated in activities like swimming, “horse races, bridge, and sports just as on any other liner,” and in the evenings, formal dinners and vaudeville shows (Axelsson). The relief was palpable to the ship’s captain, Gustav Schroeder, who wrote in his journal of his passengers’ “somewhat nervous disposition” as they left Hamburg, but that the “[p]ainful impressions on land disappear quickly at sea and soon seem merely like dreams.” (Lawlor 31)

Shortly before the *St. Louis* would arrive in the Port of Havana, Captain Schroeder was formally notified of Cuba’s decision to void the “landing permits” issued to the passengers prior to their departure from Germany. These permits, he was informed, were intended for “tourists,” not “immigrants,” who required *visas* (Gellman 144). The refugees had left Germany under the impression that the landing permits were valid. However, they had been fraudulently issued by Cuba’s immigration director, Manuel Benitez Gonzalez, who

² Scholarship and public conversations about the *St. Louis* are inclined to use “S.S.” However, the proper classification is “M.S. *St. Louis*” or “motor ship,” distinguished by its diesel engine systems, as opposed to the typical “S.S.” or “steamship” prefix (“[New Motor Liner]”).

exploited a loophole in Decree 937 – the framework for Cuba’s immigration procedure – which did not differentiate between “tourist” and “refugee” designations. Over time Benitez profited between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 through this scheme. On May 5th, 1939, just more than a week before the *St. Louis* departed, Cuba passed Decree 55, a measure to close the loophole (147). While Hamburg-America was aware of the invalidation of the landing permits for refugees, Captain Schroeder was notified just days before their arrival in Cuba (Glaser 112). Accounts differ as to why the *St. Louis* was allowed to embark on its voyage, given Hamburg-America’s knowledge of Decree 55. One explanation was that Cuban officials assured the company that the new policy lacked retroactive provisions and that *St. Louis* passengers would therefore be unaffected (Thomas/Witts 86). Whatever the truth, the policy change left the refugees stranded as the Cuban government showed only opportunism and indifference to their plight.

Negotiations ensued and a series of offers and counteroffers were quickly exchanged between the Cuban government and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee [JDC], an organization dedicated to aiding Jewish refugees. At one stage, Lawrence Berenson, the attorney who spearheaded negotiations on behalf of the JDC, considered Cuban monetary demands excessive. Ignoring pressure from Cuba to agree promptly to their demands, Berenson countered with a lower number. When the clock ran out on Cuba’s offer, Berenson became desperate to salvage the deal and wired across the \$500,000. Cuba, however, withdrew from negotiations.

While waiting for the matter to be settled, Captain Schroeder steered the ship to the United States. His humanity towards the passengers was evident from the beginning of the voyage, but it was even clearer when he advocated for them (48). Schroeder ignored the German Reich’s strict orders not to speak to any Jews and was adamant that the ship’s crew “never forget for a moment that these passengers are to be treated no differently than any others.” Once news spread of Cuba’s refusal to admit passengers, Schroeder insisted that he would “with all available means, seek a remedy, so that a disembarkation outside Germany will occur” (Schroeder). The humanity of one individual, someone who answered to affiliates of the Nazi regime no less, would stand in stark contrast to the inhumanity of immigration systems.

Corruption and indifference had failed the refugees in Cuba, so they looked to the United States. For most of the passengers, Cuba was not the intended final destination. Rather, it was where they hoped to join countless refugees waiting for U.S. visas. Onboard, the Passenger Committee sent messages to President Roosevelt, imploring him to help. Americans who sympathized with passengers also sent letters—one of which, written to Eleanor Roosevelt by an 11-year-old girl, said:

I am so sad the Jewish people have to suffer so . . . Please let them land in America . . . It hurts me so that I would give them my little bed if it was the last thing I had because I am an American let Americans not send them back to that slater [sic] house. We have three rooms we do not use. [My] mother would be glad to let someone have them. (Gellman 155)

For four days, the *St. Louis* hugged the coast, pacing up and down the Atlantic – to Canada – then back toward Havana. At one point, it lingered just beyond U.S. waters, near the Florida coast. However, America refused entry to every passenger and the U.S. Coast Guard followed the ship to prevent passengers from swimming ashore.

At the time, no adequate explanation was provided as to why the United States would not accept these refugees, although the indifferent logic of bureaucracy was on full display in the government's declaration that passengers without preauthorized arrival documentation should not have been allowed to leave Germany in the first place. A *New York Times* article, published June 2, 1939, substantiates this sentiment: "the only step the United States government could take . . . was one that had just been taken, namely, to request the German government to refuse to let refugees leave" without absolute certainty that their intended destinations would take them (Phillips 5). Notably, the article fails to question the adequacy of existing U.S. immigration policy to accommodate the extraordinary circumstances of the refugees ("Public Opinion"). Instead, their rejection is justified in terms of failure to follow established procedure. The language of bureaucracy is thus used to soften the blow, as if "our hands are tied" is less devastating than an unequivocal "no." Such a decisive refusal was nevertheless captured by a U.S. State Department memorandum containing President Roosevelt's only public acknowledgement of the *St. Louis*: "The Saint Louis [sic] matter is to be considered a closed incident. . ." ("FDR and the Holocaust"). To the passengers, the glimmer of Miami's coastline must have been a haunting reminder of their physical proximity to refuge and freedom and of that towering obstruction wedged invisibly between them (Lawlor 39).

On June 6th, about three weeks after the *St. Louis* left Hamburg, the ship headed back to Europe, which just months later would fall victim, country by country, to the Nazi regime. After failed negotiations with Cuba, then the United States, the JDC negotiated the admission of passengers to European countries. On June 17th, the *St. Louis* ended its 5-week journey and entered the port of Antwerp, Belgium. From Antwerp, 214 passengers went to Belgium, 181 to the Netherlands, 287 to Great Britain, and 224 to France (Gellman 155). The passengers, fleeing the fire of Nazi Germany, were returned to countries under threat from the same flames. At first, the international col-

laboration to save the passengers was applauded. But the real outcomes were not realized until later.

A deeper dive into U.S. immigration policy reveals various domestic social, economic, and political sentiments that played a role in the rejection of the *St. Louis* passengers. Had they been allowed to disembark in Cuba, most hoped to bide their time as they navigated the byzantine United States quota system established by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 (Linden 431). The Immigration Quotas Act placed precise federal limitations on the number and nationalities of people permitted to immigrate to the United States. It initially imposed a ubiquitous two-percent rule – meaning immigrants could not exceed 2% of the total number of people of their nationality in the United States (calculated using the outdated 1890 census) (“68th Congress”). By favoring immigrants from Northern and Western European countries who were already a part of the demographic majority in the U.S., the policy was a testament to increasingly isolationist sentiments. When the Act was amended in 1927, the two-percent rule was replaced with policies that were no less protectionist. Abetted by a convoluted new visa process, America essentially shut the door to nationalities it deemed undesirable by limiting immigration to 150,000-person quotas proportionate to the 1920 census. Mae Ngai implicates the policies in “The Architecture of Race,” arguing that “new immigration law differentiated Europeans according to nationality and ranked them in a hierarchy of desirability” (70) and detailing the unquestionable influences of Eugenics, Nationalism, and the “100% Americanism” in determining these numbers (68, 84).

The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 did not take the possibility of asylum seekers or refugees into account. There were no emergency “exceptions” to the iron-clad immigration restrictions. In addition, the byzantine inefficiency of visa application processes meant that the government frequently failed to fulfill its intended quotas. With no fast-track option, refugees and asylum seekers were told to wait their turn. Unfilled spots often outlived the people desperate to fill them (“Voyage”). Most of the *St. Louis* passengers were on their way to Cuba in the hope of patiently waiting to claim their place in the U.S. When they were refused permission to disembark, they were no longer afforded them the luxury of time, their fate seemingly determined by labyrinthian bureaucracy.

Historians disagree about whether the quotas directly influenced America’s rejection of the *St. Louis*, but what is unquestionable is the U.S.’s lack of urgency despite clear foresight regarding the mounting refugee crisis. Nearly a year before the *St. Louis* set sail, in July 1938, representatives from 32 countries, and several organizations, flocked to Evian-les-Baines, France, on Lake Geneva, for an intergovernmental conference initiated by President Roosevelt. The intention was to discuss Germany’s persecution of the Jews and potential resolutions for refugees. Leading up to the con-

ference, Adolf Hitler publicly stated: “We, on our part, are ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries, for all I care, even on luxury ships” (“80 years ago”). The U.S. delegation’s conference chairman, Myron Taylor, remarked in his Evian speech: “unless steps [are] taken forthwith to remedy the present of exodus of people from their country of origin, there [is] catastrophic human suffering ahead” (Myron 4). Despite these devastating stakes, *New York Times* journalist Clarence Streit was moved to compare the atmosphere of the conference to “a poker game” where “the object is changed from money and arms to human beings” (Streit). That various delegations traded refugees like commodities suggests the extent to which they conflated the human crisis with logistical or bureaucratic problems. At least 32 countries *knew* about the persecution of Jewish people in Germany and understood that refugees had nowhere to go, but the conference yielded no change and stands as a largely-forgotten emblem of *informed* indifference.

Beyond Evian, legislators and activists who advocated for Jewish refugees were systematically frustrated, providing a glimpse into America’s polarized public and political environment, leading up to the May 1939 voyage of the *St. Louis*. Only a few months prior, Congress considered the “Wagner-Rogers Bill” as a temporary immigration exception. The bill mirrored Britain’s Kindertransport program, which took in approximately 10,000 children dropped off at a train station in the Netherlands by parents hoping to spare them the unconscionable realities of Nazi Germany (Benz/Hammel 4). Wagner-Rogers proposed admitting 20,000 children as refugees over two years (Wyman, 523).

The proposed bill ignited debate throughout the country. On the senate floor, the president of the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies, John B. Trevor, argued that the children would “become competitors with American citizens for American jobs,” and continued:

The Fortune poll, to which I have referred...proves conclusively, that the overwhelming majority of our fellow citizens has neither the intention nor the desire to turn this country into an orphan asylum for the indigent children and refugees of all the world, and that poll...was taken with a full knowledge of conditions now existing in Europe (“Admission of German Refugee Children” 223).

President FDR’s cousin, and wife of the U.S. Immigration Commissioner, Laura Delano, believed “20,000 charming children would all too soon grow up into 20,000 ugly adults” (Breitman 74). Senator Robert Reynolds (R-NC) stated, “Let’s save America for Americans” (Walters 4). Objections like these continue to echo in current anti-immigration rhetoric.

Wagner-Rogers did garner *some* support, however. Following newspaper coverage of the bill, the director of the Non-sectarian Committee for German Refugee Children reported an inundation with “something like 2,500 letters asking for children” (“Warner-Rogers Debate Documents” 6-8). In a letter addressed to *The New York Herald Tribune*, an 18-year-old girl wrote: “How do you expect American young people to believe this is a land of tolerance, opportunity, and a place to be proud of, when we won’t let in even 20,000 youngsters?” Ironically, despite widespread fear of the economic impact the director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations stated that “organized labor does not fear the alleged ‘influx’ of German children that opponents of this bill say will descend upon us...organized labor welcomes the opportunity this Nation has to do a simple act of human charity.” Roosevelt never commented on Wagner-Rogers, and opposition outweighed support, so the bill died in committee.

Despite a myriad of requests, the U.S. government failed to increase immigration quotas or carve out an exception to more fairly account for the dire nature of the circumstances from which the refugees were escaping. Unchecked because of a lack of political will, refugees were left to the mercy of State Department’s immigration officials whose job it was to maintain barriers to entry. These officials possessed unilateral authority to decide who would be admitted to the United States, and often determined with impunity whether a policy or quota should be enacted. More often than not, the indifference of immigration bureaucrats served the aims of isolationists. Laurel Leff argues that “[l]egal scholars have long recorded the broad discretion afforded immigration officials but have neglected the way it operated to accomplish a policy outcome: lower immigration in the 1930s and early 1940s” (Leff 3).

This was cultural, political, legislative, and administrative context to which the passengers of the *St. Louis* were subject. Cuba’s rejection of the *St. Louis* handed the United States an opportunity for heroic intervention, but they failed to rise to the occasion. For some, the moral implications of this failure were immediately clear. On June 19, 1939, one day after the *St. Louis* arrived in Antwerp, a *Des Moines Register* editorial probed the moral implications of this failure: “we Americans who believe in freedom allow the Jews on the ‘*St. Louis*’ to be sent back to Germany, where tortures horrible beyond words will be inflicted upon them. Are we murderers?” (Farrell). Responding to reports of the *St. Louis*’s rejection, Bishop James Cannon, Jr. wrote that the “failure to take any steps to assist these distressed, persecuted Jews in their hour of extremity was one of the most disgraceful things which has happened in American history and leaves a stain and brand of shame upon the record of our nation” (Morse 280).

Even before the eventual fates of the passengers became known, it was clear to such commenters that *St. Louis* was an opportunity for the U.S.

to set a different precedent; one that pursued its own avowed principles, rather than situating itself as an indifferent isolationist island.

It is difficult to parse the motives of the American government in its handling of the *St. Louis* crisis. In his 1936 acceptance speech for Renomination for the Presidency, FDR distinguished between two kinds of Government: “Better the occasional faults of a Government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a Government frozen in the ice of its own indifference.” The question begged by this distinction is whether the decision to reject the *St. Louis* should be understood as a mistake by a charitable government, or part of a pattern of omissions by a government “frozen in the ice of its own indifference?” Providing an answer to this question is complicated by the tendency of the American public to define itself in terms of the “positive” or “heroic” actions of the United States in the wake of incalculable atrocities while sidestepping honest appraisal of its own culpability. For example, the United States is quick to glorify its role in the liberation of the concentration camps in Europe, but slow to accept responsibility for the Jewish lives it could have saved by giving refugees access to its own shores. It hails itself as a defender of freedoms, but looks away from its isolationism, “100% Americanism,” eugenics, and xenophobia (Diamond).

