

**NAES**

National Association for Ethnic Studies

---

Ethnic

Studies

Review

2010

Volume 33 Issue 2

ISSN: 1555-1881

## 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.

### Editorial Board

**Editors**  
Carleen Sanchez  
Ron Scapp

**Associate Editors**  
David Aliano  
Ravi Perry

### Editorial Advisory Board

Edna Acosta-Belen University at Albany, SUNY	Rosanne Kanhai Western Washington University
Jorge A. Bustamante El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Mexico)	Paul Lauter Trinity College
Duane W. Champagne University of California, Los Angeles	Robert L. Perry Eastern Michigan University
Laura Coltelli University de Pisa (Italy)	Otis L. Scott California State University, Sacramento
Russell Endo University of Colorado	Alan Spector Purdue University, Calumet
David M. Gradwohl Iowa State University	K. Victor Ujimoto University of Guelph (Canada)
Maria Herrera-Sobek University of California, Irvine	Jesse Vazquez Queens College
Evelyn Hu-DeHart Brown University	John C. Walter University of Washington
Vernon Johnson Western Washington University	Bernard Young Arizona State University

Designed by Eileen Claveloux

Ethnic Studies Review (ESR) is published by the National Association for Ethnic Studies for its individual and subscribing libraries and institutions. NAES is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.

Copyright©ESR, The National Association for Ethnic Studies, 2012. All Rights reserved. Written authorization to photocopy any part of this publication, store in a retrieval system, or transmit by any means must be obtained from NAES.

**ESR**



# ESR

## Ethnic Studies Review

The Journal of the  
National Association for Ethnic Studies

*Volume 33 Issue 2*

### Table of Contents

<b>Chicana/Latina Undergraduate Cultural Capital: Surviving and Thriving in Higher Education</b> Maricela DeMirjyn .....	1
<b>Chicano/Mexican “Culture” as a Rational Instrument in the Human Sciences</b> Alexandro José Gradilla .....	25
<b>Structuring Liminality: Theorizing the Creation and Maintenance of the Cuban Exile Identity</b> Jaclyn Colona and Guillermo J. Grenier .....	43
<b>Thematic Shifts in Contemporary Vietnamese American Novels</b> Quan Manh Ha .....	63
<b>First Impressions, “America’s Paper” and Pre-Primary Black Presidential Candidates: <i>The New York Times</i> Coverage of Rev. Jesse Jackson (1983), Rev. Al Sharpton (2003), and Sen. Barack Obama (2007) Campaign Announcements and Initial Days</b> Ravi Perry.....	83
<b>How Are They Racialized? Racial Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students</b> Ying Wang .....	109
<b>Historical Consciousness and Ethnicity: How Signifying the Past Influences the Fluctuations in Ethnic Boundary Maintenance</b> Paul Zanzanian.....	123
<b>Poetic Economics: Phillis Wheatley and the Production of the Black Artist in the Early Atlantic World</b> Rochelle Raineri Zuck .....	143



**Chicana/Latina Undergraduate Cultural Capital:  
Surviving and Thriving in Higher Education**

**Maricela DeMirjyn  
Colorado State University**

This study addressed the retention of Chicana/Latina undergraduates. The problem explored was one; how these women perceive campus climate as members of a marginalized student population and two; which strategies are used to “survive the system.” As a qualitative study, this work was guided by a confluence of methods including grounded theory, phenomenology and Chicana epistemology using educational narratives as data. The analysis indicated that Chicanas/Latinas do maintain a sense of being “Other” throughout their college experiences and this self-identity is perceived as a “survival strategy” while attending a mainstream campus. Further analysis also showed that Chicanas/Latinas begin their college careers with social/cultural capital and is used as a fluid source of support during their stay at the university.

**Chicano/Mexican “Culture” as a Rational Instrument  
in the Human Sciences**

**Alexandro José Gradilla  
California State University, Fullerton**

The use of “culture” as an analytical category by social scientists presents an opportunity to examine how professional discursive formations are used to make empirical assertions. The social fact of culture is neither uniform nor unitary. Traditionally, culture has been thought of as a product of disciplinary research, not necessarily a variable for empirical study. When culture is used as a tool or instrument of scientific methodology, it loses its fluid nature as a disciplinary discourse. In this essay, I examine the specific discussion of the epidemiologic health paradox that states that the Chicano/Mexican immigrant “culture” serves as a protective factor against many maladies that afflict other U.S. populations. Since the 1970s, this discussion of culture as a protective factor provides an interesting exposition of the uses of culture by empirical scholars.

# **Structuring Liminality: Theorizing the Creation and Maintenance of the Cuban Exile Identity**

**Jaclyn Colona**  
**Florida International University**

**And**

**Guillermo J. Grenier**  
**Florida International University**

In this article, we examine the exilic experience of the Cuban-American community in South Florida through the dual concepts of structure and liminality. We postulate that in the case of this exilic diaspora, specific structures arose to render liminality a persistent element of the Cuban-American identity. The liminal, rather than being a temporal transitory stage, becomes an integral part of the group identity. This paper theorizes and recasts the Cuban-American exile experience in Miami as explicable not only as the story of successful economic and political incorporation, although the literature certainly emphasizes this interpretation, but one consisting of permanent liminality institutionalized by structural components of the exiled diaspora. We argue that the story of exemplary incorporation so prevalent in the academic literature is a result of structured liminality. We apply Turner's conceptualization to the creation and maintenance of the Cuban-American Exile Identity (Grenier and Perez, 2003). While testing the theoretical postulates is beyond the scope of this article, we interpret previous research through our new theoretical lens.

## **Thematic Shifts in Contemporary Vietnamese American Novels**

**Quan Manh Ha**  
**The University of Montana**

This article examines the thematic shifts in three contemporary Vietnamese American novels published since 2003: Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, Dao Strom's *Grass Roof, Tin Roof*, and Bich Minh Nguyen's *Short Girls*. I argue that by concentrating on the themes of inferiority and invisibility and issues related to ethnic and racial relationships in U.S. culture (instead of concentrating on the Vietnam War and the refugee experiences), some contemporary Vietnamese American authors are attempting to merge their voices into the corpus of ethnic American literature, which usually is thematically characterized by identity, displacement, alienation, and cultural conflict, etc. Each author explores the problems confronted by individuals caught up in various phases of the Vietnamese diaspora of the twentieth century.



These important works are treated primarily thematically, even as the theoretical approaches of various critics are employed to examine those themes. All three novels take Vietnamese American literature in new thematic directions, which signals great promise for future developments.

Key words: contemporary Vietnamese American novels, Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, Dao Strom's *Grass Roof, Tin Roof*, Bich Minh Nguyen's *Short Girls*, invisible identity.

**First Impressions, "America's Paper" and Pre-Primary Black Presidential Candidates: *The New York Times* Coverage of Rev. Jesse Jackson (1983), Rev. Al Sharpton (2003), and Sen. Barack Obama (2007) Campaign Announcements and Initial Days**

**Ravi Perry**

Recent research documents how party rules, election reforms, and the growth of primaries and caucuses have greatly changed the presidential nomination process. Acknowledging that most Americans get their information about presidential candidates through the news and that mass media have played a significant role in introducing candidates to potential voters, I conduct an longitudinal content analysis of the *New York Times* articles to ethnographically explain how language, article placement and content in 'America's Paper' has significantly impacted the framing of black presidential candidates' pre-primary presidential campaigns. In particular, the data reveal how the newspaper's coverage of the candidates appears to vary based on perceived viability and as willingness to vote for a black president increases.

Keywords: Black presidential candidates, New York Times, Pre-Primary Coverage, Content analysis, Sharpton, Jackson, Obama

**How Are They Racialized?  
Racial Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students**

**Ying Wang  
University of Maryland, College Park**

The present study explores the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students at a Southwestern University in order to find out how they experience race in daily life, what their interpretations of the racial experience are and how do racialized experiences shape their perceptions of life chances. The results indicate that the racialization process plays an important role in Chinese students' life through their lived experiences.

Most Chinese students have noticed race and some of them have experienced racial discrimination. However, Chinese students still hold up the importance of education and believe that education will blunt the racial edge.

## **Historical Consciousness and Ethnicity: How Signifying the Past Influences the Fluctuations in Ethnic Boundary Maintenance**

**Paul Zanazanian**  
**Concordia University**

Theorists tend to limit ‘history’s’ role in the dynamics of ethnicity to that generally played by collective memory. By bringing the notion of historical consciousness to the fore, new possibilities may, however, emerge for discerning how history, as one cultural mode of remembering among many others, impacts both ethnicity delineations and fluctuations in boundary maintenance. In encapsulating the many forms of commemoration as well as the different dimensions of historical thinking, the contribution of historical consciousness accordingly lies on how group members historicize temporal change for moral orientation in time. By likewise signifying past events for negotiating their ethnicity and agency toward the ‘significant Other’, social actors gate-keep group boundaries. And, depending on their capacity and willingness to recognize the ‘significant Other’s’ moral and historical agency in the flow of time, they can transform group delineations and render ethnic boundaries more porous.

**Key Words:** Historical Consciousness; Ethnicity; Group Boundaries; Boundary Maintenance; Boundary Fluctuations; Collective Memory; Disciplinary History; Moral and Historical Agency.

## **Poetic Economies: Phillis Wheatley and the Production of the Black Artist in the Early Atlantic World**

**Rochelle Raineri Zuck**  
**University of Minnesota Duluth**

This essay reads Wheatley as a key participant in the shifting economic and emotional relationships between artists, audiences, and texts that we now associate with romanticism. To recover facets of the role that the black artist played in the romantic movement(s), I examine three “portraits” of Wheatley—the poetic spectacle managed by her promoters, the actual portrait that appeared as the frontispiece for her *Poems on Various Subjects*, and the portrait that Wheatley herself created through her poetry. These portraits chart the tensions that circulated around the

figure of the black African artist in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, tensions between genius and “barbarity,” originality and imitation, exteriority and interiority, and artistic expression and commodification. These binaries have often characterized the terrain of Wheatley studies, marking opposing positions and points of contention. I argue for a different way of reading, one that sees the figure of Phillis Wheatley as produced through the interplay of all of these forces within the context of the early black Atlantic. Wheatley and her work exposed both the emphasis on “authentic” self-expression through art and the ways in which the mental life of the artist became available to the reader as a consumer product. She created a different vision of the black artist than that which commonly circulated in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, one that fused Christian discourse with romantic elements of imagination, Nature, and the poetic sublime, yet remained distant from and somewhat inaccessible to white readers.

Keywords: Wheatley, black Atlantic, poetry, romantic



## ARTICLES

# CHICANA/LATINA UNDERGRADUATE CULTURAL CAPITAL: SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Maricela DeMirjyn*  
*Colorado State University*

Historian Vicki Ruiz mentions in her works the importance incorporating Chicana, Mexicana and Latina narratives into the academy, specifically in fields where our voices are marginalized (Meyer 2008, 23). This essay seeks to create a conversation regarding what constitutes Chicana/Latina cultural capital in relation to academic achievement by using the educational narratives of undergraduate students. Specifically, the text analyzes what forms of cultural capital Chicana/Latina undergraduates bring into higher education and, in essence, continue utilizing through their time within the university system. The primary goal of this work is to demonstrate that Chicanas/Latinas do have cultural capital that assists in academic success, as well as a sense of efficacy or agency within the system of higher education. As such, various subcategories of cultural capital are explored through the life stories of Chicanas/Latinas “surviving the system” of higher education. Through this analysis, the forms of cultural capital are refined as strategies used by Chicanas/Latinas to “manage, handle, carry out and respond” to their university experiences (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 101). For the purposes of this work, the identifier of Latina is used to be inclusive of the participants who self label as Mexicana, Mexican, Mexican-American or Latina, as all of the women are of Mexican descent and only half use the label Chicana.

Statistically it has been repeatedly demonstrated that Chicanas/Latinas share some of the lowest percentage rates of graduation in higher education at every level, from bachelor’s degree on through doctoral degrees. Women of Mexican origin who are typically cited as “success stories” are often displayed as sell-outs, or *vendidas*, to their home/ethnic communities. The educational narratives embodied within this study demonstrate that there are other ways of “surviving the system” and keeping an ethnic identity as Chicanas/Latinas intact. Thus, this study represents what Mohanty (1994) refers to as a “collective voice” (153) regarding the educational experiences of Chicanas/Latinas pursuing their degrees in higher education. This collective voice is what Darder (1995)

signifies as representing a cultural consciousness “grounded in collective memories of historical events, language, social traditions, and community life” (6). And, in part, this collective voice, grounded in a collective consciousness, displays a necessary critical reflexivity as a first step towards taking action in promoting educational equity (Hesford 1999).

The two research questions governing this study are as follows:

- How do Chicanas/Latinas perceive the campus climate as women of color?
- What forms of social/cultural capital are important for Chicanas/Latinas in their own words?

Previous research acting as theoretical and conceptual guides for this work include studies relating to researcher identity and support networks identified as social/cultural capital within the Mexican American community.

Providing supporting evidence for what develops as Chicana/Latina student-oriented cultural capital in this study are two essential research works regarding Chicanas and education by Segura (1993) and Gándara (1995). Briefly, Segura (1993) mentions the key need for assisting Chicano/Latino students in gaining access to information regarding admittance procedures at the university level. Correspondingly, this article describes how Chicanas/Latinas actively seek assistance from peers, tutors, teachers, etc. and form networks with individuals or groups having information on how to get into college, thereby creating their own cultural capital. Additionally, the work by Gándara (1995) observing the impact of mothers’ support in the academic success of Chicanas lends validation to the present analysis of mothers representing a form of cultural capital used in “surviving the system” by Chicana/Latina students.

Regarding past work referencing forms of social/cultural capital assisting academic achievement for Mexican Americans, two key sources were instrumental to this study. The first source is a dissertation by Diaz (1998) addressing the process of social and academic integration of Latino college freshmen. Interviewing 11 Latino students, Diaz focuses on personal attributes, as well as prior schooling influences, prompting Latinos to select education as a mechanism for upward mobility. Serving as a second source is Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) examining of support networks for U.S. Mexican youth involving school and kin, which addresses how individuals are situated within their own personal web. He states, “much of what determines whether our associates might possess the resources we need depends on our own social class and background” (xi). Stanton-Salazar discusses his own experiences and personal network as being somewhat of an enigma and attributes it to the following:

I was privileged: by my fair skin, by having an immigrant mother and family in Mexico, by having a Chicano

mixed-race father who was steadily employed and had family ties to White folks in the suburbs, by being sentenced to Catholic school, by having a bicycle, by having blue eyes and by looking somewhat White—and by being treated well by strangers who assumed I was. (x)

Other research revolving around “community cultural wealth” includes the following six areas of defined capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant (Yosso 2005, 70). However, these identified forms of capital have been attributed to social capital produced by various communities of color, and as such, have not been specifically applied to the academic success of Chicanas/Latinas within higher education. Lastly, the research by Delgado Bernal (2006) on pedagogies of the home touches base on the concept of cultural capital being constructed from a household knowledge base situated in the communities of Chicanas/Latinas. She states, “Pedagogies of the home provide strategies of resistance that challenge the educational norms of higher education and the dominant perceptions held about Chicana students” (Delgado Bernal 2006, 113).

My own experiences, as a Chicana who has “survived” various stages in her educational trajectory, set the tone for this body of research, as well as written works showcasing the impact and importance of linking pedagogy with voice. Theoretical pieces, such as *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999), altered my life by increasing my awareness of what it politically signified to celebrate my culture and my ethnicity as a woman of Mexican descent.

By using life stories as a means of expressing “voice” for university women of Mexican descent, the Chicanas/Latinas participating in this study are able to narrate their own sense of ethnicity in conjunction with their lived educational realities. Additionally, it enables an understanding of how these women engage in active agency regarding their survival in a racialized system socially formatted to accommodate White males. These Chicanas/Latinas are the subjects of their own becoming. They are women of color who are not only maintaining their racial/ethnic identity while pursuing degrees in higher education, but they are also using their “ethnic selves” as a source of strength. As one Chicana interviewee candidly remarks:

It drives me to be more successful because the odds are always against you. I feel as a Chicana demographics are changing, but I try to think about it, like in the literature, like in the Mexican Revolution, the women who were soldiers, who were there and never acknowledged. That’s inspired me to set an example, not just for me, but my community. - Alicia

## METHODOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

“How educational research is conducted significantly contributes to what and whose history, community, and knowledge is legitimated. A Chicana feminist epistemology addresses the failure of traditional research paradigms that have distorted or omitted the history and knowledge of Chicanas” (Delgado Bernal 1999, 316). These are Delgado Bernal’s (1999) concluding remarks regarding the impact of using Chicana epistemology in educational research as a means of resistance. She sees two key factors in the use of untold Chicana histories—her own and the women she writes about, which she views as providing “endarkened” (Dillard, 1997, as cited in Delgado Bernal 1999, 301) perspectives in educational research.

From a researcher’s perspective, Delgado Bernal (1999) implies that Chicana researchers employ cultural intuition and that mainstream educational scholarship fails to provide a paradigm to study the realities of Chicana students. She states that cultural intuition as demonstrated by Chicana researchers is equivalent to Strauss and Corbin’s “theoretical sensitivity,” defined as “a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data” (as cited in Delgado Bernal 1999, 307). Therefore, an understanding of data results from not only the research process and previous literature, but also from one’s personal experiences and community affiliations. Zavella (1997) likens this to Chicana feminist research’s overall ability to “present more nuanced, fully contextualized” (57) of Chicana experiences and identities. “Chicana feminist epistemology goes beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods, and lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal 1999, 303).

Both Delgado Bernal (1999) and Zavella (1997) situate themselves as Chicana researchers whose ethnic identity directly impacts and influences their work. By disclosing common ethnic background and experiences, they position themselves as running parallel lives to their interviewees. For example, in Delgado Bernal’s 1997 study of eight Chicana student activists (cited in Delgado Bernal, 1999), she shared her experiences of when she was also a student activist. Zavella (1997), in her work regarding Chicana cannery employees, states “I hoped that my brief disclosures about my own ethnic heritage would allow my informants to express their own sense of ethnicity” (49).

This work establishes a transformative methodology that encompasses aspects of social feminist research as means of promoting a social theory regarding the agency of Chicanas in higher education and retention. As a feminist researcher using a feminist methodology, I attempt to give voice and subjectivity to women as a means of de-centering tradi-



tional male-oriented research that objectifies (Neuman 2000). As a Chicana feminist researcher, I transform the above mentioned methodology to be inclusive of race and class, as well as other embodiments of comparative mainstream difference and power relations, aside from gender.

As a result, this study encompasses a Chicana methodology addressing “both the position from which distinctively Chicana research questions might be asked and the political and ethical issues involved in the research process” (Delgado Bernal 1999, 303). Furthermore, by definition of a feminist researcher, I am neither objective nor detached, but rather interactive in my work—fusing both my personal and professional worlds (Neuman 2000). This methodologically fosters my relationships with my interviewees by engendering aspects of equality and agency in the research dynamics. Using a Chicana feminist methodology allows for humanistic, action-oriented research, as well as flexibility in crossing boundaries between research techniques and academic fields that are both critical and interpretive (Neuman 2000).

The research site for this qualitative work is located in California’s Central Coast at a public university where approximately 16% of the undergraduate student population is Chicano/Latino (University of California 2004). Twelve on-campus open-formatted interviews were conducted in a private office, as well as in secluded outdoor areas on the university grounds, and each interview took place for approximately 2 hours. (See Appendix A.)

Participants were volunteers, mainly hearing about the research project either personally or by the snowball effect, whereas one participant would recommend another potential participant (Krathwohl 1997). Requests for volunteer participants were also made in person through classroom announcements in Sociology and Chicana/o Studies courses, specifically the Sociology undergraduate classes of “La Chicana” and “The Chicano Community” and the Chicana/o Studies introductory class on Chicana gender. Visits to Latina-identified campus organizations, such as *Hermanas Unidas*, were made in an attempt to recruit additional participant volunteers.

My interests as a researcher regarding Chicana experiences in higher education, as well as the stipulation for participants to be of Mexican descent and to have either junior or senior status, was explained at the onset of each announcement. I indicated that although I was interested in the experiences of all Latinas, as a researcher I had to narrow my group focus. I also explained that the reason I was looking for volunteers who were either juniors or seniors, or in some cases “seasonal seniors” as campus students’ refer to fifth-year seniors, was because I wanted to hear about their educational experiences at the university level.

*Personal Profiles - Participants*

**Alicia.** Alicia is the second eldest daughter in a family with four children. Her older sister started college at the community college level, but Alicia is the first to attend a 4-year university. She grew up in Northern California and is interested in pursuing a political career advocating for social justice issues of concern within the Latino community.

**Sonia.** Sonia was born and raised in Southern California. She is the eldest child and has four brothers and sisters ranging in age from 1 to 15 years. Her college experiences began at a state college, but she transferred into the UC system after her first year. Sonia plans to go on to graduate school and currently she is majoring in Sociology.

**Lorenza.** Lorenza is the elder of two daughters and is from Southern California. She relies primarily on her spirituality and faith in the Virgen of Guadalupe to guide her through life. Lorenza is engaged, but is waiting to finish her bachelor's degree before getting married. Her long-term goals include entering the field of education; as she states, "My thing is to teach other people."

**Antonia.** Antonia has four brothers and sisters and is the second child in the family. She began college as an art student and was the first in her family to start attending a 4-year university. Antonia jokingly makes reference to being born in Mexico as a way of saving her father money on her delivery. Her future plans entail participating in the Teach for America Program.

**Roxana.** Roxana is the eighth child out of nine brothers and sisters. After the death of her father, she began taking classes at the community college level. Roxana was encouraged to transfer to the local university by her older sister who served as her role model. She remembers at the age of 6 years visiting her sister, who attended the same university. She says that her father was upset that her sister moved out, but that "he got over it" and "even made a desk for her," which the family still owns 20 years later. Roxana's goal is to become a counselor.

**Lydia.** Lydia is the first person in her immediate and extended family to go to college. She is the fourth child and has two brothers and two sisters. Lydia was raised in Northern California by her mother, who is her main mentor. She is light-skinned and gets teased for talking surfer slang. Her major is Global Studies, and her desire is to become a social justice activist.

**Elva.** Elva is the third member in her family to attend this university; however, as the youngest child, there was pressure for her to not leave home. Born and raised in Central California, she found the university to be "really different from home" because home was "primarily Mexican." She is currently involved in bringing members of her high

school to campus, and Elva plans to continue working with students after obtaining a teaching credential.

**Esperanza.** Esperanza is the youngest out of four sisters. She is from Southern California and is the fourth daughter to go to college. As all of her older sisters attended UC schools, Esperanza had previous experience visiting three campuses, including here, before leaving high school. She says she chose this campus because her parents attribute her eldest sister's lesbian identity as being caused by the university environment and they "would have a problem" with her attending the same college and, also, the other campus was too close to home. After graduating, Esperanza wishes to advance her studies at the master's degree level in education.

**Cristina.** Cristina is the eldest of four brothers and sisters and is from Central California. Her parents are from a small ranch in Mexico and she is the first one in her family to go straight to the university. This is a big accomplishment; as Cristina says, "We're talking about 15 uncles and aunts and their children" who live in the states. Her future plans include joining the Peace Corp and teaching Chicano literature at her old high school.

**Monica.** Monica is the middle daughter in a family with three sisters. Her older sister attended a UC campus and served as a role model by sharing her experiences. Currently, Monica serves a similar capacity for her younger sister and, as Monica states, "She knows that she has to go to school." Her aspirations include attending medical school and specializing in cardiovascular health, which is due to what she believes was the premature death of her grandfather.

**Concha.** Concha is the eldest of four children, and she primarily raised her younger brothers and sisters due to her mother's difficulties with mental health. She identifies as both a Chicana and as a Native American since her grandfather is "Indio-Yaqui." Concha, a fan of "Che" early on in high school and having been labeled as a "communist" by her father, is very politically active on campus and within her community. Her goal is to become a high school counselor.

**Sofia.** Sofia is the second eldest out of a family with four children. She identifies as Lebanese Chicana and was raised from a young age by her father and stepmother after the death of her mother in a car accident. The primary language spoken at Sofia's home is Spanish, although she does know some Arabic. She is close to her father's Lebanese family, as well as to her Mexican family members on her mother's side. Her future goals include activism and graduate studies.

### *Life Stories*

The use of life stories or narratives collaborates well with this project's philosophy of following a Chicana feminist epistemology/research by allowing the autonomous voicing of participants recounting their personal experiences. The authenticity of this work is revealed in its candidness and direct portrayal of these narrated lived realities by Chicana/Latina undergraduates. As such, it "provides a detailed account of how those being studied feel about and understand events" (Neuman 2000, 171). Additionally, as a Chicana feminist researcher I adhere to an overall sense of validity as being displayed within truthful accounting of experience.

### *Grounded Theory*

This research study begins with an interest in the roles that ethnic identity and social/cultural capital play in the success of Chicana/Latina university students. By applying grounded theory as a methodology, this work sets out to discover, develop, and provisionally verify via data theoretical principles pertaining to the above mentioned phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Grounded theory as a means of using Chicana/Latina undergraduate educational narratives to build a theoretical relationship between social/cultural capital and ethnic identity, as well as agency, occurs during the collection and initial analysis of the data (Neuman 2000). Hence, as a methodological practice or approach, grounded theory evolves within the actual process of the research study. This coincides with the philosophical portrayal of this work as a transformative site for lived experience and Chicana feminist epistemology by maintaining research fluidity. Theorizing in this manner leads towards different ways of looking at previous data and assists in the formation of new connections and understandings.

### *Phenomenology*

Also playing a methodological role in this work is phenomenology. Stewart and Mickunas (1974) state that phenomenology "insists upon openness to the full range of social reality" (129) and that it may be used to examine aspects of human life, such as education. In addressing values, goals, and meanings relating to Chicanas/Latinas experiences in higher education, this research specifically uses a Chicana phenomenological approach. Such an approach is based on a transformative notion combining Chicana ideology and awareness with traditionally employed phenomenological practices. Thus, it entails subjective interpretations and perceptions of the lived experiences shared within the stories by the participants that acknowledge Chicana consciousness as a way to identify key events, ideas, or themes within educational narrative data. Mar-

tinez (2000) recognizes Chicana phenomenology as being not only descriptive but interpretive and critical of what she labels “social, discursive, historical, and cultural discriminations” (96).

