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**NAES**

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STUDIES  
REVIEW**

**Ethnicity: Questions, Trends and Interpretations**

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## The National Association for Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies Review (ESR) is the journal of the National Association for Ethnic Studies (NAES). ESR is a multi-disciplinary international journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups and their cultures, and inter-group relations. NAES has as its basic purpose the promotion of activities and scholarship in the field of Ethnic Studies. The Association is open to any person or institution and serves as a forum for its members in promoting research, study, and curriculum as well as producing publications of interest in the field. NAES sponsors an annual spring conference.

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# ETHNIC STUDIES REVIEW

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## Ethnicity: Questions, Trends and Interpretations

General Editor: Otis L. Scott

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## Editor's Notes

In this opening issue of volume 31 we are presented with both nuanced and bold entry into several long enduring issues and topics stitching together the interdisciplinary fabric comprising ethnic studies. The authors of these articles bring to our attention social, cultural and economic issues shaping lively discourse in ethnic studies. They also bring to our attention interpretations of the meaning and significance of ethnic cultural contributions to the social history of this nation—past and present.

In “Artisans and the Marketing of Ethnicity: Globalization, Indigenous Identity and Nobility Principles in Micro Enterprise Development” Robin Chandler forces the question as to whether or not ethnic artisans are in control of their creative productions or are their cultural products subject to old and new forms of global economic exploitation. Delphine Gras’ article, “‘I’ll Rise’: Rememory, Hope and the Creation of a New Sphere in Ben Harper’s Music” offers an interesting challenge. Using Jürgen Habermas’ concepts of the public sphere, Gras focusing on Ben Harper’s creativity, makes the case that African American music constructs social spaces which inspire - some would say- incite- the politics of social movement and change.

Greg Carter’s article “ ‘AShplit Ticket, Half Irish, Half Chinay’: Representations of Mixed Race and Hybridity in the Turn of the Century Theater” explores how three turn of the century theatrical productions addressing “race mixing” strengthened the social and political place of free white males in this nation. Mika Roinila’s “Rifton Finns: An Ethnic Enclave in Ulster County, New York,” presents an ethnography of the early Finnish-American settlements in upstate New York. This article draws our attention to the cultural impacts of the Finnish American settlements on this region of New York.

In “Memories of Home:Reading the Bedouin in Arab American Literature” Anissa J. Wardi and Katherine Wardi-Zonna explore the place and meaning of food in Arab culture. The authors argue for a proper recognition of the symbolic and practical importance of Arab food traditions and the implications of these traditions for raising levels of trans ethnic understanding, acceptance of cultural difference and cooperation.



## Contributors

**Robin M. Chandler** is an Associate Professor in the Department of African American Studies at Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.

**Delphine Gras** is a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington. Her research interest is in how music and literature contest hierarchies and foster new public spheres.

**Greg Carter** is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. His dissertation is an intellectual history of defenders of Americans who have defended racial mixing.

**Mika Roinila**, an Assistant Professor of Geography at Bethel College, Mishawaka, Indiana, specializes in research on Finnish ethnicity in North America.

**Annissa J. Wardi** is an Associate Professor of English and the Buhl Professor at Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Katherine Wardi-Zonna** is a licensed Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Psychology at Gannon University, Erie, Pennsylvania.

# **Artisans and the Marketing of Ethnicity: Globalization, Indigenous Identity, and Nobility Principles in Micro-Enterprise Development**

**Robin M. Chandler, Ph.D.  
Northeastern University**

## **Ethnicity 2007**

As a constructed category of human difference, 'ethnicity' has given way to 'culture' in its shared genealogy in the new millennium. Public knowledge about such phenomena as 'ethnic cleansing', debates on immigration, and the use of ethnicity as both a dependent and independent variable in research and policy are central realities in the domestic and foreign policies of many nations. The social psychology of group affiliation, nationalism, and the use of ethnicity (as well as gender) in workplace diversity, or the deployment of ethnicity in electoral politics continues to perplex and complicate human social interaction.

One of the anomalies of culture as a way of life among 'subcultures' is the degree to which ethnic differences constrain or expand human freedom and the right of access to the benefits and resources of the planet. Globalization and transnationalism, in particular, has affected the way culture-as-difference is deployed in identity politics and the manipulation of culture in the reconstruction of societies (Yúdice, 2003).

Race or ethnicity is often a marker of advantage or disadvantage. Structured inequalities, over consumption, and the competition for scarce resources. Social conflict and political unrest only further exacerbate the possibilities of economic freedom for the poor and deepen the economic divide creating dimensions of stratification based on power, privilege, and prestige. Conventional social science has examined these challenges historically, but the new globalization of capitalization and increasing political tensions among governments have caused many social advocates, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions to take their case to the micro-level in a bid to alleviate poverty through small business development –microenterprise from rural settlements to the urban centers. This has led to a confrontation with indigenous knowledge and indigenous people. The question is when and where ethnicity or culture

is compatible or oppositional to commerce. Who are these ethnic entrepreneurs and do they control the course of their ethnic traditions in the new market economy?

Philosophical ideas concerning race were formulated by academic disciplines in nineteenth century followed by new knowledge about the seemingly infinite range of ethnic groups identified at the height of imperialism. Social science and anthropology have claimed two streams of thinking on how ethnicity is defined. One stream of thought characterizes ethnicity and its derivations to common descent and cultural continuity. Another focuses on other distinct markers such as phenotype (physical appearance), name, language, history, and religion, factors formerly associate with race. Globalization has expanded how individuals define themselves as well as how state institutions define them. In any case, the indigenous is experienced as ethnic and, therefore, both are part of the long-standing colonial relationship. The heritage debates located in the tourism industry involve not only the rights of ethnic peoples (human and intellectual), but create a striking convergence with issues of environmentalism, fair trade, and sustainability. What further complicates these social and economic relations is the correlation between ethnic groups and poverty and the new income-earning potential of ethnicity in the handicrafts industry. Some critics refer to links between tourism as an extension of neo-colonialism in the developing world. (Boniface and Fowler, 1993) Therefore, the question of ethnicity and artisans may be reframed as an indigenous/colonial relationship, one which exposes the possibilities of the western/elite consumer once again pursuing those objects of pleasure and desire once promoted as "the exotic other." Within international development, however, there exist genuine commitments to the alleviation of poverty and numerous social and financial organizations have made their mark, some well before the inauguration of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

In this essay ethnicity is being presented as an aspect of economic mobilization in the developing world and in emerging economies specifically focused on material culture as a product of ethnicity in the handicrafts industry. Historically, material culture, particularly crafts have played a diminishing role in the GNP of many countries because they have been situated in the informal sector, undervalued as 'folkways', or associated with 'women's domestic work', thus unaccounted for in the formal economic picture. Further, the emergence of credit options for the poor, prominently associated with the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, suggested new banking models from the World Bank to national financial systems of microfinance. Besides ethnicity then, the poor have become a target market for micro-finance institutions, where a century ago it was assumed that the poor were bad financial risks having no collateral besides their labor. How we define and value different types of human labor appears to occur in renewable cycles.

An insinuating industrialization and the demand for mechanized goods marginalized the cottage industries as labor-intensive industries that focused on the hand manufacture of products associated with rural life and cultural heritage. A time-consuming process, the production of handicrafts as rare objects of personal consumption eventually lost their niche markets and patrons with few exceptions. As a result many of these industries died out from the silk-weaving tradition of Laos to the pottery-making traditions of the Amazon region, or the sculptors of Tengenengue in Zimbabwe. However, to focus on not merely the artisan industries but the artisans themselves reveals shifts in how we think about ethnicity in the new millennium. As such, identity issues, the sense of ethnic self, and the preservation of that sense of

ethnic traditional ways though that priceless social product-the craft- represents the central preoccupation of current theory, practice, and policy among these small business artisans and the legion of international social entrepreneurs who are providing capacity-building skills to these artisans.

Whether, this occupational interest in artisans and their traditional crafts is seen as ethnic exploitation by formal organizations, capitalistic institutions, or by the altruistic values of a new generation of social entrepreneurs, the private ownership of production, the revitalization of ethnic values, and the spiritual focus on the essential nobility of men and women, especially the poor, is creating new forms of social cohesion, economic empowerment, and a resurgence of interest in the professional artisan in the social hierarchies of many local communities in developing nations. Artisans are achieving a new spiritual status all over the world, one that elevates not only their social and economic conditions, but also their role as players in cultural continuity

## **Ethnic Artisans**

*Ethnic artisans* are defined as native-born producers of indigenous handicrafts and other culturally specific products in developing nations who self-identify as 'native' or 'indigenous'. In the ancient world, east and west, an individual who possessed artisan skills were part of a merchant class who were servants to kings, emperors, rulers, chiefs, sheiks and pharaohs alike. The production of art and artifacts is a much older project that dates to pre-literate societies engaged in traditional ideas concerning "faber", the making of objects both utilitarian and aesthetically unique.

By the middle ages, artisans became associated with the guild system, an intricate network of master artisans who were "licensed" by local and national authorities. The guild system existed from Europe, to Japan's Edo period, to the court artisans of Ife and Benin in medieval Mali and Songhay. This system was partly a self-regulating association that administered quality control, managed all components of production and distribution, and provided protection from competitive markets. One passed through stages of professional growth from apprentice to journeyman, from journeyman to master artisan, the latter accredited through the production of a "masterpiece". Individual artisans, guilds, or artisan families gained reputation and status by creating objects that met the standards of the guild or court, but extended the bar to produce unique objects that defined personal style becoming the signature of the artisan, both male and female, or of a family.

Cultural transmission of knowledge and technique become key factors in how ethnic artisans learned and passed on the making of their craft. As master craftsman and craftswoman, artisans provided the aesthetic labor necessary for the construction of both objects and ceremonies that preserved national and group identity through state-sponsored and religious patronage. The master-apprentice model, guild systems, and indigenous knowledge that characterized old world development among artisans have given way to new forms of development. However, in many regions from Puerto Rico to Southeast Asia, artisan skills are passed down through families, extended family members, or young people in local communities. The *Santeros* of Puerto Rico, its lace bobbin weavers, and the *Mascaras* of Loiza, east of San Juan have become family traditions. Such practices of cultural transmission retain the creative wealth within communities in home-based enterprises in which mentoring and training workshops

validate heritage and the production of handicraft objects. From a commercial standpoint, one of the primary interventions in the promotion of handicrafts has been a tourism sector. However, their focus has been on the promotion and sale of marketable objects selling ethnicity- and less on the capacity building of the artisan. Other organizations have increasingly stepped up to provide more comprehensive social and business development skills to assist artisans in meeting the demands of small businesses in the global market. Browse through the über-stylish pages of home furnishings, travel, and food industry journals for direct marketing advertisements by artisan industry brokers or the travel and tourism sections of popular newspapers who lure travelers to “exotic” destinations such as Istanbul and its 550 year old Grand Bazaar, the oldest and the largest covered market place in the world.

## **Microenterprise as Development**

In the paradigm shift from traditional ways of life to modern ways of life, the imposition of western ideas on ethnic groups has been sweeping both in the way the west has defined wealth purely in economic terms and the press of globalization on a shrinking planet driven by overconsumption and underdevelopment. While the era of historical imperialism may have ended with the Age of exploration, the economic, political, and cultural engine of colonialism was driven by a need to exploit and subjugate both ethnicity and ethnic groups. The destructiveness of policies of imperialism and colonialism has been followed by what the western world now refers to as ‘development’. The scope and scale of penetration into the financial world of poverty has been the work of micro-finance institutions (MFIs), commercial banks, and NGO’s. Latin America has taken a lead in advancing small business loan opportunities for individuals and households who have “an established minimum capacity to repay a loan”(Acción, 2005). However, the economic realities of urban and rural poverty are regionally dependent. In Africa and Asia, most of the poor reside in rural areas, while in Latin America “The majority of the poor live in urban areas while at the same time the poorest people live in rural areas (ibid). By 2002 the distribution of extreme poverty in Latin America including the Caribbean was 13+% in urban areas and 37+% in rural areas. “Indigence” in both rural and urban settlements is, therefore, conditional on region. However, microcredit clients in the artisan sector have emerged as sustainable phenomena in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and increasingly in the Middle East as ethnicity and cultural heritage become policy magnets. Data collected on specific artisan industries points to the dynamism of integrated approaches to social and economic empowerment of low-income families and the poor. However, the role that women have been playing in the economic activity of their local and national artisan industries including the informal sector is gaining significant momentum. Historically, women’s work as often been relegated to the informal sector. Not until 1993 were international statistical definitions of informal sector employment adopted and fewer than 100 countries provide national statistics since 1995. The difficulties in quantifying the contributions of women to the artisan industries of developing nations that lack statistics are an inherent drawback in measuring their labor as artisans. The larger goals of collecting data by sex in order to monitor comparative wage earnings between men and women, while increasing, do not pull out the occupational output of artisans. This data frequently shows up conflated with tourism statistics or in individuated NGO reports. However, the numbers of handicraft workers across countries and regions as exemplars of the growing interest in stimulating entrepreneurialism among the poor, especially

women continue to grow. Here are some reasons why women dominate and thrive in artisan industries.

### **Women-Surviving and Thriving**

By the late 1990's the World Bank and other international and national aid agencies recognized that women, especially poor and low-income women, were dependable financial risks. A now growing revolution in universal banking models that historically preferred assets or capital as collateral for loan-making, poor and low-income women are now playing a competitive role as full participants in small business owners in the developing world. The loan repayment rate of microcredit loans reported by MFI's has surpassed more than 98% as generally reported by the Grameen Bank, Acción, and Finca, leaders in the microfinance movement. However, beyond the economic factors that have made artisan industries sustainable, the role of women as central agents in the lives of families and communities is increasingly evident. Home-based entrepreneurs (HBE's) are a critical sector of developing nation economies as prospective clients in artisan industries. As artisans, many have been the recipients of handicrafts traditions transmitted from master craftswomen or are newly trained in the revival of traditional crafts once central features of their ethnic groups.

Globally, gender, the role of women's empowerment schemes, and the political nature of gender inclusion from a human rights and governance point of view are increasing foci. Barriteau (2001) looks at the Caribbean political economy and gender and Otero (1998) follows gender-related policymaking and Mf. To further document the history of artisans and ME. Nearly 85% of the world's poor live in developing nations. The 'feminization of poverty' describes the disproportionate effects of poverty on women and children. Due to transportation challenges between rural and urban markets and the prominence of street vendors (male and female), house-bound constraints of (e.g., Moslem) women and the resulting home-based (formerly cottage industries), lack of access to equal education and training, the home-based sector, street vendors, the informal economy, and the cooperative have been viable labor sites in which women artisans can participate in local economies. (FN-See Strassmann (1987), Cross (1998), Ehlers (2000), Bartra (2003) for research on these categories of labor participation and the stresses on moving handicrafts to local markets. Tourner and Fouracre (1995) address the challenges of differential transport access for women particularly in developing nations and the need for gender awareness in developing policies of urban planning that overcome the lack of access to safe, affordable, and efficient transport. Further, advances in e-commerce can, in some cases, reduce the reliance on conventional transportation for all entrepreneurs.)

### **Critiques of ethnic-based micro-enterprise**

Critics of microenterprise and microfinance suggest that 1) small-scale businesses will not necessarily move the national economies of developing nations and 2) that, perhaps, direct giving (philanthropy) may be a better route to reversing the entrenched, transgenerational, and historical poverty present in many countries. It is possible that a whole scale reversal of poverty and its long-term effects can no more be reversed than global warming. The primary concern here is ethnicity.



Entrenched poverty is primarily characterized by race-based, ethnically rooted deprivation and inequality and the systematic underdevelopment of ethnic communities globally. From this vantage point, the current fever of (over) development appears as a continuation of the exploitation (of ethnic artisans in this case) to satisfy the insatiable demands of the global market.

While the study of race and culture may seem an embedded or implicit correlative with poverty in many nations, the way that race or culture-based poverty operates, particularly among artisans has yet to be directly addressed. This is for several reasons:

- 1) Increasingly, studies bypass race in favor of cultural identity as a variable of policy interest;
- 2) Income generated by artisan industries is not often incorporated in the databases of developing nations, unless it is conflated with tourism or the new formula called “creative industries”;
- 3) “Creative industries” policies are initially associated with fine arts and entertainment (music, theatre, and film) and have distinct differences as economic industries
- 4) A shift in focus to gender-focused policy initiatives has weighed in on gender, but not always gender and race as “double jeopardy” in poverty studies;
- 5) Marketing ethnicity as “cultural heritage” content for the tourism industry and as global policy development sheds light on the priorities of philanthropists and entrepreneurs, economists, and activists in the developed world. A critical perspective of artisans themselves is missing

## **Conclusion**

From the global vista, UNESCO’s Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity (ACP countries-African, Caribbean, Pacific) with ILO (International Labor Organization) and UNCTAD has been investigating key elements of how nations preserve culture. The international policy framework of “Intangible Heritage” and “Living Human Treasure” are preservation measures that seek to associate human rights and diversity with the endangerment of ethnic heritage in a time of globalization. And given the enormous challenges of reducing and eliminating global poverty in a market economy matrix, many social scientists, human rights and legal advocates, and development economists have addressed the related issues of social inequality and injustice which are at the heart of the structural inequalities that plague both developing and developed nations. Luttrell and Dickson (1999) discuss corporate and government social responsibility models, fair trade practices, and their impact on artisans industries. In a treatise on trade and social justice and Bhala (2003) has considered how the international development community participates in and confronts national, global, and local policies that purport to enhance access to justice for the ‘have-nots’. There is no dearth of writing and research on how to reduce poverty and eliminate it. However, I would argue that poverty reduction must move in tandem with wealth reduction. Microenterprise among ethnic artisans is, beyond its critics, producing profound opportunities for artisans to remain in rural areas, preserve their traditional knowledge, and offers new insights into the essential nobility through innovative human economic occupational development.

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## **“I’ll Rise”: Rememory, Hope and the Creation of a New Public Sphere in Ben Harper’s Music**

**Delphine Gras  
University of Washington**

Recent studies about resistance music in the United States primarily focus on the hip-hop movement. However, it does not offer the only musical discourse contesting contemporary injustices. Even though the debate about hip-hop is a crucial one that deserves full attention, it seems necessary to widen the current conversation on music to take into account a wider array of musical genres and artists. This will in turn allow us to see the revolutionary power of music in its full force. In the United States, black music, from the Spirituals to Rhythm and Blues, has undeniably been a potent agent for social change. Because they enable strangers to identify with each other through a common discourse, songs from many different genres have fostered what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities.”