In the lead-up to the war, American public opinion meant the government was not compelled to act in the interests of Jewish refugees. FDR was “ever sensitive to public opinion [and] ... recognized that Americans’ condemnation of Nazi persecution of Jews was simply not matched by their corresponding concern for its victims” (Friedman 90). A 1938 poll indicated that while 94% of Americans condemned the Nazis, 71% of Americans disapproved of accepting refugees (“Public Opinion”). The American public seemed stuck in a crisis of identity. They condemned Nazi atrocities but did not want to take responsibility beyond that.

In a 2018 *Time* article, Lily Rothman asks a germane question in this regard: What did Americans in the 1930s really know about what was happening in Germany? She quotes Daniel Green, a curator for the Holocaust Memorial Museum, for whom the American public’s indifference to the plight of Jewish refugees is attributable to a “gap between information and understanding.” Intellectualizing the disparity between America’s awareness of the atrocities and its decision to act, Green argues that it takes stories that “puncture through our consciousness.” While there was some public knowledge of the horrors of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, it was not until 1942 that the devastating death tolls in concentration camps made a breakthrough. Public pressure began mounting, but once the U.S. government started to act on behalf of victims, it was too late.

The increased public interest in the plight of European Jews coincided with America’s initial entry into the war after the December 7, 1941,

attack on the Pearl Harbor Naval Base by Japanese forces. As the nation moved onto a wartime footing, Americans paid closer attention as the stakes of the war. Arguably, the U.S.'s domestic response to Pearl Harbor provides further evidence of its "crisis of identity" between heroism and culpability. The Japanese attack was the impetus for the abhorrent policies enacted by executive Order 9066. First, the U.S. government ordered the removal of both citizen and non-citizen Japanese populations from the vicinity of military bases. A month later, approximately 122,000 Japanese people across the west coast were forcibly interned. These internment camps existed on American soil for the remainder of the war. All the while, the U.S. was beginning to comprehend the magnitude of the persecutorial death occurring in Hitler's Concentration Camps.

In January of 1944, Henry Morgenthau Jr., the Secretary of State, wrote a letter to FDR passing on findings from the scathing "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews." Morgenthau's letter detailed the complicity of immigration bureaucrats in Jewish deaths given their deliberate inaction from late 1942 to late 1943, after the scale of Nazi genocidal activities was confirmed: "I am convinced on the basis of the Information which is available to me that certain officials in our State Department, which is charged with carrying out this policy, have been found guilty, not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler" (213). Morgenthau quotes Representative Celler, who noted that Interdepartmental Review Committees for visas were "glacierlike in [their] slowness and cold-bloodedness. It takes months and months to grant the visas and then it usually applies to a corpse" (219).³

Then, in a suggestion that evidences a bewildering cognitive dissonance that prevents him from comprehending the theoretical parallels between Japanese Internment and Nazi Concentration camps, Morgenthau proposes a solution to the United States' refugee dilemma: "[Jewish r]efugees, upon arriving in this country could be placed in internment camps similar to those used for the Japanese on the West Coast and released only after a satisfactory investigation.

³ By the conclusion of World War II, there were approximately 190,000 unfilled quota spots, meaning the U.S. abandoned 190,000 refugees through negligence, deliberate inaction, or hesitation to participate in the conflict (Mullins). According to Leff, the bureaucratic indifference of immigration officials was so effective at limiting immigration even at the height of the refugee crisis, that by the conclusion of World War II, only about 2/3 of German quotas were filled by the U.S. government, the exception being 1939 where German quotas were maximized (391).

Furthermore, even if we took these refugees and treated them as prisoners of war it would be better than letting them die.” The irony notwithstanding, the United States’ refusal to consider internment as a way to admit German refugees is indicative of the pervasiveness of the country’s isolationist attitudes. That immigration refusals continued even after the U.S. was aware of the atrocities suggests that its handling of the *St. Louis* crisis set the precedent for a pattern of omission. As Morgenthau’s report argues, America was less a charitable but mistaken actor than it was an indifferent bystander. Morgenthau’s report resulted in a torrent of pressure for the American government to respond and “rescue” those remaining. This prompted Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board on January 22, 1944, which endeavored to right some of the wrongs that came back to haunt them. But by this time, refugees were no longer escaping Nazi Germany by the boatload, and the U.S. could only mitigate the cataclysmic magnitude of damage.

In the aftermath of World War II, it was determined that of the 937 passengers aboard the *St. Louis*, 254 died in the Holocaust. Had the U.S. opened its doors, had it set a different precedent in 1939, those deaths, and perhaps countless others, could have been prevented.

The intergenerational legacy of the *St. Louis* endures. If the *St. Louis* episode had a silver lining, it was the post-Holocaust acknowledgment of refugees, and distinct necessity for immigration exceptions and policies that take refugees into account. Refugee policies have since been implemented in the United States, but there remains a corresponding quota, subject to vacillating political currents influenced even still, by eugenics, racism, nationalism, and xenophobia. The Trump administration’s refugee bans which barred immigration from several primarily Muslim Countries, and its “Remain in Mexico” policy, among others (Schulte) are prime examples. With the persistence of refugee crises, of war and displacement, the U.S. seems not to have changed very much at all, and certainly not enough (“Refugee Admissions”). Policy and bureaucracy – and an ocean – stood between the United States and Jewish refugees fleeing Europe. The M.S. *St. Louis*, a luxury cruise liner with deck pools and social halls, was not built to be a life raft. It was not meant to be the passengers’ safe haven. It was only supposed to take them to one. But that was what it became. Delegated the task of caring, Captain Gustav Schroeder, of the *St. Louis*, begged the U.S. to save his passengers from the horrors of Nazi Germany, but the U.S. declined. The story is a glaring example of what happens when faceless bureaucracy rather than human mutuality decides governmental actions. Unfortunately, such stories bridge generations.

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Shifting Perspectives: A Comparative Analysis of Khalid Mohammed Khalid's Works on Islamic Governance

By Maryam Azzawi

By the mid 20th century, Egypt, putatively an independent kingdom since 1922, stood at a crossroads. Aggrieved by the continued British military presence, with pan-Arabism and regional nationalism on the rise, political and intellectual factions jostled to chart a path forward. In 1950, Khalid Mohammed Khalid [KMK], a recent graduate of Islamic jurisprudence from the prestigious al-Azhar University published his first book, *Min Hunna Nabd'a* [*From Here We Begin*]. In it, he levelled various critiques at the state of Egyptian politics and society. The publication was the subject of immediate outraged calls for the condemnation of the writer and his claims. Just weeks later, it was banned – and copies were confiscated by the Egyptian police – on the basis of allegations that it publicly denounced the religion of Islam, advocated for violent regime change, and incited hatred toward the capitalist class. In the introduction to the 12th edition of his book, KMK details having to stand up in court for a month to convince the authorities the outrage was based on dubious claims. Only then was his book reissued to the public (37-42).

Min Hunna Nabd'a's most controversial chapter, “Nationalizing Governance,” criticized calls for the establishment of an Islamic state. KMK argued that there was no unequivocal justification for the politicization of Islam and that, as a religion, it should remain distinct from matters of law and governance. Several subsequent books were published in response, including Mohammed Fareed Wajdi's *Lays Min Hunna Nabd'a* [*We Do Not Begin Here*], Abdul Muta'al al-Sa'aidi's *Min Ayn Nabd'a*. [*From Where Do We Begin?*], and Mohammed al-Ghazali's *Min Hunna Na'lam* [*From Here, We Begin to Know*], among others. Perhaps the most interesting retort to KMK's argument, however, was his own, which he published more than 30 years later under the title *al-Dawla*

fil-Islam [*The State in Islam*] (1981). A passionate refutation of his earlier argument, the book contains 12 chapters, each discussing the necessity, creation, and maintenance of an Islamic state.

In this essay, I look to understand KMK's reversal through a comparative analysis of *Min Hunna Nabd'a* and *al-Dawla fil Islam*. I will argue that the latter book reveals three key changes to KMK's methodology: (1) a transition away from hermeneutics; (2) the proliferation of Islamic and Arabic sources to support his argument; and (3) the extent to which his contemporary context seems to control his argument. I explain these changes in terms of the differing sociopolitical contexts in which KMK published each of these books. His journey, understood through the lens of an ideological reversal 30 years in the making, is a window into the theoretical discussions taking place within Egypt at two distinct socio-political moments: the secular, leftist 1950s and the religious, conservative 1980s. My comparative analysis aims to serve as the foundation for further study of the Egyptian intellectual class's cultural evolution as they come to terms with independence, state transformations, and religious identity.

Because none of KMK's earlier books are available in English, I translated all quotations from his texts in this essay. Doing so is particularly challenging given that his ideological reversal is reflected in a major discursive shift. While always unequivocal in his identity as a practicing Muslim, Islamic jurisprudence scholar, and a Hafiz of the Quran,¹ KMK's earlier writings grapple with Islam through a secular humanist lens. By 1981, he was more confident in the capacity of traditional Islamic scholarship in relation to governance. His later work reflects this return to traditional Islamic scholarship: he became famous for writing *siyar*, prophetic biographies of the men and women companions of prophet Mohammed. All this is to say that translating KMK's texts into English is challenging given their grounding in complex geopolitical contexts and religious tradition as evident in his dense allusiveness in Arabic.

I initially approached the texts from my positionality as a student at an American university whose critical lens reflects more than 11 years of Western education. As the limitations of this lens became apparent, I was required to change my approach, and drew on an upbringing and family history inflected by the dynamics KMK's works addressed. My analysis came to reflect my own family's intergenerational ideological evolution. My grandfather

¹ Meaning he memorized the Quran by heart; one of the highest skills a Muslim could achieve.

bought *Min Hunna Nabd'a* in the 1950s. He considered KMK to be one of the greatest thinkers of the time and owned several of his other books that make leftist arguments. The book was passed down to my father, who was more engaged by KMK's later books, like *al-Dawla fil Islam*, which spoke more to his own views on the Islamic state. My grandfather and father were aligned with their respective generation's prevailing ideals: the 1950s celebrated the new hope for a united socialist Arab future, while the 1980s saw Islam as the new leading protagonist in state and regional politics.

Personally translating quotations from *Min Hunna Nabd'a* and *al-Dawla fil Islam* required me to build a clear image of KMK for myself within the larger socio-political discourse that shaped him and that he helped shape. I did so from the conviction that the absence of responsible English translations of primary texts continues to make the proper representation of Arab and Muslim religious scholars challenging. It is the responsibility of scholars like me, native Arab speakers and students of Middle Eastern history, to develop ideologically honest and linguistically proper translations into English of consequential Arabic literature.

Min Hunna Nabd'a

As KMK's first publication, *Min Hunna Nabd'a* established him within the Egyptian intellectual class by outlining his political and religious stance. His trademark ideas and popular rhetoric situate him at the heart of Leftist socialist discourse, despite his religious background as a scholar. He argues against the Islamic state on the basis of (1) the historical tyranny of the clergy within religious states, (2) the preferability of individual adherence to rather than state mandating of religious prohibition, and (3) the ambiguity of Islamic law.

KMK grounds his claims about the dangers of clerical tyranny in European history, specifically the Catholic Church's domination, and tumultuous developments that led to the creation of the secular European nation state. He draws this case study into conversation with the political environment he inhabits. He compares the power of Catholic priests to those of the *Kahana*, Egypt's clergymen.

Relatedly, KMK questions the propriety or even the right of the state to mandate religious prohibitions, to act, in other words, as the moral police. Reflecting on practices considered vices in Islam such as, for example, drinking, indulging in drugs, and gambling, he writes:

there is no way [to destroy the vices] without the purification of the soul and encouraging self-dignity. It is not the government and its laws that can bestow on us the purity of the soul. How easy it is to disregard the laws and commit an array of vices without the government hearing or knowing. (180)

Following on from this argument, KMK questions Islam's capacity to provide a stable underpinning for the modern state, which demands precise worldly justice. Such requirements are at odds with the ambiguity of certain rulings within Islam. To make this point, KMK refers to certain Hudud, a term that can literally be translated as "borders" or "limits," but which refers to punishments specified in the Quran for crimes that violate boundaries set by God. KMK points to religious rulings which advocate against purely literal interpretations of the Hudud. So, for example, Umar al-Khattab, the second of the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs" that succeeded the prophet Mohammed, suspended the punishment specified for the crime of theft during a time of famine when stealing of food was necessary for survival.² For KMK, the hermeneutic susceptibility of the text – the notion that it was open to various interpretation – meant Quranic law was too ambiguous and Islamic jurisprudence too imprecise to serve as the basis for the modern nation state's legal system.

Instead, he insisted matters of religion and the state should continue to be practiced in separate spheres. He writes,

We knew the nature of religion and its end goal by the phrase that the Prophet narrated: 'Prophethood, not kingship...For I am a mercy bestowed.' So what use does religion have being a state? And how would it be possible for religion to be such when it is an eternally truthful fact, unchanging, whereas the state is a system dependent on continuous evolution, advancement, and constant transformation? Is religion a grade below the state, that the former must transform to merge into the latter? Additionally, the state with its permanent system of change is vulnerable to criticism and insult and is vulnerable to downfall, defeat, and occupation. So why would we expose religion to these horrors? (173).