#### CHICANA/LATINA UNDERGRADUATE CULTURAL CAPITAL

As previously stated, this article addresses the forms of cultural capital brought to campus by Chicana/Latina undergraduates. An analysis regarding what constitutes Chicana/Latina capital as the participants enter the university system began by coding their educational narratives for conceptual categories. In a process similar to open coding, transcripts were reviewed by both the researcher and auditors for themes relating to capital assessed as supporting retention or continuing educational success.

The next step in the data analysis entailed creating domains by comparing and contrasting the various categories and themes making separations between forms of capital. During the second pass or axial coding of the educational narratives, three themes were developed, as well as their corresponding subthemes. Coded and labeled under the primary theme of *mothers* are the two subthemes of *verbal support* and *role model*. The second theme, *high school outreach*, houses the two subthemes of *student organizations* and *academic programs*. The third, *social networks*, contains five subthemes and includes *advisors/counselors*, *peers*, *siblings*, *teachers*, and *tutors*.

#### *Mothers*

Two subthemes developed regarding how the mothers of the Chicana/Latina interviewees serve as a source of cultural capital. The first subtheme, verbal support, consists of what the Chicana/Latinas narrated as their mothers’ verbal influence towards their educational trajectory into higher education. The second subtheme, role model, in essence speaks to the participants’ mothers as guiding them to do well in school by how they lived their lives.

***Verbal Support.*** As demonstrated in past research, mothers are seen as impacting the academic success of their Chicana/Latina daughters regardless of their own educational levels. None of the mothers of the Chicanas/Latinas interviewed had a high school degree and most were educated in Mexico up to secondary school. The following accounts are examples of the participants’ mothers supplying verbal support regarding education that are converted by the Chicana/Latina narrators into a source of cultural capital for assisting in their academic success.

Education is just really important to my mom. She was the one that was like, “Do you know what you’re going to do? Do you know where you’re going to college?” - Antonia

I always received a lot of family support. My mother was especially involved with school; my father not so much because he had to work from 5 a.m. in the morning. The only thing they told me was “School is important. Finish school. Finish school.” The only college we were exposed to in Orica was community college. That’s when my mom would always tell me, “There’s where you’re going to go.” - Cristina

The above excerpts make evident that the mothers of the Chicanas/Latinas in this study actively supplied a source of cultural capital by voicing “pro-school” messages to their daughters. In some cases, the mothers’ lack of formal knowledge regarding the system of higher education limited the scope of what they were able to voice, but the underlying meaning of support for reaching beyond a high school degree is undeniable. These excerpts portray moments in the Chicana/Latinas educational narratives temporally located while the students were at high school age or younger.

**Role model.** The excerpts below include three samples using coding for the terms *role model* in conjunction with *mom* or *mother*.

My biggest role models in life in general are my grandmother and mom. Just because they, you know, I look up to them a lot. They’ve done so much. They’ve gone through so much. They share their stories with me all the time. I sit for hours with my grandmother and she tells me everything. They’re my biggest role models, my biggest inspirations. - Elva

I’ll start by talking about my mom since she’s one of the main reasons why I’m here. Just growing up with her and seeing how she struggled as a single mother and her strong will. It’s just inspired me to do more than she has, since I was small. She’s always told me “I’m not an educated woman, but you can be and you have the opportunity to be and I came over here to give you the opportunity.” So my mom came here from Mexico. She has crossed the border illegally many times. -Lydia

Although mothers most definitely play a prominent role in terms of Chicana/Latina undergraduate cultural capital, in a few circumstances either a grandmother or an aunt played a similar role. In these cases, these women, seen as family elders, provided additional support for the participant or were the only source of support in the cases where the mother was inaccessible to the student. In two narratives, the mothers were unavailable due to death or mental health problems. However, both women

were still briefly mentioned in the context of the narratives. It is also important to note that on occasion the Chicana/Latina participants made reference to their “parents” or fathers as supplying educational support.

My senior year in high school is when I realized that mom and dad didn’t come from Mexico so I could just throw my life away and take everything for granted. It wasn’t an easy transition for them; they left their family behind. I just realized it. I have so many more opportunities here than they did over there. So, I went to Coastal College and went through their transfer program and went to UC last year. - Roxana.

### *High School Outreach*

The second thematic category focuses on two components of outreach occurring at the high school level. The first component is coded under the subtheme student organizations and the second component is categorized under the subtheme of academic programs. The excerpts coded for the overarching theme of high school outreach specifically address instances in the Chicana/Latina educational narratives when groups and not individuals were mentioned as providing access to either information regarding college or promoting college accessibility.

***Student organizations.*** As a subtheme, student organizations includes any coded references to high school groups in which the Chicana/Latina narrators were members. It specifically addresses program involvement that assisted in increasing the Chicanas/Latinas’ cultural capital by increasing their levels of awareness regarding college matters. The following passages are indications of coded data regarding frequent involvement in Latina/o student groups, such as MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan), although from time to time references to sport clubs or theatre were found in the narratives.

I also had another Spanish teacher who was always helping me, got me involved with MEChA at school and later I got involved with being President of the Spanish Club. So there were always people, there were always a lot of role models. A lot of them were Latinos who were helping me and trying to tell me what was happening at school, where to go for certain information.

- Cristina

We actually started off [MEChA], my best friend who is here at UC, was the president so the UCX [University of California, anonymous campus] folks came over and said, “We’re here to help. We’re the most active chapter in Southern California. We’ll host a meeting.” They had their own workshops like UCX Raza workshops. Like

even last year I went back and saw the workshop that we started where high school students teach each other about activism and how to go about, you know, in your high school and see all the discrimination and how to take steps to change that. So we had our own workshop on that, so I think it was thanks to the guidance from the UCX students who were there with their outreach program every day, who would really encourage us to read this, or they would come into our Chicano Studies class, “you’re reading this go to this event. There’s this person speaking” and you know just a lot of inspiring words and their moral support. And I think that’s when we really discovered what it meant, the political and everything else that comes with being Chicana. I have a whole philosophy of “Chicana no nace se hace.” You know, “You aren’t born a Chicana, you become one.” So I think it was probably junior and senior year at our high school, when I was like “wow. This is me. This is something I want to be part of.” - Lorenza

I was really active in high school. So my sophomore year I got involved in MEChA and I really got involved with that and doing different cultural events. Like Cesar Chavez and honoring him. I joined ASB [Associated Student Body], Link Crew; it was to help mentor freshman and Spanish Club. I’ve learned to balance my time.  
– Monica

Overall, the students groups, such as MEChA, created spaces for the Chicana/Latina participants to establish their footing as marginalized students within our educational system. By interacting with other students, the interviewees were able to acquire assets, including time management and reading materials, which acted as stepping stones for their future academic success.

*Academic programs.* Academic programs, as the second subtheme of high school outreach, relates to all the excerpts coded in the Chicana/Latina narratives indicating a particular program oriented towards assisting their academic achievement. These programs include references to experiences during the participants’ high school years, as well as summer bridge programs while transitioning into college.

I went to Summer Discovery Program and it was for high school students as a precollegiate experience and I came here and I stayed at Santa Clarita [student dorm] for a month and a half, I took that first summer session



as a student. So I took Chicano 1A and Soc 2 and I found out that I loved being on my own.

- Cristina

And then I got involved with this class, it's called AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination]. And it's a program to get underrepresented students in college and so it helped a lot. I actually went for my first college campus as a field trip and they showed me what I had to do, the entrance essay that I didn't know anything about.

- Lydia

I came to STEP [Striving Toward Educational Possibilities], a program funded by EOP [Educational Opportunity Program]. It's a 2-week program and that was really helpful. I think that really gives us a head start. We know the campus, we get to know the library, all the basics we need, we enroll in classes, we get our IDs, we get to know the bookstore. It's an awesome program and if it wasn't for STEP, I probably would have been lost in the first week of school. - Elva

All of the above mentioned programs provided a source for students to gain a systemic understanding of the necessary steps for not only continuing onto the university level, but also for succeeding within academe.

### *Social Networks*

The final theme of this analysis delves into the use and construction of social networks by Chicana/Latina students as a means of acquiring information pertaining to entrance into higher education. All of the women interviewed identify as "first-generation" college students. The types of alliances were separated categorically into five subthemes. These subthemes include advisors/counselors, peers, siblings, teachers, and tutors.

**Advisors/counselors.** The Chicana/Latina undergraduates in this study repeatedly mention within their narratives specific junior high and high school counselors, or academic advisors in a club or group in which the narrators were members. The gender or race/ethnicity of these individuals was frequently female and non-White, however, there were a few exceptions, such as in the case of "Mr. Lopez." The following excerpts represent evidence of advisors/counselors as a form of Chicana/Latina cultural capital used as a means of bridging their way into higher education.

One of the counselors at high school she had mentioned that she had majored in sociology and said “Why don’t you take one of those classes and see if you like it and major in that?”

- Roxana

In the 7th or 8th grade some teacher, I think her name is Ms. Montoya, recommended me for this program called AVID and since then I remember Mr. Lopez who was the person in charge of that, he was the one who totally changed my view on everything. I’m going to probably thank him for life because he was the one that talked to me about college. He took me on a field trip with a couple of other students to UC, and during that time I was probably like a C or D student, so for me, my goal was to finish high school and get a job and that was it.

Mr. Lopez was the first one to tell me there were scholarships and financial aide and I was like “Damn, they help poor people?” So since then . . . my grades raised and he would tell us how to do notes and how to organize our binder, and also once we were sent to high school he was “College Prep, College Prep and never be afraid to ask” because he said “Nobody is going to come to you and tell you that this is what you need for school. You have to ask.” I remember Mr. Lopez told me “You know, just because you enter the university, it doesn’t mean that you’ve made it. Once you show me that you got your bachelor’s degree, that’s when you know you made it and you can go further on.” - Cristina

I also had a counselor really push me to come here. He came here too and he was really supportive. The director in the Upward Bound Program was always really supportive in taking us to different schools. So, I always had outside support and resources. – Monica

Typically, most of the advisors or counselors who were mentioned within the educational narratives were voiced as having shared a similar upbringing or cultural background to the participants. Conclusively, the similarities shared between both groups may have assisted in the creation of a trusting or safe space in terms of the students opening up with their future plans.

**Peers.** This subtheme includes passages by the Chicana/Latina undergraduates coded for references to high school friends or associates who were influential in the decisions pertaining to higher education.

Friends, I've had a lot of friends whether they're older or the same age as me, just because I see them and I see their desire or strength to keep going, although they've had so many obstacles throughout the way to, to maybe stop them or make it difficult for them to continue. – Esperanza

One of my best friends, Nan, she was very involved in school activities and Future Leaders of America, CSF [California Scholarship Federation], and she was the one who was always telling me "You have to be in this program it helps you for this." Because she had relatives that had gone through the process so she was always helping me. . . . It was important for me to do community service. By getting involved . . . I was doing a lot of networking, especially with mujeres helping me out and everything. So it's really just great to know that maybe even though I didn't get a lot of mentor from my cousins or aunts, I know that I had a lot of help from my immediate, closest friends. - Cristina

I came in as a Chicano Studies major because I always have known I wanted to do that. My friends are all majors at UCX and I was like "oh their books are interesting" and I would sneak into their classes. So, I've always known that I wanted to be Chicana/Chicano Studies. – Lorenza

Friendship networks have continually been shown to be a source of support for individuals. In the case of this study, the majority of the friendship networks of the interviewees were identified as being of Latina/o descent. This may explain why the peers were viewed as providing examples of how surviving and thriving within the university system is possible.

**SIBLINGS.** For this subtheme, the Chicana/Latina educational narratives were coded for both male and female siblings; however, most cases coded as a form of cultural capital are excerpts referencing older sisters. The following passages provide an example of how the participants' siblings assisted in transferring cultural capital regarding higher education.

Since my sisters were older than me and they went to UC campuses, I had visited UCY, UCZ, and here. So I

had visited all three campuses when I was younger and my sisters would always be on me about my grades, college applications, “When are you going to do this?” SATs, and all this stuff. AP [Advance Placement] classes, “Take as many AP classes as you can.” though not many were offered at my high school. So they would help me a lot with that. - Esperanza

And seeing my sister, she’s older. She paved the way. She had joined Upward Bound and that’s what got her into college and then I joined it too. And that gave me the experience of living in the dorms, taking classes, and doing things on my own. - Monica

When I was in junior high, my oldest brother graduated from high school and he went to UC. So that was the biggest jump that our family had done. He was the first person in the family to go to college and because of him came all the expectations for the rest of us because he went to college and it’s like “Okay, now everyone else.” He would always call me, always checking up on me. “How are you doing in school? What are your grades like?” All the time, he would just really push me and that’s really good, really good and now I’m here. And then so my sister, who is a year younger than him, when she graduated from high school, she also came to UC. So, it kind of started this, you know.

- Elva

Although the majority of the participants with siblings who motivated them to go onto college were sisters, those who did have brothers either in the university system or as college graduates were equally supported despite gender differences. This would seemingly go against the stereotypical gender norms attributed to Latina/o households.

*Teachers.* The subtheme of teachers provides a space for the coding of excerpts of the Chicana/Latina educational narratives for instructors identified by the narrators as key figures in their educational trajectories. The following excerpts provide an example of how the Chicana/Latina participants center their social networks with past teachers as undergraduate cultural capital.

My English teacher in junior high and two Spanish teachers in high school; they both were really encouraging and helped me out with college applications and personal statement. - Monica

One of my AVID teachers who actually was White, was one of the people who helped me out the most. She was White, but she just lived a very different experience. Her dad didn't support her financially at all. She was a teenage mother, and was on welfare and went through college raising her kids, so I saw my mom in her somehow. She inspired me to go and not to go to community college. - Lydia

I remember in 9th grade, the first class I ever went to was first period English. There was this teacher who, I couldn't figure out what ethnicity/race she was. She turned out to be Italian. . . . the first thing she said was "If you're going to take something from my class, it's that you really want to go to college." College? I mean half of the people there just looked at each other and laughed. You know, like "College, yeah right! We're not going to go to college" and what not. But throughout the year she was, every assignment had to do with college regardless of what the assignment was, you knew she was going to be talking about college. "In college, if this interests you, you can go ahead and study it further in college and do research." Research? "What the hell is that?" You know, research seemed like such a foreign word. First I wasn't sure what research really was, but she said, "That's when you can really dig deep into your passion." I thought, "Crazy, she's just talking nonsense, none of us are going to college." Lo and behold, the last day of class she's like "What did I tell you? In my class there wasn't going to be a day that you didn't think about college." So, I think she has probably been the first person to talk to me about college. She's probably the reason why I am here. You know, she was the one to tell me, "Can I see your schedule? You should be in Honor's classes. Okay, we're going to meet with your counselors." - Lorenza

An important detail to note from these passages is that teachers, regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, played key roles in verbally motivating the Chicana/Latina narrators to pursue their educations at the university level.

**Tutors.** This subtheme as a category encompasses data coded using the word "tutor" as well as "mentor" in the educational narratives of the Chicana/Latina participants. Although in many cases direct references to

names were not provided by the Chicana/Latina undergraduates, attention was paid in the coding process to the specific mentioning of adult individuals noted as assisting the narrator who were not identified as either counselors or teachers. The following excerpts demonstrate tutors/mentors at the high school level as a form of pre-campus Chicana/Latina cultural capital.

Yeah, Ms. Ramirez, she started a program called Project College Bound and she took mostly minority, low-income students. I was one of those students and we'd have these workshops and I had a mentor. She was really cool. She was the first White woman I saw take an interest in minorities. And when I first met her, I thought "Oh great." You know? I had bad experiences with my teachers at Santa Rosita High and so I was kind of like "Okay, whatever." But after the program was over and I had graduated from high school, . . . we were the only ones that kept in touch. All my other friends and their mentors never kept in touch and she'd come over to my birthday party, she came to my dad's funeral. Stuff like that. It meant so much to me and she would take me to college fairs, like Coastal College. She was just very supportive and I just thought that was great. - Roxana

Luckily I went to the Care Center one day and there was a guy from Cal State and he was talking about Cal State and how he could help me with the application process. So I took interest and I got help from him. He helped me out, filling out the application and he even took me to Cal State to turn in the paperwork because I applied in January, so I applied late. He really was a help. - Sonia

One of the UC students that would come and do the tutoring at my high school. She was also just in the same place I'm at, first generation, what a lot of Chicanas are, first generation, low-income background and she was kind of the first one. I never really opened myself up to anyone. I would go in and get tutored and . . . she'd help me with my homework, but she actually took time to really hear my family issues and say "maybe you should try this out. Or sometimes culturally this is what our parents have been taught and maybe it's different from what we might think" and how do deal with a lot of, just the generational, the, my beliefs and my parents that are contradicting at times. She's the one who taught me how

to deal a lot with that because my parents, my sister, we're such a little family, that we're used to being around each other." - Lorenza

In most cases, by having a mentor at the high school level, the Chicana/Latina participants were able to gain the needed "know how" for taking the next steps in continuing on with their educational careers. Tutoring by college students who self-identified as Chicana or Latina also provided an avenue by which the Chicanas/Latinas in this study were able to obtain the necessary information, as well as inspiration.

As demonstrated by this study, there is potential for Chicanas/Latinas to not only survive but thrive in the system of higher education. Analysis of the narrative reflections by the participants shows the complexity of creating and using cultural capital as strategies for academic success. The three main thematic categories of *mothers*, *high school organizations* and *social networks* support identifiable sources of Chicana/Latina capital. Additionally, the analysis reveals how cultural capital can be developed and is "evolving in nature" allowing for longitudinal studies "in terms of sequences, or in terms of movement, or change over time" (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 104).

Future discussions regarding Chicana/Latina cultural capital involve looking at how this capital remains fluid in terms of use and construction. This entails investigating the ways in which Chicana/Latina undergraduates continually use specific forms of previously established cultural capital, as well as create new forms while attending college for both themselves and future generations of Chicana/Latina students. Specifically, engaging research on how networks are not only created, but maintained, will assist in understanding the impact on both recruitment and retention of Chicanas/Latinas in the university system.

This work challenges an assimilationist model as the only model for academic success at the university level. Analysis of the narrative reflections by Chicana/Latina university students shows a complexity of strategies, including social networking among family and friends, creation of "safe space," and use of ethnic group membership and identification as a means of graduating with college degrees. The next project for publication will entail a detailed description of how forms of Chicana/Latina cultural capital are carried throughout the college careers of women of Mexican descent as students, as well as how additional forms of capital are constructed in the process of surviving and thriving.

#### REFERENCES

Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza 2nd edition*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999.

- Darder, Antonia, "The politics of biculturalism: culture and difference in the formation of 'warriors for gringostroika and the new mestizas'," in *Culture and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Bicultural Experience in the United States*, ed. Antonia Darder (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 1995). 1-20.
- Delgado Bernal, Dolores, "Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research," in *Learning as a Political Act*, ed. José A. Segarra and Ricardo Dobles (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1999). 301-325.
- Delgado Bernal, Dolores, "Learning and living pedagogies of the home: the mestiza consciousness of Chicana students," in *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, ed. Dolores Delgado Bernal, et.al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). 113-132.
- Diaz, Jessica C., "Process of Social and Academic Integration Among Latino College Freshman." (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998).
- Hesford, Wendy, *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Krathwohl, David, *Methods of Educational & Social Science Research: An Integrated Approach 2nd edition*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997.
- Martinez, Jacqueline M., *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity: Communication and Transformation in Praxis*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000
- Meyer, Leisa D., "'Ongoing Missionary Labor': Building, maintaining, and expanding Chicana studies/history an interview with Vicki L. Ruiz," *Feminist Studies* 34.1/2 Spring/Summer (2008): 23-45.
- Mohanty, Chandra, "On race and voice: challenges for liberal education in the 1990s," in *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge Press, 1994). 145-166.
- Neuman, William L., *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches 4th edition*. Needham Heights: A Pearson Education Company, 2000.
- Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo D., *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.



- Stewart, David and Algis Mickunas, *Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and its Literature*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1974.
- Strauss, Anselm L. and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1990. University of California, Student Handbook, September 26, 2004, <http://kiosk.ucsb.edu/Diversity/whatdoesucsblooklike.asp?page=diversity&subpage=whatdoesucsblooklike>
- Yosso, Tara, "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8.1. (2005): 69-91.
- Zavella, Patricia, "Feminist insider dilemmas: constructing ethnic identity with "Chicana" informant," in *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*, ed. Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella (New York: Routledge Press, 1997). 42-61.

## APPENDIX A

**Interview Questions****General – Warm up**

Describe your educational experiences.

What are your feelings or perspectives about college?

Describe your college experiences.

**Family/Mentors**

What is your family background?

How did/does your family support your education? Which family members played significant roles & in what ways?

Describe any mentors you have had, both family and non-family.

**Racial/Ethnic Identity**

How would you describe yourself?

When asked the question, “What are you?” how do you respond?

How has your ethnicity or race influenced your education?

As a student, have you ever been accused of “acting White?” If so, please give an example.

How, if ever, has your ethnic identity been questioned?

Do you see yourself as being bicultural or multicultural person? If so, in what ways?

What stereotypes, if any, have you had to face?

How has your ethnic identity impacted your educational experiences?

**Campus Compatibility & Climate**

How do you view your college environment?

We think of university settings as being sterile or impersonal. What have your experiences been?

Do you have a sense of belonging on campus?

How comfortable have you been while going to college?

**Academic Identity & Adaptability**

What makes you a college student?

When you think of a good college student, what qualities come to mind?

Does your ethnic identity conflict in any way with your academic identity? If so, in what ways?

What makes you adaptable to college life? How have you adapted to being a college student?

How prepared were you for leaving home? What did you do to make the transition easier?

How do you handle stressful times? Or how have you handled past situations related to school that were stressful?

### **Self-Reflection & Expectations**

Discuss why you are going to college.

Describe your overall view regarding your educational career to date.

Do you see yourself as having potential to succeed? If so, in what ways?

What are your next steps after finishing your undergraduate degree?



# CHICANO/MEXICAN “CULTURE” AS A RATIONAL INSTRUMENT IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

*Alexandro José Gradilla*  
*California State University, Fullerton*

The instability of the discourse of culture demonstrates the problematic nature of its deployment as an instrument of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, its instability is what has permitted advocates to use culture as a positive and even protective factor for the first time. Before the 1970s, Chicano/Mexican culture was framed as pathological or deficient by many policymakers, scholars, and social service professionals (see Gonzalez, 1990; Gonzalez, 2004; Monroy, 1999; Sanchez, 1993). The advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture use “culture” as a positive discourse despite the history of its negative use. This feat merits exploration, especially their turning the dominant discourse against itself. Yudice (2003) argues that “culture is expedient as a resource for attaining an end,” especially when the cultural resource serves a communal need (pp. 22, 29). Fundamentally, he sees the discourse of Chicano/Mexican culture as being transformed from one of pathology or deficiency to one of “community resource” by the proponents of Chicano/Mexican communities (p. 29).

My argument requires an epistemological sketch in order to contextualize my case study. The problem of using “culture” as an analytical category across the qualitative-quantitative divide ignores the history of the Mexican origin population in the United States. Their racialization has been based on “cultural” inferiority, not solely on “biological” inferiority (see Almaguer, 1994; Menchaca, 2001). This hybrid form of racism is what Razack (1998) has called “culturalized racism.” Razack includes cultural deficiency, social inadequacy, and technological underdevelopment models in her definition. Culturalized racism diverts attention away from structural factors and provides for a versatile explanatory discourse for poor social outcomes of minority groups. It ignores the possibility that employment, the environment, patriarchy, or racism cause poor socioeconomic outcomes. Culturalized racism also occurs when groups are blamed for their poor social conditions because they refuse to exchange their culture for a “superior” one. The consequences of this epistemological history inevitably shaped, as Mignolo (2000) has elucidated, not the “scholarship of culture” but the “cultures of scholarship” that inform our understanding of Chicano/Mexican culture. I conclude with an analysis

of the epidemiologic paradox as a discourse based on an unstable variable: culture. Both critics and advocates of Mexican (or Chicano) culture deploy it as a critical discursive formation. Incredibly, the advocates of Mexican/Chicano culture attempt to reclaim it as a resource and not use it, to modify the famous prescription of Audre Lorde (1984), as “the master’s tool.”

I do not intend to demonize the quantitative traditions of the human sciences by presenting the heroic value of qualitative studies. In his discussion of the production of (anthropological) knowledge and discourse, Rabinow (1992) reminded us that the ultimate product or artifact is “reality.” He proposed to build on Foucault’s stance on modern knowledge that “an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (Foucault, 2000). In the human sciences, “culture” has been not the *object* of study for anthropology but rather its *product*. Since culture can never be totalized or fully captured (or, to use the terminology of critical ethnographers, “represented”), I argue that what anthropology has *scientifically* produced is a discourse about culture.

As the anthropological discourse of culture travels from its epistemological “home” into other disciplines, it inevitably will assimilate its new environment.<sup>1</sup> Further compounding the problem is the assumption by social scientists and by qualitative and quantitative scholars that culture, when converted into a variable, maintains the same meaning. But how do we reconcile culture as a fluid category in one disciplinary discourse and a concrete scientific reality in another? The discourse of epidemiologic paradox demonstrates a need for a new discussion on the uses of culture. As Rabinow (1991) states, these types of interrogations and new paradigms are not capricious “nor is it a question of positivists versus humanists; ethical questions are traverse to epistemological ones.” Using Rabinow’s “anthropology of reason” framework, I examine the epistemological problem of uncritically using culture as an analytical category.<sup>2</sup>

In the discussion below, I examine two methodological issues that expose the epistemological problem of using culture as an analytical tool. In scientific models of research, the control of stable variables allows researchers to configure and re-configure variables as needed. Quantitative or policy scholars may desire to include culture or cultural variables

---

<sup>1</sup> Said’s idea of traveling theory (Said, 2002) is useful here because he shows how theories change through time and space. He stated, “[t]he first time a human experience is recorded and then given a theoretical formulation, its force comes from being directly connected to and organically provoked by real historical circumstances. Later versions of the theory cannot replicate its original power.”

<sup>2</sup> See Rabinow (1992). Another framework I will draw from is Latour’s anthropology of science, in particular his call to anthropologize rationality (see Latour, 1991).