As a starting point to this invitation for further studies on contemporary music as a powerful counter-discourse, I will be looking at Ben Harper, in order to see how he upholds the social power of music and promotes diversity. With Martin Luther King Jr. and Bob Marley for inspiration, Ben Harper is one of the many artists who pursue the fight for a more egalitarian society, while at the same time refusing labels. Exploring a variety of genres, he seeks to express his diverse origins, thus debunking classifying systems like census or musical categories. Indeed, his paternal grand-mother is half Cherokee, half African-American, while his maternal great-grand-mother is of Russian-Jewish descent. Harper celebrates a variety of influences: from black diasporic music to the many musical American traditions. His refusal of categories and his powerful discourse offer a means to expand the contemporary public sphere.

This project explores the role of Ben Harper’s music in the fostering of a more inclusive public sphere. “I’ll Rise” refers both to Maya Angelou’s poem and to the song Harper created in her honor. This song is central to our discussion as it inscribes Ben

Harper in the tradition that precedes him—a tradition all the richer as it does not limit itself to the field of music. Moreover, the artist he pays tribute to is not only a woman, but a feminist, which hints at Harper's openness. Finally, "I'll Rise" evokes the main topics of this study: the hope to overcome any hardship, the will to free oneself from alienation and oppression, and the desire to assert one's worth. After defining the possibility to foster a public sphere through music, this study will analyze the work of Ben Harper around three themes: rememory and tradition, hope and freedom, and the creation of a larger public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* cogently delineates the power of the public sphere as a social agent. Indeed, as Gwendolyn Pough claims: "Habermas's model is relevant and useful because it sets up as a model a time when individuals came together, discussed issues of collective good, worked toward change, and challenged state power" (Pough 2004, 16). Habermas's main appeal stems from the fact that his concept of the public sphere gives back agency to individuals. He offers an alternative to Marxist determinism so that social entities may have the potential to change their living conditions. Habermas, like Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, shows that Marx's study of the pervasiveness of capital, all-powerful economic structures and ideology does not account for the disruptive presence of the media or the potential of social imaginaries to challenge order and transform society.

Diverse groups have asserted their will to take control of their destinies and have indeed altered state apparatuses on several occasions. The bourgeois class's overthrow of the nobility set the example. Habermas demonstrates how the bourgeois class gained political power over the State thanks to its growing public sphere. It is important to note that he makes it clear that this uprising deeply relied on the increasing use of the media. The press widely spread and undermined the authority of the State in order to advance an alternative agenda. As these new ideas disseminated through the mass media, the press influenced the population at large.

But, Habermas's title immediately betrays the narrowness of his study. Its sole focus is the bourgeoisie. Vorris Nunley rightfully points to the fact that many have discarded his theory because of its special focus on the bourgeoisie. Many theorists agree that Habermas presents a restricted version of the public sphere that does not account for differences. He describes a highly normative and prescriptive public sphere that solely belongs to a wealthy class. Hence, he does not allow for much counter-discourse, let alone coming from disenfranchised others. His analysis appears even more problematic now that the bourgeois class also represents the power of the State. However, rather than rejecting his thesis altogether, reshaping it seems more productive.

While Habermas has redefined his analysis of the public sphere to announce its decline and 'refeudalization' in "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," I would like to suggest that the means to create open public spheres have evolved rather than disappeared. Everybody can daily challenge the imposition of language from the outside, slowly shaping their own discourse and progressively drifting away from alienating ideology.

Through a more extensive study, we soon realize that popular music emerges as a major tool for diverse public spheres, an extremely potent social agent that reaches across class. Popular music is capable of creating new meaning, thus reshaping language and the public arena, as the press did for the bourgeois class. It thus enables strangers to identify to a common discourse and has the potential to transform society, mainly for groups silenced by hegemonic powers. It is therefore not surprising that many artists aspire to liberate themselves and others through emancipatory musical discourse.

While the bourgeois class enjoys its monopoly over the power of naming, everyone individualizes language. As a consequence we are not locked within the ideology of the language we express ourselves in. As Salman Rushdie demonstrates in "Imaginary Homelands" language shapes our epistemology—our way of apprehending the world—but we can transform it as well. Our constant interactions foment new meanings so that language is never fixed. It can always evolve, hence allowing us to call into question set rules and phrasings. In the specific African American rhetorical tradition this phenomenon corresponds to "Nommo, the African belief in the pervasive, mystical, transformative, even life-giving power of the Word" (Gilyard 2004, 12). Here, the editors of *The Voice of Black Rhetoric* echo a point of view similar to Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of "magma," a fluid composition of dialogical forces recurrently renewing itself. As Castoriadis asserts: "the social is this very thing- self-alteration" (Castoriadis 1987, 215).

In the song "Walk Away" (1992), Harper exemplifies how we can all transform language. He makes full use of his poetic freedom and creates many puns to reinforce the theme of the lost love:

But you put the happy  
In my ness  
You put the good times  
Into my fun.

Breaking down the word "happiness" in two ("happy" and "ness"), he reinforces the feeling of loss and separation. Indeed, while "happy" is a word in and of itself, "ness" loses any meaning. This loss of signification hints at the feeling of the abandoned person of the song. For him, life has lost its meaning because of a break-up. In this stanza, Harper invents a word ("ness") to more potently express the sadness of the separation, as well as the feeling of happiness and completeness that preceded it. "Walk Away" thus constitutes a great example of how songs can modify language, thus shaping what Castoriadis calls "magma" and illustrating the power of "nommo." This concept of nommo reappears throughout Harper's work. As we will see, "Excuse Me Mister" fully demonstrates how individuals can reclaim their power of naming and contest accepted norms.

Change stems from the confrontation and fusion of multiple forces and discourses. The public sphere cannot be oblivious of the plurality of its participants. Similarly, the public sphere does not circulate its ideas solely through the press. It uses a variety of media, "micro-narratives of film, television, music, and other expressive forms, which allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies" (Appadurai 1996, 10).

“The vernacular” matters as a means to oppose the normative discourse of the State, now part of the bourgeois public sphere. Hence, Arjun Appadurai posits that multiplicity is the key to counteract a master-narrative. If we locate counter-hegemonic discourse in a specific place, it might not be effective in destabilizing bourgeois order. On the contrary, highlighting and praising a variety of discourses debunks the bourgeois public sphere for its lack of perspective and inclusiveness. As a consequence, it is also necessary to resort to a variety of media, even more so as the bourgeoisie still regulates a fair part of the Press. A more inclusive public sphere must consist of “micronarratives” from different perspectives, through different media.

Music constitutes one of these “micronarratives” and emerges as a more popular mode of expression than the press. Concerts, popular gatherings where music spreads its influence, therefore take part in the praxis that allows strangers to unite. The members of the audience respond to a common discourse. As they actively share a moment, they have access to a collective epistemology that often contrasts with State or bourgeois ideology.

Looking at Harper’s concerts allow us to see how he reclaims his own tradition and values, opposing bourgeois order. He brings people together to form a counter-public. For the time of song or with a lasting impact, his discourse is shared and opens up the public sphere. As a rallying cry, he often concludes his concert with “Like a King” that then merges with “I’ll Rise.” This last song, “I’ll Rise” not only concludes his concerts, but also his second album. While the title of this album, *Welcome to the Cruel World*, announces a pessimist attitude, Harper chooses to end with a message of resolution and resistance. The a cappella form makes his message even stronger as it situates the lyrics closer to daily reality and talk. When Harper sings this set of two songs in a concert, he inscribes himself in the struggle for social equality while paying tribute to Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King Jr. and Rodney King. He even invokes the longer traditions of African-American artists when he echoes the word of the famous guitarist Blind Willie Johnson at the end of “Like a King.”

The last lyrics he incorporates in his finale are Bob Marley’s “don’t give up the fight.” This moment marks the apex of his call for change as he draws inspiration from previous generations. On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1994 at the Fillmore Theater in San Francisco Harper even included Marley’s lyrics from the song “Get up, stand up.” This message is all the stronger as it constitutes the last words of the concert. Harper declares:

I often end my concerts with this song because it works really well at that moment. This song symbolizes uprising. A revolt of the mind, a force, a comprehension. Refusing to submit to anyone. An aspiration to something better in life. The greatest of blessings is a shared blessing. It’s a song about liberty.

At this moment, the crowd overcomes class, gender or national categories. They unite their hope, their *Will to Live to Fight for [Their] Mind*, to borrow two of Harper’s album titles. Fists up in the air as a sign of their participation in the fight, they physically pay tribute to Marley and the quest he had. Like Marley, Harper believes that music can bring people together.



Concerts secularize the religious sentiment in order to unite diverse individuals, an additional step towards a more inclusive public sphere.

The cheering crowd at a rock festival is similarly fused. There is a heightened excitement at these moments of fusion, reminiscent of Carnival or of some of the great collective rituals of earlier days. So much so that some have seen these moments as amongst the new form of religion in our world. Durkheim gave an important place to these times of collective effervescence as founding elements of society and the sacred. (Taylor 2004, 169)

As it establishes a comparison between concerts and carnival, this analysis brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the carnivalesque. For Bakhtin, "carnival" represents a charivari, a day celebrating diversity. It does not constitute a simple reversal of order. Instead, all barriers break down, undermining more profoundly any categorization. Art is part of Castoriadis's "magma." The lexical fields of "fusion" and "effervescence" are indeed highly reminiscent of his analysis. Music constitutes a powerful discourse and affects our epistemologies. In the dialogue it operates with hegemonic discourse it can have unpredictable effects, eruptions that destabilize order. Whereas it is not totally clear if carnival allows for a lasting alteration or constitutes a cathartic moment before order reaffirms itself, Castoriadis's magma is always changing. It is never cast in one shape because it is made of a wide range of discourses and social interactions. Multiple voices, multiple media, and multiple audiences compellingly complicate Habermas's public sphere.

There is not one but many public spheres. The owners of the press are not the only ones capable of creating imagined communities. As Neal claims:

Thus the use and critique of mass media and popular culture can serve as a viable mode of social and political praxis for the post-soul intelligentsia, as they seek to liberate dated tropes and stereotypes of blackness in ways that venture to decolonize contemporary African-American thought processes. (Neal 2002, 122-123)

Music plays a tremendous role in the building of a community and represents a potent agent for social change and the democratization of the public sphere. It expresses communal values and facilitates a sense of belonging.

I will focus on Black music because it has not only expressed or mirrored the oppression and hopes of African Americans, but it has also enabled the latter to assert their humanity and, hence, to gain cultural and political representation. Music enables one to constitute a specific public sphere free from the alienating influence of the State as we can see from Vorris Nunley's statement: "Countless known and unknown Black bards temporarily escaped the hegemonic gaze of Whiteness to make themselves a world" (Nunley 2004, 223). As it was the case in the past, the bard is at the center of the community. Through his composition he unites strangers under a common social imaginary. Music can also keep memories alive or restore forgotten events. By keeping traditions alive and mentioning silenced events, it constitutes a compelling counter-discourse. The role of the griot in the black diaspora illuminates this aspect of music. As a communal singer, he voices the values and praises the greatness of his group. Hence

music shapes the identity and distinctness of a community. It fosters a sense of solidarity.

The griot unites the community with a collective discourse that is greatly imbued with social and political content. He is also an historian who keeps the traditions alive and constantly celebrates past events that hegemonic powers would otherwise silence. The griot thus plays a major role in maintaining an alternative collective memory. This in itself constitutes a counter-discourse because it offers a perspective different from the one of the bourgeois public sphere. The griots rewrite historical accounts that had left them out. In *To Wake the Nations*, Eric Sundquist elaborately demonstrates that these singers are both spirituals leaders and rebels. Their subversive songs give an impetus for action and emancipation so that they serve as epistemological disruptions in white patriarchal American discourse.

In this context, it is interesting to see recent African American artists presenting themselves as griots. Greg Tate indeed mentions a band named "The Six Legged Griot Trio," while Gwendolyn Pough establishes a parallel between hip-hop singers and griots. Throughout different musical periods African American musicians have created a language of their own, shaped their epistemology and claimed their power of naming, thus shaping their own reality and community. This epistemic challenge constitutes a form of nationalism that clearly aims at changing society.

Songs, which Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies as belonging to "forms of nationalist mobilization" (Chakrabarty 2000, 39) offer a call for action. In the nineteenth century, the slaves organized uprisings thanks to the hope and coded messages of the spirituals while African Americans overcame the Reconstruction and the Depression eras thanks to the call for change of the Blues and the Jazz. In the sixties, Martin Luther King Jr. even claimed that music was the strongest weapon against injustice, and mobilized many specifically thanks to that medium. As Arjun Appadurai powerfully asserts: "The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape" (Appadurai 1996, 7).

Nowadays, Rap artists represent the group that most visibly voice its discontent, or even rage, in order to oppose the normative bourgeois public sphere. Following the steps of their predecessors, they use music to uphold memory and shape a new life for themselves: "They are the griots of the ancestral land speaking into the rhetoric of the future" (Cook 2004, 269). They undeniably create a sense of public space. As a consequence, a large part of the youth identifies with them. It is therefore not surprising that Mark A. Neal celebrates their rhetoric. He demonstrates how hip-hop discourse expands the black public sphere and allows for a high degree of democratization of the latter.

As Tricia Rose cogently remarks, "Given the complexity in rap's storytelling, how is it that most Americans only know about the most extremely violent passages?" (Rose 1994, 156). She denounces the demonization of Hip-Hop, pointing to the fact that white bourgeois public sphere purposely turns these artists into scapegoats in order to undermine their discourse. Her most cogent analysis demonstrates how it is much easier to blame violence on the vehemence of their prose rather than attempting to change the conditions that foment injustices and the alienating institutions that have actually favored racism and sexism for centuries. However, most critics focus on the

fact that “black males cultivated and embraced the hypermasculine image” (hooks 1994, 131), again failing to see that it emerges as a means to cope with and counteract their feminization and reification by white bourgeois society.

The contemporary despair that permeates a considerable part of rap music is more problematic. While rap music urges to resist and potently counteracts hegemonic discourse, it sometimes fails to offer many exit doors or constructive ways to oppose oppression. In these cases, it typifies contemporary despair and post-structuralist cynicism, which explains why Kali Tal mentions the “decline of Black counterpublic” (Tal 2004, 40). People are too depressed to act. One may wonder whether the commodification of music has anesthetized musicians and deprived them of their potential as major initiators of social change.

How can African American males express themselves through music and move people to action in the twenty-first century? This endeavor is not only one to find one’s adequate expression but also one to delineate one’s identity as both an individual and a member of a larger group. In a stiflingly categorizing and labeling society the question arises of how an artist can express himself or herself freely. The solution stems from the fact that one does not solely belong to one group but many. Diversity and tradition do not have to oppose each other in an either/ or logic of Hegelian dialectics.

Ben Harper figures as one of the contemporary musicians that offer a powerful discourse against oppression, while still providing hope in a manner reminiscent of the long tradition of the artists of Spirituals, Jazz, Blues, Rhythm and Blues, or Soul. His music incorporates and expands the potential of rap music thanks to its inherent diversity and unflinching resistance to classification. Harper thus embodies the “connection between violence an idealism” that Chakrabarty mentions (Chakrabarty 2000, 45), uniting the philosophy of Martin Luther King and Malcom X, two philosophies that never really were split and which have always been co-dependent. Indeed, in an interview Harper declares:

I could spend all of my time singing about hatred, condemning gangs, machismo, violence and it wouldn't change anything. So I sing about love. Even 'Like a King,' my song about Rodney King is a song about love, with a soft, non-violent chorus. It's not a call to hatred.

He pays tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. in “Like a King” (1992), his song about the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Here he condemns the persistence of racial discrimination and violence: “Well Martin's dream/ Has become Rodney's worst/ Nightmare.” Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of peace and tolerance has not been achieved yet because racism still subsists in the United States. However, this song does not lack optimism as Ben Harper explains:

The most amazing thing about Martin Luther King was that he exuded peace, it emanated from him, from his whole being, from his slightest look, his slightest gesture. When you're in that place, you can move forward. He's THE man, one of the most nonviolent people the world has ever seen; everything was prayer for him, and that's exactly the road we have to take.

Racial tensions can only disappear if we follow King's path. For Harper, King is indubitably seen as a model and a king, as we can notice from the repetition of "like a king" throughout that song. Hence, Harper draws strength from his predecessor in order to demonstrate that hope is resistance.

Hope and Faith constitute two major elements of musical expression. In the African American tradition they represent the mainstays of musical creativity as well as key elements African Americans must deploy in order to overcome past and present ordeals. While a good share of the African American population would like to forget the atrocities of slavery, many theorists, including bell hooks and Toni Morrison, posit the need to acknowledge past hardships so as to prevent similar situations from arising anew, to correct an erroneous and romanticized account of history, and to proudly assert their *Will To Live*, to use the title of Ben Harper's fourth album.

Ben Harper's recourse to forms and tropes alluding to Spirituals inscribes him in the larger tradition of music as protest and survival. Nowadays, the term "survival" may seem overstated but it hints at the survival of a tradition as well as the survival of the will to make a better world. What many fail to see is that hope is itself a form of resistance. With songs like "Two Hands of a Prayer" (1999) and "In the Lord's Arms" (1999), Ben Harper revives the tradition of Gospel and the Spirituals as providers of hope in the future to come. He thus provides a good example of counter-discourse to contemporary nihilism as defined by Herbert Hill and Neil Nehring.

"Power of the Gospel" (1995) stands out as the epitome of his many tributes to the spirituals, not only due to its undeniable artistry, but because it conflates most tropes of the Spirituals. The long introduction, in which wind instruments prevail, creates a very emotional opening. Its multitude of tonalities and its contrapuntal structure seem to echo different voices, reminiscent of a eulogy, hence restoring forgotten songs and paying tribute to the deceased in a musical process of "rememory." For a while the music stops and the wind instruments disappear so that we can only hear the acoustic guitar. Finally, there is a pause before the words and the wind instruments break through and shatter the silence to resonate so that we listen to the first words of this chiasmic subversive message referring to the power of the Gospel: "It will make a weak man mighty/ It will make a mighty man fall." Not only do those two lines express hope but they also employ the same ambiguity as the one found in the Spirituals. The message of hope empowers the oppressed while it also refers to a reversal of the situation, hence constituting a possible call for uprisings thanks to its inherent polysemy. Through his music Ben Harper insufflates a new breath, while celebrating traditions with many tributes to the Spirituals, the Blues, or any preceding style. When he celebrates "The Power of the Gospel," what he mainly praises is hope, as well as the tradition in which he inscribes himself, the musical tradition of resistance.

While Ben Harper echoes Robert Johnson's Blues of loneliness ("Crossroad Blues") in songs like "Church House Steps," he also echoes the determination present both in the Spirituals and in the Blues, not to fear death in songs such as "Glory and Consequence" (1997) or in the shadow song of the same album "Bye and Bye, I'm going to see the King," which pays tribute to Blind Willie Johnson. Moreover, Ben Harper revitalizes the conceit of the road in songs like "How many Miles Must We March" (1992) "One Road to Freedom" (1995) or "Picture of Jesus" (2002). The road metaphor often appeared in the Blues. It anchored songs in reality, while evoking hope

in spite of obstacles. "How many Miles Must We March" echoes Robert Johnson's "Stones in my Passway": "I got stones in my passway/ And my road seem dark as night [...] Boys, please don't block my road." He asserts his determination. He will go on regardless of what he has to overcome. The road to social equality is long and troublesome. But these artists decided to bring their own contributions to the fight thanks to their songs.