This passage is revealing of KMK secular commitments in *Min Hunna Nabd'a*. It is important to note the way in which he deploys Hadith.³ In this chapter, he does not (as he does elsewhere in the book) debate the theological significance of the Hadith he cites: "Prophethood, not kingship ... For I am a mercy bestowed." Rather, he deploys the Hadith as the self-evident basis for his argument against the conflation of Islam and the modern nation state.

² For more information, see *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'in* vol. 3 pg. 442. https://archive.org/details/elammwk/elammwk_1/

³ Sayings and traditions of the prophet that have been narrated and recorded down ever since his death.

Accordingly, it is not just the unsuitability of Islamic law as the basis of state legal systems that is at stake. It is also the instability of the nation state that makes it incommensurate with the eternal truth of Islam.

KMK's belief in the inherent instability of the secular state is key to understanding his political commitments. Aligned with Egypt's revolutionary left, he believed in a progressive model of history driven forward by class struggle. While the truth of Islam was eternal and unchanging, systems of government come and go. So KMK writes that,

When we critique capitalism, for example, we do not forget that it is one of the factors of progress and that it is one of the stages progress has to go through until it reaches its final goal. We only ask it to clear the way for a just socialism that is demanded and desired by the people. (172)

The separation of Islam from the business of national governance is indicative of KMK's belief in the necessity of political change and, more specifically, his desire that it be guided by socialist principles and economic policies.

Egypt Between Nationalism and Islamic Revivalism

In 1952, two years after the publication of *Min Hunna Nabd'a*, the Egyptian Free Officers movement staged a coup d'état, toppling the monarchy of King Farouk and instilling an Arab nationalist republic.⁴ One of the "Free Officers," a leader of the revolution, was Gamal Abdel Nasser, who would go on to become the second president of Egypt. A leftist himself, he was rumored to be a fan of KMK's writing. True or not, the rumor indicates that KMK's book was voicing prevalent concerns about Egyptian life under the regime of the puppet monarchy all while being subjected to a highly regressive religious class.

Egypt had been under British military and economic control since the 1880s. While Britain supposedly recognized Egypt as an independent sovereign state in 1922 by facilitating the establishment an Egyptian monarchy, frustrations deepened as Egyptians saw no significant decline in British control. Some anti-monarchists and social thinkers (like KMK) proposed leftist theories of pan-Arabism and regional nationalism to defeat Western imperialism. The 1952 Free Officers Revolution and establishment of the

⁴ For more about the 1952 Revolution and the Free Officers, see <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/egypts-1952-revolution-seven-decades-military-rule>

Egyptian Republic emerged from this line of thinking, and in 1956, the same year Gamal Abdel Nasser assumed the office of the President, the last British troops left Egypt. "Nasserism," a largely secular, anti-imperial, pan-Arabist ideology with loose socialist leanings, came to define Egyptian governance and foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s.

Crucially, however, in the decades prior to the Free Officer Revolution, secular pan-Arabist republicanism was not the only anti-imperialist and anti-monarchist ideology to emerge. Another anti-colonial ideology evolved alongside it, one that understood Islam as a force with which to combat foreign liberal influence. This religious resistance faction had been developing its own agenda for regime change for decades before the 1952 revolution. Its most effective and influential messenger was (and arguably remains) the Muslim Brotherhood, a religiously-based social and political movement founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded to compete with foreign missionary organizations in Egypt, providing Islamically-centered (rather than Christian) education for young boys and girls. It took a philanthropic approach towards social change in Egypt. The suffering of the lower class was, to them, a clear indication that the modernization plans of the new Egyptian state, built on ideals of Western liberalism in collusion with the British, were a failure (Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred W. Wenner). The Brotherhood was committed to installing a religious state that would protect the rights of modern Muslims against Western hegemony. Its ideology drew on an established intellectual, religious, and anti-colonial tradition espoused in, for example, the religious and political reformist writings of Muhammed Abdu (1849-1905), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's (1839-1897) advocacy for pan-Islamic political mobilization against Britain, and the fundamentalist and pro-Islamic caliphate teachings of Rashid Rida (1865-1935). As the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Banna's teachings clearly espouse the notion that Islam, more than a religious practice, should again serve as a political ideology in Egypt and the Islamic world more broadly:

Islam is a comprehensive system that deals with all spheres of life. It is a country and homeland or a government and a nation. It is conduct and power or mercy and justice. It is a culture and a law or knowledge and jurisprudence. It is material and wealth or gain and prosperity. It is Jihad and a call for an army and a cause. And finally, it is true belief and correct worship (al-Banna).

The overarching message is clearly that there was to be no separation between Islam and the state.

The 1930s-1940s in Egypt witnessed the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. Its ideology grew increasingly popular, abetted by growing nation-

alism and disdain towards King Faruq's puppet regime. British refusal to evacuate the Suez Canal and the king's unilateral power over the Egyptian parliament served to foment an active anti-colonial front, with movements like the Muslim Brotherhood organically emerging out of lower and middle-class society (al-Abdin). Its anti-British and anti-Egyptian-monarchy teachings placed it at increasingly violent odds with the government. In the 1940s, the Brotherhood established an armed wing, its "Secret Apparatus," which was directly involved in bombings and political assassinations of the ruling class. Most notably, in 1948, after the banning of the organization by the Egyptian government and the detention of thousands of its Brothers, a member of the "Secret Apparatus" assassinated the Egyptian prime minister, Al Naqrashi Pasha.

This is the intellectual and political context with which KMK's *Min Hunna Nabda'a* had to contend. His work contributed to a rich intellectual tradition that had been in circulation in Egypt since the age of the Arabic *Nahda* (or Enlightenment), as the proliferation of ideas in the late 19th to early 20th century came to be known. The intense public reaction to *Min Hunna Nabda'a* is evidence of the pervasive tensions in 1950 between secular pan-Arabism and calls for an Islamic state. Unquestionably, KMK's anti-imperial, anti-monarchic, and anti-capitalist sentiments raised the hackles of the government, no doubt especially sensitive to calls for regime change after the violent assassination of the prime minister just two years earlier. However, in aligning him with a secular socialist revolution, *Min Hunna Nabda'a* placed KMK at odds with Egyptians who had for decades been immersed in teachings that espoused the necessity of the Islamic political state as an alternative to authoritative monarchy.

In the decades after the Free Officer Revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood would be an important influence in the resurgence of Islamism as a driving force in Egyptian politics and society. The Brotherhood welcomed the Free Officer coup d'état. The first president of the Egyptian Republic, Mohamed Naguib, professed some sympathy with their cause, which was a pretext used by Nasser to depose him in 1954 (Salahi). The Nasser regime cracked down on the Brotherhood, threatened by its Islamist populism and Secret Apparatus. In the mid-to-late 1950s and 1960s, thousands of Brothers were jailed, interned, and sometimes executed for bombings, treasonous acts, and attempted assassinations. Increasingly, Islamist populism was a reaction against Nasser's leftist pan-Arabist policies, which failed to live up to their promise of domestic stability. Lacking social and political cohesion, Egyptians were drawn to less theoretical and more grounded ideologies by which to understand their modern identity.

Nasserism's pan-Arabist regionalism was also unpopular. The pan-Arabist movement had been dealt a humiliating blow in the Six-Day War of 1967, with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan unable to withstand Western-backed Israeli

forces. When Nasser died in 1970, the new president Anwar al-Sadat shifted away from regional alliances towards independent state policies (Ajami 359) which were “[t]he most dramatic illustration of the weakness of Pan-Arabism, and objectively, the most important” (360).

The unpopularity of his predecessor’s policies meant that Sadat soon turned in a more populist direction. He softened the government’s stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood. As Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred W. Wenner write,

under Nasser, the ascendancy of the Left and its emphasis upon Arab nationalism (in foreign policy) and on egalitarian reforms (in domestic policy) in large measure neutralized the appeal of the Brotherhood to many of the socioeconomic elements at the bottom of the social pyramid. Upon achieving power, Sadat was forced to develop and promote some ideological emphasis to fill the void left by Nasser’s death; Sadat opted to use Islam.

Sadat freed the imprisoned members of the Brotherhood and called for their participation in the drafting of the new constitution. Newly unbanned and given a seat at the political table, the Muslim Brotherhood grew steadily in influence as they pursued their Islamist goals.

In 1979, one year before KMK would publish *al-Dawla fil Islam*, the Iranian revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, provided Islamists with a model for success and possibility. These were the events, between 1950 and 1981, that might have inspired KMK to reverse his thinking about the superiority of secular governance and to consider Islamism as a socially relevant and ideologically effective alternative.

Al-Dawla fil-Islam

KMK published *al-Dawla fil Islam* [*The State in Islam*] in 1981 with the main goal of correcting the argument he made in *Min Hunna Nabda*. The intervening 30 years of social upheaval, thought, writing, and publication, is reflected in the transformation of his ideological framework.

In *al-Dawla fil Islam*, KMK begins by attributing his prior position to two specific factors. First, he sees it as the effect of his study of Europe and the Christian religion. He writes that he was “so severely affected by the repulsiveness and atrocities of the Christian religious state, that [he] projected the image, unjustly so, on the political leaders in Islam and considered them as part of the religious Islamic state” (11). Second, he writes that he had concerns about the militancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1940s, as evinced by the activities of their Secret Apparatus. Their violent meth-

ods pushed KMK to ask, “[i]f this is the path of the religious when they are far from governance, then how would their methods be when they rule?” (12). He writes that he failed to see the existence of violent Islamist militant groups as a “temporal” matter, and instead mistook to be an inevitable and ever-lasting characteristic of Muslim statehood. In doing so, he lost sight of the eternal truths of Islam.

In the next 11 chapters of *al-Dawla fil Islam*, KMK portrays historical and religious exemplars of effective Islamic governance. So, for example, the same man who, in Min Hunna Nabda, asked “What use does religion have being a state?” (173) now writes glowingly about the merging of religion and the state:

The Islamic society in Medina had a state led by the prophet of God, peace be upon him, a state with an army, a flag, laws, taxes, and all the requirements of a modern political state. Its great foundation was laid by the leadership of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, then what followed in the generations after. Perhaps we might never find a religion or a philosophy whose nature necessitates the existence of a state the way we find in Islam. (*al-Dawla fil Islam* 22)

KMK sees attributes that define the modern states in the early Muslim community led by the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, and extrapolates their historical example into the contemporary possibility of successful Islamist state governance.

This reflects KMK’s general approach in *al-Dawla fil Islam*. Using anthropological, historiographical, and political science lenses, he argues that the past existence of the Islamic state, starting in Medina and then spreading as an Empire, is undisputable. He deploys this historical fact as a basis for political aspiration, rather than evidence for the incontrovertible right of the Islamic state to exist in the modern world. In this way, he defines the early Islamic empire not in terms of a religion, but also as a philosophy that promotes political ideals and aspirations that are grounded in Islam’s moral praxis.

Furthermore, KMK is eager to frame the Islamic state and its imperial successes in terms of political and cultural values typically associated with modernity:

In less than 80 years, the Islamic conquests controlled more regions and territories than the Roman Empire did in 800 years. Furthermore, the Islamic conquests were never oppressive and subjugating, rather they were merciful, guiding, and peaceful. They were wars of liberation and urbanization. The proof lies in the fact that even after the dismantling of the Islamic state, Muslims were still leading

the world in knowledge and modern thought for 5 more centuries.

Furthermore, these conquests were not based on discrimination, for many of the descendants of those liberated territories achieved great success within the state. When the Muslims left Spain for example, they did not leave it plundered and in disarray. Rather they left it a great empire because of the culture, material advancement, and civilization they contributed to it. After all of that, do we continue to shout: religion, not a state? Then what were all of those great liberation⁵ battles and might for? (25)

KMK's account of the Islamic state and empire emphasizes the improvement it brought to those living in the territories it incorporated, from broad-based economic (material) well-being, to the advancement of science and culture. Here, although he does not say so explicitly, KMK distinguishes the Islamic Empire from the Catholic Church's European dominion with which he earlier conflated it. He argues that the Islamic empire's conquests were peaceful (rather than violent), that it treated its minority subjects mercifully (rather than cruelly) and in the spirit of guidance (rather than coercion). KMK's claims regarding the historical achievements of the Islamic state and empire form the basis of his argument that a just and fair Islamic state could once more elevate the lives of its citizens. Whether KMK's claims about the Islamic empire are factual or not, the larger point he makes is that religion itself is not inherently un-democratic, and it can, even by modern definitions, govern without succumbing to tyranny and stagnation.

Comparative Analysis

KMK's approach to the question of the Islamic state differs in three key ways between *Min Hunna Nabd'a* and *al-Dawla fil Islam*.

The first difference is KMK's transition away from a hermeneutic approach to the Quran, Hadith, and other foundational / historical texts in of Islam. In *Min Hunna Nabd'a* he argues against the suitability of the Quran and Hadith as the basis for state law owing to the hermeneutic susceptibility of the texts – its openness to interpretations. Put another way, KMK, questions whether the text is capable of meeting the complex social demands of a post-colonial Egypt. However, if *Min Hunna Nabd'a* is concerned with the

⁵ I translate the word "liberation" from "fath," a term KMK uses as the Quran did (Chapter 110) to describe his conquest of Mecca after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah had been breached by the Meccans and their allies. He thus "liberated" the city from the decades long religious repression and immoralities. The term "fath" was also used to describe subsequent battles in for lands occupied by repressive Byzantine or Persian regimes as well as later conquests within Islamic history.

suitability of Islamic governance given Egypt's modern reality, the goal of *al-Dawla fil Islam* is to prove that Islam has all the prerequisites to serve as the foundation of a viable religious state. Whether or not such a state needs or even should be implemented in Egypt of the 1980s does not seem to be a question KMK feels the need immediately to answer. This could suggest either that he retains some doubts about Islamism, or that Islamism is so obviously the answer that its suitability for Egypt need not be explained. Regardless, KMK does not subject theological and historical evidence to the demands of contemporary governance. Rather, he draws on the theological and historical evidence in an effort to assert the past existence and successes of Islamic governance.