(language, attitudes, etc.) in their research model. But what these scholars do not demonstrate is their understanding of culture or the relationship of the group being studied to its culture (or, heaven forbid, cultures). A key difficulty in converting culture, which is a disciplinary-based discourse, into a scientific instrument is the tendency to "black box" it in the design of research models.<sup>3</sup> Scientific researchers of human phenomena, unlike ethnographers, are not required to demonstrate their "ethnographic authority."<sup>4</sup> Latour (2004) reminded us that scientific research, in order to maximize its returns, is risk producing and that some social scientific research is "not risky enough." The endeavor almost depends on predictability instead of discovery or disruption.

Latour (2004) discussed the problems of conducting scientific social research with human subjects. He stated:

Contrary to non-humans, humans have a great tendency, when faced with scientific authority, to abandon any recalcitrance and to behave like obedient objects, offering investigators only redundant statements, thus comforting those same investigators in the belief that they have produced robust "scientific" facts and imitated the great solidarity of the natural sciences! . . . in contrast to bona fide natural objects which, utterly uninterested by the inquiries, obstinately "object" to being studied and explode with great equanimity the questions raised by the investigators—not to mention their laboratories! . . . the social sciences have not been thwarted in their development by the resistance of humans to being treated as objects, but by their complacency about scientific research programmes which make it more difficult for the social scientists to quickly detect the artifacts of the design in the case of humans than in the case of non-humans. . . . Human science laboratories rarely explode! (217)

Indeed social scientific authority depends on the belief in the stable reliability of its models, techniques, and instruments. Categories, identities, truths, knowledge, or subjectivities are not allowed to explode; they cannot. Empirical faith is placed in the study design and, more importantly, in the variables used to produce the edifice of social facts that reveal the underlying laws of society. Again, if culture is a discursive product of a

---

<sup>3</sup> Rabinow (1992) stated, "[i]t is suggested that scientific instruments operate as 'black boxes' when most users of the instruments no longer need to understand the theories embodied in the apparatus and rely upon the standard interpretation of the data generated by the instrument" (p. 8).

<sup>4</sup> See Rosaldo's discussion of the critiques of objectivity and the "lone ethnographer" as "detached" researcher (Rosaldo, 1988).

particular discipline and not a scientifically reliable category, then how can culture be used as a variable to construct empirical realities or truths? Furthermore even the philosophical foundation of social scientific authority, the strict separation of objectivity and subjectivity, is not a guaranteed given.

A key tenet of social scientific research is the objectivity or “detached” nature of the investigator. Latour (1994) reminded us that “objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed, they grow together, and they grow irreversibly together.” Social scientists are never detached or distant from their research. This does not mean that “good” ethical research by social scientists is not possible, but it is difficult for social scientists to claim the same level of detachment from their research as laboratory scientists. In the human sciences, the researcher and the researched share the same social milieu. Interrogating the methodology of the “hard” social sciences proves to be more risky or explosive than interviewing human subjects. The difficulty of challenging established truth or knowledge is that the process also necessitates confronting power. Foucault (2000) alerted us to the problem that

. . . it’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power. . .but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself. (133)

The discomfiting aspect of this proposition is that truth and knowledge are not free from power or politics.

To provide context for this discussion on the scholarship of Mexican and Chicano culture as connected to the apparatus of power and knowledge, it is critical to first discuss the need to expose the “cultures of scholarship.” Mignolo (2000) defined the cultures of scholarship as being “cast in terms of textual national legacies, for it is in and by texts that the educational system. . .is structured and that science is articulated, packaged, transmitted, and exported” (262). The legacies, according to Mignolo, are long lasting in terms of determining which groups produce “culture” and which produce “scholarship and science” (263). Any discussion of the Chicano/Mexican culture, whether positive or negative, will be trapped by epistemological structures. Immense aporias confront the advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture because in challenging the dominant paradigm or episteme, they must contend with what Mignolo observed as “the goal of science and scholarship is to conquer the facts, whether perceived as human nature or natural nature” (265). In my analysis, a core question at the heart of using culture in the epidemiologic paradox research by the advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture is this: Is



it possible to use a discursive formation (the master's tool) that was not originally intended to help a population and transform it into a liberatory tool?<sup>5</sup> In order for readers to comprehend the task of confronting the dominant "cultures of scholarship," I will detail the scientific craft of ethnographic writing that establishes the authority of the qualitative social scientist.

Most ethnographies written before the 1980s have served to rearticulate a group's ontology and epistemology. The impact of these projects is the further domination of the group being studied. The "ethnographic script" of minority populations has become another pillar in the structure of dominance. The "gate-keeping" concepts of ethnographies written by anthropologists established official and sanctioned discussions about groups (see Appadurai, 1988). The power of these concepts is they produce the effect of the "real." Ethnographic scripts are part of hegemonic forms of knowledge: they inscribe their discourse into the geography, the place of study, and into bodies (Appadurai, 1986). Gate-keeping concepts produced in ethnographies provide readers with the "facts" and "realities" of "different" cultures. These concepts teach that certain cultures are defined by a few essential aspects, that is, metonymic objects stand in for entire cultures. For example, India is represented by castes, hierarchies, and untouchables and China by forms of ancestor worship and strategies for saving face. In Mexico and Central America, this includes *compadrazgo*, *fatalismo*, *machismo* and folk etiologies (*susto*, *empacho*, *caída de mollera*, *ojo*, etc.). The power of such gate-keeping concepts within the ethnographic script is that they shape our understanding of a population through its "culture."

Mimeographed cultural facts take on a life of their own when conflated and converted into objects, thus enabling more facile replication through ethnographic representations by anthropologists. In the hands of anthropologists, the authority of these concepts and scripts arises from the ability of scholars to produce and reproduce (or replicate) the same

---

<sup>5</sup> Mignolo (2000) offered this view (which in many ways is germane to my discussion but the entirety of his proposition would require a longer exploration) about developing a new thinking: "[w]hat cultures of scholarship export is mainly a 'method,' since the problems they deal with are problems related to their own place of origin. What border thinking from the colonial difference shall contribute would be to place the 'problem' engrained in the colonial difference (the local problem) before the 'method.' Starting from the problem instead of starting from the method, assuming the colonial difference as conceptual genealogy instead of the genealogy of the social sciences (or cultures of scholarship in general), would release knowledge from the norms of the disciplines. But, above all, it will make visible that knowledge production from the colonial difference will have to deal with the 'silences' of history and the 'differences' of coloniality, that is to say the colonial difference. Border thinking then emerges, historically, at the end of the cold war as a critic of the scientific distribution of the planet. And it emerges, logically and conceptually, from the perception of knowledges and languages placed in a subaltern position in the exercise of the coloniality of power. (p. 306)

facts through time (decade after decade) and space (anthropology department to anthropology department). The “ethnographic authority” used by anthropologists produces the effect of authentic cultural representation (Clifford, 1988). The veracity of the research and the infallibility of the researcher are established by deploying writing techniques that convince readers of the absolute expertise of the anthropologists. Anthropologists construct facts and reality rhetorically using allegory and surrealism. This method assists the ethnographer in creating or exaggerating difference to produce a convincing anthropological account. The problem with this approach is that it essentializes culture and homogenizes people.

The “writing of culture” by anthropologists has become a venue for culturalized racism. Kelley (1997) accurately noted that social scientists have, in effect, racialized culture. Negative terms such as nihilistic, dysfunctional, and pathological are neatly folded into “Black culture.” Kelley argued, “[r]elying on a narrowly conceived definition of culture, most of the underclass literature uses behavior and culture interchangeably” (16). Hence the “behaviors” of a small subgroup of African Americans stands in proxy for the culture of the entire African American population. From a social policy standpoint, this is practical because using a stable definition of groups and culture facilitates actionable policies. But from the perspective of the groups being represented, these ethnographies only serve to create a caricature or simulation.

The transformation of cultural caricatures into “truth” is based on the anthropologists’ discourses and practices that are the discursive basis for their authoritative knowledge. For the Mexican origin population, culture is a discursive formation with many layers of ascribed meaning. Ethnographic representations become codified social facts. The Mexican as “ignorant,” “backward,” and “superstitious” was a dominant recurrent theme in many ethnographies of the 1950s and the 1960s (see Carlos, 1997; Montiel, 1970; Romano, 1968, 1969, 1970; Vaca, 1970a, 1970b). These labels are important because they served to characterize the Mexican origin population as pathologically different and deviant from U.S. norms. An emphasis on negative cultural attributes and their exclusive application to specific minority groups can distort the humanity of those groups.

I now turn to a discussion of the epidemiologic paradox, or the discussion of cultural protective factors, examining the epistemological collusion of qualitative and quantitative knowledge through the use of the ambiguous category “culture.” The epidemiologic paradox discussion began in the 1980s with regard to the positive health outcomes of Mexican immigrants (see Markides & Coreil, 1986). The overall health indicators observed included “infant mortality, mortality at other ages, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, other diseases, functional health, and

mental health." One of the most striking findings for health professionals and policymakers relating to the epidemiologic paradox is that poor immigrant mothers can give birth to healthy babies without any prenatal intervention. Social science researchers, who investigate minority populations, attribute causation to culture, especially when they encounter "confounding factors" or their numbers "do not add up." In their 1986 report written for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Markides and Coreil did not intend to create controversy. The authors found, in this health paradox, that culture appeared to play a positive role in most indicators of health. They did not question the use of culture as a variable or rational instrument of measurement. When culture is used as a category within a scientific methodology, it can be interpreted in ways that support the overall research findings. In this first major instance, it was interpreted as positive.

Markides and Coreil (1986) comprehensively culled evidence based on prior quantitative empirical research on the health outcomes of the Mexican origin population. They found that Mexican immigrants had equal, if not better, health outcomes compared to the U.S.-born white population. They also found that, although Mexican immigrants and African Americans share similar social and economic conditions, health indicators such as infant mortality remained higher for African Americans, as well as for U.S.-born Puerto Ricans. Markides and Coreil listed the factors involved in the health paradox: "The relative advantages or disadvantages of Hispanics include cultural practices, family supports, selective migration, diet, and genetic heritage." Markides and Coreil were not the first to discover these better health outcomes nor were they the first to use the label "epidemiologic paradox." However, the publication of their findings had important institutional ramifications (see Guttman, Frisbie, DeTurk, & Blanchard, 1998). Their results ruptured the orthodox understanding of the culture of the Mexican origin population as pathological or deficient. The "common sense" of the cultures of scholarship appeared to be fragmenting because the social science research industry's *scientific* knowledge had been turned on its head (Latour, 1994).

The epidemiologic paradox directly challenged conventional social scientific thought regarding the nature of white and minority health. One of the key factors in the paradox for healthy Mexican immigrants was low acculturation rates (Latour, 1994). Markides and Coreil concluded their review with this list of possible factors that could explain the surprising and mostly positive results.

Possible explanations for these relative advantages and disadvantages in health status may involve several factors.

1. Cultural practices that favor reproductive success may contribute to favorable birth weights and low neonatal mortality.
2. Selective migration may confer some reproductive advantage as well as contribute to general health.
3. Early and high fertility in Hispanic women may contribute to lower breast and higher cervical cancer rates.
4. Dietary factors may be linked to low cancer rates and high prevalence of obesity and diabetes.
5. Genetic heritage, particularly Native American admixture, may partly account for certain cancer patterns and excess diabetes.
6. Extended family support may reduce need for psychiatric treatment and protect from stress-related morbidity.
7. Low socioeconomic status and associated environmental risks probably contribute to high rates of infectious and parasitic diseases.
8. Other, as yet unknown causes, may contribute to a favorable life expectancy and other positive health indicators.

Their assessment considered many factors that could serve as cultural protective factors, but, most interestingly, culture and family were deemed positive. Other fascinating factors mentioned, especially in the area of negative health, were genetic heritage and low socioeconomic status. If anything, the authors at least attempted to frame their positioning of culture among important intersecting variables. Markides and Coreil ended their review by warning that health outcomes could deteriorate as Mexican immigrants and their children became “acculturated”. With this pronouncement, the researchers not only demonstrated their view of Chicano/Mexican culture as beneficial, they also presented the possibility that U.S. culture is detrimental to health outcomes for “healthy” immigrants. However, the results of their research were not decisive in determining the protective aspect of Chicano/Mexican culture. Following their research, other investigators began to look for reasons beyond culture.

A key point regarding the power/knowledge discursive formations and the cultures of scholarships is the influence of the dominant paradigms or epistemes within the human sciences. Even research scholars who are members of same group being studied are not free of epistemological constraints. Paredes (1993) famously advised that Chicanos and their cultures were not distorted because of overtly racist white scholars. On the contrary, the scholars were very sympathetic and politically “left”

of the American mainstream.<sup>6</sup> Paredes revealed that the problem was not with the researcher but with the research methodology. Hence, according to him, if the methods, models, or theories are bad, then, regardless of who does the research, the final results or findings will be problematic. In 1999, for example, Chicana sociologists Segura and de la Torre indignantly challenged the idea that immigrant health practices were beneficial: "[w]e argue that the current popular trend of promoting the 'good' health behaviors of recent Mexican immigrants should be challenged as ignoring the cultural contradictions that exist and are often rooted in patriarchal family structures" (156). They instead promoted the idea that patriarchy and sexism are primarily Mexican cultural phenomena and, like many social scientists regardless of race or gender, believe that patriarchy and sexism are present in the United States' culture but play less of a role than in immigrant or minority cultures. They were hesitant to accept the idea that there could be positive aspects in Mexican immigrant culture. Instead they attributed the good health outcomes to living in the United States and acculturation.

Segura and de la Torre reinforced the dominant epistemological view of U.S. culture as progressive and Mexican culture as backward. They repositioned the epistemological terms of epidemiologic paradox by re-inscribing the discourse to reflect this line of thinking: Chicanas are more feminist oriented (modern) and Mexican immigrant women are more traditional (backward).<sup>7</sup> They also contended that since these Mexican immigrant women are living and working in the U.S., they technically should be considered "highly" acculturated and therefore more similar to Chicanas (Segura & De La Torre, 1999). For them, the cultural protective factors for good health outcomes are based on residing in the United States. Mexican culture, in their view, cannot be responsible for good health outcomes. They also believed that the daily lives of Mexican immigrant women are better here and there is more opportunity for them to re-make themselves as more independent, which may be valid but

---

<sup>6</sup> In a similar strain, Said (2002) contended in his study on Orientalism, that the "best" Orientalists are the scholars from the Middle East because they have learned and incorporated the master narrative of what Middle Eastern culture and society are really like. The power of dominant knowledge to shape the thinking of scholars also implicates minority scholars who attempt to advocate for their communities. The scholar as an interlocutor as defined by Said carries two definitions. The first originates from the colonial situation of being the colonizers' messenger and interpreter. The other definition comes from the academic realm; it is meant to refer to a speaker who has been domesticated and represents the dominant perspectives. These epistemological and ontological dilemmas bedevil many minority scholars. (pp. 297-9)

<sup>7</sup> Recently sociologists and anthropologists of gender have noted the problematic epistemological formations surrounding the discourse of gender, culture and Mexicans. More importantly the perception that Mexico's gender system is dominated by machismo and passive women does not hold up when confronted with ethnographic data. See Gutmann, 2007a, 2007b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994.

does not preclude the maintenance of culture. Segura and de la Torre recommended redefining “traditional” as “adaptation and innovation” to include Chicanas and Mexicanas (163). The skepticism toward the idea of Mexican immigrant culture providing cultural “protection” not only comes from Chicana feminists but also from quantitative social scientists.

In another study focusing on the long-term advantages of the health paradox for Mexican American children, an epidemiological research team (an ethnically mixed group) found a higher risk of poor developmental skills for children of immigrant backgrounds, regardless of birth weight (a key indicator in the health paradox findings) (Padilla et al., 2002). The researchers tested the paradox hypothesis by giving standardized tests to different groups of children (U.S.-born Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, African Americans, and white children). They found many of the immigrants’ children to be developmentally challenged (1119). They cautioned that the overoptimistic tone of some of the research on the paradox does not consider long-term effects on the healthy babies as they mature into childhood (1120).

What the authors found to be more important than birth weight was the mother’s education level and socioeconomic status. Their main concern was that the focus of health intervention policy in early childhood should promote socioeconomic opportunities, not reinforce culture. They believed that “foreign” culture and language skills actually impeded academic success and caused developmental problems, but that these could be overcome with access to better resources (1120). They minimized the importance of programs that promoted cultural maintenance rather than providing economic support. Instead of advocating for both aspects to be included in intervention programs, they dismissed the cultural (as possibly being beneficial) in favor of purely economic solutions. It is admirable that the researchers desired a structural response to help children with developmental problems, but it need not come at the expense of culture by debasing or deriding it as a minimally beneficial factor.

Another skeptical research team (Palloni & Morenoff, 2001) concluded that the health paradox is the product of poor methodology. They faulted the paradox literature for relying on “variable and risk approach” modeling for the research design: “[w]e showed that the biases can be large even under benign conditions, that the entire enterprise of controlling for confounding influences, so fundamental in a risk or variable-based approach, can be self-defeating” (171). With dramatic language, Palloni and Morenoff proclaimed that the paradox “crumbles” and “fizzles” because of the reckless construction of un-theorized variables such as ethnicity or the lack of inclusion of the social selection process of immigration, which they claimed is the sign of “lazy researchers.” They

warned, “[f]urther studies following the conventional risk or variable approach will produce only vapid stories, suffering from the same fragility as already expounded” (171). They concluded by stating that the Hispanic (epidemiologic) paradox is a “punch line” for poorly constructed research models, so that Mexican culture in the U.S. cannot be the cause of good health outcomes. Instead they insisted it is poor statistical data and faulty models that give the illusion of beneficial outcomes.

Cultural deficiency discourses and other epistemological forms of culturalized racism not only affect individual members of racialized groups daily, they also influence the construction of knowledge and the cultures of scholarship that reproduce negative representations of culture. But as I mentioned earlier, culture is a fluid and flexible discourse. In order to reposition “culture as resource” and not as pathology, a struggle for meaning that will have structural or institutional implications must take place.

Yudice (2003) offered his perspective on the possibility of transforming the meaning of culture. Using a Gramscian lens, he stated, “[i]n our era, claims to difference and culture are expedient insofar as they presumably lead to the empowerment of a community” (344).<sup>8</sup> If advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture are able to seize the discourse from its dominant perch and then transform “the master’s tools” into tools of liberation for a community, then the discourse of culture can be a “terrain of struggle.” Many advocates for Hispanic and Latino communities have used the paradox to critique inequality, lack of access to healthcare, and lack of opportunity for the production of minority professionals. These advocates have the audacity to claim that the benefits of “cultural protective factors” work in the following way: “these factors serve to shield them [Hispanics] from many high-risk health behaviors” (see Falcon, Aguirre-Molina, & Molina, 2001). Falcon, Aguirre-Molina, and Molina supported the perspective that health professionals and researchers need to reassess strategies and interventions that preserve culturally determined protective factors that optimize health outcomes.

Advocates for the paradox discourse created a rift in the dominant cultural and health ideology by engaging in a “war of position” in order to organize fragmented social interests and create a new language. Burawoy (1990) argued that transformative movements need strong leadership. More importantly, the type of leader is important for Burawoy.

---

<sup>8</sup> For more context for this quotation, I offer these earlier statements from Yudice: “[c]ulture, in this view and following Gramscian theory, was understood as a ‘terrain of struggle.’ But the content of culture receded in importance when the instrumental usefulness of the claim to difference as a warrant gained legitimacy. It might be said that previous understanding of culture—canons of artistic excellence, symbolic patterns, that give coherence to and thus endow a group of people or society with human worth, or culture as discipline—give way to the expediency of culture.”

He stated that “[o]rganic intellectuals close to, and with faith in, subordinate groups must assume a critical role in any such war of position.” In another example of “advocates” creating a discourse of culture as resource is Scribner’s editorial in the *American Journal of Public Health* (Scribner, 1996), which used the journal’s institutional authority to advocate for Hispanics. He stated,

The fact that the health status of Mexican Americans as a group deteriorates with exposure to community environments in the United States and the fact that the characteristic deterioration in health status is associated with the loss of a Mexican cultural orientation indicate the existence of a group-level model of risk. It is a model of profound importance for public health, one that has been virtually ignored by the research establishment. The paradox of Hispanic health exposes the limitations of the reductionist paradigm of biomedicine in setting the research agenda for public health. The acculturation hypothesis suggests that a group-level effect for cultural orientation is far more important in determining risk of chronic disease among Mexican Americans than genetic, biologic, or socioeconomic factors operating at the individual level.

Scribner’s editorial demonstrated the small spaces available to counterdominant thinking. This example shows the tensions within the public health, biomedicine, and the research “industry” (see Latour, 1994).

Other Latino advocates have acknowledged the importance of culture but emphasize the power of economic factors for determining health outcomes. Elena Fuentes-Afflick (Science Blog, 2000) pointed to the paradox as a way to further improve child and maternal health outcomes. A concern in this debate is that healthy outcomes with little or no medical attention can pose a potential problem if used as justification for denying access to healthcare. Fuentes-Afflick (Science Blog, 1998) noted that times of stress (postpartum for women, for example) may weaken culturally protective factors and Latinas may put their own health at risk. For example, a mother who might have provided a source of family income prior to getting pregnant may develop poor eating habits if she is unable to work and the family’s income is cut in half. Culture, even as a protective factor, is vulnerable to powerful forces such as the economy. Latino advocates through their research effectively demonstrate the power of culture and the many possibilities for understanding the positive effects of minority culture.



Academic writing, research, discourse, and knowledge constitute more than mere intellectual or scientific inquiry. Research provides the basis for policy recommendations on pressing social issues. The recommendations serve as guidelines for governmental agencies and institutions. The production of academic knowledge on the Mexican origin population has produced essentialized representations. Initially, research that described culture was used to reinforce ideas that Mexican culture was deficient. The empirical tradition of research, though usually reliable as a form of rational knowledge, is negated by the very concept it attempts to monitor: culture. For the Mexican origin population, poorly informed and designed research is their greatest risk factor. The epidemiologic paradox is an unstable discourse that creates a space of transgression for research scholars who attempt to subvert orthodox thinking. Culture becomes a surrogate discourse for racialization; the paradox discourse is a battle between negative and positive discursive formations within the cultures of scholarship.

Culture as an instrument of scientific reason was meant to describe the Mexican origin population as a problem. A rupture in the structures of epistemological domination occurs when culture is framed as a protective factor. Many Latino scholars and advocates were able to turn the discursive formation of culture back on itself. Advocates of minoritized groups now face a critical choice. As Abu-Lughod (1991) implored, "[t]he West still has tremendous discursive, military, and economic power. Our writing can either sustain it or work against its grain." For these advocates, the burden of defying conventional epistemology also means defying dominant power. Culture is not a negative factor or impediment but a benefit. In the combative arena of academic publishing and policymaking, culture occupies an ambiguous terrain of struggle. Empirical scholars attempt to make culture a unit of analysis. This provides the opportunity to shift culture from a confounding factor to a critique of U.S. practices, norms, and dominant culture. The health of immigrants and their long-term outcomes provides an opportunity to highlight positive aspects of minority populations and to demonstrate the negative aspects of U.S. culture. An important institutional fact is that the cultural protective factor analysis will not gain prominence until there is a critical mass of minority scholars, especially Latinos, to promote this view.

Academic and policy writing makes scientific claims about its objects of study. Researchers use the rational tools of their science. Their methods, writings, and findings are not viewed as polemical or agenda driven but as truth driven. The application of their "findings" should invoke concern if issues of asymmetrical power relations are not addressed. Since no power system is totalizing, there is always room for

struggle. Advocates can transform the master's (rational) tools to reframe the discourse of culture into a beneficial community resource. This "war of position" enabling advocates to see the culture of minority as valuable was only possible because of the context of the late twentieth century. Yudice (2003) reminded us that for culture to make the transition from a dominant tool to one controlled by communities "it is not so much that power dispenses with culture, but that it no longer needs it to shape ethical subjects of the nation. Culture is 'freed,' so to speak, to become a generator of value in its own right" (336). Let's hope that with the increasing "value" of Chicano/Mexican culture that the Chicano/Mexican community itself will no longer be *valuably worthless*.

#### REFERENCE LIST

- Abu-Lughod, Lila, Writing against culture. In R.G. Fox (ed.) *Recapturing anthropology: Working in the present* (pp. 137-162). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, (1991).
- Almaguer, Tomas, *Racial fault lines: the historical origins of white supremacy in California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (1994).
- Appadurai, Arjun, Theory in anthropology: Center and periphery. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28 (2), 356-361, (1986, April).
- Appadurai, Arjun, Putting hierarchy in its place. *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1), 36-49, (1988, February).
- Burawoy, Michael, Marxism as science: Historical challenges and theoretical growth. *American Sociological Review* 55 (6), 775-793, (1990, December).
- Clifford, James. (1988). *The predicament of culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Falcon, A., Aguirre-Molina, M., & Molina, C.W., Latino health policy: beyond demographic determinism. In C.W. Molina, R.E. Zambrana, M. Aguirre-Molina (eds.), *Health issues in the Latino community* (pp. 3-22). San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, (2001).
- Foucault, Michel., & Faubion, J.D., *Power*. New York: New Press, 2000.
- Gonzalez, Gilbert G., *Chicano education in the era of segregation*. Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, (1990).
- Gonzalez, Gilbert G., *Culture of empire: American writers, Mexico, and Mexican immigrants, 1880-1930*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, (2004).
- Gutmann, Matthew C. *Fixing men: Sex, birth control, and AIDS in Mexico*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (2007a).