When Ben Harper sings "Excuse Me Mister" (1995), he attacks politicians for their detached and blind attitude. The dehumanized voice prefigures the dehumanizing conditions that a ruling minority imposes on others, which is emphasized by musical breaks. These pauses seem to stop time so as to point to the seriousness of the message while also celebrating specific African rhythmic traditions. Screams and back vocals echoing the wider society enhance the urgency of the situation. However, he does not present himself as a victim. On the contrary, he proudly asserts agency with the repetition of "I'm a Mister too." This song deconstructs the hegemony of white capitalist patriarchy by appropriating its power of naming. Indeed, taking the title "mister" out from the front of the politicians' names, Harper symbolically deprives them of their authority so that he can denounce their exclusivist attitude and expand the title "mister" to the wider community which should be included in the distribution of resources.

In what Andrew Ross describes as an increasingly disenchanting generation in "The Gangsta and the Diva," music becomes the most potent locus of resistance because youth do not believe in politics any longer. Ben Harper can be compared to rappers who "do bring issues and concerns, via their lyrics, to public attention that might not otherwise be heard" (Pough 2004, 29). What makes his music so interesting is that it is both vehement and hopeful: "'I'm not a negative cat,' Harper contends. 'I've been far more militant in my life and it hasn't gotten me anywhere. But I'm down for expressing negativity to get to a positive place'" (*Rolling Stones*, September 16, 1999). His criticism is constructive and his involvement with the community is diverse.

He mostly provides a safe place for women and does not solely endorse a hyper-masculine heterosexual perspective. He actually demonstrates a certain openness and desire to comment on gender and sexuality. Moreover, he seems to be in touch with his feelings and dares revealing weaknesses, echoing Rose's perspective about emotions: "We learn a great deal about ourselves in spaces of emotional vulnerability" (Rose 1994, 155). Although Harper replicates some paradigms of sexist Blues lyrics when he depicts women as treacherous, he also impersonates women to voice their everyday ordeals. In the song "Mama's got a Girlfriend Now" (1992) he transcends what could be called the appropriation of the female voice and body to condemn the attitudes of passive violent men and celebrates nurturing homosexual love. We can see that the homosexual relationship he positively depicts contrasts with the heterosexual one he discards in the same song or in "Widow of a Living Man" (1997), here again voicing women's sorrows and sense of loneliness.

Ben Harper acknowledges the necessity to be humble when speaking for others and mentions his upbringing by women. As already mentioned, he pairs his criticism of women with their celebration. He does not compartmentalize them as victims and offers a wide range of portrayals. He mentions their talking in tongues "In the Lord's Arms" (1999), while in "Gold to Me" (1995) he depicts them in an extremely positive light. While criticizing materialism and superficiality of the larger society, he contrasts inner

riches with temporary superficial attributes of wealth. Instead, he praises human beauty, “not the kind of gold that you wear.” Similarly, “Diamond on the inside” (2002) pays tribute to the beauty of women and the beauty of African American communities. While “Ground On Down” (1995), “Ashes” (1997) and “Glory and Consequences” (1997) express the fear of losing the loved one, which was a permanent threat during slavery, “Burn To Shine” (1999) and “Forever” (1992) reverse the negative portrayals of split families to promote a positive image of families in black communities.

Moreover, his diverse incursions in many musical genres mirror his refusal to stifle people’s identity within labels: “As he has throughout his career, Harper showed no regard for musical boundaries” (Marie Elise St. Léger 1999). Throughout his career, he has repeatedly asserted his refusal of categories. The revolutionary potential of his music is heightened by his attempt to disregard delimitations between musical genres. This decision echoes the concerns of many critics to provide a safe black public sphere that would accept and value its diverse constituents. It is precisely because Ben Harper’s musical influences are varied that his compositions offer a wide public sphere. Like Stevie Wonder he explores a wide array of styles—the Spirituals, Gospel, Blues, Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, Reggae, Rap music, or Heavy Metal. This impressive assortment undeniably expresses a rare openness. It is important to note that Stevie Wonder was not a cross-over. As Arnold Shaw emphasizes, Wonder took position on several issues. Similarly he claims that “The sound of popular music in America until the advent of Rock’n’Roll was forged by three black singers—Ethel Waters, Louis Armstrong, and Billie Holiday. All three are regarded as Jazz and Blues singers, but all three sang the Pop songs of their days” (Shaw 1986, 272).

Some styles reflect their content better than others. Hence, Harper’s incursion in Heavy Metal might stem from a desire to follow Jimi Hendrix’s longing for revolution. The latter indeed said “‘Maybe if we play loudly enough,’ he said, ‘we can shut out the world’” (Shaw 1986, 243). Harper touches on every style, allowing the style to mirror the message of his songs. His incursions into a plethora of musical influences appear as a sign of open-mindedness and richness instead of constituting the badge of a crossover and commercial product. In an interview, he claimed that living in a fragmented world induced him to think that every blending was possible. As such his explorations into country music or other styles that are often associated with “white culture” do not point to a crossover or an attempt to pass, but a conscious effort to mirror and express a desire for both unity and for the respect of differences.

It is precisely because of his refusal of stifling categories and his hopeful but critical portrayal of contemporary American society that Ben Harper contributes to the elaboration of a contestatory discourse, thus opening doors towards an heterogeneous public sphere. He is one of the most promising contemporary artists using music as a weapon. In his compositions he follows the path of Bob Marley and stands against social injustices, while attempting to foster hope as many artists did before through the Spirituals, Jazz, Blues, Rhythm and Blues, or Soul. His songs uphold memories while offering the possibility for a more egalitarian future. What he really offers is a refusal of stifling labeling, a door to a diverse public sphere, not a white bourgeois public sphere, not a black patriarchal public sphere, but an all-encompassing public sphere united by a popular form—music. This analysis is but a stepping stone for further debates on the revolutionary role of music in contemporary society. It merely constitutes one of the many examples that demonstrate that the death of Rhythm and Blues and the tradition

of music of resistance has not yet come. As Ross powerfully advocated: "Let this be a starting point, and not a conclusion, for cultural politics of masculinity that is willing to take diversity as a radical task, and not as a liberal, consensual limit to intolerance" (Ross 994, 166).

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# **“A Shplit Ticket, Half Irish, Half Chinay”: Representations of Mixed-Race and Hybridity In Turn-of-the-Century Theater**

**Gregory T. Carter**  
**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Charles Townsend's 1889 adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* features white actors playing light- and dark-skinned African-American characters, changing degrees of make-up as the script, stage business, or number of available players demands. Thomas Denison's stage directions to his 1895 play, *Patsy O'Wang*, an Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up, stipulates that the alternation of the half-Chinese, half-Irish cook between his two ethnic personas is "key to this capital farce," and that a comedic use of the Chinese dialect is central to this. *The Geezer* (c. 1896), Joseph Herbert's spoof of the popular musical, *The Geisha*, features white actors playing Chinese dignitaries, but also donning German and Irish accents. The white actors in these plays enact different paradigms of hybridity. The actors in Townsend's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a Melodrama in Five Acts embody conceptions of both mixed and unmixed African Americans, freely alternating between each. In *Patsy O'Wang*, the main character's background is central to the story, and the lead actor moves between the two ethnicities by his accent, mannerisms, and politics. Racial mixing is central to the plot of *The Geezer* through Anglo actors who make themselves hybrid by appearing Chinese and appropriating a third accent, rather than the creation of racially mixed offspring.

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Shelley Fisher Fishkin, whose seminar, "At Century's End," served as the impetus for this paper. Besides, this opportunity to engage with turn-of-the-century primary sources at the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Center, she provided the encouragement to pursue this line of research.

The goal of this paper is to connect these three, late nineteenth-century plays, uncovering how depictions of racial mixing worked to bolster the status of free, white males. In particular, this paper asserts that the use of humor defined racially mixed people (as well as their parent racial groups) as worthy of mockery went beyond mere jest and towards the ends of deprivation, whether of employment opportunities, voting rights, or freedom to intermarry. There was more to lose from these plays than mere self-esteem, just as there was more to gain from writing, acting, or watching these plays than mere entertainment. What makes the potency of this humor possible is the versatility of white actors, writers, and audiences. By versatility, I mean the ability to move between racial and ethnic identities, mainly through changes in make-up, costume, mannerism, and speech. This versatility was a result of the racial segregation of the time, since theater groups were all-white. But it also relied on the stereotypes of ethnic groups. Along with the playwrights, the performances pulled from a well of conceptions about different peoples. In regards to race mixing, they also pulled from essentialist beliefs about the transmission of character that the homogeneous audiences could appreciate. Building on Ross Chambers's exploration of how whiteness appears to be un-marked while other racial groups appear to be marked in opposition to whiteness, I pose that actors of this time marked themselves as mixed through their performances. His essay, "The Unexamined," presents a list of social categories that are "unmarked," or free of "deviation, secondariness, and examinability," and considers whiteness the primary of such unburdened categories. He continues,

Like other unmarked categories, it has a touchstone quality of the normal, against which the members of marked categories are measured and, of course, found deviant, that is, wanting... Whiteness is not itself compared with anything, but other things are compared unfavorably with it, and their own comparability with one another derives from their distance from the touchstone. (Chambers 189)

In a way, the white actors of in these three plays considered themselves blank tablets, on which they wrote the signs of racial identity. They mixed whiteness with blackness and Asian-ness, but they also contributed to formulating those racial groups—as well as immigrant white groups—in relation to American whiteness in general.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> While Chambers is speaking of contemporary racial identity, his analysis is helpful in starting to examine the racial order of the late 1800s as well. I wish to avoid the weaknesses of whiteness studies, namely defining "whiteness" too broadly or treating race as a "ubiquitous and unchanging transhistorical force rather than a shifting and contingent 'construction'," as Peter Kolchin warns. Instead, I refer to this set of writings for its attention to an often-overlooked racial identity that many have strived towards throughout United States history. I also thank Neil Foley and John Hartigan, whose writings remind us that there is more than one kind or whiteness at any given time, and that historical and contextual grounding is key to racial analysis. Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, American Crossroads; 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of American History* 89.1 (2002).

What follows is an exploration of the history of stage representations of mixed-race, as well as analyses of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Patsy O'Wang*, and *The Geezer* in relation to mixed-race and hybridity. At first consideration, what joins these turn-of-the-century plays is the complex notion of white actors becoming hybrid. However, what resonates is that these transformations are aggressive maneuvers, exercises of white versatility and license, directed at racial and ethnic others. They echo blackface performances of the earlier part of the nineteenth century and foreshadow future representations of mixed-race throughout the twentieth century.

## **Representations of Mixed-Race**

Representations of mixed-race in literature hail all the way back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, with the intrigue that followed the birth of a dark child to fair parents. In the New World context, whether in the English, Spanish, or Portuguese colonies, a hierarchy of color emerged, favoring those with a greater degree of white heritage. These colonies also invoked biblical justifications for slavery, which was central to their hierarchy. In the United States, the taboo of intimacy with racial others and the "curse of Ham" combined with scientific thought to suggest that offspring of black-and-white unions were illicit, immoral, and unnatural. By the mid-nineteenth century, the racial order in the United States, whether the North or the South, placed whites above blacks and mulattoes, and conferred upon the latter a middling, confused, and doomed situation.<sup>3</sup>

American literature regarding racial mixture reflected social and scientific thought regarding the topic, and the most prevalent mixed-race character was the Tragic Mulatto, who, according to Freda Giles,

served as a readily identifiable symbol of racial conflict, alienation, and insurmountable struggle against an untenable position in American society... The mulatto could be identified with and pitied as the victim of the miscegenation taboo while at the same time be feared as the despised other lurking within who had to be punished, either for trying to sneak into the white world as an imposter or for reminding the black world of the mark of the oppressor. (Giles 63-64)

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading on the history of racial categories, see Clara E. Rodriguez's *Changing Race*. Werner Sollors's *Neither Black nor White yet Both* provides an in-depth exploration of interracial themes in literature. *The Leopard's Spots*, by William Ragan Stanton, traces the establishment of American thought on the position of racially mixed people. Joel Williamson's *New People* gives a history of mulattos' social position from colonial times. Clara E. Rodriguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*, *Critical America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980), Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), William Ragan Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* ([Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

The Tragic Mulatto's catastrophic flaw is not character, ambition, or naiveté, but blood, an expression of nineteenth century ideas about racial hierarchy, the essentialist inheritance of inferiority, and the threat to society that results from miscegenation.<sup>4</sup>

In his 1933 essay, "The Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," poet Sterling Brown points out the racism in several popular representations of African-Americans in literature. In addition to the Contented Slave, the Wretched Freeman, the Comic Negro, the Brute Negro, the Local Color Negro, and the Exotic Primitive, Brown addresses the stereotype of the Tragic Mulatto, which had become popular with both black and white writers. Besides being a melodramatic abstraction that distracted readers and viewers from a history of sexual exploitation, the Tragic Mulatto stereotype also played out along distinct gender lines. Females were often winsome, beautiful, and lovelorn, while males were often aggressive, physical, and rebellious, a result of their nobler, white blood. Where untenable love often led to the females' downfalls, attempts to rebel often led to the males'. The rebelliousness of male Tragic Mulattos also put them at odds with romantic racist ideas of the time that attributed blacks with spirituality, docility, and child-like joy, thus calling into question their Christianity. Both those for and against slavery held these notions, making stereotypes such as the Tragic Mulatto useful for any agenda. While the Tragic Mulatto represented a type with black and white heritage, its focus on essentialism, blood, and social status makes it useful in analyzing characters with other racial heritages. These patterns arise in Patsy O'Wang and The Geezer, as well as Uncle Tom's Cabin, the only play here with mixed, black-and-white characters.<sup>5</sup>

On the American stage, the representation of mixed characters goes hand-in-hand with the history of blackface minstrelsy and its comedic yet aggressive use of white, male actors. In fact, some maintain that blackface minstrelsy, which rose in the early decades of the nineteenth century, is central to understanding all forms of American popular culture, from the spoofs of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to vaudeville's "coon shouting," to early Hollywood and beyond. On one hand, early blackface performers had esteem for the black performers they saw in urban areas like New York, and put much effort into imitating them. On the other hand, blackface minstrelsy rose out of white anxiety regarding competition over jobs, provided a venue for working-class Irish to identify as white, and purveyed negative stereotypes of blacks. The most popular stage example of the Tragic Mulatto was Irish American playwright Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859). Here, Zoe, a woman with one-eighth black blood, is in a doomed affair with her cousin, George. In the end, Zoe and George

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to Sollors's text, Judith R. Berzon's *Neither White nor Black* provides a valuable background on these aspects of the Tragic Mulatto. Judith R. Berzon, *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Also see George M. Fredrickson's *The Black Image in the White Mind* for more background on ideas of romantic racialism. Sterling A. Brown, "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," *Journal of Negro Education* 2.2 (1933): 160, George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, Conn.; Scranton, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press; Distributed by Harper & Row, 1987).

cannot be together, she poisons herself rather than be with another man, and the remaining characters die in a steamboat explosion. The Octoroon incorporates themes of unrequited love, marginality, and even incest that reappear in many Tragic Mulatto texts, and serves as a model to compare other works of American literature concerning racial mixing, whether fiction or drama.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1890's writers such as Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, and George Washington Cable managed to re-work the Tragic Mulatto trope in their works, Puddn'head Wilson, The Wife of His Youth, and The Grandissimes, but the dominant representation of mixed-race on the American stage reflected the same tropes that blackface minstrelsy established. In fact, vaudeville, in many ways minstrelsy's direct descendant, broadened the American stage's dealing with racial identity to include many minority and white ethnic groups. The reliance on stereotype was central to its subject matter, as well as its appeal. In vaudeville,

Asians had odd-sounding languages, bizarre diets, and wore pigtailed; Germans spoke "Dutch," drank lager beer, and ate sauerkraut and sausage; and Irishmen had brogues, drank whiskey, partied, and fought. Exaggerating these ethnic "peculiarities" and minimizing or ignoring their commonplace features, minstrels and their vaudeville successors molded distinct ethnic caricatures, each of which sharply contrasted to all the others. (Toll 92)

These performances helped make America's increasing heterogeneity "comprehensible and manageable" for the audiences. However, in addition to reconciling different groups to each other, Gavin Jones credits the linguistic twists performers used to the "personality-dominated star system of vaudeville," where a recognizable actor's presence and improvisation of the dialect would make the performance his or her own. He argues that vaudeville's antipathy towards proper English was a means to use humor to alleviate the "linguistic insecurities of the large acculturating element of its immigrant audience," while they strove to speak better English from day to day. Likewise, the nonsense onstage helped different ethnic groups communicate to each

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<sup>6</sup> For further reading on blackface minstrelsy, see Annemarie Bean, et al's collection, Inside the Minstrel Mask. Love and Theft, by Eric Lott stands as the pre-eminent text on the subject. Blackface, White Noise, by Michael Rogin, takes a less forgiving stance on minstrelsy, but does extend the discussion into early film history and the assimilation of Jewish Americans. Sollors uses Boucicault's play as a touchstone throughout his Neither White nor Black yet Both, as it exhibits so many prevalent themes in interracial literature. Annemarie Bean, James Vernon Hatch and Brooks McNamara, Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Literature House, 1970), Eric Lott, Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Michael Paul Rogin, Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

other and ease the shock of the “confusingly heterogeneous city” outside (Jones 173-77).<sup>7</sup>

These are solid observations regarding the play of stereotypes in melodramas such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and vaudeville pieces such as *Patsy O’Wang* and *The Geezer*, but most relevant to this paper is the obvious purpose Jones cites: “to demean through laughter the otherness of foreign speech.” Surely, negotiation and acculturation were processes the performers and spectators of vaudeville took part in. But, as an inheritor of blackface minstrelsy’s treatment of race, racial aggression is central to vaudeville’s humor. In her exploration of the autobiographies of ethnic impersonators, Laura Browder addresses the same topic:

While ethnic impersonators may free themselves from the historical trap of an unwanted identity by passing into a new one, their success rests on their ability to manipulate stereotypes, thus further miring their audience in essentialist racial and ethnic categories. (Browder 10-11)

The performers under discussion in this paper were such changelings who may have been escaping from their own identities. They knew how to effectively manipulate essentialist beliefs and shed light on American identities in general. The plays also marked blacks, Asians, mixed-race people, and other immigrant groups as non-white, and thus, subordinate, and associated the actors more closely with their white identity. Michael Omi and Howard Winant would call these plays acts of racial formation, or “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.” This is a “process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized,” as well as contributing to the hegemonic ways in which society is organized (Omi and Winant 55-56). The idea of racial formation, which can offer a framework to many historical situations, is central to understanding the aggression of these plays. Whether consciously or not, these plays were also racial projects, serving needs immediately relevant to those involved.