KMK describes the putative failure of his approach in *Min Hunna Nabd'a* in terms suggestive of confirmation bias. He did not sufficiently question his disapproval of Islamism, and all his subsequent reasoning served only to affirm it. He describes the "flaw in the methodology" as follows:

I made them [his reasons against the Islamic State] a 'source' of my thinking, not a 'subject' of my thinking. There is a big difference between making an event or thing the source of your thinking vs. making it the subject of your thinking. When something is the source of your thinking, it leads you in its way, not in the way of truth. And you perceive yourself, whether knowingly or not, being pulled towards premises and advancing towards conclusions that haven't been thoroughly examined and studied through independent intellectual scrutiny.

By contrast, in *al-Dawla fil Islam* treats the Islamic state, not as contemporary political platform with which to agree or disagree, but as a phenomenon the complexity of which is evidenced in the theological texts and historical record. In his later work, in other words, KMK makes the Islamic state the "subject" of his thinking:

However, when something is the subject of your thinking, it provides your neutral thought process with all the considerations of the studied issue without requiring you to make a predetermined judgment that confines the thought within its iron-strict framework. For this fundamental reason, I acknowledge my fault in issuing judgments against the government in Islam that I had previously named the religious government (12)

The second difference between KMK's approaches in 1950 and 1981 concerns the types of sources utilized. In the first book, his use of Islam-

ic sources such as the Quran, Hadiths, and historical (pre-modern) Islamic Scholars is heavily interspersed with modern European, Arab, and Muslim scholars. Quotes from religious texts were sporadically used, and then only if they aided the flow of his overarching anti-Islamist argument. By his own admission (*al-Dawla fil Islam* 11) *Min Hunna Nabd'a* used religious narrations of questionable validity to argue the abuses of the religious class and the clergy, and to highlight their misuse of religion to achieve political power. In his later argument, KMK decreases his reliance on modern European sources, and draws more heavily on Hadiths, Quranic verses, and theological and historical analysis from Arab/Muslim scholars. While this does not necessarily suggest a change in the author's attitudes towards European intellectual history or the importance of modern scholarship, it does correlate with the differing methodological approach in *al-Dawla fil Islam*. While many of the cultural and political values KMK attributes to the historical Islamic state are typically understood to be characteristic of Western modernity, he distances himself from the secularist viewpoint from which he earlier critiqued the Islamic. By drawing almost exclusively from religious texts, theology, and history, KMK is able to attribute these cultural and political values to Islam and the Islamic state.

The third difference that sets the two books apart is the extent to which KMK seemingly allows his contemporary context to control his argument. In *Min Hunna Nabd'a*, he is responding directly to his contemporaneous political events of his contemporary political dynamics, and was more interested in discussing the state of affairs in Egypt more broadly. "Nationalizing Governance" is the only chapter in the book that focuses on the conflation of religion with modern politics, with other addressing a variety of social, cultural, and political issues. In terms of genre, *Min Hunna Nabd'a* describes itself as socio-political commentary.

In his introduction to *al-Dawla fil Islam*, however, KMK is explicit that he made a mistake in trying to understand Islamism through the lens of "temporal matters," distinguishing between, for example, the contemporary violence of the Muslim Brother and the the eternal truth of the Islamic state. KMK does not explicitly foreground the "temporal matters" of late 1970s and early 1980s Egypt in his argument for the viability of the Islamic state. Rather than a political commentary, the later publication is better described as a theological and historical analysis. The former text is led by the happenings of his day, while the latter text eschews them.

The ideological journey of Khalid Mohammed Khalid is not just his own. It represents the experiences of Egyptians and also Arab/Muslim communities more broadly who have witnessed transitions from one system to

another, from colonial to independent states, from secular to religious governance. Such changes require such communities to reconceive of their collective identity, to navigate each new system's promises and failures to meet their needs. My analysis of KMK's ideological reversal describes the shifting mindset of someone who finds himself dissatisfied by his earlier efforts to make sense of his historical moment. Disappointed with the failure of the secular, socialist ideologies he espoused earlier, he looks to sacred texts for truths that transcend temporal matters. My comparative approach speaks to questions of modern Egyptian identity, but the same lens could be applied to other revolutionary and nationalist contexts in the region. Doing so is fundamental to a clear understanding, the self-determination, and self-actualization of the greater Muslim/Arab world.

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Satyajit Ray's *Devi*: Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Censorship of an Indian Art Film

By Iyad Chowdhury

"*Devi* has been forgotten because it has never been revived" (Cardullo 159). So said Satyajit Ray, the world-renowned Bengali filmmaker, in an interview in 1982. Indeed, his film *Devi* (1960) was "lost," but the better term might be "erased." Soon after its release, *Devi* became the subject of public outrage and banned for subsequent decades by the Indian government. Additionally, in 1993, the original master print was damaged in a laboratory fire. Although filmmakers and archivists aspired to transfer old negatives onto DVDs and VHS tapes in the latter half of the 20th century, it was not until 2021 that the Criterion Collection restored the film in 4k resolution. Now available through streaming services, Ray's divisive and controversial film is more accessible than it has ever been since its release.

Despite its long unavailability, *Devi* remains remarkable for a 21st century Indian film in both form and content. Loosely based on Bengali writer Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay's short story, Ray's film is set in 19th-century rural Bengal and depicts the experiences of female protagonist Doyamoyee, Doya for short, the seventeen-year-old bride of Umapasrad, the character who will serve as the focus of my investigation. Umapasrad primarily resides in Calcutta, where he attends school, argues against *Sati*,¹ and writes letters to Doya. Umapasrad is one of three leading male characters – he is the younger son of Kalikinkar Roy, a zamindar (landowner) in Chandipur, Bengal, who, along with his older son Tarapasrad, is a dogmatic follower of

¹ *Sati* is the now-discarded Hindu practice by which widows were burned alive alongside their deceased husbands on funeral pyres.

the Hindu goddess Kali. Doya, deeply cherished by her husband, is also her father-in-law's favorite.

The crux of the film grows from Kalikinkar's conviction that his daughter-in-law is a goddess. After experiencing an intense dream, he suddenly sees Doya as the "living reincarnation of the goddess Kali." As a result, Kalikinkar leverages his social capital to draw the local village to his estate where they pay homage to his daughter-in-law turned "deity." Yet Umaprasad, who identifies with the Brahma Samaj², is convinced that his father is being irrational by giving his dream such credence. Kalikinkar responds by singing a devotional song that suggests Kali had "come to him because of his devout faith." But just as the clash between father and son begins to escalate, they are interrupted by an alleged miracle when Doya cures a sick child with the "blessing of the goddess."

Umaprasad suddenly finds himself at odds with his European, secular education. He urges Doya to leave with him to Calcutta, but she refuses, fearing "what would happen to [him]" if he disobeyed his powerful father. He leaves without her. In a sudden turn of events, Doya is forced to leave the village. She becomes the subject of anger after she fails to cure her own nephew, Khoka, and he dies. The story ends with a silhouette of Doya, in her marriage jewelry and sari, frantically running through a field and into the horizon. The film's concluding shot is of a goddess statue that fades to black.

Soon after *Devi's* release in 1960, it was banned from public viewing because of a letter in a newspaper, *The Statesmen*, that labelled its plot as "anti-Hindu." Ray defended *Devi* as "attacking dogma and superstition" rather than Hinduism, and dismissed the charges as "very stupid, one doesn't take such letters seriously" (Cardullo 160). In another interview with French filmmaker Pierre-André Boutang in 1989, he elaborates:

[*Devi*] attacked dogmatism, the extreme form of religion. But people were writing in the paper that because Ray was Brahma, he was attacking Hinduism. *But they are stupid people, you cannot take them into account...We have a fairly backwards audience here, I must say, in spite of the film society movement and all that, if you consider the larger audience, it is a backward audience, unsophisticated audience.* (Calico centric 2011)³

² Brahma Samaj is the community of people associated with Brahmoism, which was an influential religious movement in 19th century Bengal that rejected fundamental Hindu traditions such as idol worship, the caste system, and polytheism. For a robust history of Brahmoism, see David Kopf's *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Mod-ern Indian Mind*.

³ Italics mine.

Notably, Ray uses the language of progress to set his vision apart from that of the “larger [Indian] audience,” which he calls “backward” and “unsophisticated.” He bewails the limited influence of India’s film society movement which sought to cultivate more knowledgeable audiences. Ray thus explicitly sets himself at odds with audiences “here” – in India – while implicitly gesturing towards “more sophisticated” audiences elsewhere – the “there” of the secular West. Arguably, then, the film’s opposition of Hinduism and secularism speaks to Ray’s progressive vision for India, and was intended to bring India into lockstep with “enlightened” Western perspectives.

Devi is an unusual film in Ray’s filmography. In addition to its politically charged past, it is one of only two Ray films that attempted to delineate a vision for the nation’s future. Scholars typically distinguish between Ray’s pre- and post-1970 filmographies. The earlier period demarcated his investment in an optimistic future, while the latter marks a reorientation towards a more cynical worldview. Film historian Rochona Majumdar, for example, asks why Ray’s later works “abandon the future,” whereas his earlier corpus envisions one (191-192). While Majumdar aptly analyzes Ray’s later cynicism, she pays less attention to the optimistic future Ray gestures towards in *Devi* and does not address why it, in particular, was subject to political censorship.

While interest in the film archives as grown exponentially in lieu of digitization projects, Indian art cinema remains understudied today given the expanding field of Bollywood film scholarship. As film theorist and historian Ravi Vasudevan has argued, recent scholarly conversations on Indian film have tended to focus on “popular formats, diaspora productions, international collaborations, and documentary films” (qtd in Majumdar 27). Additionally, Majumdar observes that while “Indian art film and auteur cinema continues to be showcased at home and abroad [it] has become somewhat marginal both to public discussion and scholarly engagement.” (Majumdar 27). With Indian art films being relegated to the periphery it remains unclear how works like *Devi* sheds light upon central discourses encompassing cinema and empire.

In this essay, I join discussions at the intersection of media studies and postcolonial criticism in an effort to understand cinematic censorship in the post-colony. I aim to parse the triangulated tensions between Ray as filmmaker, *Devi* as film, and India as nation. I begin by detailing Ray’s relationship with India, characterizing it through the rise of the film society movement. A subsequent analysis of the character Umapasrad shows that the film comprises Ray’s attempt to challenge, reinscribe, and reshape the Indian historical imagination with a view to the future. Thereafter, I argue that the political censorship of *Devi* can be understood as an effort to preserve the Indian national imaginary. More specifically, it suggests that, in a crucial moment of India’s emergence into nationhood, the film elicited public unease because it grappled with the tension between Hindu religious precept and the secular nation state.

Filming Empire: Film Societies and “Good Cinema”

In the late 1940s, the world emerged from two decades of economic crises and war, the effects of which were felt from metropolises to colonies, from East to West. In the case of India, which was also emerging from colonialism after the partition of 1947, there was a collective desire among an elite fixated on “progress” and “improvement” to usher the nation into liberal modernity. Indian art cinema was part of this “modernizing” effort as a vehicle for fashioning “educated” and “en-lightened” nationalist subjects (Majumdar 3). The notion that art cinema was a way to “modernize” India echoed already-embedded ideas about the novel which, through assimilationist colonial institutions, was associated with Enlightenment virtues such as liberty and democracy (Chakrabarty 154).⁴ As cinema became popularized in the early 20th century, nations across the world adapted culturally significant novels to celluloid. The Indian government, determined to modernize the emerging nation, actively supported the production of films.

As cinema was popularized, it simultaneously became coded as a marker of national success among nation states. Broadly speaking, a global trend emerged: the advancement of state-sponsored technological apparatuses, including film industries, became the newest barometer for measuring progress during post-WWII national recovery.⁵ As Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, cultural production is intimately tied to national identity, which in the context of the India’s postcolonial terrain, suggests that cinema was a key factor in creating a national image for its population. For Anderson, “deep attachments to nationalism” (4) are constituted through an *imagined* view of who is included or excluded from the nation. As literature did before, film served as a social apparatus to disseminate ideas of “national character” on a broad scale. In India’s case, it sought to foster imagined kinships between “members of the nation” and hundreds of millions of other members they “will probably never see” (6).

Indian cinema writ large sparked new discursive social practices that formed part of efforts to constitute a “modern” nation. Yet, art cinema in particular was framed as a medium to push the nation “forward” and cultivate an “educated” and “modern” citizenry by political and social institutions such as the International Film Festival, the National Film Archives, the Federation of Film Societies in India, the Film Finance Corporation, and The Film Institute

⁴ There is a developed academic conversation concerning the novel’s role in India’s colonial period. For historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty, the novel and prose has been registered as a mechanism for state surveillance by pushing native ideas into western molds. See *Provincializing Europe*.

⁵ This was particularly marked in the annals of East Asian films. For an insightful study of how such an archive has impacted modern imaginaries about Asia, see Roh et al. *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (2015, Rutgers University Press).

of India (Majumdar 6). Indeed, celluloid had dramatically overtaken print as the toolkit to “fix” the nation under the shadow of Western standards of value. In a 1951 report, for example, the three-time mayor of Bombay S.K. Patil insisted that film was superior because citizens could “learn much quicker from film than from a book” (Majumdar 11, 27). As a result, Indian elites internalized the modern invention’s supposed prowess; in turn, film was emphasized as a pedagogically valuable tool to construct national imaginaries by combining meaningful Indian literature with “modern” aesthetics. As Majumdar aptly explains, the development of “good films” was premised upon nationalist visions that “sought to understand and communicate a sense of the post-colonial present that, despite bearing the scars of colonialism, was nevertheless poised toward a future of progress and development” (Majumdar 1-2).