- Gutmann, Matthew C. *The meanings of macho: Being a man in Mexico City*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (2007b).
- Gutmann, Myron P., Frisbie, W. P., DeTurk, P., & Blanchard, K.S., Dating the origins of the epidemiologic paradox among Mexican Americans. *Texas Population Research Center Papers 1997-1998* (Paper No. 97-98-07), (1998, April).
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette, *Gendered transitions: Mexican experiences of immigration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (1994).
- Kelley, Robin D.G., *Yo' mama's disfunkcional!: Fighting the culture wars in urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1997).
- Latour, Bruno, The impact of science studies on political philosophy. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 16 (11), 3-19, (1991, Winter).
- Latour, Bruno, Pragmatogonies: A mythical account of how humans and nonhumans swap properties. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (6), 791-808, (1994, May).
- Latour, Bruno, How to talk about the body? The normative dimension of science studies. *Body & Society* 10 (2-3), 205-229, (2004).
- Lorde, Audre, *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Markides, K.S. and Coreil, J. (1986, May-June). Health of Hispanics in the Southwestern United States: an epidemiologic paradox. *Public Health Reports* 101, 253-265, (1984).
- Menchaca, Martha, *Recovering history, constructing race: the Indian, black, and white roots of Mexican Americans*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, (2001).
- Mignolo, Walter, Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking. *Princeton studies in culture/power/history*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, (2000).
- Monroy, Douglas, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the great migration to the Great Depression*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (1999).
- Montiel, Miguel, The social science myth of the Mexican American family. *El Grito* 3 (4), 56-63
- Padilla, Yolanda C. et al. (2002, March). Is the Mexican American "epidemiologic paradox" advantage at birth maintained through early childhood? *Social Forces* 80 (3), 1101-1123, (1970, Summer).
- Palloni, Alberto, & Morenoff, J. D., Interpreting the paradoxical in the Hispanic paradox: Demographic and epidemiologic approaches. *Annals of the New York Academies of Science* 954, 140-174, (2001).

- Paredes, Américo, & Bauman, R., *Folklore and culture on the Texas-Mexican border*. Austin, TX: CMAS Books, Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, (1993).
- Rabinow, Paul, For hire: Resolutely late modern. In R.G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing anthropology: Working in the present*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, (1991).
- Rabinow, Paul, Studies in the anthropology of reason. *Anthropology Today* 8 (5), 7-10, (1992, October).
- Razack, Sherene, *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, (1998).
- Romano, Octavio, The anthropology and sociology of Mexican Americans: The distortion of Mexican American history. *El Grito* 2 (1), 13-26, (1968, Fall).
- Romano, Octavio, The historical and intellectual presence of Mexican Americans. *El Grito* 2 (2), 32-46, (1969, Winter).
- Romano, Octavio, Social science, objectivity, and the Chicanos. *El Grito* 4 (1), 4-16, (1970, Fall).
- Rosaldo, Renato, *Culture & truth: the remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1989).
- Said, Edward, *Reflections on exile and other essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (2002).
- Sanchez, George J., *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, culture, and identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, (1993).
- Science Blog. (1998.) UCSF study finds length of time between pregnancies can affect health of baby [<http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/1998/D/199803049.html>].
- Science Blog. (2000). New UCSF study looks at risk factors for infant mortality in Latina women [<http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/2000/E/200004197.html>].
- Scribner, Richard, Editorial: Paradox as paradigm—The health outcomes of Mexican Americans. *American Journal of Public Health* 86 (3), 303-305, (1996, March).
- Segura, Denise A., & De la Torre, A., La Sufrida: Contradictions of acculturation and gender in Latina Health. In A.E. Clarke & V.L. Olesen (eds.), *Revisioning women, health and healing : feminist, cultural, and technoscience perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Vaca, Nick C., The Mexican American in the social sciences, 1912-1970, Part II. *El Grito* 4 (1), 3-24, (1970, Fall). Vaca, Nick C., The Mexi-

can American in the social sciences, 1912-1970, Part I *El Grito* 3 (3), 3-24, (1970, Spring).

Valencia, R.R., *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. London: Falmer Press, (1997).

Vélez-Ibáñez, Carlos, G., *Border visions: Mexican cultures of the Southwest United States*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, (1996).

Yudice, George, *The expediency of culture: Uses of culture in the global era*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, (2003).



# STRUCTURING LIMINALITY: THEORIZING THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE CUBAN EXILE IDENTITY

*Jaclyn Colona*  
*Florida International University*

*And*

*Guillermo J. Grenier*  
*Florida International University*

Structure and liminality are pervasive epistemic concepts in the social sciences. Structure is one of the most important elements in the discourse of social science, signifying “patterns” of “rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984: 377)<sup>1</sup>. Liminality, from the Latin *limen*, meaning “threshold”, was first conceptualized as a social state by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage* (1909) but was popularized and expanded by Victor Turner (Turner, 1969). Liminality for Turner consisted of a separation from, or suspension of, the objective structures of society, such as rank, class, kinship ties, and gender. The liminal period is conceptualized as transitory; an “interstructural state” in which an individual or group of individuals abandon (willingly or grudgingly) a specific social state, characterized by specifically structured interactions, but have not yet entered (or re-entered) the newly prescribed social state and its accompanying responsibilities and status. In the liminal stage, the subject’s identity is redefined under conditions that have “few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner 1969:94). The liminal individual or groups are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (1969: 95).

Does the concept of liminality assist in our understanding of the dynamics of the Cuban-American diaspora? In arguing that it does, we posit that liminality is, indeed, a state where subjects find themselves “betwixt and between”—but structurally so. That is, liminal conditions can be lasting, maybe permanent, elements of group identity. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Turner defined structure as “a more or less distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of position and/or of actors which they imply” (Turner, 1969: 166-167). Elsewhere, he follows Robert Merton and defines it as “the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences” consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society (Turner, 1974: 236-237).

liminality of exile is real in its interstitial nature but rather than being characterized by anti-structure, it is structurally established by social forces that are themselves permanent (laws, policies, geopolitical forces). Turner acknowledged the existence of social settings where relationships are established to maintain the nature of liminality, such as monasteries and hippie communes. These relationships can begin as transitionally liminal, yet solidify into social structures under certain conditions. The case of Cuban exiles in Miami illustrates how a liminal exile identity can be solidified by structural forces within the community.

In this article, we examine the exilic experience of the Cuban-American community in South Florida through the dual concepts of structure and liminality. We postulate that in the case of this exilic diaspora, specific structures arose to render liminality a persistent element of the Cuban-American identity. The liminal, rather than being a temporal transitory stage, becomes an integral part of the group identity. This paper theorizes and recasts the Cuban-American exile experience in Miami as explicable not only as the story of successful economic and political incorporation, although the literature certainly emphasizes this interpretation, but one consisting of permanent liminality institutionalized by structural components of the exiled diaspora. We argue that the story of exemplary incorporation so prevalent in the academic literature is a result of structured liminality. We apply Turner's conceptualization to the creation and maintenance of the Cuban-American Exile Identity (Grenier and Perez, 2003). While testing the theoretical postulates is beyond the scope of this article, we interpret previous research through our new theoretical lens.

#### ON LIMINALITY AND EXILE

The concept of liminality has been used to clarify the social condition of a variety of populations, always emphasizing the transitional elements involved. The concept has been particularly helpful in underscoring the status of migratory populations (Traphagan, 2000; Menjivar, 2006; Chavez, 1991; Yang, 2000) and it has been used to understand the situation of a broad range of transitional stages for individuals and groups. The power of the concept also has been applied to analyze instances of chronic illness (Little, Jordens, Paul, Montgomery and Philipson, 1998; Deegan and Hill, 1991), employment status (Garsten, 1999; Czarniawska and Massa, 2004), organizational behavior (Tempest and Starkey, 2004), the development of the self (Noble and Walker, 1997), tourists and strip clubs (Ryan and Martin, 2000), gender and transgender identities (Besnier, 1994 and 1997; Coggeshall, 1988), post-industrial work ideologies among high school students (Bettis, 1996), the psychological effects of menstruation (Derr, 1982), physical



disability (Murphy, Scheer, Murphy and Mack, 1988) and labor strikes (Rothenbuhler, 1988).

In these and other studies, liminality is seen as part of a process that is unproblematic. Liminal states are transitional states where old structures are suspended and new ones are yet to be introduced. Implicitly or explicitly, the studies accept Turner's definition of structure which, following Robert Merton, emphasizes the "role-sets, status-sets and status-sequences" operating regularly in a given society (Turner, 1974: 236-237). Liminality is a transition between status-sequences of a given society; a point where old hierarchies no longer define the situation and new definitions await. Much of the power of the concept comes from this postulation of a period of "anti-structure." In the absence of hierarchical structures, new forms of social relations arise. Social solidarity emerges as a form of anti-structure or, in Turner's term, "communitas": the expressions of anti-structure in society<sup>2</sup>. Communitas is an experience arising from the condition of liminality that serves to unify and bond the *liminaires* allowing them to transcend structural relationships. The absence of structure allows for the operation of two distinct social forces: the creation of an environment of equality among the *liminaires* and a condition of timelessness, where all activity is interpreted as "the same" until a re-integration into social structure is achieved. While in the liminal state, human beings are stripped of anything that might differentiate them from their fellow human beings. Communitas is a "moment in and out of time;" an eternal now that precedes the re-integration into structured social processes (Turner, 174: 237-239).

To understand the process of exilic identity formation, we find useful Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of "imagined communities" and Maurice Halbwachs' concept of "collective memory" (1992). For Anderson (1983: 15-16), group identity creation is an act of imagination; because "Members of modern nations cannot possibly know all their fellow-members, and yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. . . [The nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." The same can be said for the experience of exile. The vertical diversity and stratification of the country of origin (class, ethnic, racial hierarchy) is narrowed by the experience of exile and the often contentious pluralism constituting civil society in the country of origin are recreated in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Another group, marginals belong to two or more social or cultural groups and "like liminars are also betwixt and between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity" (1974: 233). We argue that Cubans are not marginal in this sense since their ambiguity is resolved by forces which "structure" their liminality.

imagined “exile community” conceived “as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

For Halbwachs, individuals have personal histories, but collective experiences can only be made relevant by social institutions designed to keep and transmit a collective memory of things past. Collective actions such as storytelling, rituals, festivals, commemorations of events and personalities, all keep a collective, and selective, group identity alive. The process is not automatic. The institutions in charge of maintaining alive the memories are selective in what is remembered as well as what is forgotten. The selectivity is driven by the needs of the present moment; the historical, temporal development of the community and its needs. The present establishes the importance of the past. In this way, the past is constantly being recreated to meet the needs of the present generation. Collective memory binds the members of the group to each other and to the past that created their present bonds (Halbwach, 1992). The liminality of exile is framed by the force of an imagined community that recreates a memory of a past that binds its members in a present struggle to recuperate it. The world of the imagined community of exile exists only in the memories of that community. The forces of history continue to reshape the homeland even as its past lives in the imagined memory of exiles.

Liminal states involve one or all of three kinds of separation: spatial, temporal, and social/moral (Turner 1979, 41). This multi-dimensionality of liminality is of particular significance to groups or individuals in exile. As in all diasporas, spatial structures are ruptured and the migrant is alienated from the temporality characteristic of economic, political, cultural and social nationality. But exilic groups are a special kind of diaspora; a diaspora characterized by its political dimension. Exiles have been dispersed from an original center to two or more foreign locations, like other diasporas. But the dispersal is motivated by the group members’ critical stand towards their homeland’s political, social, economic or cultural environment. The dispersal might be forced or voluntary but in either case, exiles are “reluctant leavers driven out by the prospect of an unacceptable fate” (Rose 1981, 8).

The “push” factors motivate exile migrations while “pull factors” motivate immigrant migration (Stein 1981, 322). In differentiating refugees from voluntary migrants, Kunz (1973, 130) highlights the refugees’ “reluctance to uproot. . .and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere” as distinguishing characteristics of refugees.

Once in the hostland, exiles retain a collective memory about the homeland. This collective memory is reinforced by commemorative rituals and geographies which keep alive social relations, attitudes and dispositions. Exiles, unlike immigrants, do not desire integration into the

hostland. Not only do they regard their ancestral homeland as their real and ideal home to which they should return, but they consider themselves the “other” in the hostland; not fully accepted— culturally, economically, politically, and socially. Edward Said, in similar vein to Turner, conceptualized exile as “a median space” where the exile is “neither completely at one with the new setting, not fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (Said, 1996: 49). This condition reinforces the motivation to commit the collective energy to the maintenance of the homeland as a lived experience in the hostland as well as a continuation of the true traditions of the original homeland<sup>3</sup>.

The experiences which create and identify exilic populations place the group members in a “betwixt and between” state, free of structures that previously bound them (nation-state, class standing, social status) but with reintegration a complex proposition. Unlike the linear, integrative process proposed by Parks during the early 20th Century— (contact/ conflict/ cooperation/assimilation)— which integrates migrants into the structures of the hostland, exiles conceptualize their rootlessness differently. The exiles do not desire to be integrated into the hostland. They desire to exit their exile liminal state by reintegrating into the homeland structures that preceded the exile experience. The process is not towards integration into the hostland; it is to return home. But they are “structurally invisible” to the homeland’s emerging “definitions and classifications” (Turner, 1974: 232), making integration into hostland structures inevitable.

Most of the literature on the Cuban success story focuses on this integration. But the liminality of exile persists. The exile identity is not derived from the historically established culture of the new society, even as they are integrated into its structures. Their security comes from hanging on to liminality; to the exile vision of return.

Although not previously framed in these terms, there is ample evidence on the creation of *communitas* as a dynamic of liminality in the early period of the Cuban exile experience in the United States (Garcia, 1996; Gonzales-Pando, 1998; Grenier and Perez, 2003; Portes and Stepick, 1995). From the many conflictive ideological strands existing in Cuba, a common identity as exiles emerged. The political culture of the island was contentious and often violent. Dozens of political parties vied for control of the state and the support of civil society organizations (Perez-Stable, 1993: 36-60). The 26th of July Movement led the Revolution but it was made possible by the discontent of most of the political actors.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Safran’s characterization of diasporic communities (1990).

Practically every civil society organization and political party took part in the anti-Batista movement and stood to benefit from the Revolution. Within a few years, however, the 26th of July Movement redefined itself. Many of the supporters of the Revolution became disaffected. Some took up arms, others were ostracized, but most fled to create the foundation of the Cuban exile community in the United States.

Political tendencies separated Cubans in the US from Cubans on the island. In exile, however, these tendencies were subsumed under their common identity as exiles. The political tendencies of the founding wave of exiles can be categorized as *Batistianos*, Conservatives and Liberals. The *Batistianos* arrived immediately after the revolution. The Conservatives followed soon after, entering the United States between 1960 and 1961. Most of the Liberals arrived later in the decade but probably were the dominant group in the 1962 to 1964 migration wave (Forment, 1989:54). Given the pluralistic ideological landscape, the rise of a coherent political identity among those fleeing the Revolution was not inevitable. The process entailed the convergence of structural, geopolitical forces as well as the solidification of an “exile” identity that cut across ideological boundaries established in the Cuban context. A sense of *comunitas* emerged: a clear identity as exiles; a common and unambiguous experience of having “lost” their homeland and having an equal stake in regaining it (Grenier and Perez, 2003).

The exile identity was temporally interstitial. The exilic experience would be a temporary break and “soon” the exiles would become ex-exiles and re-integrate into the structures of the home country. Exile movements were an integral part of Cuban history and, given that the United States had always weighed in previously, the initial cohort of exiles felt confident that their stay in the U.S. would be temporary; a “time in which the structural view of time is not applicable” (Turner, 1974: 238). Most exiles arrived in the U.S. with tourist visas. As Garcia states, “they were in the U.S. not to make new lives for themselves as *norteamericanos*, but to wait until they could resume their previous lives back home” (1996, 15).

#### ON THE CUBAN EXILE DIASPORA: EXILE AS A LASTING LIMINAL STRUCTURE

Ultimately, individuals and groups can self-identify as exiles but whether this identity and status is acknowledged or not in their “host societies” depends on the nature of the structured political relations between their country of origin and their country of destination. That is, the exile identity is a structured, constructed phenomenon; a result of social relations between people and institutions, mediated by the political relationship between their countries of origin and destination; what is politi-

cal or “exile,” and what it is not, therefore, depends on the nature of those relations. Exile can become a political role, a bargaining chip, a marketable identity, a type of capital.

The early 1960s was a good time to cash in exilic capital in the United States, especially if the group in question was predominantly white, political migrants fleeing communism. American attitudes toward immigrants were fairly positive circa 1960, in the wake of postwar prosperity and a period of very low immigration. There was a special sympathy for refugees fleeing from communism which was given structure by the State’s decision to bestow refugee status on the arrivals. No matter if one was a member of the Communist Party in Cuba or not, if you fled the Revolution, you were a political refugee. In the U.S., groups designated as refugees are offered special governmental assistance when they arrive that is not available to other immigrant flows (Zucker and Zucker 1987).

The fortification of the exile identity was assisted by the U.S. government in some powerful ways. The U.S. government created for the arriving Cubans an unprecedented direct and indirect assistance program, the Cuban Refugee Program, which cost nearly \$1 billion between 1965 and 1976 (Pedraza-Bailey 1985, 41; Perez-Stable and Uriarte, 1990, 6). Even in programs not especially designed for them, Cubans seemed to benefit. From 1968 to 1980, Hispanics (almost all Cubans) received 46.9% of all Small Business Administration loans in Dade County (Porter and Dunn 1984, 196).

The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 was perhaps the iconic manifestation of structuring liminality. The Act (Law Number 89), “adjusted” the legal status of Cubans arriving in the United States after January 1, 1959 (the date of the triumph of the revolution) to one of political refugees accorded the benefits of political asylum. Cubans were allotted automatic permanent residence status without the need of a review or lengthy waiting time. The Act not only grants working papers but also access to public resources, such as welfare, unemployment benefits and medical assistance.

The U.S. covert war against the Castro government provided additional structure to the exile identity. The University of Miami had the largest CIA station in the world outside of the headquarters in Virginia. With perhaps as many as twelve thousand Cubans in Miami on the CIA payroll in the early 1960s, it was one of the largest employers in the state of Florida. It supported what was described as the third-largest navy in the world and over fifty front businesses: CIA boat shops, CIA gun shops, CIA travel agencies, CIA detective agencies, and CIA real-estate agencies (Didion 1987, 90-1; Rieff 1987, 193-207; Rich 1974, 7-9). This type of structural reinforcement of a group’s exile agenda contributed to

the formation not only of a common identity but also served as seed capital for legitimate enterprises of the economic enclave.

In sum, the total benefits available to Cubans because of the exilic identity surpass those available to other U.S. minority groups. About seventy-five percent of Cuban arrivals before 1974 directly received some kind of state-provided benefits (Pedraza-Bailey 1985, 40). These benefits facilitated the incorporation of Cubans into the fabric of U.S. society. Cubans recognized that these benefits were bestowed because of their exilic, liminal existence. What might have been a liminal period preceding incorporation became a permanent element of Cuban-American reality and identity in South Florida. Liminality had its benefits.

### *The Enclave as Liminal Space*

The benefits accrued by Cubans as refugees, a structural position accorded them by the U.S. government, were instrumental in transforming the Miami area into a social and economic ethnic enclave<sup>4</sup>. The existence and persistence of the Cuban ethnic enclave has been well established (Perez, 2001; Logan, et. al 1994; Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes and Jensen, 1989). What interests us here is how the enclave institutionalized liminality through its socio-institutional relationships.

The most important overall feature of the Cuban economic enclave in Miami is its institutional range. The variety of relationships possible among Cubans is so extensive that some claim it is possible for Miami Cubans to completely live within the ethnic community (Perez, 1993). The institutional range of the enclave was established in the decade of the 1960s and allowed for the establishment and survival of the Cuban exile culture. This process was assisted by the settlement pattern of the new arrivals. Despite the resettlement efforts of the Cuban Refugee Program to other regions to the US, most Cubans remained or returned to the Miami area. The majority settled within a four square mile area southwest of the central business district, an area that came to be known as "Little Havana." Thanks to the density of settlement, this area became a liminal space for Cuban exiles. Retail stores, restaurants, and places of worship, all became centers where discussions and rituals of exile could be performed (Garcia 1996; Gonzalez-Pando 1998).

Exiles found it easy to establish cultural boundaries in South Florida. The pressure to assimilate was reduced and the benefits of liminality were reinforced. Organizational and social networks emerged that allowed Cuban exiles to express and maintain their Cuban-ness while integrating into American society. An example of liminal relationships

---

<sup>4</sup> An ethnic enclave is "a distinctive economic formation, characterized by the spatial concentration of immigrants who organize a variety of enterprises to serve their own ethnic market and the general population" (Portes & Bach 1985, 203).

established among exiles is the emergence of character loans. While major banks would not loan money to Cubans without collateral, which only the wealthy had, character loans became institutionalized as an exile's financial institution. Smaller banks and even private businesses loaned Cubans money or franchise fees based on their social networks within the exile community (Garcia 1996, 87; Gonzales-Pando 1998, 135).

*Liminal Structures and Institutions: Cuban Media and Los municipios*

Exiles, holding out the hope of recovering the homeland, strive to transplant and replicate the institutions of the country of origin, contributing to the sense of solidarity and common identity. The completeness of the enclave, gives rise to a density and diversity of relationships that we argue contribute and give value to the liminality of exile. We will focus here on what we consider to be two of the most significant structures and organizations which lend cohesion and continuity to the liminal exilic identity: the Spanish language media and the *municipios en el exilio* (Municipalities in Exile).

The intense and diversified entrepreneurial activity of the enclave facilitated the growth of its own Spanish-language media, which became a major conduit for an exile identity (Perez 1992; DeSipio and Hanson 1997). Tabloids, newspapers, and magazines—totaling in the hundreds by the onset of the 1970s—were published by the exiles (Garcia 1996). These Miami-based Spanish-language media are quite distinct from their English-language counterparts insofar as the central focus of their news is Cuba. This focus on Cuba is important because, as Knight (2001, 108) observes, the press may not be able to dictate what people think, but “it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (quoted in Bailey and Gayle 2003, 60).

A particularly potent vehicle for disseminating the liminal exile ideology was the political tabloids, or *periodiquitos*, distributed by Cuban businesses. Before 1959, only the Nicaraguan owned *Diario Las Americas*, provided news in Spanish. By the end of the decade hundreds of newspapers, magazines and tabloids, with names like *Patria* (Motherland), *Conciencia* (Conscience), *El clarin* (The bugle), *Centinela la libertad* (Sentinel of liberty), and *El gusano* (the Worm, the pejorative term used by Fidel to refer to the exiles), kept the exile agenda in the public consciousness (Garcia 1996, 132-135). While the publications could be characterized as conveying a diversity of views (right-wing *Batistiano*, Conservative, and Liberal), they all served the purpose of communicating and interpreting the exile experience as a temporary one, characterized by a fierce anti-Castro viewpoint and maintaining alive the visions of a Cuba destroyed by a Revolution (Forment 1986, 61-63).

The exile identity was similarly imagined and revitalized in the voices of the exile leaders broadcast through the dozens of Spanish language radio stations catering to the exile community. Spanish language broadcasts in English language stations became common in the early 1960s and the first entirely Spanish language radio stations, WQBA, "*La cubanísima*" (the "most Cuban"), and "*La fabulosa*" WFAB, were established by mid-decade. The first Cuban-owned station, *Cadena Azul*, came online in 1973. By the 1980s, over 10 Spanish language stations broadcast in the Miami area (Garcia 1996, 106).

By 1970, exiles in south Florida also had their own Spanish language TV station, WLIV-Channel 23, an affiliate of the Spanish International Network (later renamed Univision). During the 1960s and 1970s, any station that addressed the growing Cuban population would begin and end its programming day by showing images of pre-Castro Cuba and playing the Cuban National Anthem (Garcia 1996, 108). By the 1980s, Channel 23 had higher viewer ratings than any other station in South Florida. Perez (1992) concludes that the enclave's Spanish-language media have played a central role in sustaining the exile ideology and identity.

Cultural organizations catering to the growing exile community began to emerge during the early 1960s. The most significant of these organizations were the *municipios en el exilio*. Prior to 1959, Cuba was divided into six provinces and 126 *municipios*, or regional governments. The first *municipio* in exile was established in 1962. Eventually, 114 organizations were established to form the *municipios en el exilio*, even as Cuba has reorganized its political geography eliminating all of the old *municipio* boundaries. The organizers of the municipalities in exile do not recognize the dissolution since it was based on the 1940 Constitution, which they consider the legitimate Constitution of the island. The pre-1959 *municipios* of Cuba exist only in exile.

The network of *municipios* "is the only group in exile that has united Cubans," according to the founder of one *municipio*. It is the "ideal vehicle to help us arrive united in Cuba" (in Garcia, 1996, 92). The organizations hoped to bridge the ideological differences within the community by appealing to the cultural bonds shared in exile. The main purpose of the organizations was to remind the members that they were Cuban Exiles, not Americans. Their ultimate responsibility was to work for the return to the island. To this day, they maintain their eyes focused on the liminality of the Cuban exile condition; a condition that can only be resolved by a return to the island, not by incorporation into the United States' social structure. Their goal is to "be the spearhead to lead the humanitarian, material and spiritual reconstruction of its fellow municipalities on the island" (*Municipios de Cuba en el Exilio*, 2010)



#### DISCUSSION: THE PERSISTENCE OF A LIMINAL IDENTITY

While the Cuban-American community is changing, there remains a powerful presence of the liminal exile in the Cuban identity. That is, to be “Cuban” is to be an “exile” rather than an immigrant. The exile liminal identity has four principal and interrelated dimensions: 1) A persistent obsession with the primacy of the homeland; 2) uncompromising hostility towards the Castro government; 3) emotionalism, irrationality, and intolerance towards voices of dissent; and 4) a political alliance with the Republican Party (Perez, 1992; Grenier and Perez, 2003).

##### *Primacy of the Homeland*

In the exile liminal identity, the affairs of the homeland represent the community’s foremost priority. The desire to recover the homeland is the focus of political discourse and the source of mobilization in the Cuban-American community. At times, the obsession with Cuba translates into conflictive policies. Miami-Dade County was the only county in the country that had an ordinance preventing county funds from being used in any business activity involving Cuban nationals. This prohibition was redundant with the Federal trade sanctions currently in place but had a direct impact on cultural organizations working within the legal limits of the Federal trade sanctions. The ordinance was judged to be unconstitutional in 2000, but support for it did not go away. When asked in the FIU Cuba Poll 2000 if they supported the principles of the revoked ordinance, 49 percent of Cuban Americans said that they did, as compared to 25 percent of non-Cubans in Miami-Dade (Grenier and Gladwin, FIU Cuba Poll, 2000).

Recently elected Congressman David Rivera, while serving as a State Representative from Miami-Dade County, sponsored a bill banning colleges and universities in the State from using any funds from any source (state, federal, private or other) to support travel or research related costs to Cuba and other countries designated by the U.S. State Department as “state sponsors of terrorism.” As of November 2010, the list includes Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Syria. The statute was ruled unconstitutional in 2008, but a federal appeals court in 2010 overturned the ruling. Like the other six Cuban Americans in Congress, David Rivera does not apologize for focusing on the exile agenda.