The treatment of racial mixing in these plays both reflects the participants’ racial identity, and serves as a tool towards the racial identity they wished to achieve. Just as important as their aggressive, racial project against subordinate groups is how the plays associated the actors, writers, and audiences more closely with a free, white, male identity they had varying grasps upon. Matthew Frye Jacobson points out how “laying claim to whiteness” was central in minstrelsy and vaudeville, and suggests that its decline in the 1930s was due to the diminished need for such a “whitener” (Jacobson 12). Likewise, David Roediger claims that minstrels were the “first self-consciously white entertainers in the world,” and that their physical and cultural disguises emphasized their whiteness—that whiteness mattered (Roediger 117). By the end of the nineteenth century and the rise of vaudeville, those of many European ethnicities

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<sup>7</sup> Joyce Flynn also provides a useful history of themes of interracialism in American drama up to the early twentieth century. Joyce Flynn, “Melting Plots: Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Amalgamation in American Drama before Eugene O’neill,” *American Quarterly* 38.3 (1986).

could participate in racial project, whether as performers, authors, impresarios, or spectators.<sup>8</sup>

Omi and Winant's inclusion of "human bodies" in their definition of racial projects is especially relevant to the discussion of drama. One could consider any piece of drama as a racial project, but it is especially true with plays with such racial themes as the three in this paper, considering their emphasis on the actors' presences. Richard Dyer's *White* makes further connections between the idea of race and the representation and organization of bodies:

All concepts of race are always concepts of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race is a means of categorising different types of human body which reproduce themselves. It seeks to systematize differences and to relate them to differences of character and worth. Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences. (Dyer 20)

He goes on to consider how racial mixture is a prevalent threat to the purity of races. United States history offers quite a few projects to regulate race mixture and its progeny, including anti-miscegenation laws, immigration restrictions, and changing racial categories. However, cultural representations are just as central as these other means. Uncle Tom's Cabin, Patsy O'Wang, and The Geezer have provided interpretations, representations, and explanations of mixed-race people comparably effective in regulating and producing race as laws, riots, and pseudoscientific texts. They and contributed to the discourse on racial identity in their own time, and influenced racial representations of the future.

### **Charles Townsend's Uncle Tom's Cabin, a Melodrama in Five Acts (1889)<sup>9</sup>**

The most popular stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1853 novel was George L. Aiken's 1852 adaptation. Despite the omission of abolitionist speeches, the alteration of characters' appearances, and the transformation of minor scenes in the book into dramatic spectacle, Aiken's play remained faithful to Stowe's abolitionist message. However, this ideological faithfulness, as well as the use of white actors to play mulatto characters, revolved around four points regarding the representations of

<sup>8</sup> It is no coincidence that Irish Americans, who often had a tenuous hold on mainstream whiteness, played such important parts in the history of minstrelsy. The same can be said for Jewish Americans and their presence in vaudeville. The binding of these groups with racial minorities onstage echoed the short social distance they had from them. Likewise, maneuverings against/away from racial minorities reflected their own efforts to assimilate into mainstream whiteness. Jacobson's work is especially helpful in understanding these trends.

<sup>9</sup> I first learned of this play through Stephen Rialton's extensive Uncle Tom's Cabin website (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/>). Quite a few of his plays exist in microfilm, in the *English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century* series. Otherwise, it has been difficult finding reviews or a production history of Townsend's plays, or even a biography of Townsend himself. Charles Townsend and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, a Melodrama in Five Acts* (New York: H. Roorbach, 1889).



mixed-race on the American stage: the rebelliousness of male, mixed characters; the sexual currency of female, mixed characters; the essentialist inheritance of traits from each parent group; and marginality from both parent groups. Aiken's was an anomaly because of its great length (six acts and thirty one scenes) at a time when most plays featured performances by singers, dancers, acrobats, and ventriloquists between the acts, as well as a farcical skit after the play. Its great length also called for an abridgement, which Charles Townsend provided through his *Uncle Tom's Cabin, A Melodrama in Five Acts*. Although Aiken's name doesn't appear anywhere in Townsend's text, nearly every line of dialogue and most of the stage business are taken directly from the earlier dramatization. By emphasizing how few actors or set changes it needs, Townsend's acting script presents itself as a comparatively simple production, explaining,

It will be observed that this version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may be played with but twelve persons; and the acts are so arranged that, by doubling as above, no re-changes of costumes or make-up are required. The scenery, too, is very simple. It will be observed that only four changes are required, instead of thirty-one. (Railton)

Published in 1889, Townsend's script may have been intended for use by very small companies or amateur productions well into the 1890s, continuing a proliferation of adaptations that had begun within years of the publication of the original novel. The popularity of these "Tom Shows" coincided with the "moment of minstrelsy's greatest popularity" and provided a venue for the debates of the time to play out on the stage. Stowe's loss of the lawsuit that would have given her recourse over the adaptations meant that they would continue, both with an anti-slavery tone, and a more burlesque, anti-abolitionist one. The latter group emphasized slapstick, stereotypes of blacks, and the idealization of plantation life. The alteration of the original story became so great that by time Stowe saw an adaptation as it toured in New Haven, she had to ask her companion to explain the plot.<sup>10</sup>

However, by Townsend's 1889 publication, slavery had ended and it was no longer an abolitionist play. Well into the twentieth century, Stowe's work continued to be a controversial item, especially since the end of the Civil War and emancipation remained unresolved topics. Post-war adaptations of the novel were themselves modes of reception of the novel—as well as means of remembering the war. From this perspective, dramatizations such as Townsend's operated in three main ways. First, they helped reconstruct a public memory of the war period, aiding viewers in making sense of it, much like Vietnam movies do for us today. Second, they allowed viewers to re-work Stowe's melodrama into a different shape, de-emphasizing the spirituality, abolitionism, or cruelty of slavery according to the desires of the author and audience. Townsend's version, especially as a radical abridgement, works on this level. Third, the dramatizations contributed to a theme of reconciliation between different sections of the nation. In this way, *Uncle Tom* becomes a sacrificial lamb for the wrongs of the nation;

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<sup>10</sup> Stowe also believed in the expatriation of blacks and the eventual extinction of mulattos. Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* 191, Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas, Tex.: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985) 64-86.

the reunions of various characters become the reunion of the North and the South; and Shelby's attempt to re-purchase Tom becomes a proxy for viewers' best intentions regarding slavery—a sort of reconciliation without contact or reparation.

As performed by Townsend's company in 1889, James T. Smith played the role of George Harris. The play opens with George revealing his plans to escape to his wife, Eliza. He laments his treatment as a slave, questions the authority of his master, and wishes that neither he nor his young son had ever been born, protesting,

I have been careful, and I have been patient, but it's growing worse and worse—flesh and blood can't bear it any longer. Every chance he can get to insult and torment me he takes. He says that though I don't say anything, he sees that I've got the devil in me, and he means to bring it out; and one of these days it will come out, in a way that he won't like, or I'm mistaken. (Townsend and Stowe 8)

This is a typical mix of yearning and melancholy seen in male Tragic Mulattos. The claim of “the devil in me” also reflects romantic racialist ideas about the spirituality of blacks and the restlessness of whites. As a typical nineteenth-century Tragic Mulatto, he has inherited both qualities from his parent races.

Later, George encounters the slave hunter, Gumption Cute, in the woods, and reveals that he is the runaway slave whom Cute is looking for.

George: Where are they? I am George Harris.

Cute: Oh, git out! You ain't a nigger.

George: I am. Coursing through my veins are a few drops of African blood which make me a wretched slave—a thing to be kicked and cursed; aye, to be branded like a galley slave. Look at that. (shows hand with letter “H” marked on back)

Cute: I swan to gunner! It makes my blood run cold. And yet, you don't talk like a slave.

George (proudly): No, because I am a freeman. I have said “master” for the last time to any man.

Cute: But, gol darn the luck, you may be nabbed! The cusses air after you now. (Townsend and Stowe 13)

George is fair enough to pass as white, but also speaks and behaves in an acceptable manner. Following Sterling Brown's observations of the Tragic Mulatto, these characteristics make him appealing to white audiences.

The audience was readier to sympathize with heroes and heroines nearer to themselves in appearance. The superiority wished upon the octoroons was easily attributed to the white blood coursing in their veins, and the white audience was thereby flattered. On the other hand, the unflinchingly

tragic outcomes supported the belief that mixture of the races was a curse. (Brown 161-62)

Likewise, they would find his rebellious behavior and divided personality an acceptable contribution to his pending downfall.

Smith also played the character, Sambo, one of Legree's slaves, who brings his master the lock of hair Uncle Tom had kept as a charm, does Legree's bidding disciplining and fetching fellow slaves, and performs a little song and dance for Legree when he needs entertainment. This character most closely resembles Sterling Brown's Contented Slave stereotype. However, Sambo only appears in the last act of the play, before George's return. According to Townsend's stage direction, he wears a "blue cotton shirt, straw hat, rough trousers, no coat," while George appears in either a business suit or a Prince Albert suit, with stylish accessories. The difference in physical appearance between these two characters conforms to stereotypes of mixed and unmixed African Americans, and raises George to a more sympathetic level; George desires freedom to correct the splitting up of his family, and Sambo is despicable in his service to the cruel Legree. What is interesting is how Smith—or whoever else may act in Townsend's adaptation—was able to move between these two characters. He became the mulatto, George Harris, then the contented slave, Sambo, only to return to being the mulatto again. He moved from a character with some white blood, to one probably of a darker complexion, and back to the more pure one. In other words, he moved away from the good attributes of whiteness, and back towards them.

In Townsend's original cast, Anne Vincent played Eliza, who urges her husband to be careful and patient, but also manages to escape and catch up with him. Within an exchange between Shelby and the slave trader Haley, the script takes a moment to discuss her fair appearance:

Shelby: That's Eliza's boy. I couldn't let him go; it would break her heart.

Haley: Stuff! Niggers ain't got no hearts.

Shelby: But Eliza is as white as your are.

Haley: She's a slave, ain't she? And don't that make her a nigger?  
Wal I reckon. (Townsend and Stowe 10)

She may have a white complexion, but her status as a slave defines her racially. Vincent also played Legree's slave, Cassy, who is also of mixed descent. Cassy appears in the last act to scold Legree for his treatment of Tom:

Cassy: Simon Legree, take care! (LEGREE lets go his hold) You're afraid of me,

Simon, and you've reason to be; for I've got the Devil in me!

Legree: I believe to my soul you have. After all, Cassy, why can't you be friends with me, as you used to?

Cassy (bitterly): Used to!

Legree: I wish, Cassy, you'd behave yourself decently.  
(Townsend and Stowe 39)

Cassy, like George, claims to have the devil in her. This exchange also hints at Legree's sexual exploitation. However, Townsend's script eliminates her connection to Eliza, as well as much of her background. Those familiar with Stowe's novel may have been able to fill in these blanks, but for others, Cassy's lack of depth brings her closer to a popular stereotype. As Deborah Gray White writes,

One of the most prevalent images of black women in antebellum America was of a person governed almost entirely by her libido, a Jezebel character. In every way Jezebel was the counterimage of the mid-nineteenth-century ideal of the Victorian lady... The image of Jezebel excused miscegenation, the sexual exploitation of black women, and the mulatto population. (White 28-29)

This stereotype persisted through Reconstruction, and echoes in some representations of black women to this day. At the time of Townsend's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, viewers would have been able to connect the insinuations of intimacy with Legree with what White later writes of as the Jezebel (White 61). The fact that Cassy has white parentage makes this a representation of a mixed-race character as well. It suggests that Eliza's own mother was a Jezebel, available to exploitation, and that Cassy may have inherited these qualities from her own, black mother. She cannot help it; this libidinity is in her blood, just as her white father passed on his omeriness. Furthermore, whether Townsend's version reveals that she is Eliza's mother, it holds her in opposition to the daughter. With her husband and child, her good manners, and her spirituality, Eliza is much closer to the Victorian ideal than Cassy, who differs from her on each of these points. Like Smith, Vincent moves from more sympathetic character, to a lesser one, and back. Physically, she transforms from Eliza, who Townsend describes as wearing, "Tidy house dress. Handkerchief about head. Red cheeks and lips," to Cassy, who Townsend describes as "Cheap cotton wrapper. Hair unbound. Face pale. Very fierce and vindictive in manner." Both of these actors' movements allow for the viewer to sympathize with them—as well as their fairer characters—more.

Reviews for Townsend's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are nonexistent, as it was one of multitudes of Tom Shows in the late nineteenth century. However, Thomas Gossett provides insight into the reception of the play during that period. He asserts that after the Civil War, adaptations of Stowe's novel became so popular, with traveling companies and established theaters bringing the play to hundreds of thousands of people by the end of the century. During this time, "it so frequently pandered to popular taste that its antislavery theme was weakened and its black characters became increasingly stereotyped." Performances increased the degree of spectacle by adding live dogs, fake blood, and gold chariots. Other, smaller productions featured as few as three actors playing all the roles. Even though critics and those involved with the book and play during the war period decried the productions for their low artistic value, they increased in popularity in the North, and eventually the South. Gossett suggests that

“there is a world of indirect evidence that the play did not cause audiences to reflect on the meaning of slavery or the role of the free black in society” (Gossett 367-87).<sup>11</sup>

The same was true for Townsend's version. It ends with Tom's death, a chorus of “Poor Old Slave,” and (if possible) a tableau of Eva in heaven. The text of the last scene gives no indication of slapstick, leaving melodrama as the driving force of the scene, and the play overall. Most likely, viewers of Townsend's Uncle Tom's Cabin were moved by the familiarity of the story, and its sentimental elements. Given this melodrama, the story of George and Eliza is central to Townsend's Uncle Tom's Cabin. They open the play, and disappear until near the end, contributing to the work's arc. Building sympathy with their story is central to the unity of the whole play. Towards this end, the author pulled from popular, literary, and scientific conventions regarding mulattos and mulatto characters. These two characters provide a framing device that relied on contemporaneous conceptions of race, character, and essential inheritance.<sup>12</sup>

The appeal of dramatizations of Stowe's novel lay in their flexibility. They may have been racist or anti-racist—or anti-racist enough help viewers come to terms with recent history. They could be comedic or melodramatic. The use of blackface could be burlesque, or a concession to segregation and casting mores of the time. As Stephen Railton writes regarding the differences between Aiken's and Townsend's plays, “It is interesting to see, however, or rather not see, the parts of Aiken's version of Stowe's story that Townsend feels can be left out” (Railton). The violence throughout could be slapstick or poignant, depending on the direction and performance of the particular cast at hand. The versatility of the play makes it impossible to determine where it stands in relation to these extremes. Overall, this vagueness was central to the popularity of late nineteenth century Tom Shows. The plays, just like their cast, could take on any number of markings to change the overall work.

### **Thomas Stewart Denison's Patsy O'Wang, an Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up (1895)**<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Changes in the story's denouement—including the Union army's appearance, Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, or Uncle Tom's ascent to heaven—had different effects on the play's reception, as well as its role in shaping public memory. Legree's whipping of Uncle Tom could become slapstick (with Tom rising to do “a good ol' plantation dance” before dying), chilling melodrama (with fake blood pouring over Tom's head and shoulders, or a sporting exhibition (when black boxer, Peter Jackson, played the role). Children and adults who saw the play were quicker to remember the spectacles than the underlying message.

<sup>12</sup> In the end, George and Eliza end up in Canada, rather than Africa, as Stowe intended. Rather than being the one who buries Tom before Shelby arrives, in this version George reappears in the last scene, accompanying Shelby in his effort to re-purchase Tom.

<sup>13</sup> Robert G. Lee's *Oriental* was the first place I had heard of Denison's play. I was able to find a copy of it in Dave Williams's collection, *The Chinese Other*, but have had difficulties finding reviews or a production history. Denison founded T.S. Denison and Company, which continues to publish educational materials. During the early years of its existence, though, it mostly published vaudeville sketches and dramatic readings, many of which he authored. A number of these are also available on microfilm, through

A large number of Chinese immigrated to the United States between the start of the California gold rush in 1849 and 1882. With the onset of hard economic times in the 1870s, other immigrants began to compete for jobs traditionally reserved for the Chinese, including agricultural labor, railroad construction, and low-paying industrial jobs, resulting in dislike and even racial suspicion and hatred. These sentiments led to anti-Chinese violence and pressure for the cessation of Chinese immigration into the United States, especially in California. Ultimately, the pressure resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), which virtually ended Chinese immigration for nearly a century.<sup>14</sup> During these years, another legacy of minstrelsy arose that expressed the anxieties of white workers: “yellowface” performance, or the use of white actors for Asian roles. As Robert G. Lee writes,

Yellowface minstrelsy also contained and displayed the racialized Chinese body. To the extent that the moral ambiguities and anomalies signified by the Chinese body posed a danger of moral contamination, the yellowface minstrel provided the sanctioned space through which to view the unknowable. (Lee 43)

Yellowface minstrelsy shared with its predecessor the use of makeup to mark white actors, the reliance on stereotype, and the racial formation of both whiteness and otherness. However, it differed in two main ways: the themes of moral contamination that were central to perceptions of Asians, and the foreign exoticism that surrounded the Chinese. While blackface minstrelsy was based on a racial group pressed into servitude that had been in America since the 1600s, yellowface minstrelsy filled in the blanks regarding an exotic, foreign group that increased in numbers only after the Civil War.

Lee also gives seven images of Asians in American popular culture that portray them as alien bodies and threats to the nation: the pollutant, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, the gook, and the coolie. Some of these are twentieth century constructions, but the last came about in the 1870s and 1890s as the U.S. working class was forming. Ascribing the derogatory name coolie to migrant Chinese laborers provided white workers with a perceived threat to their employment opportunities, and an “other” to act against, sometimes violently. Additionally, politicians used this threat to rally white workers together in the name of “free labor,” as opposed to “coolie labor” or “nigger work” (Lee; Roediger; Saxton). Once again, a racial minority group found itself

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the English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century series. Thomas Stewart Denison, "Patsy O'wang, an Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up," The Chinese Other, 1850-1925: An Anthology of Plays, ed. Dave Williams (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> For further reading on the political use of anti-Chinese sentiment, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the bundling of all Asian ethnicities, see the following: Andrew Gyory, Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), Ronald T. Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans, Updated and rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

the adversary to a racial project that played out on the streets, in the ballots, and on the stage.