It is in such a context that we may begin to understand Satyajit Ray, the posterchild of Indian art film. His wide appeal as a director centered around his “simple” approach to storytelling. His work was meant to be accessible to a cosmopolitan audience, which in turn, propelled his popularity in the West. Films like 1955’s *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*) and 1964’s *Charulata* (*The Lonely Wife*) were heralded as the exemplars of “world cinema” at the Cannes Film Festival. Arguably, Ray courted such esteem by drawing on French New Wave film aesthetics of Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, and Eric Rohmer; auteurs Western cinephiles believed to be at the forefront of Western culture. In an essay titled “New Cinema”, Ray lauds the poetic sensibility the New Wave brought to cinema as “perhaps the richest in its absorption of all that is best in French culture” (15). Ray frequently sought to incorporate European aesthetics to his films by utilizing French *mis-en-scene*, creating politically charged films, and adopting humanist themes.

Yet the challenge for postcolonial filmmakers who aspire to address imperial discursive practices is not, simply, to reiterate them by relying uncritically on Western aesthetics. In attempting to appeal to global audiences, Indian “good films” struggled to escape a double bind, caught between developing a national imaginary, and indexing themselves for Western markets as “world cinema” with “exotic,” “Oriental” themes. Edward Said’s observation regarding the role film (and television) played in the “reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed” rings especially true in the context of Indian art cinema. The medium (and media more broadly) “forced information into more standardized molds” demanded by Europe (26). Far from apolitical, film has the capacity to reinscribe colonial power dynamics when it translates native contexts into Western forms. Drawing on Anderson and Said, Indian art film can be understood to have had a dual effect: on the one hand, it aided in constructing an Indian national imaginary at a moment of postcolonial transition; on the other, it potentially reinscribed racially-charged motifs of the Orient into that same imaginary.

The varying receptions of Ray's work show the challenges of navigating between South Asian and Western audiences. While he received positive reviews from European institutions, and while his films were undoubtedly popular and cherished by the emerging Indian middle class, the elite "literati" of film societies took issue. For instance, the economist Ashok Rudra, a prominent film society member, argued that Ray's films often critique Indian sociality, but fail to provide meaningful alternatives to resolve tensions arising out of the nation's transition into capitalist modernity. Although a harsh critique, it rang somewhat true; among Ray's earlier oeuvre of 18 works, only two films prescribed a path for India's future: 1962's *Kanchenjunga* and the film in question for this paper, *Devi* (Majumdar 115).

Umaprasad Between Worlds

Devi's narrative evinces a vision for the future of a postcolonial Indian nation shaped by a transition away from traditional religious beliefs to into rationalism. Umaprasad, Doya's Westernized husband, is the embodiment of that shift. To substantiate this claim, I look to three key scenes that speak to his character as an exemplar of the progressive modernity necessary to move the nation forward. However, given the film's political censorship, this it also necessary to consider how Umaprasad represents a future that runs contrary to the Indian imaginary.

A native subject of the British Empire in 19th century India, Umaprasad might aptly be described as an example of Frantz Fanon's "colonized intellectual." John Drabinski explains Fanon's concept as a native "who translates the colonized for the colonizer, in the colonizer's language and for the political, social, and cultural purposes of the colonizer." *Devi* portrays Umaprasad as torn between two worlds, mediating between East and West in the service of the British Empire. By the end of the film, Umaprasad "wins" the struggle against his father's dogmatism – an implicit victory of Western secularism over Eastern "spiritualism."

Just after Doya is elevated to goddess-status by Kalikankar early in the film, Ray shifts his attention to her husband, Umaprasad and his friend as they watch a play at a theater. The set resembles an upper-class Bengali house, art pieces hanging above the actors as they drink and smoke hookah. An exchange between the two main characters is especially instructive. The first is an unnamed "Insulter," who, like Umaprasad, is dressed in the attire of a "modernizing" Bengali. The second, Kenaram Ghosh, wears traditional farming attire.

- I: Which Ghosh? Of the caste of the herds men? Or scribes?
KG: Scribes
I: You're a scoundrel. You're a scoundrel.

Your father's a scoundrel, as was his father before him. Going back seven generations, it's an entire lineage of scoundrels!

Audience laughter.

KG: I won't listen to this. He's insulting my ancestors!

CUT TO: Umapasrad and his friend laughing with the rest of the audience on the balcony.

I: Should I fear him because he's drunk? Guard!

KG: A scoundrel, am I? You're the scoundrel!

CUT TO: Fully framed theatrical stage from Umapasrad's POV.

I: Don't be mad, friend. I'll prove it. If I fail, you can beat me over the head with your shoe, and my father, and my father's father.

Like Umapasrad, the Insulter is a “colonized intellectual” who, as Homi Bhabha puts it, attempts to “mimic” the colonizer and becomes “almost, but not quite” European (85). His modernized clothing, relative to the traditional farming attire of Kenaram Ghosh suggests a class disparity between them. The Insulter benefits materially from Empire and is therefore vested in maintaining its ascendancy. That he considers calling in the guards when he raises the anger of Kenaram Ghosh shows his willingness to leverage the mechanisms of power his privileged position affords on him.

The disparity between the Insulter and Kenaram Ghosh is not just about socio-economic class. The Insulter does not deride his guest because he is in traditional farming attire. Rather, he affronts Kenaram Ghosh because he is a *Kayasatha*, a member of a high Hindu caste of scribes, recordkeepers, and ministers that held prominent positions in the administration of the Mughal Empire. This Empire, though ruled by Muslims, assimilated Hindus into government leadership, and was dissolved by the British Crown after the 1857 Indian Rebellion. Given the film's setting in the 1860s, the sight of a man belonging to the *Kayasatha* caste in peasant clothing would have resonated profoundly with the audience amongst whom Umapasrad sits. They laugh at the Insulter's derision of Kenaram Ghosh as a “scoundrel,” suggesting they identify with his disdain for the Hindus who served the Mughal Empire: they are deceptive, dishonest, unscrupulous, opportunistic. The Insulter speaks as a beneficiary of the British Empire, a new modernizing dispensation that overrides traditional Hindu caste hierarchies.

However, his mockery of Kenaram Ghosh's father and seven prior generations of forefathers is especially offensive, given the constitutive role of paternal relationships in Hindu culture. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, it holds as a sacred precept "the child's submission to the father / parent [as an expression of] *bhakti*, the sentiment of devotion and adoration" (231). Though he embraces the British Empire, the Insulter is *also* Hindu. In a moment that illustrates the ambivalence of the colonized intellectual, he backtracks on the taboo he has committed and attempts to diffuse the situation with humor. He reestablishes mutuality with his "friend" by clarifying that he, too, is responsible to an extensive patrilineal heritage – *purbapurush* – even if it is as odds with Kenaram Ghosh's. If his insult is unfounded, he says, Kenaram Ghosh is entitled to "beat [him] over the head with [his] shoe, and my father, and my father's father."

For Indian audiences in the 1960s, much is revealed about Umaprasad through his delight. His uproarious laughter at the derision of someone belonging to the *Kayastha* caste suggests his identification with the Insulter. He, too, is a colonized intellectual, navigating uneasily between his embrace of the benefits the British Empire affords him and his native identity as Bengali Hindu. In addition, Ray's brief framing of the staged interaction through Umaprasad's point-of-view invites the film's audiences to consider how it reflects on their own circumstances. The Insulter's bravado in admonishing a former functionary of the Mughal Empire might remind them of their own newborn postcolonial confidence. The invocation of *bhakti*, or sacred paternal devotion, as the notion that unites the two men despite their differing political allegiances might call to mind the underpinnings of India's early national cohesion. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues the role of *bhakti* in the development of Indian nationalism. Influenced by such prominent writers as Rabindranath Tagore, it was transformed into a *political* sentiment through songs and literature that hailed "Mother India" as an all-accommodating, overarching deity. It was hoped that "Indians would come together because as children (sons) of the same mother they had a natural bond" (232). *Bhakti*, a sacred Hindu precept that had survived the Mughal Empire and the British Empire, was thus transformed into a "sacred brotherhood;" the glue that held India together.

Emerging from the play, Umaprasad's "colonized intellectual" leanings are put on display when he assumes the "civilizing" role of one who believes that the modernization of Bengal requires "the liberation of the mind from the blind bondages to superstitions and customs of the Middle Ages" (236). In a conversation with a friend after the play, Umaprasad reveals his father financially supports his education. His friend, however, explains that he is subject to "total disinheritance" (Ray): though his family is wealthy, they refuse to support him because he is in love with a widow. His family, under the sway of a public that insists on *sati*, or widow burning, distances itself from him. Umaprasad, the colonized intellectual, speaks through a "tongue

that is forked” (Bhabha 84) and quickly offers to convince his friend's father that widow remarriage is morally justifiable, even if the public condemns it. Umapasrad assumes a Western humanist lens, thereby positioning himself as “savior” both of the widow and his friend.

Sati is most famously addressed in postcolonial studies by Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak does not assign moral value to *sati* but is instead interested in illuminating the power dynamics between the Colonizer and Colonized, between Britain and India, as expressed through the tension between Western modernity or Eastern tradition. In an analysis of writings by Edward Thompson, an early-20th century British scholar vested in the “suttee” debates, Spivak argues that he “appropriates the Hindu woman as his to save against the ‘system’” (279). This she cites as evidence of the moral superiority assumed by the British Imperialists; an attitude she derides as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (269). When Umapasrad volunteers to argue against *sati*, he aligns himself with the Western intellectual tradition, and comes to resemble the ideal Indian imperial subject. Umapasrad’s situates himself among the native elite but, more specifically, as a “colonized intellectual,” who has internalized the West’s condescending, presumptuous Orientalist attitude towards Hindu religious practice. He is a fundamentally split native who uncritically expresses the colonizers’ “understanding.”

Umapasrad’s split subjectivity culminates in a rejection of his father and, by association, the sacred Hindu precept of *bhakti*. Near the film’s end,



Fig. 1. Still from *Devi*: Kalikinkar (left) on the ground as Umapasrad (right) approaches him (Brook).

he is pictured towering over his Kalinkikar, who trembles on the floor in misery. Umaprasad is triumphant, overstepping traditional Hindu hierarchies by rebuking his father, convinced that his “blind faith” has “plac[ed] the burden of divinity on Doya” and “set her on a path of destruction.” He seizes control from Kalinkikar: “[n]ow, I am going to save her.”

Ray, Mother India, and Censorship

By his own admission, Ray adapted the character of Umaprasad to be a vehicle for his own worldview. In a 1989 interview, he declared that “[t]he son’s character is very much developed in this film according to *my* feelings [...] for dramatic reasons. I was full of sympathy for him. I believed his arguments were much stronger than the father’s arguments, because of the irrationality involved” (qtd Robinson 124). Ray thus aligns himself – a filmmaker in early-postcolonial India – with the “colonized intellectual” who, to recall Bhabha, “mimics” the colonizer and becomes “*almost, but not quite*” European.

In this light, Umaprasad’s repudiation of *bhakti* stands for Ray’s insistence on the necessity of a Western progressive model of history in which the past must be left behind in order to advance into a better future.⁶ Enlightenment thinker John Locke evinces this intergenerational logic of Western enlightenment: the father’s dominion expires with the son’s entrance into adulthood; the death of paternal authority gives each new generation of “brothers” an opportunity to make their own history (Sect. 74).⁷ Through Umaprasad, Devi insinuates that the nation’s futural trajectory depends on the rejection of a foundational Hindu precept as a “backward-looking” veneration of fathers and forefathers, replacing it with a “forward-looking,” transgenerational fraternal order.

Ironically, even as *Devi* espoused Ray’s vision for India’s futural trajectory, its seeming dismissal of *bhakti* placed it at odds with emerging nationalism. This, to add nuance to the overbroad claims of its anti-Hinduism, accounts for the government’s decision to ban the film. Partha Chatterjee’s account of the essential role ancestral brotherhood played in post-partition Indian nationalism is instructive. He argues that for Hindu nationalists, Indian-ness – the basis of in-group membership of the nation – was inextricably tied to a reverence for and protection of the “inner / spiritual” essence of the nation, characterized by the enduring signifier of “Mother India” (*deshmata*). The Hindu precept of *bhakti* remained fundamental to this national imaginary, with the fetishized and feminized figuration of India an object of veneration for both the fraternal “new patriarchy” and, putatively, their ancestors.

⁶ It is worth noting, however, that later in his career, Ray came to appreciate certain Hindu “superstitions” such as reincarnation or karmic suffering. See Cardullo.

⁷ See Carol Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* for a feminist critique of Locke’s account.

To be a loyal Indian, in other words, was to follow in the footsteps of one's forefathers, even if they did not survive Indian independence.

While this "inner / spiritual" essence was the non-negotiable foundation of Indian nationalism, "it was not a dismissal of modernity," but the basis of the insistence that "modernity [be made] consistent with the nationalist project" (Chatterjee 123). Any permissible vision of India's future trajectory, in other words, had to balance "her" spiritual heart with the demands of modernity. Some of *Devi's* audience may have been unwilling to look past Umapasrad's modern arguments against sati, but his dismissal of Kalikinkar, his father, in the name of modernity was a betrayal of a principle fundamental to both Hinduism and India's national imaginary. Given cinema's broad reach, *Devi's* implicit message that the nation's advancement depended on the exclusion of its sacred-turned-political precept, meant it was a threat worthy of banning.