##### *Uncompromising Hostility towards the Castro Government*

The goal of the Cuban exile is the overthrow of Fidel Castro. This is to be accomplished through hostility and isolation, not rapprochement. Such an ideology has been, in general terms, consistent with United States policy towards Cuba over the past 50 years. Some argue that pressure from Cuban Americans (and the importance of Florida in national

elections) has been the major factor that has kept the U.S.'s Cuba policy essentially immutable for five decades and focused on a strategy of isolating Cuba (Barreto, et al 2002).

Certainly since 1980, when the candidacy and election of Ronald Reagan dramatically increased the participation of Cuban Americans in the U.S. electoral system, and prompted the formation of an exile lobby group in Washington<sup>5</sup>, the Cuban voting bloc has been a loyal ally of hardliners in both parties (De la Garza and Desipio 1994; Moreno and Warren 1992). The exile desire of return and reintegration into the homeland often manifests itself in belligerent, hardline postures. The FIU Cuba Poll 2007 found that over seventy percent of the South Florida Cuban population still favors exile led military action against the Cuban government; over fifty percent support a U.S. led invasion (Grenier and Gladwin, FIU Cuba Poll 2007).

Appealing to the liminal exilic emotions has been a tactic widely used by both Republican and Democratic candidates. It has sent two Cuban-American Republican Senators to Washington and four Republican members of Congress. Even the two Cuban-Americans? Democratic congressional delegates from New Jersey, Senator Menendez and Congressman Sires, are strong supporters of the exile agenda and typically vote with the Florida Republicans on Cuba issues.

Support for the trade sanctions against the island, the embargo, is another element of the incessant struggle against the Cuban government. The fact that nearly 50 years of trade sanctions have not brought about a change in the government does not go unnoticed. Over 74 percent of Cuban-Americans are aware that the embargo has not worked, yet 62 percent favor its continuation. (Grenier and Gladwin, FIU Cuba Poll, 2007)

### *Irrationality and Intolerance*

Support for the embargo underscores yet another trait of the liminal political identity of Cubans in the U.S.: the importance of emotion over pragmatism. While admitting that the embargo may be ineffective, a majority in the Cuban community continue to oppose any softening of U.S. policy because of its symbolism. If the U.S. abandons its hardline stance against Cuba, Fidel Castro will have "won" the fifty year struggle. It is therefore a struggle that is based not so much on pragmatism as it is on emotion (Girard and Grenier, 2008).

Cubans—as with exiles everywhere—are not likely to be objective about a situation that has so intrinsically altered their lives and compelled them to live outside their native country. The emotional basis of the exile

---

<sup>5</sup> The Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF)

liminal identity is what makes Cubans in the U.S. take positions that everyone else judges to be irrational, as happened in the case of Elián González (*see* Grenier and Perez, 2003; Chapter 8). In fact, many Cuban exiles will readily, and even proudly, admit to not being rational in matters that have touched them so deeply, and will even flaunt their passionate lack of objectivity. One participant in a Miami demonstration carried a placard that read: *Intransigente . . . ¿y qué?* (Intransigent . . . so what?).

The unfavorable side of emotionalism and irrationality is a traditional intolerance to views that do not conform to the predominant “exile” identity of hostility towards the Castro regime. Those who voice views that are “soft” or conciliatory with respect to Castro, or who take a less-than-militant stance in opposition to Cuba’s regime, are often subjected to criticism and scorn, and their motives questioned. During the decade of the 1970s, violence against dissenters was a real possibility. Over one hundred bombs exploded in Miami during the decade directed at Cuban-Americans diverging from compliance with the parameters of the exile identity (Torres, 1999: 102).

Many saw the 2010 elections as a reaffirmation of the exilic identity of Cubans in the United States. One of the most popular Cuban-American bloggers categorized the elections as a referendum on the exile agenda. Despite prognostications that there is a “shift in the Cuban American community towards a less intransigent and gentler approach towards Cuba’s communist dictatorship, [the November 2nd elections] show that overwhelmingly they voted for candidates who have maintained a strong opposition to rewarding the Castro regime” (de la Cruz, Nov. 15). The liminal exile identity is difficult to transform.

### *Preference for the Republican Party*

The primacy of the homeland explains the overwhelming preference for the Republican Party, a trait that sets Cubans apart from most other Latino groups. Registered Republicans far outnumber registered Democrats among Cubans in Miami: 63 to 21 percent (Grenier and Gladwin, Cuba Poll, 2008). In the mind of a typical Cuban-American, loyalty to the Republican Party demonstrates the importance of international issues in the political agenda of Cubans (Barreto, et al 2002; De la Garza, et al 1994).

If Cuban-Americans were to view themselves as immigrants in this country, rather than as political exiles, and made judgments about political parties based upon their needs and aspirations as immigrants in the United States, they would be Democrats in overwhelming numbers. This would be true not because of the general social agenda of the Democrats but specifically because of the experience of Cuban migration. The mea-

asures that have facilitated Cuban immigration and the adjustment of Cuban-Americans in the United States—from the Cuban Readjustment Act to the Mariel boatlift— have all been enacted by Democratic administrations.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to empirically test the major theoretical propositions presented, one particular study is worth mentioning. Girard and Grenier (2008) explored the power of the enclave and its institutions to “incubate” the exile identity which, as we theorize in this paper, is a liminal experience. The authors discovered an “enclave effect” which establishes a statistically significant relationship between the measures of the liminal exile identity and residence within the Cuban-American enclave. Living in the enclave triples the odds of belonging to the Republican Party and doubles the odds of considering a political candidate’s position on Cuba important for local voting purposes. The enclave effect also increases the Cuban-American respondents’ support for continuing the embargo, the travel ban to the island, as well as prohibiting political contact with the Cuban government. These are key measures of uncompromising hostility towards the Castro government.

Similarly, respondents who receive most of their information from the Spanish language media are significantly more likely to hold beliefs in line with the liminal exile identity than those who do not. This is a powerful statement about the power of the exile environment and its institutions to secure the permanency of liminality (Girard and Grenier, 2008).

#### CONCLUSION: THE LIMINALITY OF LIFE ON THE HYPHEN

How do these dynamics translate to second and future generations? While one would expect the influence of the enclave to be a positive one in the incorporation of Cuban-Americans into the new structures of the United States, one would also expect that the insularity of the enclave, along with its density of social networks, would reinforce the Cuban cultural memory and facilitate the transmission of Cuban traits and identity, including the exile identity. The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) raises interesting questions about the future of Cuban identity for those living in the Miami area.

When it comes to ethnic identification, second-generation Cubans were more likely to identify themselves as hyphenated Americans than any other national immigrant group in the sample. Yet, they were also more likely to identify themselves as American than any other group and the least likely to identify themselves with a non-national identity (e.g. Hispanics). To us, this is not as surprising or contradictory as it may seem. The Cuban identity remains influenced by the exile experience.

This influence manifests itself even as the relatively successful integration of the population establishes Cubans as the most successful “Hispanic” group in the United States. Yet Cubans do not consider themselves Hispanics. This lack of identification is twofold. Cubans are not Hispanics because they do not see their experience being structured by the experience of Hispanics, as a pan ethnic category established by U.S. historical development. Most importantly, they shun the Hispanic label because their experience as exiles and not as immigrants sets them apart from other Hispanic populations (Gonzales-Pando 1998, 89).

As a group, Cubans have experienced unusual success securing economic resources but this very success is due to their vision of themselves as not belonging to U.S. society; they are exiles. They are both integrated and transitional. A new type of relationship is being established by exiled Cubans in the process of settling in the United States—one that demonstrates characteristics of permanent liminality; of a population that does not want to integrate because they “belong” in the old country, as well as characteristics of a successful minority group working within the existing structures to secure its place.

#### REFERENCES

- Arguelles, Lourdes. 1982. “Cuban Miami: The Roots, Development and Everyday Life of an Émigré Enclave in the U.S. National Security State.” *Contemporary Marxism*, Summer:27-43.
- Bailey, Gordon and Gayle, Noga. 2003. *Ideology: Structuring Identities in Contemporary Life*. Orchard Park, New York: Broadview Press.
- Barreto, Matt; Rodolfo O. de la Garza; Jongho Lee; Jaesung Ryu; and Harry P. Pachon, 2002. “A GLIMPSE INTO LATINO POLICY AND VOTING PREFERENCES.” The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute. March.
- Besnier, Niko. 1994. “Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space. In *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, edited by Gilbert Herdt, New York: Zone Books. 285-328.
- Besnier, Niko. 1997. “Sluts and Superwomen: The Politics of Gender Liminality in Urban Tonga.” *Ethnos* 62:5-31.
- Bettis, Pamela. 1996. “Urban Students, Liminality, and the Post Industrial Context.” *Sociology of Education* 69:105-125.
- Chavez, Leo R. 1991. “Outside the Imagined Community: Undocumented Settlers and Experiences of Incorporation.” *American Ethnologist*. 18: 257-278.
- Coogeshall, John. 1988. “‘Ladies’ Behind Bars: A Liminal Gender as Cultural Mirror.” *Anthropology Today* 4:6-8.

- Colona, Jaclyn. 2009. "On Exile and the Permanence of Liminality: The Ideology of *Communitas* in the Cuban American Community of Miami" Paper submitted to the American Anthropological Association. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dec. 3-5, 2009. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Committee on the Judiciary. 1976. "Terroristic Activity: Terrorism in the Miami Area." Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws. Ninety-Fourth Congress. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. May 6.
- Czarniawska, Barbara and Carmelo Mazza. 2003. "Consulting as a liminal space." *Human Relations* 56: 267-290.
- Deegan, Mary Jo and Michael R. Hill. 1991. "Doctoral Dissertations as Liminal Journeys of the Self: Betwixt and between in Graduate Sociology Programs." *Teaching Sociology* 19: 322-332.
- De La Garza, Rudolfo and Luis Desipio. 1994. "Overview: The Link Between Individuals and Electoral Institutions in Five Latino Neighborhoods." In *Barrio Ballots: Latino Politics in the 1990 Elections*, edited by Rodolfo de la Garza, Martha Menchaca, and Luis Desipio. Boulder: West View Press. 1-42.
- DeSipio, Louis, and James Richard Henson. 1997. "Cuban Americans, Latinos, and the Print Media: Shaping Ethnic Identities," *Press/Politics*, 2: 52-70.
- De la Cruz, Alberto. 2010. "The Generational Divide that is neither generational nor divided." Alu. <http://babalublog.com/2010/11/the-generational-divide-that-is-neither-generational-nor-divided/>.
- Derr, Bruce. 1982. "Implications of Menstruation as a Liminal State." *American Anthropologist* 84: 644-645.
- Didion, Joan. 1987. *Miami*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Forment, Carlos. 1989. "Political Practice and the Rise of an Ethnic Enclave: the Cuban American case, 1959-1979." *Theory and Society* 18: 47-81.
- García, María Cristina. 1996 *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban-Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Garsten, Christina. 1999. "Betwixt and between: Temporary Employees as Liminal Subjects in Flexible Organizations." *Organization Studies* 20: 601-617.

- Girard, Chris and Guillermo J. Grenier. 2008. "Insulating Ideology: The Enclave Effect on South Florida's Cuban Americans," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 30: 530-543.
- Grenier, Guillermo. J.1994. "Los Bravos de la Política: Cubans and the Electoral Process in Miami—the Case of the 1990 Elections." In *Barrio Ballots: Latino Politics in the 1990 Elections*, edited by Rudolfo de la Garza, Martha Menchaca, and Louis Desipio, 161-196. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press.
- Grenier, Guillermo J. 2006. "The Creation and Maintenance of the Cuban American 'Exile Ideology': Evidence from the FIU Cuba Poll 2004." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25: 209-224.
- Grenier, Guillermo J. and Lisandro Perez. 2003. *The Legacy of Exile: Cubans in the United States*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- and Alex Stepick III. 1992. "Introduction" In *Miami Now!: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Social Change*, edited by Guillermo J. Grenier and Alex Stepick III, 83-108. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- and Hugh Gladwin. *FIU Cuba Poll: 1991-2008*. Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR). Florida International University. [www.fiu.edu/~ipor](http://www.fiu.edu/~ipor)
- Knight, G. (2001). "The Mass Media." In *New Society: Sociology for the 21st Century*, edited by Robert J. Brym, 89-116. Toronto: Harcourt.
- Kunz, E.F. 1973. "The Refugee in Flight: Kenetic Models and Forms of Displacement", *International Migration Review* 7:125-146.
- Little, Miles, Christopher Jordens, Kim Paul, Kathleen Montgomery and Bertil Philipson. 1998. "Liminality: A Major Category of the Experience of Cancer Illness." *Social Science & Medicine* 47: 1485-1494.
- Menjívar, Cecilia. 2006. "Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants' Lives in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 111: 999-1037.
- Moreno, Dario and Christopher Warren. 1992. "The Conservative Enclave: Cubans in Florida." In *Latinos in the 1988 Election*, edited by Rodolfo O' de la Garzas and Louis DeSipio, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Municipios en El Exilio. 2010. <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2362188362>.
- Murphy, Robert F., Jessica Scheer, Yolanda Murphy and Rita Mack. 1988. "Physical disability and social liminality: a study in the rituals of adversity." *Social Science and Medicine* 26:235-42.

- Noble, Charles and Beth Walker. 1997. "Exploring the relationship among liminal transitions, symbolic consumption, and the extended self." *Psychology and Marketing* 14:29-47.
- New York Times. 1965. "Cuba's Refugees 'Adjust' to U.S.; Survey of Exiles Points to Waning of Anti-Castroism." December 5, 25.
- Park, Robert E. 1928. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man", *American Journal of Sociology* 22:881-893.
- Pedraza-Bailey, Sylvia. 1985. *Political and Economic Migrants in America: Cubans and Mexicans*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Pedraza, Sylvia. 1992. "Cubans in Exile, 1959-1989: The State of the Research" in *Cuban Studies Since the Revolution*, edited by Damian J. Fernandez, 235-258 Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press.
- Pérez, Lisandro. 1992. "Cuban Miami" In *Miami Now!: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Social Change*. Edited by Guillermo J. Grenier and Alex Stepick III, 83-108. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Perez, Lisandro. 2001. "Growing up Cuban in Miami: Immigration, the Enclave, and New Generations. In *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, edited by Ruben G. Rumbaut Alejandro Portes, 91-125. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press and Russell Sage Foundation.
- Perez-Stable, Marifeli. 1993. *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course and Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Porter, Bruce and Marvin Dunn. 1984. *The Miami Riot of 1980: Crossing the Bounds*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.
- Portes, Alejandro and Robert L. Bach. 1985. *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Portes, Alejandro and Leif Jensen. 1989. "The Enclave and the Entrants: Patterns of Ethnic Enterprise in Miami Before and After Mariel." *American Sociological Review* 54: 929-49.
- Portes, Alejandro and Alex Stepick III. 1996 *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rich, Cynthia Jo. 1974. "Pondering the Future: Miami's Cubans after 15 Years." *Race Relations Reporter* 5:7-9.
- Rief, David. 1987. *Going to Miami: Exiles, Tourists, and Refugees in the New America*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Rothensbuhler, Eric W. 1988. "The Liminal Fight: Mass Strikes as Ritual and Interpretation" in *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies*."



- Edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, 66-90. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rose, Peter. 1981. "Some Thoughts about Refugees and the Descendants of Theseus", *International Migration Review* 15:8-15.
- Ryan, Chris and Amber Martin. 2001. "Tourists and strippers: Liminal Theater." *Annals of Tourism Research* 28:140-163.
- Said, Edward. 1996. *Representations of the Intellectual: The Reith Lectures*. New York: Knopf Doubleday.
- Stein, Barry N. 1981. "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study", *International Migration Review* 15:320-330.
- Stepick, Alex, Guillermo Grenier, Max Castro, and Marvin Dunn. 2003. *This Land Is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tempest, Sue and Ken Starkey. 2004. "The Effects of Liminality on Individual and Organizational Learning." *Organization Studies* 25:507-527.
- Traphagan, John. 2000. "The Liminal Family: Return Migration and Intergenerational Conflict in Japan." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56: 365-385.
- Turner, Victor 1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine.
- Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Yang, Guobin. 2000. "The Liminal Effects of Social Movements: Red Guards and the Transformation of Identity." *Sociological Forum* 15: 379-406.
- Zucker, Norman L. and Naomi F. Zucker. 1987. *The Guarded Gate: The Reality of American Refugee Policy*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Javanovich.



## THEMATIC SHIFTS IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE AMERICAN NOVELS

*Quan Manh Ha*  
*The University of Montana*

Asian American narratives generally have been discussed by literary critics within the context of U.S. history and politics vis-à-vis the social issues that challenge the specific ethnic groups that produce them. In the Introduction to *Imagine Otherwise*, Kandice Chuh maintains rather emphatically that more current theoretical trends in Asian American literary criticism tend to employ paradigms established by scholars of postcolonialism and transnationalism, and that Asian American literature and criticism *should* “remain a politicized tool for social justice” for the immigrant communities (Chuh 2003, 4). The Vietnamese Americans’ historical and immigration experiences are different from those of the majority of other Asian American groups, and early Vietnamese American literature usually critiques U.S. intervention and foreign policy during the Vietnam War, and it also addresses the problems of social injustice in the homeland, Vietnam.

Since 2003, some new voices have emerged in Vietnamese American novels that tend to avoid the traditional war-related issues treated by their Vietnamese American literary forebears. For example, both Dao Strom’s *Grass Roof, Tin Roof* and Bich Minh Nguyen’s *Short Girls* emphasize themes of cultural assimilation, ethnic identity, and generational gaps, which concern second- or third-generation immigrants, for whom the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese homeland are a less immediate concern. Interestingly, Monique Truong’s *The Book of Salt* deals even with issues of French colonialism and the Vietnamese diaspora of the colonial period, which occurred prior to the World War II era, but she focuses on themes that also remain central to the Vietnamese American experience of the later twentieth century. She chooses to set her impressive novel in the Paris of Gertrude Stein and other American expatriates of the post-World War I period, rather than in the contemporary United States. Therefore, the problems of separation from the homeland and alienation within the adopted country are presented for examination at considerable critical distance from the immediate experience of those same problems as they occur in post-Vietnam War America. Thus, the perspective has shifted in Truong’s novel from war politics *per se* to multiculturalism, and even to diasporic issues, treating the broader consequences for Vietnamese immigrants throughout the twentieth century.

In *Politicizing Asian American Literature*, Youngsuk Chae addresses recent trends in the works of contemporary Asian American authors who, like Truong, also choose not to engage themselves in political discourse directed specifically toward social change in today's United States:

[M]ost “popular” Asian American multicultural writings have not situated their narratives in specific socio-political and historical contexts. Rather, they tend to decontextualize political and economic circumstances and the structural inequality that racial minorities and immigrants have faced by focusing mainly in issues of cultural conflicts, generational gaps with their parent generation, or identity crisis. (Chae 2008, 4)

Chae observes that Asian Americans generally still face “social discrimination” and “structural inequality,” and that, by not addressing these problems, popular Asian American narratives unconsciously imply an acceptance of a status quo that ignores racial conflicts and promotes the American mythic ideals of democracy for all and endless opportunities for those who work hard (Chae 2008, 4). Chae takes a radical view on these matters, and in her confrontational assessment, she suggests that many contemporary Asian American writers are attracted to current trends in multicultural literature because of the market's strong demand for ethnic narratives that treat cultural assimilation and acculturation, but with little or no mention of the embarrassing history of racism and discrimination against people of color in the United States (Chae 2008, 15). Thus, in some ways, recently published Vietnamese American works conform with trends followed in Asian American literature in general, but in other ways they maintain their ethnic and artistic uniqueness.

This article discusses three major recently published Vietnamese American novels, produced by popular presses, emphasizing their thematic treatment of characters and social issues. I argue that, by concentrating on the themes of inferiority and invisibility, these novels, in their particular way, accommodate the popular American audience's thirst for informative ethnic literatures, on the one hand, but deal non-confrontationally, or only indirectly, with very serious conflicts and contradictions that Vietnamese American experienced in attempting to realize in realizing their American dream, on the other. These contemporary Vietnamese American works either exclude war-related topics or mention them only in passing, and their authors address American social issues only from a distance, and in a particularly Vietnamese American way. *The Book of Salt* is discussed first in the analyses that follow.

MONIQUE TRUONG'S *THE BOOK OF SALT*

Truong's debut novel, *The Book of Salt* (2003), is a striking example of early twenty-first-century Vietnamese American literature, which avoids war-related topics while focusing on other issues of importance to Asian American authors, such as ethnicity and personal identity, race and racialization, gender politics and sexual identity. Her novel's intricate themes, innovative blends of historical fact with fictional possibility, and plausibility in extraordinary character development have gained an enthusiastic readership and made *The Book of Salt* a national bestseller. Understandably, Truong has won coveted awards for her creative originality and eloquent narrative style. The plot of Truong's novel is structured non-chronologically, intertwining the narrator-protagonist Binh's past in Vietnam with his present life in the Gertrude Stein (Truong's spelling of the name) household in Paris. This stylistic device is not uncommon in postmodern fiction, in which the narrative voice often is that of a character who "may coax or ravish or prompt our outrage, compel us with its understated sincerity, seduce us with a dance of revelation and concealment" (Glausen 2003, 23). Nevertheless, Binh's flashbacks are integrated effectively into the forward flow of the novel's events, making *The Book of Salt* a unified work of complex stories-within-stories.

While many earlier Vietnamese American novels are semi-autobiographical, Truong takes a postmodern approach to writing historical fiction in *The Book of Salt*, which is related to that suggested by John Barth in his article "The Literature of Exhaustion," but not in complete imitation. In a conversation about her novel with the publisher, when asked how she was inspired to write a book about a Vietnamese cook who works for Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Tolkas in Paris, she replied that, when she was in college, she purchased *The Alice B. Tolkas Cook Book* because of her curiosity about Tolkas's marijuana brownie recipe. However, she soon realized that the book she bought was more like a memoir than a cookbook *per se*, and in the chapter entitled "Servants in France," she discovered that Tolkas describes two Indochinese men who were employed to cook for her and her partner at 27 rue de Fleurus: "One of these cooks responded to an ad placed by Tolkas in the newspaper that began 'Two Americans ladies wish —.' By this point in the book, I had already fallen for these two women and for their ability to create an idiosyncratic, idyllic life." Truong was "surprised and touched to see a Vietnamese presence" in the household and to discover his familial relationship with Stein and Tolkas. She then surmised that this live-in Vietnamese cook must have known much about the personal, domestic lives of these two American women: "[I]n the official history of the Lost Generation, the Paris of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Tolkas, these 'Indo-Chinese' cooks were just a minor footnote. There could be a personal

epic embedded in that footnote.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the idea for her novel was born and began to grow.

Wenyng Xu notes some parallels between the fictional Vietnamese cook Binh in *The Book of Salt* and two actual Indochinese cooks who worked for Gertrude Stein and her partner in Paris (Xu 2007, 128-29). In *The Alice B. Tolkas Cook Book*, for instance, we find Trac, a Vietnamese cook who responded to the cook-wanted newspaper advertisement and who “spoke French with a vocabulary of a couple dozen words” (Tolkas 1954, 186). This cook, as Tolkas remembers, often used negation in his conversation with his hostesses; he “would say, not a cherry, when he spoke of strawberry. A lobster was a small crawfish, and a pineapple was a pear not a pear” (Tolkas 1954, 186). Truong borrows and incorporates these particular peculiarities into her portrayal of Binh in her novel, describing him as a little Indochinese man “who can’t even speak proper French, who can’t even say more than a simple sentence” (Truong 2003, 15-16). After Trac left the Stein household to establish his own family, Nguyen was hired. Prior to his arrival in France, Nguyen had been “a servant in the household of the French Governor-General of Indo-China, who brought him to France” (Tolkas 1954, 187). Similarly, Binh in *The Book of Salt* had worked in the kitchen of the French Governor-General in Saigon; however, the fictional Binh, unlike the historical Nguyen, was fired for his involvement in a homosexual affair with the French Chef Blériot before sailing to Paris for resettlement. Another parallel that Xu points out in her analysis of *The Book of Salt* is that, in reality, Gertrude Stein and Tolkas were arrogant and condescending, just as are the fictional Gertrude Stein and Tolkas, who act superciliously toward their Vietnamese cook. In Truong’s novel, they make mildly discriminating observations about Binh, their live-in Vietnamese cook, as well as Lattimore, an American southerner and occasional guest of mixed race who is “passing for white” in Paris (Truong 2003, 128-29).

Generally, inferiority is associated with invisibility and voicelessness. American media and popular culture always have feminized Asian men and portrayed them as subordinate and submissive in same-sex relationships and in sexual affairs generally. Richard Fung, in his article “Looking for My Penis,” writes, “Whenever I mention the topic of Asian actors in American porn, the first question I am asked is whether the Asian is simply shown getting fucked” because “Asian and anus are conflated” (Fung 1996, 187). Similarly, in the Introduction to *Racial Castration*, David Eng also points out that the “antithesis of manhood” is assumed by the West about the East: “the Westerner monopolizes the part of the ‘top’; the Asian is invariably assigned the role of the ‘bot-

---

<sup>1</sup> “*The Book of Salt: A Reader’s Guide*” <[http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers\\_guides/truong\\_salt.shtml](http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/truong_salt.shtml)>

tom'” in gay narratives and pornography (Eng 2001, 1). Although many Asian American novelists try to deconstruct this Western assumption or perception of Asia and Asian people as feminine and meek, Truong does not. Interestingly, male masculinity in the early twentieth century was often associated with colonial rule, as Judith Halberstam observes, especially when it referred to British colonial power and Western European colonialism in Asia and Africa (Halberstam 2006, 99).