Thomas Stewart Denison's 1895 comedy, Patsy O'Wang, an Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up, is a prime example of yellowface performance and its use to portray mixed, Asian characters, just as blackface portrayed mixed, African-American characters. This play tells the story of Chin Sum (aka Patsy O'Wang), a half-Irish and half-Chinese man who works in the home of Dr. Henry Fluke and his wife. Denison writes in his director's notes, "Whiskey, the drink of his father, transforms him into a true Irishman, while strong tea, the beverage of his mother, has the power of restoring fully his Chinese character" (Denison 126-27). This premise drives the rest of the play. Dr. Fluke believes that he is privy to this information, and when Patsy becomes drunk, terrorizing one of his patients and becoming generally unmanageable, he hatches a plan to force-feed black tea to the cook. However, Patsy is fully cognizant of the effects of whiskey and tea upon his behavior; its implementation is what brought him to the United States in the first place. He dupes the Flukes into believing that their plan has worked, but announces in the end that he has decided to stick with whiskey and his rowdy, Irish character. Now in the "land of opportunity," Patsy decides to go into politics, making what the Flukes's Irish servant, Mike calls, "a split ticket, half Irish, half Chinay." The play closes with Patsy singing a song, to the tune of "Pat Molloy," retelling his life story and his future plans.

A fool for luck, the proverb says, a fool O'Wang must be,

But now I'm turned true Irishman, bad cess to all Chinees.

And in this free Ameriky I'll have a word to say;

I'm goin' into politics, I'll drink no more green tay.

And for the moral of this tale, I'm sure it's very plain:

When tipples stir your blood too much, you'd better just abstain.  
(Denison 148)<sup>15</sup>

On one hand, the resignation to whiskey offers a poignant twist to the story, an answer to the extreme position of the time's temperance movement, and a spoof of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was published in 1886. But on another, what really comes through are notions of essentialism and genetic transmission of character and culture.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Also notable is his lack of a discernable accent, unlike Mike, or his Chinese alter-ego. Denison, "Patsy O'wang, an Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up," 148.

<sup>16</sup> See the following for more on the re-gendering of theater, rehabilitation of temperance movement, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union's cultural production: K. Austin Kerr, "Organizing for Reform: The Anti-Saloon League and Innovation in Politics," *American Quarterly* 32.1 (1980), Richard Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences," *American Quarterly* 46.3 (1994), Alison M. Parker, "Hearts Uplifted and

Similar to the treatment of George Harris in Townsend's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Patsy's physicality. Much of the play involves his torment of Dr. Fluke's patient, their chasing him through the house, and his seeming ability to drink gallons of tea. Here, Dr. Fluke interacts with the strong-willed Patsy:

Patsy (determinedly): It means you can't fill me up with tea and turn me back into a Chinaman. They did that trick in Hong Kong!

Dr. Fluke (crossly): What are you now? Irish or Chinese?

Patsy: Irish forever.

Dr. Fluke: But confound you man, I hired you for a Chinaman. A bargain's a bargain.

Patsy: That bargain is off. (Denison 147)

Here his rebelliousness and desire for freedom connects him to male, Tragic Mulatto characters and essentialist notions of racial inheritance. However, Patsy rejects the roles that people assign him. He also asserts his Irish-ness even more so for others to accept him as such. He has decided to subscribe to the *herrenvolk*, free, male variation of whiteness emergent in nineteenth century California—and similar to the identity that the other projects in this paper serve. He may even take up an anti-Chinese platform as his political career advances, bringing that group the “bad cess” he sings of.<sup>17</sup>

Patsy provides an interesting case, because of the agency that he exercises. Unlike George and Eliza, he can decide how he would like to identify himself racially. He sides with his Irish character, a luxury the mixed characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do not have. This is because, even though these two works are contemporaneous, they address different concerns. The question of Chinese exclusion (presumably in California) is much different than the place of mulattos in the South. Thus, the drama Denison creates in response is much different. In any case, Patsy O'Wang presents another opportunity for the audience to sympathize with a likeable, mixed character striving for independence, influence, and a more advantageous racial identity, at the ends of the other racial projects of this time. The main character's embrace of assimilation foreshadows debates about ethnic identity and the choices of mixed-race people well into the twentieth century.

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Minds Refreshed": The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Production of Pure Culture in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of Women's History* 11.2 (1999).

<sup>17</sup> Similar to the comparative approach of this paper, Tomás Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* explores the variable racial environment present in late nineteenth century California, one that presented made the particular experiences of blacks, Asians, Mexicans, and Native Americans different, but that resulted in a system of white, male dominance. Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).



## Joseph W. Herbert's *The Geezer* (c. 1896)<sup>18</sup>

The *Geisha* or, a *Story of a Tea House*, composed by Sidney Jones, with lyrics by Harry Greenbank and based on a book by Owen Hall, was a popular, British musical first produced in 1896, running longer in London than any single Gilbert & Sullivan play. It tells the story of a British naval officer stationed in the orient who falls in love with a geisha. His fiancée learns of their developing relationship, comes to Japan, and disguises herself as a geisha to win him back. A local overlord aims to disperse the geishas and possess the new arrival, but the British entourage rescues her. In the end, the naval officer marries his fiancée, the geisha marries an Asian man, and a French woman marries the overlord. While Hall was careful to ensure the accuracy of the portrayal of Japanese life on stage, with Japanese people attending rehearsals and extensive consultation with the Japan Society of London, its treatment of racial types surely reflects its times, sustaining the fascination for all things oriental. As one critic of a recent re-recording of the operetta writes,

The work smacks of stuffy late-Victorian colonialism, and is suffused with attitudes and lyrics that could cause Asian associations to riot today. The main comedy part is a Chinese laundryman/teahouse manager saying “wellee” instead of “very”—the sort of thing that presumably caused great mirth from the time of the Boxer Rebellion. (Traubner)

However, his review admits that it is terribly catchy, despite its condescension upon Asians, its attempts at “oriental” music, and its borrowing from Gilbert & Sullivan. Still, even though *The Geisha* lags behind *Madama Butterfly* and *The Mikado* in popularity today, it survived as a perennial favorite in Central Europe decades after its 1896 debut (Traubner).<sup>19</sup>

*The Geezer* (c. 1896) is a parody of the popular musical by a young actor and dramatist named Joseph Herbert, commissioned by popular vaudeville performers, Joe Weber and Lew Fields, who owned and managed Weber and Fields Music Hall on Broadway between 1896-1904. As such, it treats the interactions between Chinese, Americans, and British in a more burlesque fashion. At the center of *The Geezer* is the Chinese ambassador, Li Hung Chang's, mission to the U.S. to find a wife for his nation's

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<sup>18</sup> Besides a brief online biography of Herbert (<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/whowaswho/H/HerbertJosephW.htm>), very little background information on the playwright or his other works is available. The play did appear at Weber & Fields' Broadway Music Hall during the week of October 26, 1896, along with five other vaudeville acts. Otherwise, there are just two copies of *The Geezer* in existence. Joseph W. Herbert, "The Geezer," (c. 1896).

<sup>19</sup> At the same time the Sino-Japanese War had recently ended, with Japan's decided defeat over the Chinese and increased influence in the Far East. European powers proceeded to “carve up the Chinese melon,” a process that echoed their partitioning of Africa. Along with America, they began to scramble for what was called “spheres of interest,” resulting in a policy in which commercial opportunities were equally available to all European powers and the political and territorial integrity of China remained untouched. These events contributed to the increased interest in things oriental, as well as the presence of various western powers in *The Geisha* and *The Geezer*.

emperor. In the states, he encounters Lord Dunraving, a British naval officer; Weary Watkins, a former U.S. general who has landed on hard times; and an assortment of sailors, ladies, and entertainers. A number of love triangles unfold between various combinations of white men and Chinese women, as well as Chinese men and white women. It turns out that Li Hung Chang plans to marry the American heiress, Nellie Fly, a striving journalist who has agreed to marry the emperor for the sake of getting an exclusive interview. The American and British men pursue Li Hung Chang across the Pacific, and, by dressing Weary Watkins as the emperor, spoil his plans.

What is remarkable about the play is its mixture of voices, costumes, and bodies. Following Herbert's directions, all of the actors were native, white Americans. However, his notes call for them to take on accents of European ethnic groups while playing Chinese roles.

Two-Hi was played by a German Comedian [Sam Bernard], who made up like a Chinaman and put on a chin piece, such as a Dutchman would wear. As the parts were specially written for this special company under my stage direction, I suggested that the part be played as a composite character; a Dutch Chinaman.

Li Hung Chang was played by an Irish Comedian [John T. Kelley] who made up exactly like Li Hung Chang, but spoke in Irish dialect. (Jones 173)<sup>20</sup>

By "German Comedian," Herbert means a native, white American playing German. Likewise, "Irish Comedian" implies the same regarding someone playing Irish. What resulted was a performance where white, American men dressed as Chinese, but spoke with stereotypical Irish and German accents. Hybridization and racial mixing took place on the bodies of the actors. Through his role in *The Geezer*, Sam Bernard became an English, German, and Chinese hybrid. Likewise, John T. Kelley became English, Irish, and Chinese.

Besides the appearance of Li Hung Chang and Two-Hi, there are two other moments where hybridization upon white actors' bodies becomes central. First is the eighth song of the score, led by the British naval officer, Lord Dunraving, where he sings of sailors of different ethnicities, imitating each. He moves from Chinese, to Irish, to German, to African American, to Italian. The lyrics he sings in draw upon stereotypes of each group, but otherwise are nonsensical, subordinate to the song's rhyme scheme. In the last stanza of the song, Dunraving returns to being English and professing his love for the heiress, Nellie Fly:

When the Anglo-main

Meets Miss Bankroll-Jane

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the use of immigrant stereotypes and dialect in vaudeville, see the following: Holger Kersten, "Using the Immigrant's Voice: Humor and Pathos in Nineteenth Century 'Dutch' Dialect Texts," *Melus* 21.4, *Ethnic Humor* (1996), Carl Wittke, "The Immigrant Theme on the American Stage," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39.2 (1952).

He simply says, "My dear, my dear"

You have money to burn

I cannot earn

Can't I be your fireman?

I have no fear.

These lines project sincerity and bravery as characteristically English traits (Herbert 16-19). The second moment is when the former American general, Weary Watkins, enters, disguised as the Chinese emperor. This is the final stage in the Anglo-American plot to rescue Nellie Fly. He quickly puts Li Hung Chang under arrest and hands the situation over to Lord Dunraving.

Interracial relationships are central to the story of *The Geezer*. From the beginning, British sailors have a thing for Chinese women. The wandering minstrel, Kantanker, is in love with O Le Mosa Sam, a Chinese prima-donna. Nellie Fly agrees to marry the Chinese emperor, a plan that Li Hung Chang sabotages so that he can marry her himself. However, in the end, not one interracial relationship comes to fruition. Li Hung Chang closes the New York tea houses that the British sailors visit. Kantanker is absent when Weary Watkins puts O Le Mosa Sam under Dunraving's protection. Nor are there any characters of mixed descent. The hybridity takes place solely on the bodies and voices of the white, male performers, which they use to rush across the globe, disciplining Chinese men, and rescuing professional-minded, white women.<sup>21</sup> This is an adventure for the viewers to enjoy, but it is also decidedly imperialist, chauvinist and anti-miscegenation.

Reviews of *The Geezer* have been hard to come by, but secondary writings on dialect writing may shed light on the audiences' general attitude towards what they were seeing. For example, Carl Wittke says, "American audiences saw these inaccurate stage immigrant characters and heard these dialects so long that many accepted them as completely authentic, although character traits, overplayed for comic effect, obviously emphasize idiosyncracies and deviations from the general folk pattern." Wittke acknowledges that the stereotypes formed people's perceptions of different groups, but credits audiences with being able to discern their exaggerations. He also notes how each minority group aimed to "clean up the caricature" as they gained more social and economic security (Wittke 232). Holger Kersten takes a position similar to Gavin Jones's regarding the humor of vaudeville's ethnic stereotypes: "What is important here

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<sup>21</sup> The science fiction film, *Blade Runner* (1982), presents a model of hybridity much like that in *The Geezer*. What is remarkable here is how the replicants, whose body parts come from scientists of all races, stand in for a mixed-race population. Their white appearance masks the racial undertones of the story, and expresses how phenotype does not always express genotype. Like the nineteenth century Tragic Mulatto, the replicants also possess a catastrophic flaw beyond their control: namely, imperfect engineering.

is that the collective laughter created a sense of community in the audience and elevated the comedians to a plane where they became symbolic figures of displacement and alienation. They dramatized the typical immigrant experience of struggling to find one's place in the new environment" (Kersten 10-11). These positions are certainly useful in understanding the use of "Irish" and "Dutch" comedians, but *The Geezer* presents another level of complexity with its lampooning of the Chinese. The history of Chinese exclusion and America's eagerness to join in "carving the Chinese melon" make racial difference relevant to the audience's reception of Herbert's play. Many have made observations regarding ethnic groups' use of humor while in the process of assimilation, at the same time overlooking how physical appearance and the racial hierarchy in the United States have made some less versatile than their white counterparts. Audiences for *The Geezer* may have felt camaraderie with the Irish and German elements of Herbert's comedy, but antagonism towards the Chinese elements.

## **Conclusion**

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a *Melodrama in Five Acts*, *Patsy O'Wang*, an *Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up*, and *The Geezer* are works by three different authors, featuring different types of mixed-race or hybrid characters. However, the versatility of the white actors involved is the characteristic all three of these plays share. These white men and women are able to take on various markings and move between different degrees of hybridity. On one hand, these maneuvers fulfill the needs of immigrants and others in negotiating the increasingly heterogeneous life of the late nineteenth century. On the other, they are also aggressive and often derogatory towards racial and ethnic others. This duality is comparable to the "love and theft" involved with the wellspring of nineteenth century popular entertainment, blackface minstrelsy. One could easily call this dynamic "laugh and theft" for its use of comedy to create solidarity at the expense of another's civil rights. After all, there is a difference between laughing at oneself and laughing at another who was segregated out of the venue. The works by Charles Townsend, Thomas Stewart Denison, and Joseph W. Herbert reflect ideas of racial hierarchy, the essential transmission of traits, and the pathology of miscegenation from that form of entertainment—as well as past social mores and scientific writings on racial character. Their plays were what Michael Omi and Howard Winant would call "racial projects," or historically-situated efforts to regulate, re-create, and produce race.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Patsy O'Wang*, and *The Geezer* have also provided interpretations, representations, and explanations of mixed-race people. The marking of white bodies to signify mixed-race or hybrid characters was as effective in regulating and producing race as any anti-miscegenation laws, race riots, or scientific texts. They contributed to the discourse on racial identity in their own time, and influenced racial representations of the future. Not only did these plays deal with hybridity, racial mixing, and other minority groups, but they also dealt with whiteness, providing a means for those involved to "lay claim" to their whiteness. Through the masked omnipresence of whiteness, these plays emphasized the non-whiteness of blacks, Asians, mixed-race people, and other immigrant groups, and associated the actors more closely with their own white identity.

The trend of white actors playing mixed-race characters by "blacking" or "yellowing up" continued well into the twentieth century. Some examples include: Ethel Lloyd as Jane in *A Florida Enchantment* (1914), George Siegmann as Silas Lynch in

Birth of a Nation (1915), Jennifer Jones in 1955's *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Angie Dickinson in 1957's *China Gate*, and Shirley Maclaine as Nicole Chang in 1966's *Gambit*. Minnie Driver's performance in *Sleepers* (1996) as the Irish-Puerto-Rican Carol Martinez is one example of this Tanface casting from the 1990's. Whether because of negligence or casting restrictions, these performances deny the issue of racial mixing and normalize mixed-race people into a more acceptable racial identity.

However, in the context of their own times, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Patsy O'Wang*, and *The Geezer* point to more than the versatility of white performers and the aggressive racial projects of turn-of-the-century drama. They reveal the rigid status of mixed and minority people during that time. For example, as Scott Herring writes of W.E.B. DuBois's efforts to discard the minstrel mask from black people through *The Souls of Black Folk*,

In the absence of any real communication between the races—an absence DuBois seeks to fill—the minstrel show defined what blacks were for most of its audience. What was the black “reality” created by the average minstrel show? Its characteristics are still well known, perhaps because traces of the minstrel form survived so long in the motion picture industry and showed a remarkable resiliency in live theater. (Herring 7)

The same was true for mixed-race people, Asians, and other minorities. Minstrel shows, stage melodramas, and vaudeville pieces of the time participated in a “one-sided exchange” in which entertainers took signs of other groups and created identities for them (as well as themselves). However, the social structures of the time made it difficult for minority groups to do the same. It would not be until decades later that the necessary communication concerning representations would develop.

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## **RIFTON FINNS: AN ETHNIC ENCLAVE IN ULSTER COUNTY, NEW YORK**

**Mika Roinila,  
Bethel College**

### **INTRODUCTION**

When you begin to consider the Finns of New York State, there are two obvious foci that have received the majority of attention in the ethnic literature. The presence of some estimated 20,000 Finns in New York City during the 1920s provided a large population with its myriad cultural, religious and social organizations and activities. The heyday of the large Finnish population has passed, and as of 2000, a total of 3,466 Finns lived in New York City.<sup>1</sup> This number remains the highest population within the state. Due to this large population size, much has been written about their existence, for example, in Brooklyn and Manhattan.<sup>2</sup> A second significant concentration of Finns within the state has always been the Finger Lakes region in western New York State. Here, in cities and towns such as Van Etten, Spencer, Millport, and Ithaca, activities and organizations have existed for decades and have also received academic interest.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is one location that has not received attention since the publication of the 1926 *History of Finnish-Americans* by Salomon Ilmonen.<sup>4</sup> In this publication, the town of Rifton or Ulster Park in the county of Ulster is listed with the names of some 13 Finnish individuals. There is nothing rare in this list of names, as Ilmonen also lists the names of Finnish immigrants in numerous other locations throughout the state and across the country. What is significant, however, is the fact that some seventy years later, the concentration of Finns in Rifton ranks seventh in the entire state of New York. Neighboring High Falls, only some eight miles west of Rifton, has the fifth highest concentration of Finns in the state (Tables 1 & 2, Map 1). While the absolute number of Finns in these two villages is very low, their proportion within the entire village population is more significant. And as it turns out, the historical presence of the Finns in this part of New York was even more significant in the past compared to the present.

My interest in this Finnish concentration began as a result of my relocation to the region in 2000. As I have lived in nearby Tillson, NY and my children have attended elementary school in Rifton, we discovered the existence of streets with Finnish names. Suominen's Road and Tervo Drive have obvious Finnish connections. As my daughters participated in the local Brownies program, I came across a plaque at the Rifton Volunteer Fire Station which honored former firefighters of the village. On this plaque, the names of several Finns were listed. Who were these Finns? Where did they come from? Where did they live? Where are their descendents? These were some of the questions I began to ponder as I discovered that Finns had once lived in this small village.

## METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, virtually nothing has been written about the Rifton Finns since 1926. With the names provided by Ilmonen in his text, I scoured the local telephone directories. I sent letters to possible Finns in the region, with limited success. Some

**TABLE 1. TOP 10 PLACES ACCORDING TO ABSOLUTE NUMBER, 2000**

Place	Total Pop	# of Finns	% Finns
New York city	8,008,278	3,466	0.04
Yonkers city	196,086	139	0.07
Ithaca city	29,006	136	0.47
West Islip CDP*	29,105	131	0.45
Irondequoit CDP	52,346	119	0.23
Albany city	95,658	117	0.12
Buffalo city	292,648	111	0.04
Syracuse city	147,326	106	0.07
Coram CDP	34,979	94	0.27
South Hill CDP	6,099	93	1.52

\* CDP – Census Designated Place, defined as a statistical entity that serves as a statistical counterpart of an incorporated place for the purpose of presenting census data for a concentration of population, housing, and commercial structures that is identifiable by name, but is not within an incorporated place.

Source: US Census Bureau – Census 2000, *American Factfinder* - <http://factfinder.census.gov>

**TABLE 2. TOP 10 PLACES ACCORDING TO PERCENTAGE  
CONCENTRATION in 2000**

Place	Total Pop	# of Finns	% Finns
Van Etten village	572	44	7.69
Spencer village	733	39	5.32
Millport village	297	7	2.36
Bemus Point village	342	8	2.34
<b>High Falls CDP</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1.98</b>
East Ithaca CDP	2,292	42	1.83
<b>Rifton CDP</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1.72</b>
Forest Home CDP	1,018	17	1.67
South Hill CDP	6,099	93	1.52
Shinnecock Hills CDP	1,798	27	1.50

Source: US Census Bureau - Census 2000, *American Factfinder* - <http://factfinder.census.gov>

responded positively and were excited to help. I also contacted the local town halls of Esopus and Rosendale to examine property maps to determine where the Finns may have lived. I also was able to gather historical census information and additional family names from the 1920 and 1930 US Censuses available online at *Ancestry.com*. Additional material was located from historical censuses available at the University of Virginia Library and through Ellis Island Passenger Arrival Records.<sup>5</sup> Local newspaper coverage of several major events that included the Rifton Finns were found in the *Kingston Daily Freeman* as well as the Finnish-American newspaper *New Yorkin Uutiset*. Several interviews with local and not-so-local Finns and their descendants took place between 2003-2005 to provide more detail to the material being collected, and finally, photographic evidence of the Finns in the region were obtained. These include photos of individuals and families, houses and structures, as well as events and activities.

## **HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT**

Rifton, NY is located along the Wallkill River, which flows northward and joins the Roundout Creek before draining into the Hudson River at Kingston. The town of Rifton is situated some 95 miles north of New York City, and has an old history. It was first settled in 1709 by the Dutch who arrived in the New World. This is the birthplace and childhood home of the reknown Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), who was a former slave, abolitionist, preacher and advocate of women's rights. Rifton was well known for a carpet mill that was built in 1889 and employed some 200 men, women and children. Situated along the banks of the Wallkill, the mill burned down in 1923. Rifton is also known for the construction of Sturgeon Pool Dam which was completed in 1923 and provides a large reservoir of water that caused the town of Saltpetreville to be drowned. Saltpetreville, in turn, was well remembered as a major manufacturer of gunpowder during the US Civil War for the Union forces.<sup>6</sup>

It has been impossible to determine when the first Finns arrived in the region. Ilmonen does not mention this in his book, and census information is limited. It is

known, however, that there were no Finns in the region in 1910. By 1920, however, there was a total of 42 Finns living in 7 homes. In 1930, a total of 95 Finns lived in 19 homes. And while nearby High Falls had a higher concentration of Finns in the year 2000, it should be mentioned that in 1930, Rifton was home to 82% of all the Finns who resided in the *entire* Ulster County. Thus Rifton is most important in this study (Table 3).

**TABLE 3. FINNISH CONCENTRATION IN ESOPUS & RIFTON, NY 1920-1930 & 2000**

Census Year	Known Finnish population in Rifton	Total population of Esopus	Total population of Rifton	% Finns
1920	42	3,913 <sup>1</sup>	~186	~ 22.58 %
1930	95	4,167 <sup>1</sup>	~198	~ 47.97 %
2000	8	9,331	465 <sup>2</sup>	1.72 %

Source: 1920 and 1930 US Census data obtained via correspondence with US Census Bureau Library, Washington DC October 28, 2005. 2000 Census Data from *American Factfinder* - <http://factfinder.census.gov>

<sup>1</sup> Until the 1980s, Rifton was part of the Town of Esopus, and thus statistics separating the population of Esopus and Rifton are not available.

<sup>2</sup> In 2000, Rifton was recognized as a Census Designated Place (CDP), and thus is identified with a distinct population apart from the former association with the Town of Esopus.

It is unfortunate that no past population data is available for the village of Rifton independent of the Town of Esopus. Contact with the US Census Bureau Library in Washington DC indicates that it is impossible to know the population of Rifton alone. Contact with local Esopus Town Historian Florence Prehn also verifies this fact.<sup>7</sup> However, some estimates can be made. The total population of Esopus in 2000 was 9,331 individuals. With Rifton added to this figure, the total population of the region formerly known as Esopus was 9,796 individuals. The population of Rifton represented a 4.75% share of the total population of the formerly designated settlement of Esopus. If this percentage share is used to estimate and establish the population of Rifton for 1920 and 1930, and in turn the concentration of Finns in the village, we notice that the concentration of Finns is highly significant. The proportion of Finns in Rifton for 1920 may have been as high as 23% and in 1930 it may have been nearly 50% of the village population. This concentration may well have been likely, and much of the following information, such as school enrollments, supports this concentration.

The earliest arrival to the US involved the immigration of a 50-year old Mary Eversti (also mentioned by name by Ilmonen), who had immigrated to the US in 1880, and was a border in the home of Iisac Suomela.<sup>8</sup> The source region for the majority of these migrants appears to have been the New York City area. Interviewees moved to the area from Brooklyn and Jersey City.<sup>9</sup> The roots in Finland range from Karelia in the east to Oulainen in the west.<sup>10</sup>

According to town property maps, most of the Finns located themselves several miles away from the town center. Finns found property for sale along Hardenburg Road

and Old Post Road. Some built their homes along Church Hill Road (Map 2). In the 1920s, Rifton was considered a

*“one horse town. It consisted of a grocery store, a gas station, a family run hotel for a few summer residents and a bar. There also was a volunteer fire department and bus stop for Kingston and New Paltz. Our farm was two miles from the village, so we either had to ‘hoof it’ or take the horse and buggy, as no one in the family had an automobile”<sup>11</sup>*

Family size was usually quite large. According to the 1930 Census, the Suominen and Hernesaho families, for example, had ten children in each family. The Salmi family had nine family members. The Hilden family had 7 members, and the Rimmi family had six members. There were also some single men and families with only a few children. In all the families, the 1920 and 1930 censuses also indicates that all of the children had been born in the United States, whereas all the parents were born in Finland. It was also common for a few of the Finnish families to host boarders from New York city, mostly boys, who were sent by their parents to “enjoy the good clean atmosphere of country living. Sometimes the parents would stay for awhile themselves”.<sup>12</sup> In 1930, a total of eight boarders, all under the age of ten, lived with Alexandra Kesti who managed such a boarding home.<sup>13</sup>

Hilma (Suominen) LaLima of Kingston (b.1918) recalls the Old Stone School of Rifton, where at least half of the students were Finns. The Suominen family, with 10 children, made up a large part of the student population! On one occasion, Hilma was made to stand in the corner of the school by a pot stove for speaking in Finnish. The children did not know English until they began school. From the 1920s, Hilma recalls her father Jalmar taking the kids to school during the winter with a horse and buggy when the weather was bad. The distance of 3 miles from the Suominen homestead to the school was usually by foot.<sup>14</sup> Finnish children and several parents also got involved in extracurricular activities, such as the 4-H Club which was led by Finnish Doris Wiren in 1930.<sup>15</sup> The strong presence of Finnish children in school reflects the total population of Rifton during these years, and provides support for the estimated statistics noted earlier in this paper.

According to the correspondence and interviewees with several current and former Rifton area Finns, carpentry was the main occupation in the area.<sup>16</sup> The 1920 and 1930 Census information verifies this as well. In 1920, of a total of seven families in the region representing 42 individuals, a total of seven individuals were carpenters. Thus, 64% of the eleven Finns able to work in 1920 were involved in carpentry. Among the heads of household, four were carpenters followed by three sons. There were also two laborers, one builder and one horse farmer. For the carpenters, house construction was their main industry, but there were also three carpenters, a builder and a laborer who worked on a shipyard and dock.<sup>17</sup> At least one Finn also worked on the Dashville Dam construction (completed in 1920), which is tied to the Sturgeon Pool construction that was finished in 1923.<sup>18</sup> In 1930, a total of 15 carpenters were found from the working population of 25. Thus, 60% of the Finns able to work in 1930 were involved in this trade. Other occupations in 1930 involved a store manager, two farm managers, equipment man, mechanic, farm helper, nurse, servant, laborer and a stenographer (1930 US Census, Esopus, Ulster Co.NY). In the 1940s, some found construction

employment on the Lackawana Tunnels, which were to carry water from large reservoirs to the residents of New York City.<sup>19</sup>

Activities among the Rifton Finns included sauna nights, sewing bees, support for the Finnish war efforts during WWII, as well as church events. One of the identifying features of the Finn is the sauna. Local non-Finnish residents have mentioned to me that they recall the sauna smoke rising into the air every weekend throughout Rifton! Indeed, many of the Finns visited the homes of countrymen who did have a sauna. According to Linda Ritner,

*"we grew up going to the Saturday night saunas at Kestie's house and we have used every sauna in Rifton at one time or another. I know where they are and can remember them vividly."*<sup>20</sup>

Today, the saunas are falling apart and are no longer in use, but they are still visible in the woods and backyards of the former Finnish homes. And if the sauna is not a separate building, it has been built into the basement, such as the very thick concrete walled basement sauna of Raymond Tresvik, who moved to Rifton after 1927.<sup>21</sup>

Sewing bees were also organized by the Finnish women, and during the 1940s, the local Finns sent their support to the Finnish Winter War effort. According to newspaper accounts, "this Rifton group has knitted many pairs of mittens for the Finnish soldiers and have laid plans for much effective work to be done in the future". According to the paper, the "Rifton Finnish Colony" at the time had a total of 22 families, and a total of 35 individuals who were participating in this effort.<sup>22</sup> During the 1940s, Finns also got involved in the war itself in large numbers. According to the History of Rifton, a total of 22 Finnish surnames out of a total of 83 individuals are listed in the Rifton Honor Roll with names of those who served their country in WWII. This represents 26% of all Rifton residents!<sup>23</sup> An example of this service was Victor Tresvik, who joined the US Air Force and flew missions over Germany in WWII, where he shot down four enemy planes.<sup>24</sup>

Some interviewees also indicated the occurrence of occasional church services that were held locally at the Rifton Methodist Church on Church Hill Road, as visiting ministers would provide communion services and even confirmation classes. The Kingston Evangelical Lutheran Church was also used for confirmation ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> However, the number of church going Finns appears to have been quite small. There is also some indication that a small group of Finns supported the Apostolic Lutherans, and met at the homes of some of the local Finns. Once a year, a visiting pastor from Michigan arrived to perform a special meeting.<sup>26</sup> There was also an attempt by some Finns to open a co-operative store on the Main Street of Rifton, but after a brief period, this did not succeed. The building that allegedly was the site of the co-op, is today the site of the Rifton Post Office.<sup>27</sup>

One of the best known locations within the entire Rifton/High Falls region is Williams Lake. This is the site of a well known resort lodge established by a Finn named Gustaf Williams in 1929. Maintained and owned to this date by grand-daughter Anita Williams-Peck, the resort has attracted many Finns from New York City, including members of the Finlandia Foundation who attend a midsummer picnic at this location

every year. Support for the resort among the Finns is still evident, although not as much as in the past.

[The lodge] “catered to everybody. Mostly the singles crowd. Many more Finns came here then [in the past], because of my grandfather I think, and then my father. But as the years go on, even locally, nobody thinks of us as being anything but American. When I tell people that I am Finnish, they say “really”, you know. Unless they know my grandfather, and some of the old-timers do... my grandmother and grandfather definitely had accents. They weren’t American and came from another country.”<sup>28</sup>

While the Williams Lake Resort is known by many of the Rifton Finns, it appears that only a few of them ever visited the resort, which also means that they know little about the origins of this important landmark. Similarly, according to Anita Williams-Peck, she is not aware of the Finnish enclave in Rifton, and never heard about it in conversations with her father or grandfather.<sup>29</sup> There appears to be an apparent lack of knowledge about the lodge among the local Finns in this area, which has been explained by some as a result of the division of class among the Finns. The well-to-do Finns, such as the proprietor of Williams Lake Resort and other New York City Finns who visited his resort did not associate with the lower working class Finns who lived in the Rifton area.<sup>30</sup> Today, while no Rifton area Finn visits the resort, Williams Lake Resort still attracts Finnish-Americans from New York City to attend a mid-summer picnic sponsored by the Finlandia Foundation.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1950s, Finnish activities had declined, but some new Finns arrived in the region and some activities were still maintained. This includes Kerttu Barnett (b.1924 in Sortavala), who moved to the United States in 1957 and arrived in Rifton in 1960, and was amazed that she had accidentally moved into a Finnish community. In her own words, the realization of Finnish neighbors is noted below:

“My family, my two children and my husband moved from New York to the countryside and we rented this house, and the next morning I went outside – it was summertime – and there was along this hill up the road a big farmhouse and somebody was yelling there ‘Mother, where is my horse?’ – ‘Äiti, missä on hevonen?’ I thought that I was hallucinating. How could I hear Finnish right like that? They were real, true Finns and that’s how we were introduced into this community of Finn. And then we started...I and some others, we started to have a coffee party every month in each house, and everyone bought something to eat.”<sup>32</sup>

Some 20-30 people would attend the coffee parties during the late 1950s and 1960s, but little by little the events declined and disappeared. Aside from the coffee parties, people attended saunas as well, but with age the older generation stopped having these events and the younger generation did not carry on with these traditions.<sup>33</sup> The younger generation has also left the region. While there are still a few who have remained, a large number have moved away. Some of the destinations are nearby, but some include destinations as far as Vermont, Minnesota, Arizona, California, and Washington state.<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

To discover a Finnish ethnic enclave in Rifton was a surprise to the author. To find the whereabouts and the history of these people in the region has been an intriguing investigative process which has helped me gain a better understanding of the impact the Finns made in this region of New York. The evidence of their existence is easy to find, once you look for it and know where to look. Many of the Rifton Finns have found their final resting place in the nearby Rosendale Cemetery. Several of the old Finns have their graves here, which can easily be identified as you walk along the many rows of tombstones. The dilapidated homes and saunas of the Finns are also evidenced in the landscape. Although there are still a few original settlers and their descendants who have remained and still live in their original homes, the sauna smoke that rose into the air in the past and made the Finnish presence known to the non-Finns is no more. The enclave that developed in the 1920s is still here, and it has been a pleasure to share their story with the readers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> US Bureau of the Census, American Factfinder, Census 2000 located at <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed March 30, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Some literature dealing with the Finns of New York State include Ewert Blomberg, *Brooklynin Suomalaisen Ewavnkelis-Luteerilaisen Seurakunnan Historia*. Hancock, Michigan, 1904; A.Loeb, "Finnish Life in New York", in *New York Magazine*, Feb.4, 1940, New York, 1940; Wilho Hedman, "Katsaus Suur-New Yorkin Suomalaisten Historiaan", in *Siirtokansan Kalenteri 1944*, Duluth, 1943, pp.81-88; Frank Blomfelt, "August Willandt: En Emigrantmissionär i New York", in *Sanct Olof*, Marienhamn, 1964, pp.67-73; and Esko Tammola, *Uuden Maan Rakentajat: New Yorkin Suomalaisten Tarina*. Otava, Helsinki, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Two works on the Finger Lakes Finns include William Høglund, "Finnish immigrant farmers in New York 1910-1960", in O.Fritiof Ander (ed.), *In the Trek of the Immigrants*, Rock Island, 1964, pp.141-155; and Melissa Ladenheim, *The Sauna in Central New York*. New York, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> The works of Reverend Salomon Ilmonen are very significant in early Finnish-American history. Ilmonen published several works which examine the Finnish settlements across the country, and he mentions Rifton in *Amerikan Suomalaisten Historia III: Yhdysvalloissa ja Canadassa Olevat Suomalaiset Asutukset*, Hancock, Michigan, 1926, 344 p.



<sup>5</sup> University of Virginia library located at <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> - accessed December 18, 2004 and The Ellis Island website at <http://www.ellisland.org/> - accessed December 18, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> *Map of the Rifton Valley*, a Rifton Land Corporation map (no publication date) obtained in Fall 2002 from Boy Scout Troop #17, Tillson, NY 12486.

<sup>7</sup> Florence Prehn. Conversation Oct. 19, 2005 in Rifton, NY.

<sup>8</sup> Data obtained from the 1920 US Census, Esopus, Ulster Co.NY accessed through Ancestry.com (December 19, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> Interviews included local residents Hilma LaLima (Suominen), June 21,2004, in Kingston, NY; Raymond Tresvik, June 29, 2004 in Rifton, NY, and an anonymous interviewee May 21,2004 in Rifton, NY.

<sup>10</sup> Noted in Salomon Imonen, 1926.

<sup>11</sup> Much information was received from Eva Mertz (Suomela) of Port Charlotte, FL who was interviewed July 18, 2004 in Tillson, NY.

<sup>12</sup> Mertz, Eva Mertz (Suomela). *And One Was Missing & Retirement Can Be Fun*, Unpublished manuscript, October 2003, p.9.

<sup>13</sup> US Census, 1930, accessed through Ancestry.com (December 19, 2004)

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Hilma LaLima (Suominen), June 21,2004, in Kingston, NY.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Devine, *History of Rifton*. n.p., n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Correspondence with Albert Aho, July 26, 2004, Big Lake, Minnesota.2004; interview with Kerttu Barnett, November 14, 2004 in Ulster Park, NY; interview with Hilma LaLima (Suominen), June 21,2004, in Kingston, NY 2004; interview with Eva Mertz (Suomela), July 18, 2004 in Tillson, NY; correspondence with Linda Ritner, June 26, 2004, South Burlington, VT.; and interview with Raymond Tresvik, June 29, 2004 in Rifton, NY.

<sup>17</sup> 1920 US Census, Esopus, Ulster Co.NY., accessed through Ancestry.com (December 19, 2004)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Hilma LaLima (Suominen), June 21, 2004, in Kingston, NY.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Correspondence with Linda Ritner, June 26, 2004, South Burlington, VT.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Raymond Tresvik, June 29, 2004 in Rifton, NY.