Devi's reemergence after 64 years is an opportunity to reflect on the ways censorship, banning, and archiving curate national identity. As Anderson and Said point out, the cultural memories contained by songs, poems, novels, and films are politically deployed to perpetuate nationalisms. *Devi's* banning reveals that film censorship is no less effective a political tool. Ray certainly struggles to strike the right balance: his attempt to resolve Umapasrad's fundamental split between Western education and Bengali Hindu tradition leaned too far into secularism for the tastes of a nation intent on preserving ancestral fraternity even as it sought to modernize. Nevertheless, the intersection between Ray, *Devi*, and Nation highlights the value of paying attention to works that have been pushed to the periphery: the history and circumstance of censorship has much to teach us about the Indian national imaginary.

Ultimately, *Devi* is a poignant reminder of the complex challenges for artists working in the postcolonial terrain, trying to carve spaces in the national imaginary while simultaneously negotiating an identity. It is easy to critique Ray's work for leaning too far into Western rubrics. Yet the bigger issue is the insidiousness of such rubrics in the first place, which illuminates the urgent necessity of critical and creative work that decouples them from the center of postcolonial historical discourses. We can obtain valuable insights from Indian art films like *Devi*, their pioneering auteurs, and the courage with which they looked to a collective past to understand their turbulent present.

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Coming Out in America: *Saving Face* and Queerness in Immigrant Communities

By Alice Nguyen

[Wil arrives home late at night. Her mother is still awake, watching a Chinese soap opera on the television screen.]

WIL
Ma?

MA
[At the television screen] Stupid girl, he's so obviously right for you.

WIL
Ma. I have something to tell you.

MA
There's not much left on this tape.

WIL
I don't think this can wait.

Ma.

I love you.

And I'm... gay.

[A pause.]

MA

How can you say those two things at once?

How can you tell me you love me...
...then throw that in my face?

I am not a bad mother. [A brief pause.]
My daughter is not gay.

WIL

(Voice shaking.) Then maybe I shouldn't be your daughter.

Saving Face (2004), a film directed by Alice Wu, gets its name from a Chinese idiomatic expression; to “save face” means to avoid shame and preserve the dignity of one’s family. The film is a charming romantic comedy-drama about a Chinese American surgeon named Wilhelmina [Wil], who attempts to “save face” by concealing her lesbian identity from her traditional mother, Hwei-Lan Gao (or Ma, as Wil calls her), as well as the rest of the Chinese community in Flushing, Queens.

Positive queer representation in American media blossomed in the 90s and early 2000s with films like *Edge of Seventeen* (1988) and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999). However, these centered on white protagonists with suburban queer experiences that resonated less with queer people of color and immigrants. *Saving Face* joined Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1999) as a film that showcased the tensions between immigrant and queer identity in America, but Alice Wu's work stands as one of the first films to depict the strife between collectivism and individualism within the queer second-generation American experience – specifically, the confrontation between the queer child and the immigrant parent.

Collectivism and individualism represent contrasting social ideologies. The prerogative of collectivism is to act based on the good of the group, while the prerogative of individualism is to act based on the good of the individual. Collectivists hold conformity and tradition in high regard, whereas individualists value personal autonomy and freedom. One ideology often comes at the expense of the other, which can lead to cultural or ideological miscommunication or conflict.¹ For the purposes of this article, we can generally understand immigrant communities as largely collectivist, and American society writ large as highly individualist. The purpose of this article is not to declare a stance on which is the “better” ideology; rather, I show how immigrant collectivism operates in enclaves within broadly

individualistic American society, and how the tension between these social ideologies impacts queer second-generation Americans who must negotiate both.

The experiences and struggles of Wil and Ma, as a queer second-generation American and her immigrant mother, respectively, conflict in many ways, but also intersect. The film begins in *media res* with both women already if differently positioned between traditional Chinese collectivism and American individualism. This implies a complex prior navigation of generational tension – of having evolved and *continuing* to evolve. The film asks how queerness disrupts the already complicated negotiation of identity between an immigrant parent and their second-generation American child. I begin by examining the ways Wil grapples with expressing her sexuality while honoring familial and cultural obligations. Then, delving into Ma's perspective, I illuminate the complex web of emotions and assumptions immigrant parents negotiate when confronted by their child's queerness. In the final section, I argue that the clash between queer sexuality and collectivist values within the ethnic community presents challenges that can be overcome through adjustments in expectations. *Saving Face* illustrates how second-generation queerness can become a catalyst for further acculturation and mutual understanding, especially for parents already familiar with the challenges of migration.

Wil

Wil is introduced to viewers as someone well on her way to singular success. The film opens with a montage of Wil, a Chinese American in her late twenties, commuting across town to her workplace. The camera lingers on a shot of a hospital and then cuts to Wil, her expression focused, wearing blue scrubs. She is the picture of precision as she leans over the operating table, suturing the wounds of an unseen patient. Looking into the O.R. through an observation window, the chief of surgery, a Chinese man, comments on Wil's surgical skill to a colleague, suggesting that she will be good enough to assume his role by the time she's forty.

In the next scene, viewers meet Wil's mother. She works in a beauty salon and wears the associated smock. She is in animated conversation with her client and friend, a lavishly dressed woman of similar age to her. The two women brag about their children's career success and complain about their lack of success in love. Within a matter of seconds, they arrange

¹ Geert Hofstede, a social psychologist, first contrasted individualism and collectivism as sociological indices in Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (1980). Other scholars have further developed the concept, most notably H.C. Triandis *Individualism & Collectivism* (1995).

a “blind date” for their two children, planning to introduce them to each other that evening at Planet China, a restaurant at which the community gathers weekly to socialize, eat, and dance.

Wil shows up late to Planet China. Ma fusses over her boyish appearance and the loose buttons at the top of her shirt and begins to chide: “People are going to think –” she starts, before she is abruptly cut off by the entrance of her own mother, Wil’s grandmother. The elderly woman expresses approval for Wil’s “sturdy and practical” dress, allowing Wil to escape further scrutiny from Ma. As the evening progresses, it becomes apparent that Wil thinks little of the Planet China gathering that her mother forced her to attend, and that Ma’s effort to hook her up with a man is part of an established pattern. “So, who’s the unlucky fellow this week?” a friend asks her. “I’m not sure,” Wil responds, “but I think it’s shorty, next to the punch bowl” (00:04:57-00:05:04). Wil has no interest in any of the men she dances with and has nothing in common with them. In fact, nobody catches her eye except Vivian, a pretty girl who arrives even later than she did.

The opening scenes of *Saving Face* establish Wil as a model second-generation Chinese American. She is a successful surgeon in New York City. She’s smart, practical, diligent, and obedient. *She* should be any immigrant Chinese parent’s dream child, except for the fact that she’s gay. Even though Wil has never explicitly told Ma, her mother knows. Wil explains how her mother discovered she was gay, to her apartment neighbor, Jay:

JAY

Seriously, Wil, why don't
you just tell her?

WIL

She knows.

JAY

She does?

WIL

She dropped by my apartment a
couple years ago unannounced.

JAY

She caught you.

So, what'd she say?

WIL

Nothing.

She dropped some dumplings
on the table and left.

We haven't talked about it since.

JAY

She kept setting you up
with guys?

WIL

That's when it started.

(00:57:15–00:57:44)

Ma's repeated attempts to pair Wil with a man are a function of a traditional Chinese immigrant woman's denial that her more Americanized daughter is gay. It is no less important to note, however, that Wil, despite her clear displeasure, goes along with the charade. The result is a familiar holding pattern between first- and second-generation Americans.

This is evident in an abundance of literature on the history and acculturation of immigrant families in the U.S. Such dynamics affect a large portion of the population, given the influx of immigrants after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Also known as the Hart-Celler Act, it sought to enrich U.S. labor markets by opening borders to educated immigrants. Today, one-quarter of the population are immigrants or children of immigrants, the majority of whom reside in metropolitan areas. Immigrants often establish "ethnic enclaves," communities in which their children, who have native familiarity with America, can be raised with strong ties to their homeland's culture.

Many immigrant parents teach their children that each of their choices reflects upon their family and ethnic community. Children of immigrants feel great pressure to project a good image, which often entails following a set path for success. Immigrant parents expect their children to acquire an education, a good career, a stable marriage, and children. The end goal is not necessarily the "American Dream," but an acceptable balance between assimilation to Western ideals and adherence to traditional values. Expected to walk a fine line between individual success and duty to the collective, immigrant children live by checklists designed to appease their family, their ethnic community, and American society more broadly.

Divergence from such expectations can pose challenges for both the first- and second-generation Americans. Queer children of immigrants are a case in point. While they face the same kinds of challenges as all queer Americans, queer children of immigrants must deal with ethnic communities that view such identities as antithetical to their traditional cultural values and incompatible with family expectations (Ocampo 160). Many immigrant parents are already reluctant to speak transparently about conventional sexuality, and even more so about alternative sexualities (Dhingra & Rodriguez, 103). Anticipating a lack of understanding, queer children of immigrants often hide their sexualities for two reasons. First, presenting an alternative sexuality might be perceived as an outright defiance of expectations punishable by familial disownment (Ocampo 158). Second, they must avoid backlash from their ethnic collective. Children of immigrants are hyperconscious of that they represent their family's "face" within the larger ethnic community, and do not want to harm their familial reputation.

To navigate these complexities, the queer children of immigrants often "compartmentalize their [lives]" (Ulep 11) and practice "moral management," a term sociologist and ethnographer Anthony Ocampo defines as the "hyperconscious monitoring of gender presentation, behaviors and mannerisms, voice inflections, clothing choices, cultural tastes and even friendship networks" (156). As many of Ocampo's interviewees attest, compartmentalization and moral management make it difficult for queer children of immigrants to be transparent with their families. They go to great lengths to conceal their personal lives, especially regarding romantic matters.

So, Wil keeps going to Planet China to dance with the young Chinese men with whom Ma sets her up, despite knowing that she will not be attracted to any of them. Wil's reluctant presence is not an identity crisis or an effort to combat her sexuality. Rather she is trying to appease her mother. She dutifully goes along with the charade because she understands how important it is to Ma to do her motherly duty by trying to match her with successful sons of Chinese parents. To Ma, Wil has successfully checked many of the items on the immigrant parent checklist – a good education, a successful career – but her family's reputation depends on Wil's fulfillment of heteronormative expectations, such as marrying a husband and having his children. These are at odds with her queer sexuality.

As her relationship with Vivian progresses, Wil tries to save her family's face by hiding her sexuality. This is especially important for Ma, because if the Chinese community in Flushing knew her daughter was gay, there would be speculation about her moral character and failures as a

mother. The “scandal” of Wil’s lesbian relationship would also affect her grandfather, the patriarch of the Chinese community in Flushing. It would be a source of shame, and irrevocably undermine his reputation and influence. Wil avoids such upheaval by avoiding public displays of her queer relationship with Vivian. She refuses to hold hands with or kiss Vivian in places like the playground and the park. All shows of affection and intimacy are carried out in the privacy of Vivian’s apartment. She is not unsure or confused about her lesbian identity but cannot live it openly because it would not be understood or accepted, with devastating implications for her family.

Ma

When her husband passed away with Wil still very young, Ma could rely on her strong family ties to alleviate the struggles of single motherhood. She therefore greatly values the collective ideology of the vibrant Chinese ethnic enclave that emerged in Flushing, Queens, after the passage of the Hart-Celler Act. However, Ma also finds herself at the receiving end of its moral conservatism. Returning to her Brooklyn apartment after a day’s work, Wil finds Ma there, cut off by her own father, Wil’s grandfather, for being pregnant out of wedlock. Now it is Ma’s turn to withhold details of her romantic life. She refuses to reveal the father. This results in an ironic reversal in which Wil sets her mother up on dates with men who might be willing to act as a father to the unborn child.

Even as she faces the shame of being cast out for deviating from expectation, Ma struggles to reconcile herself to Wil’s sexuality. Her own shame is, at least, understandable to her in terms of traditional Chinese moralism. However, given the common view among immigrant parents that queer identity is an American or Western concept (Ulep 9), Wil’s lesbianism must have seemed without precedent. Certainly, there is evidence that Ma is subject to three commonly held misconceptions about queerness in immigrant communities.

The first misunderstanding is that the queer child wishes to be of the “opposite” sex. Not all cultures have a hard distinction between gender and sexuality, leading immigrant parents to conflate the two (Ulep 8). Within various heteronormative cultures, effeminate behavior by men and masculine behavior by women are frowned upon because they violate traditional gender roles and threaten family structures (Dhingra & Rodriguez 104). Because queer identity and gender nonconformity are often linked, immigrant parents often assume sexual orientation is a symptom of gender confusion. This assumption fuels attempts to coerce the child into gender conformity.

In *Saving Face*, Wil's androgynous presentation prompts criticism from Ma, as though managing her daughter's gender expression will retroactively "correct" her sexual orientation. However, Vivian, Wil's romantic interest, presents a challenge to Ma's logic. Vivian defies the idea that sexual orientation is tied to gender expression by being simultaneously lesbian and conventionally feminine. She wears dresses and is a successful ballet dancer.

The second misunderstanding is that queerness is an illness that must be cured. In Ocampo's study of gay Latino and Filipino men, respondents report that despite their parents' wariness of the Western healthcare system, they attempted to send their children to therapy to "correct" their homosexuality (Ocampo 167). Ma does not turn to Western medicine to "cure" Wil, but attempts to purchase Chinese herbal remedies from a neighbor to "improve [her] marriage chi" (00:21:10-00:21:15). Given her awareness of Wil's queerness, this intervention is a clear attempt to fix her sexual orientation.