In Binh's relationships with non-Asian men (mostly Caucasian, but one significantly of “mixed blood”), he plays the passive role. His name, [Hoa] Binh, means *peace* in English, and peace, as interpreted by Milton J. Bates, is a feminine concept while “[w]ar, aggression, and violence are masculine” (Bates 1996, 139). To cite one early example from the novel, Truong describes Chef Bleriot's masculine physical attributes: “[he] made up for his youthful appearance with a harshness of manner [. . .]. We would have called him Napoleon, except that he defied us by being neither too short nor pudgy around the waistline. No, Bleriot was as commanding in his looks as in his manners” (Truong 2003, 59). Physically, Bleriot is more masculine and aggressive than Binh, and when they make love, Bleriot is the dominant while Binh is the submissive partner: “Even in the throes of what I choose to remember as love, my body felt the lines stretched between us, razor-sharp when pressed against the flesh” (Truong 2003, 195).

Binh is cast in a mold of such sexual submission throughout the novel, just as his lowly employment as a cook places him in a position of service to many who find him useful, at least for a while. Binh certainly plays the subordinate role in his sexual relationship with Lattimore: Binh longs to feel Lattimore's skin, and he is rewarded with a kiss “until we are skin on skin” (Truong 2003, 109). Binh characterizes the nature of his relationship with Lattimore as follows: “I cook for him, and he feeds me” (Truong 2003, 213). Cooking is nurturing, which, like peace, is feminine, and the verb *feeds* in this context should be understood metaphorically—it implies that Lattimore is the dominant partner who actually employs Binh for the services he renders. Describing his cooking, Binh often uses sexual allusions and metaphors to explain how he prepares a dish. For example, when he was nine years old and learning how to cut scallions into little “O”s, he used a silver knife (which evokes a phallic image) and cut himself. The accident implies erotic connotations of penetration and bleeding: “my throat unclogs, and my body begins to understand that silver is threading my skin” (Truong 2003, 72).

Besides the theme of sexual identities, there is a colonial discourse between Binh and his non-Vietnamese employers and lovers, which illustrates the social and racial relationship between the inferior and the superior. As noted above, in Saigon, Binh worked as a kitchen boy, and

his brother Anh Minh was the *sous chef* in the kitchen of the Governor-General. However, Minh was not appointed *chef de cuisine*, because of his status as a Vietnamese national. He was chagrined at the arrival of the French Chef Bleriot, whom the Governor-General's wife, the Madame, invited from France to replace a former, aging chef. At first, Binh compares Chef Bleriot to a "typical colonial officer" who gave orders and established rules in the kitchen (Truong 2003, 132). Madame felt sympathy for her French chef after hearing her secretary talk about his sexual affair with Binh, but she felt angry at Binh for having humiliated Bleriot, who was merely a victim of Vietnamese lies and "alleged falsehood" (Truong 2003, 132). Although Madame did not discriminate against homosexuals, she did not approve of interracial relationships, because they challenged her colonialist belief in racial hierarchies: "She did not care about the relations of two men, just as long as they were of the same social standing and, of course, race" (Truong 2003, 132). Eventually, Binh was released from service because of his impertinent relationship, but Bleriot, although chastened, was allowed to maintain his position in the kitchen. This illustrates how Binh, one of the colonials, was humbled by the French colonialists who were occupying his country. In *Race and Resistance*, Viet Thanh Nguyen states that the queer body often is used to address colonialism and that sexuality provides metaphors for both colonizing and decolonizing (Nguyen 2002, 128). Bleriot exploited Binh sexually in order to satisfy his emotional needs and carnal desires, albeit with Binh's consent and active participation. Nevertheless, this relationship and its humiliating outcome, especially for Binh, suggest the detrimental consequences that are potential in a colonist's physical exploitation of the colonized's body.

Subsequently, living in Paris, Binh struggles with his identity as a homosexual and as an exile living within expatriate communities residing there. Although the Americans, within the context of the novel, were not colonizing Vietnam in the 1920s and 1930s, Binh is well aware of the power relationships between his Mesdames and himself, and of their condescendingly colonial attitude toward the Inchochinese. GertrudeStein and Tolkas maintain their regal superiority over Binh, and they treat him merely as a live-in cook, nothing more and nothing less. When Binh receives a letter from his brother Anh Minh, they admit to him that "they had never seen my *full* name in writing before" (Truong 2003, 5; emphasis added). Their statement implies that they had failed to perceive him to be a complete human being because one's name represents one's identity. GertrudeStein even expands his first name to "Thin Bin" because of his small physique, and she "merrily" mispronounces Binh to make the two words rhyme (Truong 2003, 32). In his Mesdames' eyes, he is a cook and a retainer whose background is not a subject of



their interest or curiosity. Their only concern is “the fruits of exile, the bitter juices, and the heavy heart. They yearn for a taste of the pure, sea-salt sadness of the outcast whom they have brought into their homes” (Truong 2003, 19). Therefore, they refer to him as a “Little Indochinese,” a “Chinaman,” a “foreigner,” an “*asiatique*,” or an “Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate, easily spotted and readily identifiable all the same” (Truong 2003, 142, 183, 152). Binh further says, “They would believe that their cooks have no bodily needs, secretions, not to mention excrement, but we all do. We are not clean and properly sterile from head to toe. We come into their homes with our skills and our bodies, the latter a host for all the vermin and parasites that we have encountered along the way” (Truong 2003, 64). When served, they are concerned about the food that is placed in front of them, and they generally ignore “the hands that prepared and served it” (Truong 2003, 65).

Ironically, his American employers perceive him as an invisible individual whose tongue cannot utter a fluent sentence in a foreign language; thus, in their minds he registers as “blind” and deaf to life (Truong 2003, 144). Binh, in fact, is reasonably sophisticated and expressively articulate in his internal monologues. He is able to control his tongue and produce eloquent sentences fraught with humor, irony, and rich nuances of meaning. In his monologues, he feels equal to his French employers in Saigon and ridicules them for their cultural arrogance and inability to “detect the defiance of those who serve them” (Truong 2003, 14). He even assures himself that he is not the fool that Gertrude Stein thinks he is because his “lack of speech” should not be equated with any “lack of thought” (Truong 2003, 153). He uses the word *ignorance* to describe Gertrude Stein’s perception of her live-in cook and his thoughts, because while she does not know much about his private thoughts and personal life, he knows much about hers and her partner’s. It is he who cooks for them, creates the setting for their performance upon the stage of their lives, and gains personal power, although restrained, from his function as a domestic in their household. It is he who could determine the destinies of his employers because “[t]here is a fine line between a cook and a murderer, and that line is held steady by the men of my trade” (Truong 2003, 67). Metaphorically, Binh’s attitude toward his Mesdames and his defiance of Bleriot’s colonial arrogance demonstrate the patient strength of the Vietnamese people in Vietnamese history and their resistance to colonialism, both from Western and Eastern invaders.

#### DAO STROM’S *GRASS ROOF, TIN ROOF*

Another Vietnamese American novel published in 2003 is Dao Strom’s *Grass Roof, Tin Roof*. Strom’s novel can be divided into four

parts. Part one is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. During the Vietnam War, Tran Anh Trinh, a female Vietnamese newspaper reporter, faced persecution for her politically reactionary, subversive writings and had to flee Vietnam with a son and a daughter just before the war ended. After a few years in a refugee camp, she and her children immigrated to the United States through the sponsorship of Hus Madsen, a Danish American, who later became her husband. Part two is recounted from a first-person point of view by April (also called Thuy), Tran's daughter. April's stories focus on her relationship with Tran and Hus, her childhood memories of Thien (her brother) and her later memories of Beth (her half-sister), her adolescence in America, and her socialization with non-Vietnamese friends. Part three is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view; it describes Thien's life as a mechanic, his friendship with ethnic-American friends, and his sexual encounters with non-Vietnamese girlfriends. Part four comprises April's diary, which she writes during her first trip to visit relatives in Vietnam after her mother's death. This fourth and final section finds April fraught with bewilderment and confusion as she tries to understand her Vietnamese roots and the influence of American popular culture upon the developing Vietnam of the 1990s.

The author describes Tran's lifestyle, before the Vietnam War ended, as "eccentric" and "unorthodox" (Strom 2003, 31, 32). Tran refused to comply with ingrained traditional mores because they stifled her desire for freedom and gender equity. Whether Tran was an adherent of the international movement of feminism or simply a very strong female figure in her society, she actually did not appear feminine in the sense in which many other women sought to present themselves in Vietnam at the time. She debunks the Western assumption that Asian women are meek, submissive, and obedient within a patriarchal, male-dominated society. In Saigon, she became a well-known writer, and her reputation brought deference and respect from her colleagues, who regarded her as a "knowing" person, even when she was silent. At work, they "trusted, even feared her; for here was one woman who couldn't be and didn't need to be fooled or wooed," due to her acumen and perspicacity (Strom 2003, 23).

However, Tran's often masculine behavior and attitudes are abandoned in the United States through her decision to settle into married life with Hus, and she no longer assumes the posture of the "knowing" woman that she had tried so hard to project in Vietnam. In Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid (the narrator's mother) attended medical school and was a doctor in China before coming to California. However, in the United States, her professional credentials are not acknowledged; she must run a laundry shop and live the life of a

middle-class, working woman—remaining invisible in American, white-dominant culture (Kingston 1989, 57, 135). Tran's situation is similar to *Brave Orchid's* in the results of her transition from the Old World to the New World. Because of her displacement and alienation, Tran must adapt to a new environment, with help from Hus, himself an immigrant who has lived in the United States for more than twenty years.

In Vietnam, she had sought social deference and professional respect, but in the United States, she becomes “enamored of him [Hus] for his authority and confidence—his compassion!—and he will teach them [her and her children] many new things” (Strom 2003, 48). Thus, Strom offers a problematic representation of Asian women in U.S. culture. Mary Yu Danico and Franklin Ng point out that Asian women are considered “desirable mates to White men” because Asian women are “dutiful, obedient, and sexually accessible” (Danico and Ng, 2004, 122). Tran's marriage to Hus leads her to accept submission and voicelessness. This is partly due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a disorienting unawareness of limited social possibilities. Her tongue is deprived of the sharpness and acuteness it had possessed in Vietnam; she understands that she and her children are political refugees, “the dislocated,” sponsored by a kind-hearted, sympathetic man, and she is no longer the well-known, popular writer who was respected and appreciated earlier by her Vietnamese readers (Strom 2003, 57).

Her new condition of voicelessness is revealed when, in Nevada, she encounters William Bentley, a belligerent neighbor who accuses Thien and her sister's Vietnamese husband of shooting his dog, and who demands that Hus pay him five-hundred dollars in compensation. Tran observes the obstreperous argument between Hus and William and feels helpless. When William ridiculed her, her face turned red, and “her gaze flinched beneath the man's mocking attention. Her mouth was fast becoming a thin, disappearing, injured little line” (Strom 2003, 66). This is the first time during her life in the United States that she witnesses racism and prejudice so blatantly hurled against Asian people. While Hus understands the situation, which results from William's “fear or rage or spite,” his wife does not (Strom 2003, 72).

Maria P.P. Root, in her discussion of Asian American women and stereotypes, generally concurs with Danico's and Ng's observations about Asian women: “Asian or Asian American women are characterized as childlike, fragile, and innocent” in many American popular movies; therefore, white men, or white characters, are cast “in a paternalistic role as a justification” for their attraction to Asian women (Root 1998, 213). Tran's encounter with William demonstrates the characteristics noted by Root, and Hus acts as an experienced, fatherly protector in this situation. Hus's paternalistic role on this occasion parallels the role of the United

States described by Senator John F. Kennedy in his luncheon remarks at a conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1956: "Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia. If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we gave assistance to its life, we have helped to shape its future."<sup>2</sup> Hus seems to reflect in his familial situation the protective role assumed by the United States in its political attitude toward Vietnam. Following this climatic incident, Strom does not develop Tran more extensively in the novel; a few years later, Tran is hospitalized for tuberculosis and then dies, in the middle of the novel.

Strom's earlier representation of the Vietnamese fathers of Tran's two children also is problematic for readers seeking normative values in her novel. Danico and Ng observe that the American media often portray Asian men as emotionless. To illustrate their point, Danico and Ng single out certain critical comments on the movie *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) that emphasize how this movie stereotypes its depiction of an "Asian American woman, married to a cold, heartless Asian American man, who [the heroine] later found happiness with a Caucasian man." Such cliché images and characters suggest that conjugal happiness is unobtainable with Asian American men and that "Caucasian men are the saviors, or [a] Prince Charming who comes to the rescue" (Danico and Ng 2004, 121, 127). In Strom's novel, both Thien's and April's fathers are indifferent about the results of their sexual affairs with Tran. They showed no emotion toward Tran when she gave birth to Thien and April, even denying their paternity. However, Hus, a Caucasian man, feels responsibility, compassion, and sympathy toward Tran after he reads her autobiographical stories, and he decides to sponsor her immigration to America. In this case, Hus, a Caucasian, indeed is represented as a "savior," while April's and Thien's Vietnamese fathers are the "cold and heartless" types to which Danico and Ng take exception.

Among major Vietnamese American novels published after 2000, *Grass Roof, Tin Roof* has not been widely appreciated. It is experimental in its form, and it has some flaws, which have prevented it from gaining popularity among the general reading public, and particularly among Asian American literary critics. For example, some of its major characters are not fully developed, such as Tran and Hus, and the author devotes many pages to describing April's and Thien's coming-of-age experiences, their entrance into adulthood, and their experimentations

---

<sup>2</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington, D.C., June 1, 1956," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*. Historical Resources. <[http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1956/002PREPRES12SPEECHES\\_56JUN01.htm](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1956/002PREPRES12SPEECHES_56JUN01.htm)>.

with sex. A resulting unevenness in structure sometimes makes the novel seem overly digressive. Despite these apparent shortcomings, the novel reflects some crucial themes of Asian American fiction: womanhood, mother-daughter relationships, racial and bi-cultural identity, personal and ethnic identity crises, cultural displacement, and the immigrant experience. Strom's novel, like others discussed in this article, takes the Vietnamese American novel in a new direction. Although the novel's reception indicates that her experiment is not totally successful, the novel is, nevertheless, significant because recent Vietnamese American fiction seeks to express the on-going experience of the Vietnamese American community, explaining the subtle, private recesses of life that more politically focused novels sometimes leave concealed. It is also significant because recent Vietnamese American authors such as Strom seek new modes of self-expression through experimentation with variation on traditional American literary genres.

#### BICH MINH NGUYEN'S *SHORT GIRLS*

Two years after Bich Minh Nguyen published her first book, *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* (2007)—a memoir of her childhood that has been widely and well received by book reviewers and the reading public—she published her first novel, *Short Girls*—a domestic-realist story of two Vietnamese American sisters, Van and Linny, who grew up and developed extremely contrasting identities in the Mid-West. Compared to Truong's *The Book of Salt* and Strom's *Grass Roof, Tin Roof*, Nguyen's *Short Girls* employs a simple plot and straightforward character development. The novel is divided into sixteen chapters, entitled "Van" and "Linny," alternately, describing the life of each sister. The narrative is clear, despite flashbacks, and at times humorous. *Short Girls* is an intergenerational novel about contrasting personalities and lifestyles, the fragility of human relationships, dysfunctional communication, generational gaps within a family, and the collapse of the American dream.

A major theme of *Short Girls* is the individual's attempt to negotiate his or her cultural and ethnic identity as an immigrant and/or refugee in the United States. Each of the four family members in the Luong family—Dinh Luong (father), Thuy Luong (mother), Van and Linny (daughters and sisters)—finds his or her own way to negotiate cultural values in order to assimilate successfully into American mass culture, although their approaches contrast greatly. In *Negotiating Identities*, Helena Grice observes that Asian American women writers often focus on the "issues of space, place and the idea of 'home'" because places and spaces characterize "our meanings and associations" (Grice 2002, 199, 200). Mr. Luong's separation from his ancestral homeland, Vietnam, leads to his

psychospacial<sup>3</sup> perception of himself as “the Other” in the United States. He feels alienated and isolated because he, like most Vietnamese people, is short, compared to the majority of American men. He repeatedly reminds his daughters: “We live in this country with some of the tallest people. That’s America” (Nguyen 2009, 59). Because of what he perceives as inferiority in physical height, he believes that it is important for the Vietnamese to manifest superiority by being “*smarter*” (Nguyen 2009, 61).

Mr. Luong denies the fact that he has become “*naturalized*,” and he prefers to use the term “*normalized*” to describe his status after taking his oath of loyalty in front of the American flag (Nguyen 132). He argues that the word “citizenship” inscribed on a piece of paper does not make him a true American. The transformation will occur only after he ceases to be invisible in the society around him—after he gains stature and visibility through recognition of his talents and inventive accomplishments. He expresses these thoughts to Van: “You know what we are? No one. We have no citizenship. Refugees aren’t belonging anywhere.” To this, he adds, “In America, we don’t belong until we make them see it [our intellectual equality]” (Nguyen 2009, 133). He does not demand recognition as exceptional within the society so much as acknowledgement by the society of his worthwhile existence within it.

Bishnupriya Ghost and Brinda Bose, in the Introduction to their book *Interventions*, coin the term *configuration* to describe “the act of shaping a personal collection of significations” by which a character’s identity is constructed (Ghost and Bose 1997, xxii). This term is useful in distinguishing the two sisters, Linny and Van. It is indeed through decisions made by each sister in selecting the attitudes and deeds that define their individual lives that they become individuated by the author. Linny is influenced by American popular and consumer culture. She is unable to manage her finances effectively, and she spends her money on trendy garments, luxurious jewelry, and high-heel shoes, while she maintains a poorly kept apartment, which she considers to represent only “protective gear, outside of which her identity could be swayed, up for grabs” (Nguyen 2009, 16). Linny refuses to learn or speak Vietnamese, denies her cultural roots, and avoids the Vietnamese American community. She is afraid of confronting Vietnamese culture and history and her parents’ past—knowledge of which she prefers to remain ignorant. Despite her successful assimilation into American popular culture, Linny feels insecure about her identity. In order to make herself more confident and visible, “Linny depended on high heels. Without them she felt diminutive—a step away from being a little girl or a doddering old Asian woman”

---

<sup>3</sup> I borrow the term *psychospacial* from Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon, 1989) 7.

(Nguyen 2009, 156). She does not want to have her name or identity attached to the manicure and pedicure business, mostly owned by Vietnamese Americans, so she shuns all nail salons as often as she can.

Concerning clothing and identity in American culture, Mary E. Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher argue that one's dress—which includes one's physical appearance, clothing, jewelry, and make-up—acts as a medium of non-verbal communication, and they reveal one's identity and relate to one's concept of the self. In this sense, “an individual's identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects [. . .] contribute meaning to situations for interaction.” Roach-Higgins and Eicher make the point that an individual can possess many identities, which both connect and separate him or her from others (Roach-Higgins *et al*, 1995, 12). Nguyen presents some of Linny's multi-identities as follows: “One day Linny was a Vietnamese girl with a jade bracelet, the next day she was trying on clothes at the mall, standing on tiptoes to try to match her tall blond friends” (Nguyen 2009, 170). Linny relies on clothing and adornment to create alternative identities for herself because she does not want to be stereotyped as just another Vietnamese manicurist. She believes that her investment in fashion will define the American identity that she aspires to assume, which will allow her to participate comfortably and seamlessly in social relations with non-Asian friends and lovers.

One's identity is defined when other people acknowledge that person as a social object, referring to him or her by employing the same words of identity that the person intends to hear (Stone 1995, 23-24). Thus, Linny's assumption or adoption of an American identity allows her to “join with some and depart from others, to enter and leave social relations at once” (Nguyen 2009, 23-24). Her sister and mother remark, for instance, that Linny does not date Asian men; in fact, she alienates herself from the Vietnamese community in Michigan by interacting exclusively with white and black American men. Madan Sarup, in her psychoanalysis of human identity, explains that, on the one hand, an individual wants to be “different from all other” people due to one's perception of one's own *particularity*. On the other hand, an individual wants to be “recognized, in one's unique particularity itself, as a positive value” within a local community, and one wants this recognition to be displayed publicly. Sarup uses the term *universality* to refer to the “social aspect of man's existence,” and she states that “[i]t is only in and by the universal recognition of human particularity that individuality realizes and manifests itself” (Sarup 1993, 19-20). Mr. Luong, Linny, and Van are all subject to the manifestations of these dimensions of particularity and universality. Unlike her younger sister, Van, in order to make herself visible in American public spheres, always presents herself as an indus-

trious, well-read, and ambitious overachiever. Root states that, ironically, while Asian American women's petiteness and shortness are seen as "physically attractive," these bodily features equate them with "diminished power and childlikeness" (Root 1998, 219). This certainly is the view long held by Mr. Luong.

Power and maturity, according to Van and her father, come from one's knowledge and accomplishments. In her childhood, she gained recognition among other American students in the classroom by volunteering to answer challenging questions, demonstrating top-quality academic performance, and eventually earning various scholarships at prestigious universities. According to Eleanor Ty, an Asian Canadian critic, "The markings on our [Asian] body have provoked from the dominant culture an array of responses that are predictable and overdetermined. Our Asian appearance continues to play a large role in determining how others read our identities, and its shapes, in ways both tangible and intangible" (Ty 2004, 8). Ty's insight provides a lens through which to view Van's perception of herself as a Vietnamese American. Van seems to have been influenced by her father's reminder that short people, as many Vietnamese tend to be, have to present themselves as smarter to prove their equality among the tall Americans. In order to escape cultural invisibility and be accepted visibly by American society, and to integrate herself successfully into American culture, Van has chosen the educational venue, suggested by her father as a way to develop her visible existence in the United States. It would seem, therefore, that Van has chosen substance over image, even as her sister Lanny has chosen the alternative.

Although Van accomplishes her ambitious academic goals, her husband Miles once told her, "*There's a core of insecurity about you,*" which she attributes to her limited height and her "being Asian in a mostly white, conservative town in the Midwest [. . .]. She had been standing on her tiptoes for most of her life" (Nguyen 2009, 111, 183). Due to her insecure feelings, she occasionally had to masquerade as a Caucasian to create an artificial comfort zone for herself. For example, when she was a student, she worked at the university fund-drive office, where she excelled among the other employees, partly because she masked her ethnic identity by referring to herself as "Vanessa" during telephone transactions. The people who talked to her "would never know who she was. They couldn't see her; they couldn't perceive her race, height, or anything about her. She relished being a disembodied voice" (Nguyen 2009, 184). Her retirement into a self-imposed, private invisibility illustrates Asian Americans' struggles to become visible in American society.

Whether Kandace Chuh is correct that Asian American writing *should* make political assertion or not, Asian American literature does, in



general, address politics and political issues because the works present the voices of the minorities, the oppressed, and the “excluded others.” In U.S. history, ethnic communities have experienced both random and governmental acts of racism and prejudice perpetuated by the predominantly white American public, and their predominantly white U.S. government. For this reason, Asian American literary texts and criticism, according to Gary Y. Okihiro, often aim at preserving and advancing “the principles and ideals of democracy” that make the United States a “freer place for all” (Okihiro 2002, ix), and the academic space that now is made available for the study of ethnic cultures is “the result of a long struggle for civil rights,” just as Rey Chow concludes in *Writing Diaspora* (Chow 1993, 139). *Short Girls*, however, is a novel of domestic realism, and the characters’ individualized perceptions of themselves in American culture are not determined so much by external racial prejudice as by internal aspirations and abilities, and the characters’ personal struggle to realize them. Many mainstream Americans face such problems, also, and their dreams fail in their realization. The Vietnam War is over; the Vietnamese American community is establishing itself, and a new generation of Vietnamese Americans is dealing with frustrations that prevail throughout the society, but still under identifiably Vietnamese American circumstances.

Nguyen seems to imply that Vietnamese Americans should not be stereotyped as overachievers, geeks, math and science experts, or computer nerds. The Vietnamese Americans are just like everybody else in terms of personal ambitions, pursuits, and goals in life. By portraying her characters with contrasting values, personalities, and perspectives, Nguyen effectively demystifies the “model minority” image that prevails in American ethnic mythology, and which too often is perpetuated in Asian American writing. Her novel both stereotypes and de-stereotypes the main characters at the same time, in order to showcase the diversity in Vietnamese American community: not all Vietnamese American girls/women are industrious, shy, and obedient; not all Vietnamese American men are passive, feminine, and asexual.<sup>4</sup> Nguyen’s novel takes Vietnamese American literature in a new direction by focusing its themes and characterizations upon post- rather than pre-assimilation situations. Effectively, the novel moves Vietnamese American literature into new, and potentially very fruitful, thematic areas.

#### CONCLUSION

In his 1992 study entitled *The Vietnamese Experience in America*, Paul James Rutledge notes that the Vietnamese Americans attempt to

---

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Luong actually has an extramarital affair with Rich Bao’s wife in the novel.

maintain their traditional cultural heritage and participate in American popular culture at the same time. This process is neither acculturation nor assimilation (Rutledge 1992, 145-46). Similarly, in her 1995 book, *The Viet Nam War/The American War*, Renny Christopher observes that bifurcated sensibility, cultural negotiation, and biculturalism are dominant themes in Vietnamese American literature. It is biculturalism that differentiates Vietnamese American literature from the mainstream of Asian American literature, and “Vietnamese exile authors, while becoming ‘American,’ insist on remaining Vietnamese at the same time” (Christopher 1995, 30). Rutledge’s and Christopher’s observations seem no longer to be valid for many Vietnamese American novels published since 2003. The characters in Strom’s *Grass Roof, Tin Roof* and in Nguyen’s *Short Girls* do not negotiate their identities; the second-generation Vietnamese Americans in these two novels are not affected by their parents’ pasts or memories.

It should be noted that, while earlier Vietnamese American authors, such as Lan Cao and le thi diem thuy, rely heavily on their family stories to construct their semi-autobiographical narratives, Truong, Strom, and Nguyen avoid this traditional storytelling approach. Their approach portends greater creativity in plot construction and in thematic development for Vietnamese American fiction. Another aspect to be noted is this: while homosexuality remains an uncommon topic in Vietnamese American literature, Truong chooses it as a main focus of her novel, and this is important, especially as racialization, queer diasporas, third-world homosexuality, and Asian American sexuality are becoming key issues in today’s literary criticism.