<sup>22</sup> *Kingston Daily Freeman*, "Finnish-Americans at Rifton Lend Hands to Cause", Jan.27,1940, Kingston, NY.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Devine, *History of Rifton*. n.p., n.d.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Raymond Tresvik, June 29, 2004 in Rifton, NY

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous interviewee May 21,2004 in Rifton, NY.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Anita Williams-Peck, Nov.8, 2004, in Rosendale, NY.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Conversation with Dr.Richard Impola and Helvi Impola, February 12, 2006 in New Paltz, NY.

<sup>31</sup> The Finlandia Foundation is the most important private source of support for Finnish culture in the United States. The New York City Chapter was organized in 1960, and with numerous chapters across the country, it actively supports, preserves and promotes Finnish culture. The New York Chapter has visited Williams Lake regularly for many years and has mentioned it on their website. For more information, see <http://www.finlandiafoundation.org/> (accessed March 27, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Kerttu Barnett, November 14, 2004 in Ulster Park, NY.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Paula Bojansky, November14, 2004, in Ulster Park, NY.

<sup>34</sup> Correspondence with Albert Aho, July 26, 2004, Big Lake, Minnesota.2004; Correspondence with Eva Mertz (Suomela), August18, 2004. Port Charlotte, FL; and correspondence with Linda Ritner, June 26, 2004, South Burlington, VT

## **Memories of Home: Reading the Bedouin in Arab American Literature**

**Anissa J. Wardi  
Chatham College**

**Katherine Wardi-Zonna  
Gannon University**

In an urban neighborhood with a large Jewish population near my home, there is an Arabic restaurant. Name, menu and ownership mark its ethnic identification, yet its politics are otherwise obscured. An American flag, permanently placed in the restaurant's window since 9/11, greets American customers with a message of reconciliation. I am one of you, it says: come; eat; you are welcome here. In a climate where "Arabs, Arab-Americans and people with Middle Eastern features, everywhere are struggling to merely survive the United States' aggressive drive to 'bring democracy to the Middle East'" (Elia 160) and where the hostility toward Arab Americans is manifest in covert "othering" and aggressive acts of surveillance, detainment and bodily harm, the steady bustle of my neighborhood eatery is of consequence.

Looking beyond the commerce taking place in the restaurant, the temporary community established there suggests Arab hospitality, which, as the speaker of Naomi Shihab Nye's "Red Brocade" reminds us, is predicated on food. Recalling an old adage, the poem begins: "The Arabs used to say, / When a stranger appears at your door, / feed him three days / before asking who he is, / where he's come from, / where he's headed. / That way, he'll have strength / enough to answer. Or, by then, you'll be / such good friends/ you don't care" (40). This stanza epitomizes the role of food in Arab culture as that which unifies, makes friends out of strangers and invites the other into the sanctuary of home. In this way, as patrons enter my neighborhood restaurant, permeated by the sounds and smells of the Arab world, I question whether this arena and, more generally, the preparation and serving of food, are untouched by national politics. Ordering Arabic cuisine, digesting the food of the "other," suggests cultural intimacy, a shared understanding that perhaps unwittingly permits entrance into an Arab homespace, as food remains an objective correlative of family, culture, and geography.

This topography of home is not lost on Arab customers who frequent the restaurant. For these patrons, the establishment provides a safe space where food and language transport them to their native homelands. Acting as a bridge, a conduit to the “old country,” my neighborhood restaurant provides insight into the manifold ways in which the portable elements of home, though seemingly depoliticized, are imbued with deep cultural and historical resonances.

Home occupies both a literal and conceptual space in Arab American letters. Arab American writers’ focus on the home can be understood in the context of postcolonial literature insofar as the politics of home, geography and displacement figure strongly in the tradition. Modern day Arab diasporic identity hinges upon alliance with Palestinians, exiled, displaced and uprooted. In fact, the speaker of Mohja Khaf’s poem, “I Can Scent an Arab Man a Million Miles Away,” recounts the many “good things” for which Arab men, as a collective, are noted: it is not surprising that the first trait is to “be politicized about Palestine / from the third grade, at the latest” (29). Solidarity with the Palestinians as a connective of Arabs worldwide is a thread of political unification which structures, in part, the modern Arab self. Thus, the demolition of Palestinian homes and villages and the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza represent a dismantling and violent erasure of Arab identity as the Arab world’s sense of home is not deterritorialized, but is firmly placed in various nation states of the Middle East, a geo-political conflation which recurs throughout the writing of Arab Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Given the colonization of the Arab world, including Western occupation and its legacy, and the continuation of imperial wars, it is fitting that Arab American texts are centrally concerned with issues of citizenship, exile and homelands. In *Home, Maison, Casa*, Johnson offers the following: “An architectural as well as psychological, geographical as well as social concept, ‘home’ figures as a deeply personal and highly political theme underlying literary and critical narratives of empire. From imperial narratives which cast ‘home countries’ against colonial peripheries to changing narratives of national identity that have occurred in the aftermath of empires, ‘home’ emerges as a powerful if contested ideological force” (13). Because Arab American writers are themselves immigrants (some of whom are fleeing from war-torn countries) or first and second generation descendants of immigrants home, for them, is an unstable affair. Such writers are removed from their native land and residing in what is, at times, inhospitable terrain. That exile and displacement are the prisms through which we enter Arab American homelands reveal that home is not an uncomplicated space of sanctuary. Rather, in this literary geography, home is often paired with mourning, loss and death. Arab Americans’ treatment of home is in line with other migrant literature insofar as “home figures as an absence”; in fact, “homesickness” is a hallmark of this literary expression (qtd. in Johnson 16).

While the Arab world recurs as a familial or ancestral location and is often embedded as a memory of home, it is Arab Americans’ tenuous placement in America, the new home, that preoccupies much of the tradition. In Joseph Geha’s *Through and Through: Toledo Stories*, the characters’ desire for home is tempered with the realization that their American domiciles are haunted with absences. Further, and perhaps more significantly, the home of their memories is impossible to reestablish in this new land, and thus home becomes a site of loss even as it promises a new beginning. In *Through and Through*, it is not always geography that defines home;

rather, certain characters, through their performance of cultural rituals, transcend temporal and geographic separation in order to become spaces of home; these characters are at home with themselves, and provide home for others. In this way, the Arab American literary tradition is in line with migrant literature which “articulate[s] a sense of home amidst homelessness by building on familial and communal ties” (Johnson 17).

Wars and other foreign policy decisions have precluded many immigrant and native born Arab Americans from making pilgrimages to ancestral lands. Because these journeys, or longed-for journeys, “hinge on the notion of return,” they can be labeled as journeys of repatriation, a term which “refers to the return of a person or an object to her/its place of origin” (Johnson 20). That many Arab American writers are not literally returning to an originary place, but constructing the Middle East as the collective site of Arab origins, underlies the complexity of home as a constellation of inherited memory, family traditions and nostalgic longings. The many texts of home in Geha’s short story collection—food, drink, language and dance—are material, ritualistic connections to the old country and their survival is due, in large part, to their portability. In this way, the very image of the Bedouin, one who literally carries home, provides a cultural lens for reading Geha’s *Through and Through*. While this short story collection is the site of analysis in this paper, the image of the Bedouin is a useful paradigm for reading Arab American creative expression more expansively.

Although greatly mythologized in both the Western and Eastern imaginary, the Bedouin has and continues to be a very real presence in the Middle East.<sup>ii</sup> The very name Bedouin, translated to mean “dweller of the open land,” or “desert dwellers” or, as they are customarily referred, “people of the tent,” embodies movement.<sup>iii</sup> Shepherds and camel herders, these nomadic peoples move either seasonally or constantly. While many Bedouin tribes move together, some customs regarding kinship structure realize loss with movement: “Separations from loved ones are a fact of life. . . . For women, the most difficult separations, after their own from their natal families at marriage, are those from their children. Daughters marry and leave to live with their husbands’ families. Their daughters’ departure is hard on mothers, who lose companionship and household help” (Abu-Lughod 283). Currently there are Bedouins, for example in the Egyptian Western Desert, who are in the “process of sedentarization,” and thus live as a minority “on the fringes of settled life” (Abu-Lughod 281).

Historically, the terms Arab and Bedouin were interchangeable. Throughout the pre-Christian and early Christian period, the term Arab signified Bedouin, and thus referenced “the nomadic as distinct from the sedentary population” (Lewis 4). Indeed, “[f]or Muhammad and his contemporaries, the Arabs were the Bedouin of the desert, and in the Qur’an the term [Arab] is used exclusively in this sense and never of the townfolk of Mecca, Medina and other cities” (Lewis 5). Further, the Bedouin’s language is regarded as “the purest form of Arabic,” as they “have preserved more faithfully than any others the original Arab way of life and speech” (Lewis 5). In this way, Arab American writers resituate the Bedouin as a synecdoche of a collective Arab past. As immigrants or children of immigrants, it is fitting that Arab American writers look to the Bedouin, a figure of movement, as an ancestral antecedent to migration and survival.<sup>iv</sup>

Bedouin life was based in hardship: severe desert climates and the dangers presented by warring tribes made survival a daily concern for these nomadic peoples. Despite the laborious conditions of early Bedouin life, the community was steeped in poetry and other verbal arts: "In harsh nomadic conditions, unfavourable to arts like painting and sculpture, language was cherished as the supreme medium of creative expression. The poet was the soul of the tribe; he was its mouthpiece, its propagandist and its chronicler. . . . Although writing was not unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs, few of these poems were written down at the time. They were composed, sung and memorized at tribal gatherings and at great poetry contests" (Musallam 25).<sup>v</sup> That these ancestors engaged in the art of bearing witness through the word further underscores their relevance for Arab American writers.<sup>vi</sup> As inheritors of this tradition of movement, hardship and creation, Arab American writers, implicitly and explicitly, resituate the Bedouin as a touchstone of their creative expression. Since Bedouin tribes are loyal to family and proud of ancestry, expressing "their cohesion and loyalty in the idiom of common ancestry" (Hourani 107), Arab American writers employ the figure of the Bedouin as a unifying ethnic marker.

Two Arab American poems, Saladin Ahmed's "Poem for Countee Cullen" and H.S. Hamod's "Moving" offer the Bedouin as the archetypal ancestral figure. Ahmed's poem signifies on Cullen's "Heritage," with Cullen's "jungle" paralleled with Ahmed's "desert." Being "three centuries removed," the speaker of "Heritage" questions the role that Africa plays in his life, with the refrain "What is Africa to me?" Although Cullen does not outright claim Africa as his native land, the speaker of Ahmed's poem insists that Africa is "home" to Cullen, just as the Middle East is to him, maintaining that "Neither of us / Has ever been there / For both of us / It is home." Since neither has seen their forebears' land, the speaker implicitly cites ancestry, a kind of blood memory, as access to these homelands, concretized in the repetition of the words "remember / remembering." Whereas Cullen hears "the echoes of tribal rhythms" in his memory, Ahmed "find[s] Bedouin." This simple, yet powerful utterance at once places Ahmed's home in a collective Arab past and also provides a key to the displacement in which the speaker is steeped. The poem, finally, is a reverie on marginalization and dislodgement, as both speakers—African American and Arab American—situate home as a site of longing.

The Bedouin metaphor is used more comprehensively in H.S. Hamod's "Moving," which registers the pain of homeland separation and cultural disinheritance. The poem is an elegy for a lost way of life, that of the speaker's father and grandfather. The speaker's children, living in American, are displaced from their Arab culture, illustrated in their inability to speak Arabic. Indeed, as Savory notes, "the most important formative factor in creating the Arab consciousness is the Arabic language, which is the bearer of their culture, the vehicle of their history and the sacred tongue of the religion of the majority" (qtd in Nobles and Sciarra 4).<sup>vii</sup> Without access to Arabic, the children are, in fact, disinherited from the Arab world.<sup>viii</sup>

Like the speaker of "Heritage," the speaker of "Moving" did not grow up in the Middle East, but nevertheless considers it home: "it is when we are at sea this way / that I sometimes think about a life / I've never known except for a little while / in some old country of time that I remember my father and / grandfather / talking about, when I kept wanting to go out to play baseball." In conflating the father and grandfather with the "old country," the speaker deftly claims the Middle East as his native soil.<sup>ix</sup> He also gestures

toward America with the image of himself as a boy waiting to play baseball while his family reminisces about the Arab world. His youthful desire to play baseball can be read as his assimilation into American culture. Indeed, baseball is the quintessential American game and pairing that with his family's stories of the Middle East indicates not merely a bicultural identity, but a cultural chasm, which, for the speaker, is growing more acute with time. As a father now, the speaker yearns for the strong family bonds prevalent in the Arab world, "where at least the whole tribe moved *together*." The emphasis on "together" marks another contrast to the family in America, in which they are described as "lost / shipmates crying. . . for help." The title of the poem, "Moving," has a layered meaning, evoking his family of origin's move from the Middle East to America, his children's move away from him and thus their Arabic roots and, more subtly, the title pays homage to the nomadic lifestyle of his "father and grandfather and their grandfather / before them." Implicitly, then, Hamod gestures towards Bedouins, as those who did not move *away*, but moved *together*.

That the speaker is uneasy with his physical separation from his children bespeaks a particular Arab worldview, namely that "Arabs do not see themselves primarily as individuals but rather as members of groups, especially family groups" (qtd. in Nobles and Sciarra 7). The term " 'worldview' comes from the German *Weltanschauung*, meaning a view or perspective on the world or the universe 'used to describe one's total outlook on life, society and its institutions'" (Koltko-Rivera 3). Amplifying the term, it can be said that "in the largest sense, a worldview is the interpretive lens one uses to understand reality and one's existence within it" (Koltko-Rivera 3). As an Arab, he subscribes to the unity of family; in fact, as Ali, Liu and Humedian note, "many Muslim societies tend to be collectivistic, and individualism and individuation from families is discouraged" (7). Arab societies are "built around the extended family system, creating a strong bond among blood relatives. Family is the first priority, exceeding obligations to work—an attitude understood by Arab employers, who will excuse an employee's absence or tardiness if family obligations or duties are involved" (Nobles and Sciarra 7). Put another way, "Arab families are 'woven as tightly as a prize carpet' indeed, 'for Arab Americans. . . the family is the self'" (qtd. in Zoghby 22). This is particularly true in Bedouin society, where "the social unit is the group, not the individual. The latter has rights and duties only as a member of his group" (Lewis 24).

Clearly, cultural and ethnic beliefs are inextricable from one's worldview and thus the speaker of "Home" is caught in a liminal space, positioned, as he is, between his Arab worldview of family and an American worldview, which encourages independence and individuation. The multiple registries of movement literalize the speaker's tensions, as the family's immigration to America has resulted in the father's inability to live in accordance with his inherited worldview.<sup>x</sup>

Movement is the prism through which we enter Geha's short story collection, *Through and Through* as generations of Arabs move to and within America. In the collection, Arab immigrants and their offspring struggle to create home in Ohio, an important state in the history of the nation, as it marked the demarcation line between slavery and freedom during the antebellum period. Before the Fugitive Slave Act, a captive could claim physical freedom from bondage when crossing the Ohio River. It is apt, then, that the Yakoub family settles in a historic landscape of trauma, hope and new beginnings.<sup>xi</sup>

The short story collection pivots on the axis of death. In “Monkey Business,” the protagonist Nazir’s young wife passes, as does the street bum, Asfoori. In “News from Phoenix,” Charlotte’s unborn baby dies, and her husband, Erwin Klein is sick; the “news from Phoenix” will be of Erwin’s death. Uncle Elias’ beloved wife Maheeba dies in “And What Else,” followed by a grief so profound it renders the old man silent; less than a month later, he, too, dies. And in “Holy Toledo,” Nadia and Mikhail’s young mother dies and the father abandons the children to live with their grandmother. Two stories in the collection, “Almost Thirty” and “Something Else” are narratives of mourning, where the protagonists struggle to make sense of their lives after their fathers’ deaths. In the former, which Salaita rightly asserts is the most “complex story in *Through and Through*” (431), the narrator chronicles his life through death: “Uncle E and his wife died first. Then Jiddo Braheem’s wife died of her old age. Aunt Yemnah died in Cleveland some years after that. The Greek Sophanakoluros died in rest home in Florida without my ever meeting him. George’s parents, Aunt Anissa and Uncle Najeeb, had a baby boy when it was past their time, and the child died without ever seeing light and nearly took his mother with him. Uncle Najeeb died when George was still in grade school. Habeeb’s first son was killed in the early days of Vietnam. Then in 1964, when I was almost thirty, my father died” (39). Death reverberates throughout the collection as members of the Yakoub family struggle to reconstruct their lives in the face of numerous losses. This is particularly difficult given the fact that these characters are also cut off from their homelands of Lebanon and Syria and thus each death registers a further loss of home. Literal deaths, then, have metaphoric implications in Geha’s *Through and Through*, as immigration is itself encoded as a death experience. Indeed, in the titular story of the collection Geha provides a definition for the phrase “through and through,” which references a kind of death with a handgun: “One round blew off his watch. The other eleven were what coroners listed as ‘through and through’—in then right out the other side; clean, but they leave less evidence” (Geha 119). This descriptor provides a key to understanding the many losses surrounding the immigrant experience. Because immigration is seen as a volitional act and popularly narrated, especially during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the time period when the collection takes place), as a move toward obtaining the “American Dream,” the pain of dislocation is silenced; that is, the deadly blow leaves no evidence. Geha’s work provides evidence for the fatal injury; in short, the casualties of immigration are concretized in literal deaths.

Arab immigrants have had a vexed relationship to U.S. citizenry, one which is complicated by their racial ambiguity: “Arabs in the United States fit uneasily into a racial schema that identifies individuals and groups as either ‘black’ or ‘white.’ The many studies on Arab American ethnicity and racial formation show that historically Arab Americans were first considered ‘not white,’ then ‘not quite white,’ then legally ‘became white’” (Hartman 145).<sup>xii</sup> This liminal social and legal positionality, like all racial inscriptions, is based on the myth of racial polarities; nevertheless, given the hierarchies and privileges associated with whiteness, it follows that early Arab settlers desired the coveted racial designation. Here, it is tenable to review Arabs’ assimilation into the larger American landscape, a shifting, complicated and ever evolving relationship that in recent years has been beset by wars and political tensions between Arabs’ native land and their current homeland.