The third misunderstanding is that the queer child is going through a phase and will eventually overcome their attraction to the same sex. As immigrant parents struggle to find a reason for their child's queer identity, they often blame Western society or their own parenting. It is a sentiment captured by a mother in Hima B's short documentary, *Coming Out, Coming Home*, which features candid conversations between Asian American Pacific Islander immigrants with queer children: "I didn't know if I raised them in America, they would be American." Implicit to this logic, however, is the idea that sexual orientation is the result of cultural context and/or bad parenting, and that it can be "fixed" or "corrected" by parenting that counters the "wrongs" of Western culture.

Such "wrongs" include the individualism embraced by second-generation Americans, which is often perceived as selfishness in the immigrant household and community. Queerness, which sets the individual apart from the heteronormative collective, might be interpreted as a mockery of the sacrifices made by prior generations to build a better life in the U.S. Queer identities may also be perceived as indicators of selfishness, immaturity, or even insufficient prayer in religious households.

Upon discovering their child is queer, immigrant parents mourn the future they believe their child has lost. The parents may mourn the loss of the child they thought they knew as if their queerness means they are longer the same person. Interviewed by historian Alice Y. Hom, one Japanese father said that he suddenly "felt like she was a stranger. I thought I knew [her]. Here was a very important part of her and I didn't know anything

about it" (307). The resultant feelings of alienation and disconnection leave some parents feeling like they no longer have a place in their child's life or, as Katherine Tanaka, a Japanese mother put it, "I didn't know how I could fit into her life because I didn't know how to be the mother of a lesbian" (308). In the early stages after a child comes out, immigrant parents may view the cultural barriers between themselves and the child as irresolvable.

Ma's response to Wil when she explicitly comes out to her late one night is illustrative of this feeling of dissonance. Ma already knows her daughter is lesbian, but still feels betrayed when she hears Wil say so out loud. She refuses to accept it as true: "I am not a bad mother. My daughter is not gay." For Ma, Wil's queerness is irreconcilable with their relationship; either Wil is her mother's daughter, or she is gay, but she cannot be both. Ma persists in attempting to control Wil's gender presentation and sexuality as though trying to fix her own perceived failings as a mother, and refusing to accept the unchangeable fact of her daughter's identity.

Between Queens and Brooklyn

Ma's exile from the Chinese community in Flushing is painful. She feels compelled to intervene in Wil's life to spare her daughter a similar fate of shame, rejection, and loneliness. But Ma's attempts at changing Wil's sexuality are unsuccessful. Wil can put on an outward display of collectivist values, but her Western sensibilities means that she must honor her sexual orientation, even if it falls outside heteronormative family values. Immigrant parents must eventually confront the reality of their child's alternative sexuality.

This is challenging for them, given their often-ignorant starting points, which manifest in a range of initial responses from conditional acceptance to outright hostility. Despite such challenges for Ma and Wil, *Saving Face* reaches an optimistic resolution, thereby demonstrating a path forward for eventual acceptance and reconciliation. In "The Journey to Acceptance: Crossroads of Asian Culture and Queer Identity" Aldric Ulep argues that immigrant parents who hold strong collectivist values eventually come around to accepting or at least tolerating their children's queer identities because they prize familial cohesion over their own individual beliefs (11). I would add that the transmigration experience facilitates such resolution as parents, too, must, to some degree, assimilate to Western individualist ideologies, which would not have been necessary had they never emigrated and remained entrenched in their collective homeland culture.

The possibility of reconciliation depends on a strong continuing bond between immigrant parents and their queer children. This is certain-

ly true in *Saving Face*, where, despite increasing tensions, Wil's and Ma's mutual love for each other eventually wins out. Many of Ocampo's interviewees expressed their resolve not to abandon their immigrant parents despite the pain they caused. Dario, for example, insisted that "[n]o matter how much resentment I have toward my dad and mom, they're still my blood, and they're still a part of me, even if it's good or bad" (167).

The reconciliation process between the queer child and the immigrant parent can take many years. For queer children of immigrants, patience is often a requisite, as their parents may advise them to remain closeted to extended family and the larger community until they themselves find a way to come to terms with the child's queer identity. The child must go back and forth with the parents to first renegotiate their space within the family structure, often a "two-steps forward, two-steps back" experience. Many immigrant parents have a "coming-out process" of their own when it comes to accepting their queer children. It is extremely challenging to overcome strong emotions, controlling impulses, and inability to understand when weighing their traditional perspective with the child's "American" one. They must address and reconstruct pre-existing beliefs about queer sexuality and come to terms with a future for their child unlike the one they had imagined.

Immigrant parents often hold steadfast to collectivist values because they fear the dissolution of the family unit and ethnic enclave without them. This fear comes from a very personal place. Emigration and immigration are profoundly destabilizing, an uprooting that required them to leave home communities behind. The immigrant ethnic collective was there for them when assimilation into the host society felt insurmountable, functioning as a home-away-from-home, a place of comfortable and familiar values amidst the overwhelming change represented by American society. The idea of being cast out of their ethnic collective is terrifying because it would leave them in a state of cultural homelessness, unacceptable to their own community and a stranger in America. This is the fear many immigrant parents have for their queer children. The irony is that from the perspective of many queer children of immigrants, their refusal to accept them is akin to exile.

However, the immigrant parent's experience also means they are well-positioned to understand some of what their queer children are undergoing. For many parents, immigration required defying the norms, expectations, or traditions of their own parents to raise a family in another country. Many understand the ridicule, ostracization, and the loneliness that being an outcast can bring. Dario, Ocampo's interviewee who earlier expressed his resolute commitment to his parents despite resenting their

view of his queerness, draws direct parallels between his experience as a gay man and their battles as immigrants to the United States: “It’s equivalent in the way you have to come out, deal with identity, deal with society, deal with yourself, finding yourself, and leaving your parents in some way” (168).

Having been in their holding pattern for some time, Ma’s eventual acceptance of Wil’s queerness is expedited by her own exile from the Chinese Community in Flushing. Ma’s understanding of Wil’s predicament grows as she confronts similar challenges to her daughter’s. Ma goes on several unsuccessful dates arranged by Wil, from whom she is increasingly estranged. Eventually, a man named Cho emerges as a contender to be her husband. He has loved her for many years and is willing to serve as the father to her unborn child. He would be a suitable husband and marrying him would return Ma to the good graces of her father and the Chinese community. The problem is that she does not love him, and she hesitates to accept his proposal. The pain of her exile is heightened by the death of her own mother, Wil’s grandmother, and so Ma agrees to put aside her individual desires and to submit to the collective morality of the Flushing enclave.

Ma doesn’t invite Wil to her wedding, but she shows up anyway. It is an act of defiance, but also an act of love. She crashes the wedding to tell Ma that she doesn’t have to marry a man she doesn’t love, that she can choose her own path. She carries a note from the father of Ma’s unborn child proclaiming his love for her and desire to marry her despite their age difference. It emerges that Ma’s refusal to reveal the father of the child was an effort to save face, given the unsuitability of her relationship with Yu, a man more than two decades her junior. She is 48; he is in his twenties.

In that moment, Ma must make a choice. She could go through with the marriage deemed appropriate by her traditional Chinese culture, but which requires her to be untrue to herself. Or, she could place her individual desires ahead of the moralism of the collective, and be true to her own desires. It is the same choice with which she has burdened her lesbian daughter with her repeated efforts to set her up with men.

Showing the kind of tradition-defying courage that may have given her the strength to emigrate in the first place, Ma chooses to be with Yu rather than Cho. Ma and Wil abscond from the scene hand-in-hand, aligned in an act of rebellion against the gathered collective. On the bus afterwards, it is clear that Ma has made a breakthrough. She finally accepts her daughter’s queer identity. Her acceptance is not professed grandly. It is understated and implicit: “You know, that Vivian... she seems nice” (1:23:26-1:23:32).

The year 2024 represents the 20th anniversary of *Saving Face*, a film that remains relevant to a diverse, intergenerational audience. For immigrant parents, adapting to American society is a lifelong undertaking, and this may include coming to terms with the queer identities of children born and raised on American soil. In this transient fast paced highly individualistic society, the parent has little choice but to do so. Unquestionably, ethnic enclaves play important cultural and psychological roles for immigrants. The difficulty arises when an Americanized individual member of a collective society cannot conform to the roles and trajectories set out by tradition. Given the inevitability of such ruptures, the collective has a choice: accommodate the individual and move with the times, or refuse, lose them, and remain isolated from America's rapidly changing society.

Saving Face ends with a hopeful image of a collective that learns to accommodate change. The closing credits are accompanied by a scene of a small gathering. Wil is accompanied by Ma and her new husband, as well as Wil's grandfather. Vivian, now her romantic partner, is also present, as is her family. Each family and individual bring their own unconventional, profoundly American histories with them. They all dine together, collectively. Ma smiles at her daughter and Vivian sitting together. Despite having undergone a deep transformation in the course of the film, having come to terms with both her own and Wil's desires, she charmingly holds steadfast to at least some of her expectations.

MA

Nice shirt, Vivian.

[To Wil] Now why can't you wear something pleasant like that?

WIL

Because I like to be nagged.

VIVIAN

I'll work on her.

MA

So there's only one thing left.

When are you going to have a baby?

(1:32:20-1:32:40)

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African of a Different Breed: Beyond Postcolonial Shame in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-class Citizen*

By Kadilo Buzugbe

It is bad enough when a country gets colonized, but when the people do as well! That's the end, really, that's the end!

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*.

When I was growing up in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, my teachers, peers, family, and even strangers, would say, "If you have the opportunity to leave this place, you should." Their voices formed a chorus:

Do anything you can to leave this place!
Why would you go to university in a place like this?
Places like this have nothing for you.

By the time I departed from Nigeria at age sixteen, I hardly considered it an option to stay. I was not forced to leave my country but it seemed as if Nigeria itself and the people in it would not let me stay. Nigeria felt less like "my country" than it did a house on fire. I needed to escape "this place" and "places like it" and look for solace somewhere the chorus and, to be honest, I deemed to be "better." That is how I landed in Houston, where members of my extended family were already established.

Away from Nigeria, I found myself thinking about a novel I had read in preparation for the West African Senior School Certification Examination, Buchi Emecheta's *Second-class Citizen* (1974). Like me, her main protagonist, Adah, does whatever it takes to escape Nigeria. Also like me, she must learn to embrace the origins she chooses to leave behind.

Second-class Citizen is a postcolonial novel that details the experience of Nigerians directly before and in the immediate wake of independence from Britain in 1960. It conveys how colonialism shaped Nigerians' sense of themselves. As though collectively unable to shake the sense that they were still being watched and judged by their former colonial masters, the new Nigerian nation's culture seemed permeated by shame. They had internalized the colonizer's lessons: their cultures and ways of life were wrong, foolish, inferior to those of the West. What was local, from "this place," was inherently valueless, while everything "over there," in the colonizer's homeland, was inherently good and desirable. Within this context, success depended on the ability and willingness to model one's worldview on that of the former colonizer. This mindset was so common growing up, that I cannot think of a single person I knew in my hometown that was free from it.

Frantz Fanon describes this mindset in *Black Skin, White Masks* in which he addresses the psychology of colonial subjects: "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (18). Such elevation is not just a matter of adopting British cultural standard, but also of abandoning one's own as primitive and undesirable; in other words, as shameful. This is the shame that drives the protagonist, Adah, to leave Nigeria for England in *Second-class Citizen*.

However, Emecheta pushes beyond the colonized subject's shame. Her novel traces the emergence of postcolonial generations out of colonial mindsets, and looks to ways they can cast off its psychological burdens. In this regard, Michael Abioseh Porter's description of *Second-class Citizen* as an "African bildungsroman" (124) is apt. Adah, evolves from someone who wishes to escape her Nigerian roots and embrace the cultural standards of the United Kingdom, to being reconciled to aspects of her Nigerian-ness and Blackness. Her emigration and immigrations story requires her to confront many disappointments, but it is through these hardships that postcolonial shame unravels in her mind. Facing racism and bigotry in her new home, she rejects the notion that her African-ness renders her inferior, and claims her Black Nigerian identity as a source of pride.

Adah in Nigeria

Adah and her younger brother, Boy, were born sometime during WWII in the predominantly Yoruba city of Lagos in the southwest of Nigeria, although her parents were from the small Igbo town of Ibuza in the southeastern Delta State. Adah's birth was disappointing to her family because they were hoping for a boy. So seemingly unimportant was her birth, that no one bothered to record it and so she did not know her exact

birthdate (7) Nonetheless, Adah thinks she is about eight years of age at a defining moment in her life: a visit from Lawyer Nweze to the enclave of Ibuza villagers in Lagos.

Adah remembers the whole community preparing for the event. Lawyer Nweze was revered, not just because he was the first lawyer from Ibuza, but because he attained his law degree in the United Kingdom. In the early-to-mid-1950s Nigeria had yet to win independence from the British Empire. Colonial subjects saw the attainment of degree in the mother country as the conferral of a great honor. The Ibuza community in Lagos was proud of its son, to say the least, and went to great lengths to prepare a grand welcome for him. The women wore special uniforms and sang, and danced with great vigor in celebration of his arrival (15).

Lawyer Nweze's welcome made a particularly great impression on the young Adah. So did her father's attitude towards the motherland. Adah remembers that her father always voiced "the title United Kingdom...in hushed tones, wearing such a respectful expression as if he were speaking of God's Holiest of Holies" (8). On the basis of such reverence and worship, Adah inferred that "[g]oing to the United Kingdom must be like paying God a visit. The United Kingdom must surely be like heaven." From early on, Adah saw the United Kingdom as paradise and going there became the pinnacle of her ambition.

However, as a young Igbo girl in pre-independence Nigeria, Adah had limited agency. When her father passed away, she was separated from the rest of her immediate family, as was the lot of many girls like her, and given as a servant to her mother's brother. Headstrong and intelligent, and despite her family's intention to marry her off at an early age, Adah finished secondary school, presumably at around the time of Nigerian independence. Again, her options were limited. She had career ambitions, but her uncle's chaotic home was not amenable to her studies (23). Additionally, Lagos was a dangerous place for young women living alone. So, with no other family willing to take her in, Adah decided that her only option was to get married.

She singlehandedly arranged a marriage to Francis, and they lived together with her new in-laws. The novel describes Francis as "a very quiet, young man who was reading to be an accountant" (23). Soon after marrying Francis, she qualified and obtained a prestigious job at the American Consulate Library in Lagos, where she comes into contact with many Americans and Europeans. Adah's income allows her to save up and soon she is planning to move Francis and their two young children, Vicky and Titi, to the United Kingdom. Adah's father-in-law disapproves of women joining their husbands in the UK and Francis artlessly says to Adah, the family breadwinner, "You'll see, you will pay for me, and look after yourself, and

within three years, I'll be back." Adah is taken aback by his willingness to accept his father's sexist stance. For her, Francis's masculine entitlement was evidence that he was "an African through and through. A much more civilised man would probably have found a better way of saying this to his wife [...but he had] had little opportunity of coming into contact with Europeans as [she] had" (28). Adah clearly associates Francis' lack of civility with African-ness, a vice from which she believes the civilizing influence of Europeans has saved her.

Adah and Francis in the United Kingdom

The instant Adah arrived in the UK, she was dismayed: "Liverpool was grey, smoky and looked uninhabited by humans" (36). She describes it as resembling "the loco-yard" in which her father used to work in Nigeria; a hub of connected and intertwined railway lines. The psychological effect of this association are profound. The United Kingdom was, in her mind, a paradise to which she could escape from Nigeria, but at first glance it resembled the workaday reality of her home country. Adah's fantasies about the mother country of her nation's former colonizers begins to unravel.

Adah is no less dismayed by the accommodation Francis has prepared for their family. She is shown into a one-bedroom apartment crammed within a complex of one-bedroom apartments occupied by fellow Nigerians who she snobbishly describes as the kind "who called her madam at home" (38). Having acquired a high-class education and worked a prestigious job at which she was surrounded by Americans, Adah holds herself above the other immigrant Nigerians, and does not want to live nor be associated with people below her station. Her discriminatory attitude is a symptom of her postcolonial shame. She differentiates herself from Nigerian-ness, which she associates with poverty and a lack of sophistication.

Francis, whose six-month head start provides him with a more realistic perspective, is forthright in response to Adah's dismay: "You must know, my dear young lady, that in Lagos...you may be living like an elite but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So you can't discriminate against your own people because we are all second-class" (39). Francis understood that leaving Nigeria does not mean you stop being Nigerian. In fact, in the United Kingdom, your Nigerian-ness is used against you.

Even as she comes to recognize the discrimination to which Nigerian immigrants in the United Kingdom are subject, Adah does not accept the status to which she is relegated. In this way she differs from Francis and other Nigerians, who seem resigned to their circumstances. They do not complain about substandard living conditions and the menial jobs open

to them: "In England," Francis tells Adah, "the middle-class black is the one that is lucky enough to get the post of bus conductor" (39). If Adah's postcolonial shame is evident in her disavowal of her Nigerian-ness, in Francis and the other Nigerian immigrants, it can be seen in their willing acceptance of their second-class status. They do not believe that, as black Africans, they deserve better.

They are quick to criticize Adah for her refusal to accept her lowly status, feeling that she did not know her place. She, in turn, is appalled at the implication that she should. Francis and the neighbors urge Adah to look for a job in a shirt factory, or somewhere that seemed fitting for her position as a "black housewife" (41). Given the hard work she put into attaining her qualifications, however, she refuses to accept this as her lot. As a young woman, Adah refused the limitations imposed upon her by Nigerian society, associating its injustices with its unsophisticated and uncivilized African attitudes towards women. When she is told that the United Kingdom unjustly discriminates against her on the basis of her Nigerian-ness, she cannot accept the implications that her qualifications mean nothing or that her European dream is based on a lie. Rather than set her sights low, as Francis and her neighbors suggest, she applied to become a senior library assistant at North Finchley Library, a position others believe to be above her station. She gets the job.

As Adah is motivated to push back against the racism Nigerians in England face, Francis does the opposite. His inferiority complex grows as he readily accepts the second-class status he is assigned and he revels in his victimhood. Unlike Adah, Francis does not so easily assimilate to English cultural expectations. Instead, he struggles to reconcile his Igbo culture with the seemingly "modern culture" of the United Kingdom. At first, Francis attempts to portray himself as a "sophisticated" European. When Adah arrives in Liverpool, she was "stunned when he kissed her in public, with everybody looking" (36), an action that would be seen as taboo back home. "I can now die in peace," he says; a sentiment Adah does not understand, but which Francis explains as an example of the English tendency to joke about everything, "even things as serious as death." When Adah suggests that Francis is "making it all up" because none of the "remote, happy in an aloof way" white people she sees look like they would joke about death, Francis's insecurities become apparent. "This separation of ours has made you bold," Francis accuses, "You've never in your life told me I was lying before." Francis espouses "modern" British values but when confronted quickly assumes his "traditional" Igbo masculinity, as though he cannot choose between them and is not at home in either. Writing about Flora Nwapa's novel, *Efuru*, Patrick Colm Hogan characterizes the effect of colonization on Igbo men in a way that makes sense of Francis: "[It] produc-

es a class of deracinated men who accept neither indigenous custom nor European views but are, in [Chinua] Achebe's phrase, 'no longer at ease' in any culture. This cultural alienation is often viewed as a source of personal cruelty and unscrupulousness" (Hogan 50). Francis's unease soon manifests in aggression toward his children and his wife.

Unemployed, Francis initially takes on a childcare role while Adah goes to work. Her youngest daughter, Titi, soon becomes sullen and quiet. When a visiting friend of Adah's grows impatient with Titi and snaps at her, "Have you lost or sold your tongue," Titi snaps back in Yoruba, "Don't talk to me. My Dad will cane me with the belt if I speak in Yoruba. And I don't know much English. Don't talk to me" (53). Titi, two at the time, struggles to overcome the complex Francis's threats causes, and has a speech impediment in both English and Yoruba until she is six.

Adah is alarmed at Francis's actions but seems to understand what is happening: "This was due to the fact that Nigeria was ruled for so long by the English. An intelligent man was judged by the way he spoke English. But it did not matter whether the English could speak the languages of the people they ruled" (54). Between the racism she must confront in England and Francis's struggle to reconcile the demands of Nigerian and English culture, Adah grows in her awareness of the shame with which colonialism has saddled her people. She is able to articulate criticism of British actions in Nigeria, recognizing the inequity implicit to the colonizers' simultaneous imposition of English and disdain for native languages.

Unquestionably, the enforcement of English over native languages was a means of eradicating some aspects of native culture. Timothy A. Awoniyi traces the effect of colonial language policies in Nigeria from the Education Ordinance of 1882 onward. The Ordinance directed the actions of Christian missionaries in the Gold Colonies (which included the colony of Lagos, current day Nigeria's biggest city) by withholding grants-in-aid for schools that did not teach primarily in English. Yoruba was one of the languages the Ordinance disallowed as a medium of instruction. Protestant missionaries tried to convey the importance of the language to the colonial government, but to little effect. Even when Yoruba and other Nigerian languages began to be recognized as part of the education system in 1926, many Nigerians were none-too-pleased as English was the established standard. To this date, many Nigerian primary and secondary schools impose English as the standard and do not teach native languages, particularly those of minority tribes. As Awoniyi describes the impact of colonial policies, "There is little evidence that the Yoruba language, like many Nigerian languages, played any significant role in Nigerian national-

ism. Instead, Nigerians took pride in their command of English, equating it with intellectual competence. To many people education came to mean simply the ability to speak and write English” (72).

Growing up, few of my friends could speak their native language. My parents cannot speak their native languages.

Sadly, neither can I.

Adah’s recognition of the injustice of colonial language practices is a key moment in her development. It is a stark departure from younger Adah in Nigeria who, at Methodist Girl’s High School in Lagos, was pleased that her name was short enough for Europeans to pronounce. According to Adah, it “gave her a start against the other girls with long names like Adebisi Gbamgbose or Oluwafunmilayo Olorunshogo” (14). Now, in England, seeing her daughter struggle with the enforcement of English, she is alarmed.

Gradually, Adah comes to see the psychological effect of the second-class status Nigerian immigrants are assigned. They internalize their inferiority, as many did the supposed inferiority of their native language, and come to believe they deserve lives inferior to white English people. Adah recognizes some of this psychological effect in herself. In big clothes stores, “she would automatically go to the counters carrying soiled and discarded items, afraid of what the shop assistant might say” (70-71). She would do this “[e]ven if she had enough money for the best” (71). But Adah also differs from Francis and other Nigerian immigrants she knew: “she would start looking at the sub-standard [clothes] *and then work her way up*”¹ whereas “the others [...] believed that one had to start with the inferior and stay there, because being black meant being inferior.” Adah resolves not to fall into this trap. Without any of the snobbish entitlement she displayed when she first arrived in Liverpool, she refuses to accept internalized inferiority. Instead, she would “regard herself the equal of any white.”

Proudly Black Future Generations

Insisting on equality with white people is only part of the answer to postcolonial shame. It leaves a key question unanswered: is it possible to embrace one’s African identity in the land of one’s former colonizer? The novel gestures towards this possibility through Adah’s development. She must realize that her ethnicity and culture are beautiful in their own right, and must lay claim to them as her own, before she can fully escape the hold postcolonial shame has on her.

¹ My italics.

Adah is introspective throughout the novel, and her embrace of her cultural identity is part of an internal process. If, early in the novel, she disdains Nigeria for all the ways it falls short of a United Kingdom she has yet to visit, once she is in the colonizer's motherland, she begins to notice deficiencies there that were not true of Nigeria. She is struck, for example, by the individualistic culture of the United Kingdom. It lacks Nigeria's communal culture, in which relatives and friends often live together or in very close proximity with each other (remember, for example, Adah and Francis moved in with her in-laws when they were married). In such communal cultures, there was always someone around to talk to or lend an ear. Adah finds the United Kingdom's more individualistic culture very isolated and emotionally repressed.

This is especially apparent to Adah when she was pregnant with her third child, Bubu. It is an extremely painful and lonely period. She thought back to the assistance her mother-in-law had given her when she was pregnant and gave birth to Vicky and Titi in Nigeria. In England she had "no mother-in-law to tell her what to do" (97). Without close communal ties, Adah finds the UK's birthing options impersonal and untrustworthy. Knowing that "the London midwives gave mothers drugs and gas" against the pain, she worries that they might kill her with an overdose if she screamed too much. Screaming was not acceptable in England, which was "a silent country [where] people are taught to bottle up their feelings and screw them up tight like the illicit gin her parents drank at home" (97). Adah finds herself thinking about her Nigerian community in Lagos with admiration and longing, seeing virtues there that England lacks.

As she starts to see her origins in a more favorable light, Adah begins to understand that the Nigerian sense of inferiority is a product of British condescension. This idea begins to take root with seemingly innocuous observations. She notices that Francis's dressing gown and pajama pants are of varying quality. His dressing gown was a British-made product exported to Nigeria and bought there. His pajama pants, also a British-made product but bought in the United Kingdom, were clearly of superior quality. Adah wonders, "who told them in Britain that people in Lagos could do without superior things" (104). Observing all the "little" ways the United Kingdom condescends to Nigeria – from exporting shabby clothes to the worrying resemblance of British dog biscuits to "ones her Pa and her uncles used to bring for her and her brother Boy from the army barracks when the war was over" (104) – Adah begins to understand the origins of postcolonial shame. The notion that everything African was inferior was a lie constructed by the colonizer. Adah used to believe it, but no longer does.

Towards the novel's end, Adah projects a vision of hope for future generations of Nigerian immigrants. One day, on a walk along Prince of Wales Road to the public baths, a tiny bird that catches her attention. Adah is struck that she notices it at all, "when less than a year before she had seen wilder birds, all gaudy in their colours, all wild in their songs" (140). Why did she notice this little grey bird when, she had barely noticed the wild and numerous birds in Lagos? She conjectures that Nigerians in Nigeria most likely do not notice the beauty that surrounds them because it is everywhere. She wonders, "Was that why the early Europeans who came to Africa thought the black man was lazy" as though his "over-abundant environment... robbed him of the ability to think for himself?" (140-141). As ridiculous as this logic is, it had a devastating impact as European colonizers projected inferiority onto Africans for generations "before the birth of her Pa." Instead of looking back, Adah looks forward: "She was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed" (141).

For so long Blackness, African-ness, Nigerian-ness, were associated with inferiority. Even Adah had been taken in by the lie. Now, she differentiates herself from the prior generations that suffered the humiliation heaped upon them by colonization and, crucially, aspires to raise children with no sense of postcolonial shame. She wants to be mother to a new kind of blackness that has no internalized association with inferiority, but that takes pride in the cultures and countries that gave it birth.

Being a member of the Nigerian diaspora in the so-called developed world had its challenges in the United Kingdom of the 1960s, just as it does in Houston in 2024. However, generations of Nigerian immigrants stand on the shoulders of post-Independence emigrants like like Adah, benefitting from the lessons they learned as they nurtured their dreams and emerged from the oppressive mindset of postcolonial shame.

I know I do.

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