Paradigmatically, Arab American history is understood in three immigration waves, which are coterminous with diminishing allegiance to U.S. assimilation. The first wave of immigration, 1880-1924, was dominated by people who identified as Christians,



Greek Orthodox, Syrians and Lebanese. As Ludescher avers, “Generally hardworking and law abiding, the [unskilled and largely illiterate] immigrants enthusiastically embraced American values” (93). The second wave of immigration, following World War II, from 1945-1967, consisted of educated professionals who were “more likely to be familiar with the nationalist ideologies that permeated the Arab world” and unlike the earlier settlers, these immigrants, “staunchly identified themselves as Arabs” (94). The third wave of immigration paralleled the second insofar as the settlers were far more politicized, “imbued with anti-colonial sentiment and Arab nationalist ideas” (94). This latter immigration, beginning in 1967 and continuing today, consisted of Muslim Lebanese and Palestinian who were displaced after the 1967 war with Israel. With this recent wave of immigration, a larger, more unified Arab American community has formed as “descendants of first- and second-wave immigrants joined the newly arrived countrymen in support of Arab concerns” (Ludescher 94). As Hartman offers: “long before September 11, 2001, issues on which Arab Americans expressed common ground with African Americans and other people of color have included: racial profiling; detention and murder for political organizing or even for the suspicion of political organizing; and the lynching of Arab Americans in the US South” (146).<sup>xiii</sup> From a historical perspective, Arabs have assimilated more readily into the United States; however, the higher percentage of Muslim immigrants, which Joseph rightly argues is “identified as a religion of color” (259), and the ongoing military strife between the United States and the Middle East has problematized the integration of Arabs in America.

In *Through and Through*, Geha forces the reader to see the damage wrought by homeland separation, yet his narrative does not remain stagnant in loss and grief; rather, the material carriers of home, namely food and drink, resituate the old world in the new.<sup>xiv</sup> Food establishments, including Yakoub’s Yankee Café and Grill, markets, coffee houses and butcher shops become the meeting ground for the Arab American community. “The shops themselves,” as Salaita argues, “function as characters, serving as mediators among Arabs and non-Arabs, Old World values and American consumer culture” (430). For the immigrants and their children, food is a primary marker of family and culture. Indeed, in “Holy Toledo,” Uncle Eddie Yakoub, back from the Navy, emblemizes his homecoming with the refrain, “The food, that’s what I missed most” (87). Food, as that which nourishes and sustains, serves as a tangible symbol of home. Throughout the collection, characters eat, prepare, serve, talk about and sell Arabic food: rolled grape leaves, lamb meat ground with cracked wheat (*kibbee*), raw liver and onions, cracked wheat and parsley salad (*tabouli*), sheep tripe stuffed with rice and pine nuts simmered in a doughy sauce (*ghammeh*), tea with anise seeds (*yensoun*), pressed apricots, goat cheese, sesame paste, pine nuts, and briny olives are a connective thread in the stories, culinary metaphors that mirror the continuation of heritage, setting the stage for hyphenated identities to emerge. For the Arab American reader, Geha’s gesture of naming Arabic fare is itself an act of homecoming.

In the conclusion of “Almost Thirty,” two young male cousins fall in love and marry American women. Notably, Geha uses food as a metaphor for their cultural dislocation: “The family received our wives, but not easily. After all, they were Americans. They could not make *phitire* or *tabouli*, and they both cringed at the sight of raw liver with onions. My wife tried to make *kibbee* once, but it turned to concrete in your stomach. So, to this day, George and I eat egg salad sandwiches at family picnics.

'The *kibbee* is not important,' we tell the others, and they shake their heads to see us eat the egg salad" (46). With the American wives come dissolution of their old world character and the adoption of an American national identity, as egg salad sandwiches are a decidedly all-American fare. The cousins are not merely eating egg salad sandwich, but are ingesting and thus becoming part of the American landscape, just as their offspring surely will.<sup>xv</sup> As if to reassert their hyphenated identities, the men move from tasting their cultural exile to dancing the *debkee* to the beat of small Arab drums: "He threw down his egg salad sandwich and he stood up, and his wife stood up with him. The four of us locked arms. I showed them the steps as best I could. Then, with our arms locked, we broke into dance" (47).

Food as a portable marker of home likewise is suggested in Syrian American poet, Mohja Kahf's "The Skaff Mother Tells the Story" and "Word from the Younger Skaff." In the former, the mother and father send their two young sons away to save them from being conscripted to fight in war; however, the mother, with little time to prepare for this sudden journey, sends what she can with her boys, namely mincemeat pies, wrapped in a wool scarf. The mother, heartbroken, exclaims, "We sent them away, / I swear, to keep them with us; they were only boys." In the following poem, written as a response to the mother's plaintive call, the son begins, "I was still hungry / when I left home, mother, / to disappear from the one piece / of earth I knew." The speaker goes on to use the metaphor of food ("the night we left. . . was dinnertime") to indicate the hunger he feels for his family, home and native land. Despite living in Brazil, his daughter, who has inherited his mother's "hair and eyes" "knows how / to make [her] mincemeat pies." Significantly, his wife never learned to make this dish, suggesting the role that blood memory plays in the continuation of ancestry and culture. The daughter's Syrian meat pies are "baked golden and sealed / with [the mother's] same thumbpress" a literal imprint of body onto food. The material marker of familial love that the mother provides for her young sons becomes the text of embodied ethnicity, which her granddaughter inherits.

Of all the food and drink items in Geha's *Through and Through*, coffee is the most prominent. As a recurring symbol, it punctuates the stories in the collection: "And there were the *ahwa* shops, where the old men sat all day amid tobacco smoke and the bitter smell of Turkish coffee" (87); "Throughout the funeral, throughout the mourning and the time of quiet that followed my father's death, George stayed by me and worried over me like a little brother. He brought me cigarettes and coffee, sat up with me in my room till all hours when neither of us had anything to say" (39); and "After dinner they had coffee, laughing at Father's stories about the seminary and the old priest who taught there" (57).

This is an important symbol, as coffee originated in "the ancient land of Abyssinia, now called Ethiopia," which is "situated at the conjunction of the African and Arab worlds" (Pendergrast 3). In fact, an Arab physician, Rhazes, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century is responsible for the first written account of coffee; however, the coffee plant (and caffeine's effects on the body) had been the subject of folktales for hundreds of years beforehand (Pendergrast 4, 5).<sup>xvi</sup> Coffee spread throughout the Arab world before making its way to Europe and the Americas. The Arabs "began cultivating the trees, complete with irrigation ditches, in the nearby mountains, calling it *qahwa*, an Arab word for wine—from which the name coffee derives" (Pendergrast 6). Although initially used for medicinal or religious use (Arab Sufi monks drank a brewed coffee beverage

because it enabled them to stay awake for midnight prayers), it wasn't long before coffee consumption began on a widespread basis throughout the Arab world. Indeed, wealthy families had special coffee rooms in their homes and a number of coffee houses (known as *kaveh kanes*) spread throughout Persia, Egypt, Turkey and North Africa:

Coffee houses allowed people to get together for conversation, entertainment, and business, inspiring agreements, poetry, and irreverence in equal measure. So important did the brew become in Turkey that a lack of sufficient coffee provided grounds for a woman to seek divorce.

(Pendergrast 7)

Since some Islamic rulers believed that coffee houses were the meeting place for rebellious activity, there were a series of edicts banning the beverage. Despite such laws, coffee continued to be drunk and the bans were eventually lifted. Coffee became so conflated with the Arab world that it was considered by Europeans a Muslim or Arabian drink.<sup>xvii</sup> In that way, coffee became, itself, a symbol of Arabs: "Pope Clement VIII, who died in 1605, supposedly tasted the Moslem drink at the behest of his priests, who wanted him to ban it. 'Why, this Satan's drink is so delicious,' he reputedly exclaimed, 'that it would be a pity to let the infidels have exclusive use of it. We shall fool Satan by baptizing it and making it a truly Christian beverage'" (Pendergrast 8). Thus, when coffee spread to Europe in the seventeenth century, it still was considered an exotic beverage, and "like other such rare substances as sugar, cocoa, and tea, [it] initially was used primarily as an expensive medicine by the upper classes" (Pendergrast 8).

The historic relationship between the Arab world and coffee is significant even today; coffee is a popular beverage throughout the Middle East, as are coffee houses where people go for conversation, to play dominoes or backgammon. Moreover, the involved preparation of Arabic coffee (known also as Turkish coffee) suggests the import of the drink: "In an elaborate social ritual, coffee was brought to boil three times in the *ibrik* (a small conical copper pot with a long handle) before the viscous drink was dispensed into small cups, the pourer carefully shaking his hand so that a little *wesh*, or froth, topped each cup" (Pendergrast 7). Geha, who uses coffee throughout his collection, mentions "Turkish coffee" in "Something Else" and in so doing gestures towards the weight of the occasion: "In the kitchen Mama helps with the coffee. Tonia can hear her in there, telling the other women about Papa and how in the old country her parents had first arranged for him to visit and have Turkish coffee" (51).

The ceremonial aspect of preparing and drinking Arabic coffee also is given voice in Naomi Shihab Nye's "Arabic Coffee." In this poem, Nye's father performs the coffee making ritual: "Leaning over the stove, he let it / boil to the top, and down again. / Two times." Capturing the special moment, Nye writes: "When he carried the tray into the room, / high and balanced in his hands, / it was an offering to all of them, / stay, be seated, follow the talk / wherever it goes. The coffee was / the center of the flower." As an "offering," the "center," coffee elicits fellowship and conversation. More importantly, the act of sharing coffee, a familiar image of hospitality in Arab American letters, is not a hastened activity, but is an act of communion.

The first story in Geha's *Through and Through*, "Monkey Business," epitomizes coffee as a brew of the Middle East and hence a text of home. Further, in this piece, drinking coffee becomes a substitute for emotion. "Monkey Business" centers on immigrant Nazir (Zizi) Yakoub's impending marriage to Udrah, a fanatical Christian from Lebanon. This arranged marriage is not based on Zizi's desire to remarry; rather, it is intended to fill the void of his late wife, Samira, for their five-year-old son, Jameel, an old-world tradition that Zizi feels honor-bound to maintain. The intimacy between husband and wife is conveyed twice through the metaphor of coffee: "He used to walk home after a day like that, and Samira would be there. She unlaced his shoes for him. She poured coffee—always there was coffee—then she would sit with him at the kitchen table" (4). In the second incident, coffee marks his wife's absence: "A bedroom, a front room, a tiny kitchen, but when Samira was alive it had been a home. . . . Even now the memory if it remains, centered and epitomized in the one remembered image of a cup of coffee, Samira sitting at the kitchen table, drinking a cup of coffee" (3). While the economy of these scenes may lead the reader to dismiss their import, coffee is used in two other significant, transitional moments in the story. Prior to proposing to Udrah, Zizi asks for coffee (10) and after their marriage is called off, signaling Zizi's permanent status as a single parent, Jameel comforts his father, removing his wet coat and shoes and brewing coffee. The scent of coffee in the apartment comforts Zizi and reminds him of his late wife, which, he muses, is "enough." The familiar scent of coffee reassures both father and son of home.

Although Samira's death is the primary loss in "Monkey Business," a minor character, Asfoori, the street bum, who is given no voice in the story, also dies and his funeral is, perhaps not surprisingly, paired with coffee, as Braheem remarks: "He's dead, right? So where's the coffee?" (15). Drinking coffee at these profound moments arcs back to the larger loss of home; thus, employing the symbol of coffee suggests an attempt to mitigate loss, writ large, with assurances of home.

Home in Geha's *Through and Through* is conceptually linked to bell hooks' notion of homeplace specifically as the interiority of the home offers renewal, recovery and healing in the midst of oppression and domination. hooks historicizes the import of home in African America culture: "African American women believed that the construction of a homeplace however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (hooks 42). In this way, Arab Americans, who often experience their position in America as provisional and uneasy, explicitly in times of national crisis, turn to those aspects of home to provide safety and, according to hooks, resistance: "we can make homeplace that space where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole" (hooks 49). The many articles that comprise home in Geha's *Through and Through*, while seemingly insignificant, bridge the geo-cultural gap.

Throughout the short story cycle, Geha reminds readers that home is a complex negotiation of place, geography, memory and politics. By remembering and imagining an Arab past, Arab American writers who seemingly have assimilated into the country in which they or their families have migrated, maintain a political and ideological connection to the Middle East manifest in the food they eat, drinks they imbibe and the

words they speak. That there is a fraught relationship between the home of their ancestors (the Middle East) and the home of their children (the United States) exemplifies home as a shifting terrain of belonging and exile, disinheritance and yearning. By privileging the portable aspects of home, Arab American authors, sojourners searching for a larger place of belonging, implicitly gesture toward the Bedouin. Mapping homelands beyond the limits of national borders and imagining the possibility of dwellings that are imprinted with geographies of the past, allows Arab American writers, modern day Bedouins, to construct home.

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<sup>i</sup> Stories of elderly Palestinian holding onto keys to houses that have long been bulldozed by Israeli troops underscore the indelible relationship between home and identity in the Arab world.

<sup>ii</sup> In the West the Bedouin has served to emblemize the exotic Arab "other." In *The English Patient*, for example, the Bedouins appear as if by magic to work some sorcery and then disappear. Therefore, like the mythic Genie in a bottle, this Arab other only serves the purpose of the West and then vanishes so as to not disrupt the order. There is no individual identity of the Bedouin; his appearance merely reinforces the Orientalist view of the Arab as exotic, different and especially non-Western.

<sup>iii</sup> The reference to the tent is a material reference to the Bedouin's home. A Bedouin's tent is fairly standard—the exterior is made of woven, black goat hair and the interior is dominated by a large colorful scarf separating men's quarters from women's.

<sup>iv</sup> Early Bedouins resisted conversion to Islam: "The system [Muhammad] offered was alien to them, demanding a renunciation of their intense love of personal independence and of an important part of their established code of virtue and ancestral traditions" (Lewis 43). Their religion was communal and their gods "were in origin the inhabitants and patrons of single places, living in trees, fountains, and especially in sacred stones" (Lewis 25). That Bedouins were steeped in ancestral spiritual practices underscores their relevance as early ancestral figures for both Christian and Muslim Arab Americans.

<sup>v</sup> Expressing some of their most poignant sentiments, Bedouin poetry creates intimacy within the community insofar as the listeners recognize that this oral lyric poetry, sung equally by men and women, is a testament to the hardship of their lives (Abu-Lughod 283).

<sup>vi</sup> "Within the Arab- American literary scene, there is much more poetry than fiction" (Akash and Mattawa xiii), and numerous reasons are hypothesized for writers' penchant for this genre, not the least of which is the relationship of Arab American writers to the

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Middle East. Because poetry is, by far, the favored art form of Arab American writers, Orfalea and Elmusa theorize that ancestral memory is at play: “the great Arab love of poetry has not been drained from New World veins” (xv). However, it should be noted that critics, such as Majaj, argue that this kind of discourse, which articulates Arab identity in terms of essentialist rhetoric, does not allow for complex cultural differences (271).

<sup>vii</sup> Palestinian American poet, Naomi Shihab Nye, also recognizes the seminal role that language plays in Arab identity and thus in her poem, “Arabic,” the man with the “laughing eyes” tells Nye, “‘Until you speak Arabic, / you will not understand pain’”. Nye, though, does not have full access to her father language: “I admit my / shame. To live on the brink of Arabic, tugging / its rich threads without understanding / how to weave its rug. . . I have no gift” (91). Because she believes her “gift” of heritage is stunted by her inability to speak Arabic, she cannot speak its pain, cannot be its witness. However, by the poem’s end, the speaker admits to “feeling sad” and responds to the man, “I’ll work on it.” Nye’s desire to “work on” Arabic suggests that she cannot fully articulate the pain of her people without speaking their language.

<sup>viii</sup> The children’s inability to speak Arabic is historically relevant, for “whereas first generation Arabs in America managed as best they could in an alien environment, their children were thoroughly immersed in American society and culture—and their first or only language was English” (Suleiman 5)

<sup>ix</sup> It should be noted that home is not an elusive construct in these works, but is placed, geographically and geopolitically, in the Arab world. While many postcolonial theorists critique nationalist discourse, nationalism and especially pan-Arabism continues to have ideological currency for Arab Americans. Identification through the Arab nation-state is particularly significant at this cultural moment, as Arabs are identified, as a group, in opposition to western colonial rule, exemplified through America’s continuing support of Israeli occupation of Palestine and the wars in Iraq.

<sup>x</sup> While the speaker of “Moving” is Muslim and the characters in Geha’s *Through and Through* are Christian, as Arabs they share similar cultural norms. Though there is a conflation of Arabs and Islam, the majority of Muslims are not Arabs and “most Arab immigrants of the first wave [from the 1870s to World War II] came from the Great Syria region, especially present-day Lebanon, and were overwhelmingly Christian” (Suleiman 1).

<sup>xi</sup> The references to African American history are not intended as a conflation of African American and Arab American experiences, the former being a forced migration into enslavement. Rather, Arab American immigration is inflected with the experiences of other groups of color in America (hence the common racist epithet “Sand Nigger” directed at Arabs), and is used here to contextualize issues of alienation and displacement.

<sup>xii</sup> For more information about Arab racial categorization, please see our essay, “In Passing: Arab American Poetry and the Politics of Race.”

<sup>xiii</sup> It must be stated that while some Arab Americans actively seek political and cultural alliance with communities of color, other Arabs, with more conservative political leanings, stake claim to their legal status of white. Arabs are not a monolithic community and therefore this argument rests on trends and not on absolutes.

<sup>xiv</sup> Food is a primary symbol for Arab American authors. In fact, two significant Arab American anthologies highlight food in their titles: *Grapeleaves: A Century of Arab American Writing* and *Food for Our Grandmothers: Arab American and Arab Canadian Feminist Writing*. Each section of the latter book provides recipes for Arabic cuisine.



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These staples, including, olives, grapeleaves and laban, provide a cultural lens with which to read the literary outpouring. Despite the many differences among Arab peoples, food suggests a familiar terrain of family and culture.

<sup>xv</sup> This trajectory of marrying American and losing touch with one's ethnicity is made clear in "Monkey Business" as Jameel, the young boy, claims that "he would marry an *Amerikani* woman. . . and teach his children to speak only Ingleez." At this thought, the "pleasure immediately drained from Braheem's face" (5).

<sup>xvi</sup> One popular legend recounts the exploits of a goat herder, named Kaldi, whose goats were dancing one day after eating a type of red cherry. The next day Kaldi tried the berry, himself, and was much energized, playing alongside his goats, while "poetry and song spilled out of him" (Pendergrast 4). Although the veracity of this tale is not confirmed, it is told often as the first account of coffee consumption.

<sup>xvii</sup> In the late nineteenth century, Hills Brothers Coffee, sold in San Francisco, commissioned an ad to be developed to sell their coffee. Even though most of Hills Brothers beans "arrived from Central America and Brazil," the ad icon was "a turbaned, bearded Arab in a flowing robe" sipping coffee (Pendergrast 125), again underscoring the relationship between coffee and the Middle East

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## ETHNIC STUDIES REVIEW

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