In *This Is All I Choose to Tell*, the first book dedicated to the critical study of Vietnamese American literature, Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, in agreement with Thomas A. Dubois, states the Vietnamese American 1.5 generation is misrepresented and misunderstood if U.S. popular culture and readers keep associating the Vietnamese Americans with the Vietnam War and their pathetic refugee experiences. Pelaud concludes, “To view Vietnamese American texts only as refugee narratives restricts the full recognition of Vietnamese American experiences and identities” (Pelaud 2011, 59). The three Vietnamese American novels discussed here clearly indicate that a new generation of Vietnamese American writers can apply their considerable literary skills in ways unfettered by the political and cultural constraints that both stimulated and limited subjects and treatments found in earlier texts. These recent novels point forward an era of greater freedom in artistic expression for Vietnamese Americans who choose to articulate their perceptions in writing, even as they pursue their professional or vocational careers in a broad spectrum of fields. The Vietnamese American authors no longer are defined by or limited to one

moment in Vietnamese or Vietnamese-exile experience. They have many new and significant avenues of experience to examine, and Truong, Strom, and Nguyen prove that Vietnamese American writers are examining them in innovative ways.

## NOTES

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barth, John. "The Literature of Exhaustion." *Postmodern Literary Theory*. Ed. Niall Lucy. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000. 310-21.
- Bates, Milton J. *The Wars We Took to Vietnam: Cultural Conflicts and Storytelling*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1996.
- "*The Book of Salt: A Reader's Guide*." [http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers\\_guides/truong\\_salt.shtml](http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/truong_salt.shtml)
- Chae, Youngsuk. *Politicizing Asian American Literature*. Ed. Franklin Ng. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Christopher, Renny. *The Vietnam War, the American War: Images and Representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese Exile Narratives*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995.
- Chuh, Kandice. *Imagine Otherwise on Asian American Critique*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003.
- Cohler, Deborah. "Teaching Transnationally: Queer Studies and Imperialist Legacies in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*." *Radical Teacher* 82: 25-31.
- Danico, Mary Yu, and Franklin Ng. *Asian American Issues*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004.
- Damousi, Joy, and Mariano B. Plotkin. *The Transnational Unconscious*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Eng, David L. *Racial Castration*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001.
- Fredrickson, George M. "Models of American Ethnic Relations: Hierarchy, Assimilation, and Pluralism." *Doing Race*. Ed. Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya. New York: Norton, 2010. 123-35.
- Fung, Richard. "Looking for My Penis." *Asian American Sexualities*. Ed. Russell Leong. New York: Routledge, 1996. 181-98.
- Ghost Bishnupriya, and Brinda Bose. "Introduction: Feminist Interventions and Locational Politics." *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*. New York: Garland, 1997. xv-xxxii.

- Glausen, Jan. "The Cook's Tale." *The Women's Review of Books* 20.10-11 (July 2003): 23.
- Grice, Helena. *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing*. Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2002.
- Halberstam, Judith. "Boys will be . . . Bois? Or, Transgender Feminism and Forgetful Fish." *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory*. Ed. Diane Richardson, et al. New York: Palgrave, 2006. 97-115.
- Kennedy, John F. "Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington, D.C., June 1, 1956." *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*. Historical Resources. <[http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference%20esk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1956/002PREPRES12SPEECHES\\_56JUN01.htm](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference%20esk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pre-Pres/1956/002PREPRES12SPEECHES_56JUN01.htm)>.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Print.
- Koshy, Susan. "The Fiction of Asian American Literature." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9 (1996): 315-46.
- Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Culture: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Nguyen, Bich Minh. *Short Girls*. New York: Viking, 2009.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Okihiro, Gary Y. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 2002.
- Pelaud, Isabelle Thuy. *This Is All I Choose to Tell: History and Hybridity in Vietnamese American Literature*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011.
- Pisares, Elizabeth H. "Payback Time: Neocolonial Discourses in Peter Bacho's *Cebu*." *MELUS* 29.1 (Spring 2004): 79-97.
- Roach-Higgins, Mary Ellen, and Joanne B. Eicher. "Dress and Identity." *Dress and Identity*. Ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson. New York: Fairchild, 1995. 7-18.
- Root, Maria P. P. "Women." *Handbook of Asian American Psychology*. Ed. Lee C. Lee and Nolan W. S. Zane. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998. 211-31.
- Rutledge, Paul James. *The Vietnamese Experience in America*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.
- Sarup, Madan. *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993.

- Stone, Gregory P. "Appearance and the Self." *Dress and Identity*. Ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson. New York: Fairchild, 1995. 19-39.
- Strom, Dao. *Grass Roof, Tin Roof*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Tolkas, Alice B. *The Alice B. Tolkas Cook Book*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954.
- Truong, Monique. *The Book of Salt*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Ty, Eleanor. *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004.
- Xu, Wenying. *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2007.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS, “AMERICA’S PAPER”  
AND PRE-PRIMARY BLACK PRESIDENTIAL  
CANDIDATES: *THE NEW YORK TIMES*  
COVERAGE OF REV. JESSE JACKSON (1983),  
REV. AL SHARPTON (2003), AND  
SEN. BARACK OBAMA (2007) CAMPAIGN  
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INITIAL DAYS

*Ravi Perry*  
*Clark University*

INTRODUCTION

Since the birth of political reporting, the press has yielded significant and powerful influence in a variety of public events (Leonard, 1986). Media texts, such as newspapers, powerfully shape our social worlds and thus affect our public life (Reese et al., 2003). Mass media also plays an important role in setting the agenda of political campaigns and how consumers react to such an agenda: “readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position” (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 1). Historically, the American public has relied on the mass media to introduce them to political candidates (Berelson et al., 1954: 234; Bartels, 1988). Moreover, while news audiences’ prior political knowledge is the most effective predictor of news recall (Price and Zaller, 1993), the content and context mass media provides the general public has often been the limited information upon which voters make decisions on candidate preferences (Lang and Lang, 1966, p. 466).

Mass media is known to affect potential voters’ decision-making processes generally (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994) and when the public has the opportunity to evaluate a perceived viable black candidate for major office, those on the left and the right acknowledge how mass media has played an even bigger role (Mitchell, 2009; Selepak, 2007; Fredoso, 2008). Black candidates for higher office immediately begin their campaigns with the general expectations from most whites that they are not qualified for the office (Williams, 1990). Building on research that examines the role of race throughout mass media (Dates and Barlow, 1983; Reeves, 1997; Entman and Rojecki, 2001; Downing and Husband, 2005), I examine *The New York Times*’ portrayal of Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. Al Sharpton and Senator Barack Obama during their campaigns for

the nation's highest office. An examination of the news articles printed within the campaigns' first thirty-days is significant as "a black candidate for higher office begins with the bias among many whites that he or she is not qualified" (Williams, 1990, p. 53). As a result, *The New York Times* coverage of the campaigns' first thirty days matters as the newspaper has the opportunity to cut against the bias depending on how the coverage commences.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, when it comes to first impressions, cognitive and social psychologists have long recognized the power of first impressions to hold firm even in the face of conflicting evidence and contradictory events (Tetlock, 1983; Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Allport, 1954; Hamilton, 1979). The first thirty days of a campaign are also significant because the pre-primary "surfacing" period generally introduces voters to the themes and issues agenda the candidate is likely to use in later stages of the campaign (Trent, 2009). Additionally, news organizations' content merits social scrutiny and may yield negative social implications (Fowler, 1991).

### *Methods*

A three-pronged longitudinal content analysis of qualitative, comparative analysis are used. One measures the frequency of articles about Jackson, Sharpton, and Obama within the selected thirty-day period.<sup>2</sup> A second method focuses on the placement of those articles which primarily discuss Jackson, Sharpton, and Obama yet were not centrally located

---

<sup>1</sup> The examination of thirty days of coverage is common: see, for example, Avraham, et al. (2000) Dynamics in the News Coverage of Minorities: The Case of the Arab Citizens of Israel, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24:2, 117-133. The choice to analyze the first thirty days of a candidate's campaign is also significant because the public's favorability ratings respective to the candidates within the first weeks of their campaign is usually different from their favorability rating later. This difference suggests that public opinion changes with increased knowledge and opportunities for influence. For example, Hillary Clinton's favorability rating with Gallup was at its highest during the first month of her presidential campaign (58%) and did not return to that level until early January 2009, as the Obama administration commenced. Near the conclusion of her campaign, her favorability rating was 54%. Meanwhile Barack Obama's favorability rating for the same Feb 9-11 2007 initial campaign period was at 53%. Near the conclusion of his 2008 primary campaign his favorability rating was 61%. Thus, how the American public views the candidates favorably within a month of their presidential announcement matters. As the public get their information about candidates through the news, (as what they know about the candidate presumably increases), their favorability either increases or decreases – it does not remain constant. See, for more information: "Favorability: People in the News." Retrieved 6/1/2010. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1618/Favorability-People-News.aspx#5>

<sup>2</sup> This analysis examines articles located within the Lexis Nexus Academic and Library Solutions database by searching for the candidates' names within quotation marks. Articles printed within the main body of the *New York Times* are examined only and excludes articles reprinted with the permission of the Associated Press. The first thirty days includes the day the candidate formally announced their intention to join the race and the subsequent twenty-nine days. The announcement date for Jackson in 1983 was November 3, January 5, 2003 for Sharpton and February 10, 2007 for Obama.



in *The New York Times*. Such positioning of articles is termed “article placement” (Page, 1996, p. 112). A third methodological process utilized a five-point Likert Scale measure to code the articles’ racial and political content.<sup>3</sup> The conclusions are based on how Sharpton, Jackson and Obama are portrayed as black presidential candidates, given a total of one hundred and fourteen articles.<sup>4</sup>

#### EXPLORING THE *NEW YORK TIMES* PROMINENCE

Why the focus on the *New York Times*? First, *The New York Times*, the industry standard for news gathering and reporting, plays in an important part in shaping political reality (Althaus and Tewksbury, 2002). Second, *The Times*, while third in national circulation,<sup>5</sup> maintains the global reputation as the preeminent news source. Further, it is understood that many comparable and smaller news outlets pattern the context of their coverage from the *Times* (Marshall, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the *Times* is known as an intricate organization whose editorial and content battles have shaped major public events for most of its history (Diamond,

---

<sup>3</sup> A five-point Likert-scale methodological process was utilized to evaluate article placement and content. Labels of *positive*, *Neutral-Positive*, *neutral*, *Neutral-Negative*, or *negative* were affixed to articles implicating the black presidential candidates accordingly. *Positive* articles favorably represented the black candidates, provided the candidate with ample quotations to address issues in their own words, and did not include stereotypical references or language. *Positive* also indicates favorable article placement and relevant political content. *Neutral-Positive* articles favorably represented the black candidates, provided the candidate with limited quotations to address issues in their own words, and did not include stereotypical references or language. *Neutral-Positive* also indicates reasonable article placement, yet limited relevant political content. *Neutral* articles are not negative or positive and yet fairly represented the black candidates respective to other candidates within the article. *Neutral* articles included limited references to the candidate. *Neutral-Negative* articles unfairly represented the black candidates and included occasional damaging language and content. *Neutral-Negative* also indicates that the article’s placement and/or the candidate’s referenced name was positioned poorly. *Negative* articles grossly represented the black candidates and included repetitive damaging language. *Negative* also indicates that the article’s placement and the candidate’s referenced name were positioned poorly.

<sup>4</sup> Articles and editorials were selected as “major” or “important” to each candidate’s election campaign and categorically exclude the following article categories: “Briefings” and “News Summary.” Carol Moseley Braun’s 2004 presidential bid is excluded because she withdrew from the campaign before the Democratic Primaries and the date of her formal announcement is in dispute. Braun filed paperwork with the Federal Election Commission to form an exploratory committee in February 2003, though, at the time she indicated she would decide whether to formally run for president later that year. Having “campaigning” for months, her formal announcement in September 2003 is not comparable with Sharpton, Jackson and Obama. Rev. Jesse Jackson’s 1988 campaign is excluded because his 1984 campaign already introduced him to voters and media conglomerates as a presidential contender; thus, the theory of first impressions would not apply.

<sup>5</sup> “Audit Bureau of Circulation”. March 31, 2010. <http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/newstitlesearch.usp>. Retrieved 2010-06-01.

<sup>6</sup> Personally, a brief intern experience in the United States Congress informed the extent to which many politicians pattern their daily activities and public comments based on the *Times* coverage.

1995). *The Times* has also been found to give more emphasis to topics ‘owned’ by the Democratic Party (such as issues pertinent to Democratic primary candidates) during presidential campaigns when the incumbent President is a Republican, which is the case for the Jackson and Sharpton presidential campaigns (Puglisi, 2004). Thus, the *Times*, as Benjamin Page suggests, is of particular interest:

Since public deliberation concerning policy issues is now largely carried out through the mass media, by professional communicators, there is good reason to look closely at forums within which the most prominent and influential communicators interact with each other and speak to broader audiences. One such forum is the . . . *New York Times* (p. 17).

Page also asserts how the *New York Times* enjoys the role of industry leader and that maintains considerable influence throughout American mass media:

The *Times* . . . is one of the most prestigious and authoritative publications in the United States . . . Thus, the opinions voiced in the *Times* also tend to find their way—directly, or through syndication, or by trickle-down processes involving editors, writers, and commentators in other media—to a mass audience. The quality of deliberation in such a forum could affect the quality of debate generally (p. 17).

While Page confirms the *Times* as the leader in print media, he also finds that the newspaper has a greater responsibility of fair and accurate coverage because it potentially affects “the quality of debate generally” (Page 1996, p. 17). In other words, it is quite likely that what the *Times* suggests can become social doctrine imbedded into the minds and thoughts of the average American. Page’s revelation here is simple: with elitism and powerful influence, certain measures of responsibility are *expected*. Yet, Page asserts later that there are reasons to be “skeptical” of such expectations, which implies that the “[*New York*] *Times* is taken very seriously by its readers, and the *Times*, in turn, takes its central position in policy debates very much to heart” (Page 1996, p. 18).

These positions the readers hold, concerning the influence of the *Times*, are significant. As a result I assume that throughout the time between 1983 and 2003, the nature of the *Times*’ influence sustained.

NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF JACKSON 1983  
PRE-PRIMARY CAMPAIGN<sup>7</sup>

The 1984 presidential candidacy of Rev. Jesse Jackson, a prominent African American civil rights leader, was an exciting and pivotal moment in African American history (Barker and Walters, 1989; Reed, 1986; Gibbons, 1993; Morris, 1990). The second black presidential candidate, (after Shirley Chisholm), Jackson was a leading figure in the African American community. *The New York Times* captured the significance of the Jackson candidacy and the careful timing of his announcement:

In barely 24 hours, America has witnessed a pivotal transition. On Wednesday President Reagan signed the law establishing a Federal holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this fixing the highest seal of public approval on the long first-stage struggle, the achievement of civil rights. Yesterday brought a welcome milestone in the second stage, the exercise of those rights[:] The Rev. Jesse Jackson . . . (“Civil Rights: The Movement Moves,” November 4, 1983, A26).

Jackson’s November 3rd campaign announcement to enter the 1984 race for the Democratic presidential nomination occurred the same week that President Reagan signed into law a Federal Holiday to be established in honor of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Dr. King’s widow, Coretta Scott King, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who has said he will announce on Thursday his candidacy for the Democratic Presidential nomination . . . were among those in the Rose Garden for an occasion that blacks described as an exciting, historic day (“President, Signing Bill, Praises Dr. King,” November 3, 1983, A1)

While the articles referencing Jackson’s candidacy appear neutral, the newspaper’s November 4th story on Jackson’s announcement also recognizes the historic nature of Jackson’s candidacy and the role he played in the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., so this article was labeled positive.

Another article I labeled *positive* was printed the day after Jackson’s announced candidacy and was on the front page of the *Times*.<sup>8</sup> *The arti-*

---

<sup>7</sup> This section includes select chronological descriptions of content analysis article coding for Jackson. For a complete reference of articles featuring Jackson, see Table 1.

<sup>8</sup> Analysis reveals three front-page articles featuring Jackson throughout the thirty-day period.

*cle appears to portray the candidate's prospects in seeking the nomination and highlights Jackson's influence on the black community:*

By attracting black votes that would otherwise go to Mr. Mondale, the Jackson candidacy almost certainly enhances Senator Glenn's chances of making the breakthrough he needs in the Southern primaries. A strong Jackson candidacy also raises the possibility of a deadlocked Democratic convention ("A Provocative Candidate," November 4, 1983, A1, Page 1).

While the article did not discuss any of the policies and initiatives Jackson proposed to implement if elected and highlights how several black leaders chose to support Jackson's opponent for the Democratic nomination – Mondale, the article also profiled some of Jackson's high-profile black endorsements, and his role as a leader in the black community. Jackson's article analysis yielded a surprising number of positive articles and the aforementioned selection is indicative of the article content that positively profiled Jackson's candidacy in its early stages.

Forty-eight hours later the *Times* printed a *neutral-positive* article wherein the newspaper noted Jackson's appearance before the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee:

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, in a speech to an Arab-American group, said tonight that the United States had an interest in both a secure Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state . . . Mr. Jackson said there was a need for discussion in this country about new ways of approaching peace in the Middle East ("Jackson Sees Palestinian State in U.S. Interest," November 6, 1983, p. 31).

This article was labeled neutral-positive because of decisive language and balanced word choice that prevented it from being labeled positive. For example, the newspaper content indicated: "James Zogby, [the group's] director, said he was not troubled that Mr. Jackson did not choose to make a major address on Middle East issues alone" (ibid). This statement reveals that Jackson's multi-topic speech was not specific to Middle-East issues with the implication being that Jackson's choice to speak about topics other than Middle East issues, was unexpected, but not problematic.

In later articles, the *Times*, again, portrays Jackson differently. For example, a November 23rd article, labeled neutral-positive, references Jackson's comments regarding key Labor endorsements for his main Democratic rival, Mondale:

Mr. Jackson, the only black among the eight announced . . . At a news conference called on short notice today . . . He offered no figures [after mention his campaign has made progress in "organization"] . . . Recently, Mr. Jackson had muted his criticism of that commission [Democratic National Committee] after being reminded by party officials that some of his key supporters served on it ("Jackson Assail Labor's Support for Mondale as Move by 'Bosses,'" November 29, 1983, A19).

These chronological quotations reveal the potential for the article to be labeled as *negative*. The article content, does in fact use strong language, "Jackson Assails . . ." and highlights out of context references to Jackson's race while ignoring the racial classification of Mondale or other Democratic nomination candidates. However, because the article provided Jackson with ample opportunity to explain his position in his own words and concludes with Jackson's perspective, the article was labeled neutral-positive as the majority of its content referenced the facts concerning Labor endorsements Mondale received and featured Jackson's responses prominently.

Not all of the *New York Times* coverage near the end of the first month of his campaign had elements of neutrality, however. In a November 26th article titled "Jackson Hones His Position on Issues," the coverage of Jackson as a presidential candidate was *positive*:

In nearly 16 years as a civil rights leader, the Rev. Jesse Jackson has amassed a voluminous record of positions on traditional civil rights concerns, ranging from busing for school integration to affirmative action. He has also touched on issues such as economic development, education philosophy and financing of domestic programs, and even some foreign policy issues (JACKSON HONES HIS POSITION ON ISSUES, November 26, 1983, p. 10).

This article focused on the issues of the campaign and the language used to describe Jackson's qualifications for his Democratic nomination bid was decisively favorable toward Jackson's experience.

In reference to New York state black leaders' endorsement of former Vice-President Walter F. Mondale for President, the *Times* printed a *neutral* article, focused on high-ranking Congressional Representative Charles Rangel's (D-NY) support of Mondale, "The endorsements represented a significant defection from the strong political support for the Rev. Jesse Jackson's bid for the nomination (RANGEL AND 4 OTHER BLACKS IN STATE BACK MONDALE, November 30, 1983, B5)."

While this article infers the potentially negative effects high profile black endorsements for Mondale may have on Jackson's campaign, it does not belabor the issue. Rather, the article lists the high profile black endorsements for Mondale and Jackson supporters in New York leadership circles. This suggests an attempt to balance the article content and is labeled *neutral*.

The final highlighted example of the *Times*' coverage of Jackson's first month as a black presidential candidate in 1983, printed a month after Jackson's historic campaign announcement, attempts to discredit Jackson and was labeled *neutral-negative*:

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who has been criticizing A.F.L.-C.I.O. leaders for endorsing Walter F. Mondale's candidacy for the Democratic Presidential nomination without polling the unions' members, today received an endorsement decided in a similar way. The Rev. T.J. Jemison, chairman of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc., endorsed Mr. Jackson . . . Mr. Jemison repeatedly declined to give a precise answer when asked if he had polled the denomination's members or its governing board . . . the church leader said that his endorsement was a personal, rather than an organizational one . . . (12/2/1983, p. B8).

The beginning content within this article contextualizes how Jackson once criticized a campaign tactic from which he later benefits. Strikingly, the *Times*' source that was to confirm Jackson's flip-flop campaign tactic, Rev. Jemison, only indicates that the endorsement in question was personal. Still, the article content infers a Jackson flip-flop even though the source of the endorsement invalidates that claim.

These selected quotations from *Times* coverage of the first thirty days of Jackson's 1984 campaign highlights the varied coverage of Jackson and the significant number of *positive* articles.

#### NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF SHARPTON'S 2003 PRE-PRIMARY CAMPAIGN<sup>9</sup>

The Rev. Al Sharpton, founder and president of the National Action Network, declared his intention to seek the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination on January 5, 2003 and formally filed papers to form a presidential exploratory committee on January 22nd of the same year. However, *The New York Times* in its first article profiling Sharpton's

---

<sup>9</sup> This section includes select chronological descriptions of content analysis article coding for Sharpton. For a complete reference of articles featuring Sharpton, see Table 2.

candidacy, *The Times'* *neutral-negative* coverage highlighted his unlikely win in its first paragraph:

The Rev. Al Sharpton has run for office three times from New York, and has lost each time. He has been embroiled in polarizing disputes throughout his career, including the handling of his personal finances and his involvement in a racially charged rape case that a jury found to be a hoax. Even the ever-energetic and indefatigable Mr. Sharpton acknowledges it is unlikely that he will ever be elected president of the United States (A Wily Contender, But Unlikely Winner, Eyes the Presidency, Section A; Column 1, Pg 16, 1/13/2003).

Clearly, this quote identifies how the article initially focuses on the drawbacks of Sharpton's candidacy.

However, the article is not entirely negative on Sharpton. For example, the article also references how serious Sharpton considers the candidacy:

He is planning to create a presidential exploratory committee on Jan. 21, and is already delivering speeches across the nation, preparing to open an office in Washington and offering opinions on everything from North Korea to deficit spending. "I'm very serious about this," Mr. Sharpton said between cellphone calls over breakfast at the Four Seasons in the Georgetown section of Washington the other day. "I'm not just talking about Sharpton getting a position in the White House. I'm talking about fighting for the soul of the Democratic Party" (A Wily Contender, But Unlikely Winner, Eyes the Presidency, Section A; Column 1, Pg 16, 1/13/2003).

The article quote above avers Sharpton's reasons for running and lists his ability to articulate positions on a variety of campaign issues. Yet, this article, one of the only major articles on Sharpton, prominently featured, and with relevant content.

A few weeks later when Sharpton formally filled his Federal Elections Commission Statement of Candidacy, the newspaper again alleges the *neutral-negative* contributions Sharpton brings to the presidential contest:

Mr. Sharpton, who has run unsuccessfully for public office three times in New York, filed papers at the Federal Elections Commission. In doing so, Mr. Sharpton, who is black, said he would appeal to Americans, including liberal Democrats and members of minorities, who he

said were not voting in presidential elections (“Sharpton takes step in Presidential Bid,” January 22, 2003 A18).

This article again immediately reminds readers of Sharpton’s failed political quests. This repetitive content is questionable. Questionable content and its placement within news articles are acknowledged as deliberate journalistic tools used to convey a particular message: “language is used in newspapers to form ideas and beliefs” (Fowler 1999, p. 1). The choice to place the details of Sharpton’s previous failed bids for public office early in the article text and within one of the few articles on Sharpton centrally placed in Section A on page 18 is suggestive as leading the reader toward a particular influence. In addition, this article highlights Sharpton’s racial identity, labeling the black candidate’s race as a key feature of his campaign. Still another concern was the content referencing Sharpton’s “appeal to Americans.” This article’s placement of content within the text and its discursive prose is troubling alone. However, the article further describes Sharpton’s civil rights struggles within a mediated context and represents his civil rights struggles in a certain tone: “He has been identified with several high-profile racially charged episodes,” written as if that is the sum total of his career experience that qualifies him to seek the presidency. In all, then, the content details how news “is a practice: a discourse which far from neutrally reflecting social reality and empirical facts,” intervenes in the reader’s own construction of reality (Fowler 1999, p. 2). For all of these reasons, this article was considered *neutral-negative*.

The next day, the *Times* detailed the effects of a fire destroying the historic ballroom at Sharpton’s Harlem headquarters:

The Harlem ballroom where the Rev. Al Sharpton has held court for six years, preaching civil rights and excoriating politicians who raised his ire, was destroyed yesterday morning by fire. City officials said last night that the two-alarm fire had been caused by an electrical problem (“Electrical Fire Destroys Ballroom at Sharpton Headquarters,” January 23, 2003).

This article is strikingly different from the previous article as it references details associated with the fire without the specter of questionable content. Even though, this article is placed in Section B, in contrast to the preferred article placement in Section A. While the article is placed in Section B, it is on the front page of the section, demanding attention to the reader, and thus contributed to its labeling as *neutral-positive*.



## A NOTE ON SHARPTON'S CONTENT ANALYSIS

Ironically, the *Times*, based in New York, from which Sharpton's National Action Network is located, had few articles on the candidate's first thirty days of his presidential campaign.<sup>10</sup> Most of the *Times* coverage was limited to the Metropolitan Desk and not the National Desk. Sharpton has an extensive body of news coverage regarding his political activism throughout metropolitan New York City.<sup>11</sup> However, the lack of National Desk coverage of Al Sharpton is puzzling. Sharpton's favorability rating, according to a Gallup Poll stood at 16%, a sizable percentage.<sup>12</sup> He sustained enough support to be listed on the ballot in twenty-two states and the District of Columbia throughout the entire primary season.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the *Times*' lack of coverage of the first thirty days of Sharpton's presidential campaign is likely in part explained by Sharpton's residence in New York. Recognized as a local black political activist throughout the metropolitan New York City region (Sharpton and Walton, 1996; Walters and Smith, 1999), the *Times* has regularly covered his local activities and actively disparaged many of his efforts. In other words, this history may have had an effect on how the *Times* initially covered his presidential campaign.

NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF OBAMA 2007  
PRE-PRIMARY CAMPAIGN<sup>14</sup>

With the tagline expressed by many, "a charmed introduction to national politics," Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) announced to the nation his intention to compete for the Democratic nomination for president on February 10, 2007. Speaking from the steps of the Old Statehouse in Springfield, IL, an invoking the passions and zeal of President Abraham Lincoln, Obama entered into the race after significant speculation<sup>15</sup> and amidst an international love affair with just the potential for his candidacy (Selepak, 2007). As a result, the conditions under which the *Times* began to cover Obama's first thirty days of his presidential campaign was vastly different from Jackson and Sharpton. Though he shared some

---

<sup>10</sup> Analysis reveals zero front-page articles featuring Sharpton throughout the thirty-day period.

<sup>11</sup> "Times Topics: People: Al Sharpton: [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/times/topics/people/s/al\\_sharpton/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/times/topics/people/s/al_sharpton/index.html) Accessed 6/1/2010

<sup>12</sup> No Author. "Favorability: People in the News." Retrieved 6/1/2010. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1618/Favorability-People-News.aspx#5>

<sup>13</sup> "America Votes 2004: The Primaries," <http://cnn.hu/ELECTION/2004/special/primary/Accessed 6/1/2010>

<sup>14</sup> This section includes select chronological descriptions of content analysis article coding for Obama. For a complete reference of articles featuring Obama, see Table 3.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, "Obama Says He'll Consider A 2008 Bid for The Presidency: Democratic Senator to Decide After Elections," Dan Balz, *Washington Post*, October 23, 2006

historic overtures and perceptions of viability with Jackson, he did not hail from the civil rights generation like Jackson or Sharpton. Thus, the *Times*' coverage of Obama was less of an introduction to him and his politics, than a continuation of the pre-existent love affair with this image.

The day after Obama's announcement, *The Times* had several articles and editorials devoted to his historic entry into the race. One of the significant articles published that day profiled Obama's announcement speech as a call for generational change:

Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, standing before the Old State Capitol where Abraham Lincoln began his political career, announced his candidacy for the White House on Saturday by presenting himself as an agent of generational change who could transform a government hobbled by cynicism, petty corruption and "a smallness of our politics." "The time for that politics is over," Mr. Obama said. "It is through. It's time to turn the page." . . . Speaking smoothly and comfortably, Mr. Obama offered a generational call to arms, portraying his campaign less as a candidacy and more as a movement. "Each and every time, a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done," he said. "Today we are called once more, and it is time for our generation to answer that call" (Obama Formally Enters Presidential Race With Calls for Generational Change, Section 1; Column 1; Pg. 34, 2/11/2007).

Noticeably the tone of the article's coverage of Obama's announcement speech leans positive. As opposed to underscoring Obama's failed bid to unseat Representative Bobby Rush (D-IL), or his perceived limited experience as a less than one-term senator, the newspaper's content largely consisted of quotes from Obama's own speech. This article was labeled *neutral positive*.

*The Times*, a week later, continued to report how Obama's entry into the race was so significant that it changed the expectations of traditional political venues:

"Perhaps it's time to write the obit to the living room," David Yepsen, the state's premier political columnist, wrote in *The Des Moines Register* after Senator Barack Obama drew thousands of people to a gym in Ames. "They are now relics of past campaigns, as ancient as the torchlight parade. Rock-star candidates need room for their fans and the gawkers" (In Iowa, the Living Room

Has Fallen Out of Favor, Section A; Column 1; Pg. 11, 2/19/2007).

In this quotation the newspaper quotes a political columnist from a major newspaper in Iowa, where an early presidential primary was to be held. By acknowledging how local reporters recognized ‘star’ candidates were erasing the once-popular living room conversation element of primary campaigns, the newspaper confirmed how traditional politics change given the infusion of new participants in the political process: “To a certain extent — and with all due respect to veteran chroniclers of the American political system given to nostalgia and perhaps idealized memories of past Iowa journeys — this may not be an entirely bad thing. The events for Mr. Obama, the Democratic senator from Illinois, were bustling with young faces that were not familiar to many Iowa political activists.” For an article that profiled how many candidates, such as John Edwards and Hillary Clinton, were drawing significant crowds at events that formally were designed to be small group conversations, no one appeared to have the draw of Obama:

Last week, Mr. Obama’s campaign aides scheduled one session in the home of Tom and Patti Friend of Iowa Falls. But after the Friends put a notice of the event in the newspaper, 200 people showed up, spilling out of the living room. When Mr. Obama walked through the door, the booming applause made it clear that the gathering was not so intimate after all; he had to climb up the stairs to find a speck of floor to speak from. One day after Mr. Obama appeared there, he bounded onto the stage at the Field House at the University of New Hampshire in Durham. Christine Sohl, who arrived early to get a seat about 20 rows back, recalled meeting a little-known governor named Bill Clinton in a group of no more than 20 people (In Iowa, the Living Room Has Fallen Out of Favor, Section A; Column 1; Pg. 11, 2/19/2007).

Given that the article profiled the increased level of interest in primary campaigns for multiple candidates and yet noted how Obama’s ‘star’ power yielded even greater interest, this article was also labeled *neutral-positive*.

A week later, *the Times* printed a front-page article of Obama, emphasizing his anti-war stance to the war in Iraq:<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Analysis reveals eight front-page articles featuring Obama throughout the thirty-day period.

Senator Barack Obama is running for president as one of the few candidates who opposed the Iraq war from the beginning, a simple position unburdened by expressions of regret or decisions over whether to apologize for initially supporting the invasion. Iraq remains a defining topic in the opening stages of the 2008 presidential race, but it may prove easier for Mr. Obama, Democrat of Illinois, to revisit the past than to distinguish his views in the future (As Candidate, Obama Carves Anti-War Stance, Section A; Column 5; Pg. 1, 2/26/2007).

This quotation, the first few lines of the article immediately references the ease with which Obama can project an anti-war image. The article does not acknowledge until several sentences inward that Obama's new-found anti-war stance was not always so fervent:

Mr. Obama was not always so critical of the Congressional vote, taken on Oct. 11, 2002. In several interviews before the Democratic National Convention in 2004, where his national political ascent began, he said he did not place blame on Democrats who had voted to authorize the war, conceding he had not been privy to the same intelligence information. Now, he appears intent on drawing the contrast between his early opposition to the war and the Senate votes to authorize it by Mr. Edwards, who has since repudiated his vote and apologized for it, and Mrs. Clinton, who has not apologized but has said she would not have supported the resolution had she known then what she knows now (As Candidate, Obama Carves Anti-War Stance, Section A; Column 5; Pg. 1, 2/26/2007).

This quotation references that Obama was not a senator at the time of the vote to authorize war in Iraq and that he, himself, had acknowledged that had he been in the position he likely would have voted for the war. Thus, it appears *the Times* chose to include the contradictions to Obama's candidate anti-war stance deep within the article, when seemingly similar contradictions for other black presidential candidates prior were either titles of articles or referenced in the initial lines of the article.<sup>17</sup> As a result this language and article placement, the article was labeled *neutral-positive*.

---

<sup>17</sup> See, for example: "JACKSON GETS SUPPORT, APPARENTLY WITHOUT POLL OF THE GROUP," Section A; Page 8, Column 3, 12/2/1983).

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the previous sections I described the content in select articles to highlight the content analysis methodology. The methodology reveals that *The Times* coverage of Jackson, Sharpton and Obama as black presidential candidates varied. The number of articles written about the candidates throughout the initial thirty-day period varied greatly as well. While the newspaper, known for its liberal bent (Okrent, 2004; Puglisi, 2004), covered all three candidates with a significant percentage of neutral/neutral-positive ratings, the newspaper covered Jackson with more positive ratings than the other candidates. The following table reveals the results:

TABLE 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

	Positive	Neutral-Positive	Neutral	Neutral-Negative	Negative	Total
<b>Jackson</b>	6 (16%)	13 (34%)	14 (37%)	5 (13%)	0	38
<b>Sharpton</b>	0	4 (22%)	8 (44%)	6 (33%)	0	18
<b>Obama</b>	1	25 (47%)	21 (40%)	5 (11%)	1	53

These data indicate a paradoxical, baseline trend within the *New York Times*' coverage of black presidential candidates. For example, while sixteen percent of the *Times*' coverage of Jackson was *positive*, suggesting favorable placement, content and representation with ample quotations to address issues in his own words, nearly half of its coverage of Obama leaned positive as was labeled as *neutral-positive*, suggesting reasonable placement content and representation with limited quotations to address issues in his own words. Meanwhile, few articles for either candidate were *negative* or *neutral-negative*. In each case, a significant percentage of articles were *neutral*.

A closer analysis that compares the historic candidacies of Jackson and Obama, indicates a slight positive change with a thirteen percentage point increase in articles labeled *neutral-positive*. Meanwhile, the percentage of *neutral* and *neutral-negative* articles remained roughly comparable. Notably, in numeric terms, the sum of articles labeled as *negative* increased by one and the sum of articles labeled positive decreased by five; whereas, the number of articles denoted as *neutral* increased from fourteen to twenty-one, though in ratio terms remained roughly equal. This trend suggests the *Times*' coverage of black presidential candidates was improved over time (see table below). Sharpton aside, *the Times* printed significantly more articles that featured Obama in 2007 than featured Jackson in 1983. Additionally, although the number of *positive* articles decreased over time, the sum of *neutral-positive* articles increased significantly.

TABLE 5: COVERAGE OF SHARPTON AND OBAMA

	Sum of Articles	Neutral Positive Content Analysis	Sum of Front Page Article Placement
<b>Jackson</b>	38	13 (34%)	3
<b>Obama</b>	53	25 (47%)	8

This table reveals that the *Times*' coverage of the historic candidacies of Jackson and Obama varied and that the newspaper printed more articles, many were placed more significantly, and that the content improved.

Overall, there is no overwhelming misrepresentation of black presidential candidates in the *New York Times*, as there were few recorded *negative* and *neutral-negative* articles. As a result, it cannot be said that the *Times* deliberately mediated in their coverage of the Jackson, Sharpton and Obama generally. However, article placement and some language choices infer a progressively positive trend, as the newspaper printed more articles on Obama and more that were labeled *neutral-positive*. The *Times*' coverage of black presidential candidates improved in terms of language/content and article placement over time.

#### CONCLUSION

*The New York Times* is the nation's newspaper industry standard. How "America's Paper" (Hirschorn, 2009) covers significant news events reverberates throughout our culture. The *Times*' coverage of black presidential candidates, Rev. Jackson, Rev. Sharpton and Sen. Barack Obama merits attention as its choice of article placement, and language can have a significant impact on the development of public opinion respective to these candidates. Examining the first thirty days of coverage post the candidate's formal announcement to enter the presidential contest, the *Times*' number of neutral and positive leaning articles increased over time, as the number of negative and negative leaning articles remained firm.

The data reveal that the *New York Times* is inconsistent in its coverage of black presidential candidates' early campaigns, with respect to Jackson, Sharpton, and Obama. However, the newspaper's article placement and content seemingly improved as the black presidential candidate's viability was believed to be greater. With several examples of the newspaper's substantive content of Jackson, Sharpton, and Obama, this analysis reminds how the process of news gathering and reporting occurs in social context:

In the end, of course, what gets defined as "legitimate," "official," or "plausible" is also a function of who does the defining. That is, how journalists select their sources

and organize the content of their news narratives depends upon their *perceptions* of the socio-political climate surrounding the event in question. Despite the objectivity ideal that undergirds the profession, newswriters *are* people, and an impressive body of scholarship describes the significant influence social location is likely to have on peoples' perceptions (Hunt, 1999, p. 95)

Hunt acknowledges that all journalists are people, and the content of their news is socially constructed. The *Times'* coverage of black presidential candidates appears to follow this theory as the number of their neutral and neutral-positive articles increased over time, as polls indicated that an increasing number of Americans would vote for a black president.<sup>18</sup>

With scholars confirming how the power of language and content within news cannot be ignored, "America's Paper" (Hirschorn, 2009), then, has a responsibility and authority as the industry standard, of which "its readers take seriously" (Page, 1996) – to continue to improve its coverage of pre-primary black presidential candidates post-Obama.

#### REFERENCES

- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Althaus, Scott L. and David Tewksbury (2002). Agenda Setting and the "New" News: Patterns of Issue Importance Among Readers of the Paper and Online Versions of the New York Times," *Communication Research*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 180-207.
- Avraham, et al. (2000). Dynamics in the News Coverage of Minorities: The Case of the Arab Citizens of Israel, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24:2, 117-133
- Barker, Lucius J. and Ronald W. Walters, (eds). (1989). *Jesse Jackson's 1984 Presidential Campaign: Challenge and Change in American Politics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Bartels, Larry M. (1988). *Presidential Primaries and Dynamics of Public Choice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

---

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, "Americans Today Much More Accepting of a Woman, Black, Catholic, or Jew As President," Frank Newport, Gallup Poll, March 29, 1999, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3979/americans-today-much-more-accepting-woman-black-catholic.aspx> Accessed 6/1/2010 or "Race and the Race," Brian Braiker, Newsweek, July 6, 2007 <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19623085/site/newsweek/> Accessed 6/1/2010.

- Berelson, B.R., Lazarsfeld, P.F. and McPhee, W.N. (1954). *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Election*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dates, Jannette and William Barlow, Eds. (1993). *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media (Second Edition)*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press
- Diamond, Edwin. (1995). *Behind the Times: Inside the New New York Times*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Downing, John and Charles Husband. (2005). *Representing Race: Racisms, Ethnicities and Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Entman, Robert M. and Andrew Rojecki. (2000). *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fowler, Roger. (1991). *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. New York: Routledge.
- Freddoso, David (2008). *The Case Against Barack Obama: The Unlikely Rise and Unexamined Agenda of the Media's Favorite Candidate*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing.
- Gibbons, A. (1993). *Race, politics and the white media: The Jesse Jackson campaigns*. Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America.
- Hamilton, D.L. (1979). "A Cognitive Attributional Analysis of Stereotyping" in L. Berkowitz (ed). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol 12. New York: Academic Press.
- Hirschorn, Michael. (2009). "End Times: Can America's paper of record survive the death of newsprint? Can journalism?" *Atlantic*.
- Hunt, Darnell M. (1999). *O.J. Simpson Facts & Fictions: News Rituals in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuklinski, James H. and Norman L. Hurley (1994). On Hearing and Interpreting Political Messages: A Cautionary Tale of Citizen Cue-Taking, *Journal of Politics*, Vol 56, No 3, 729-51.
- Lang, Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang (1966). "The Mass Media and Voting," in Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz, eds., *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, 2d ed., New York, Free Press.
- Leonard, Thomas C. (1986). *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marshall, Eliot. (1998). The Power of the Front Page of The New York Times, *Science*, 280: 5366, 996-997.



- McCombs, Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw (1972). The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media Public Opinion Quarterly 36:176-187
- Mitchell, Greg (2009) *Why Obama Won The Making of a President 2008* Charleston, South Carolina: Booksurge Publishing.
- Morris, Lorenzo. (1990). The Social and Political Implications of the 1984 Jesse Jackson Presidential Campaign. New York: Praeger.
- Nisbett, R. E., & Ross, L. D. (1980). *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Okrent, Daniel. (2004). "Is The New York Times a Liberal Newspaper?" *New York Times*, July 25.
- Page, Benjamin I. (1996). *Who Deliberates; Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Price, Vincent and John Zaller (1993). Who Gets the News? Alternative Measures of News Reception and Their Implications for Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 57, No. 2, pp. 133-164.
- Puglisi, Riccardo. (2004). Being the New York Times: The Political Behaviour of a Newspaper. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=573801>
- Reed, Adolph L., Jr. (1986). *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Reese, Stephen D., Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. and August E. Grant (2003). *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and our Understanding of the Social World*. New York: Routledge.
- Reeves, Keith. (1997). *Voting hopes or fears: White Voters, Black candidates and Racial Politics in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Selepak, Andy (2007). "The Media's Obama Love Affair." *Accuracy in Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.aim.org/media-monitor/the-medias-obama-love-affair/>, Accessed June 2010.
- Sharpton, Al and Anthony Walton. (1996). *Go and Tell Pharaoh: The Autobiography of the Reverend Al Sharpton*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Tetlock, Philip E. (1983). Accountability and the Perseverance of First Impressions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol 46, No. 4, 285-292.
- Trent, Judith S. (2009). The Early Presidential Campaign of 2008: The Good, The Historical, But Rarely the Bad in Denton, Robert E., Jr.,

(ed). *The 2008 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Walters, Ronald W. and Robert C. Smith. (1999). *African American Leadership*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Williams, Linda F. (1990). White/Black Perceptions of the Electability of Black Political Candidates. *The National Political Science Review*, 2, 45-64.

<b>Table 1: Jackson Selected <i>Times</i> Articles</b>			
<b>Article Title</b>	<b>Date Published</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>Article Placement</b>
President Signing Bill, Praises Dr. King	11/3/1983	Positive	Section A; Page 28, Column 1
Mondale's Lead Found Wider	11/3/1983	Neutral	Section A; Page 26, Column 2
Jackson Issues Denial Of Being Anti-Semitic	11/3/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 15, Column 4
A Provocative Candidate	11/4/1983	Positive	Section A; Page 1, Column 1
Civil Rights (Editorial)	11/4/1983	Positive	Section A; Page 26, Column 1
Persistent Glenn Courts Black Voters in the City	11/4/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Page 5, Column 5
Jackson Declares Formal Candidacy	11/4/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Page 5, Column 1
DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES DISAGREE OVER ADEQUACY OF NUCLEAR FORCE	11/6/1983	Neutral	Section 1; Part 1; Page 26, Column 1
JACKSON SEES PALESTINIAN STATE IN U.S. INTEREST	11/6/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Part 1; Page 31, Column 1
Washington Look Back, Look Forward (Editorial)	11/6/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section 4; Page 21, Column 4
JACKSON POSES SOME DIFFICULT QUESTIONS FOR OTHER DEMOCRATS	11/6/1983	Positive	Section 4; Page 5, Column 1
6 DEMOCRATS, IN REPLIES TO KOCH, AGREE ON ARMS	11/7/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 17, Column 1
ARABS, JACKSON AND JEWS: NEW PAGE OF TENSE RELATIONS	11/7/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 12, Column 3
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY; HOMOSEXUALS INCREASINGLY FLEX POLITICAL MUSCLE	11/8/1983	Neutral	Section A; Page 26, Column 1
ANDERSON FOUNDS A POLITICAL PARTY	11/9/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Page 25, Column 1
MAJOR LESSON AT POLLS	11/10/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Page 1, Column 3
ELECTION OF 2 BLACK MAYORS IS EVALUATED BY COLLEAGUES	11/10/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section D; Page 27, Column 5
Democrats to Sponsor Debate	11/12/1983	Neutral	Section 1; Page 21, Column 1
WILL A WOMAN BE A VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE	11/12/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Page 10, Column 3

SECRET SERVICE PROTECTING JACKSON MONTH BEFORE OTHER CANDIDATES	11/12/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section 1; Page 2, Column 1
WASHINGTON RALLY DRAWS THOUSANDS	11/13/1983	Neutral	Section 1; Part 1; Page 17, Column 1
BOSTON ELECTS RAYMOND L. FLYNN, A POPULIST COUNCILMAN, AS MAYOR	11/16/1983	Neutral	Section A; Page 1, Column 2
OHIO POLITICIAN SAYS HE'LL RUN CAMPAIGN FOR THE REV. JACKSON	11/16/1983	Positive	Section A; Page 27, Column 1
A DEMOCRATIC DISPUTE TURNS NASTY	11/17/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 12, Column 4
ECONOMY IS ONESURE THEME, BUT WHO WILL IT WORK FOR?	11/20/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section 4; Page 5, Column 1
ACCOUNT DIFFER ABOUT DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS TANGLE	11/23/1983	Neutral	Section A; Page 19, Column 1
Former Atlanta Mayor Backs Jackson's Presidential Drive	11/24/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Page 18, Column 1
GLENN SHOWS GAIN IN NEW POLL	11/24/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Page 15, Column 1
IOWA DEMOCRATS SY ONLY MONDALE'S MARGIN OF VICTORY IN DOUBT	11/25/1983	Neutral	Section A; Page 20, Column 1
DECISIONS FACE JACKSON ON KEY CONTESTS AND WORKERS IN FIELD	11/25/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Page 20, Column 1
JACKSON HONES HIS POSITION ON ISSUES	11/26/1983	Positive	Section 1; Page 10, Column 4
CANDIDATES AVOID POLITICAL FORUM	11/27/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Part 1; Page 30
VOTING: THE NEW BLACK POWER	11/27/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section 6; Page 35, Column 1
GLENN NARROWS MONDALE'S LEAD IN RACE FOR FUNDS	11/28/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 7, Column 1
JACKSON ASSAILS LABOR'S SUPPORT FOR MONDALE AS MOVE BY 'BOSSSES'	11/29/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Page 19, Column 3
REAGAN AIDE HINTS AT HELP FOR CITIES	11/30/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Page 25, Column 1
RANGEL AND 4 OTHER BLACKS IN STATE BACK MONDALE	11/30/1983	Neutral	Section B; Page 5, Column 3
RIVALS ATTACKED BY 2 DEMOCRATS	12/1/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Page 14, Column 4
WOMEN'S ENDORSEMENT SEEMS A 2-WAY RACE	12/2/1983	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Page 24, Column 5
JACKSON GETS SUPPORT, APPARENTLY WITHOUT POLL OF THE GROUP	12/2/1983	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Page 8, Column 3

<b>Table 2: Sharpton Selected <i>Times</i> Articles</b>			
<b>Article Title</b>	<b>Date Published</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>Article Placement</b>
In Harlem, Response To Shooting Is Subdued	1/5/2003	Neutral	Section 1; Column 6, Pg. 27
The Seven Dwarfs (Editorial)	1/6/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 6, Pg. 21
Daschle, Changing Course, Declines to Seek Presidency	1/8/2003	Neutral	Section A; Column 1, Pg. 17
A Bad Joke, Resembling A Bad Penny	1/10/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section B; Column 1, Pg 1
A Wily Contender, But Unlikely Winner, Eyes the Presidency	1/13/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 1, Pg 16
First Joint Appearance Set By 6 Presidential Hopefuls	1/15/2003	Neutral	Section A; Column 5, Pg 18
RALLY; Thousands Converge in Capital to Protest Plans for War	1/19/2003	Neutral	Section 1; Column 1, Pg 12
Mount Morris Journal; A Gay Bathhouse in Harlem? Hey, It's No Secret	1/19/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section 1; Column 1, Pg 28
Mayor Honors Vow to Sharpton, Who Returns the Disfavor	1/21/2003	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Column 3, Pg 6
Cake or Prayer, Marching or Running, Holiday Is a Work in Progress	1/21/2003	Neutral	Section B; Column 2, Pg 1
Rule No. 1: It's Sharpton Who's No. 1	1/21/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section B; Column 1, Pg 1
Sharpton Takes Step in Presidential Bid	1/22/2003	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 5, Pg 18
In Turn, 6 Presidential Hopefuls Back Abortion Rights	1/22/2003	Neutral	Section A; Column 1, Pg 18
A Routine at a Harlem Bully Pulpit	1/23/2003	Neutral	Section B; Column 1, Pg 4
Electrical Fire Destroys Ballroom at Sharpton Headquarters	1/23/2003	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Column 2, Pg 1
Sharpton Fire Is Spawning Conspiracy Theory	1/24/2003	Neutral-Positive	Section B; Column 1, Pg 3
Sharpton Rallies the Faithful, But From a Different Pulpit	1/26/2003	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Column 1, Pg 28
Street Where He Lived and Died Now Amadou Diallo Place	2/5/2003	Neutral	Section B; Column 1, Pg 6

<b>Table 3: Obama Selected <i>Times</i> Articles</b>			
<b>Article Title</b>	<b>Date Published</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>Article Placement</b>
Today's Version of 'I Will Run' Is Way More Than 3 Little Words	2/10/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1, Pg 10
In New Hampshire, Clinton Owns Up to Her Vote on Iraq War	2/11/2007	Neutral	Section 1; Column 1, Pg 34
Decoding the Debate Over the Blackness of Barack Obama (Editorial)	2/11/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section 4; Column 1; Pg. 11
Stop Him Before He Gets More Experience (Editorial)	2/11/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section 4; Column 2; Pg. 12
Obama Formally Enters Presidential Race With Calls for Generational Change	2/11/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Column 1; Pg. 34
Why Are the Pacifists So Passive? (Editorial)	2/12/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 2; Pg. 21
Until The War Ends (Editorial)	2/12/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 21
For Clinton and Obama, Different Tests on Iraq	2/12/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 2; Pg. 1
Obama Plan Has a Critic in Australia	2/12/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 18
Obama Restructures a Remark on Deaths	2/13/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 3; Pg. 16
All Eyes on Iraq Debate	2/13/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 18
Claiming Outsider Status, Romney Says He'll Seek White House	2/14/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 22
Obama, Legally Blonde (Editorial)	2/14/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 27
As Connecticut Senator Runs for President, He Hopes to Be Heard	2/17/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 12
Clinton Gives War Critics New Answer on '02 Vote	2/18/2007	Neutral	Section 1; Column 1; Pg. 30
SENATE REJECTS RENEWED EFFORT TO DEBATE IRAQ	2/18/2007	Neutral	Section 1; Column 6; Pg. 1
The Real Patriots (Editorial)	2/19/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 15
In Iowa, the Living Room Has Fallen Out of Favor	2/19/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 11
After a Delicately Worded Pitch, Clinton Draws Cheers	2/20/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 3; Pg. 15
The Hot Ticket in Hollywood: An Evening With Obama	2/20/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 3; Pg. 15
Obama's Big Screen Test (Editorial)	2/21/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 21

Rivals at Democratic Presidential Forum Push Positions on Iraq War Into Spotlight	2/22/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 18
In Both Parties, 2008 Politeness Falls to Infighting	2/22/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 1
Stepping to the Plate, Giuliani Is Seeing Only Softballs	2/23/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 17
Proposal by Obama on Public Financing Appears to Gain	2/23/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 17
In a Clinton-Obama Skirmish, A Detour From the High Road	2/23/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 1
Et Tu, David? A Lucrative Friendship Sours	2/23/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 4; Pg. 16
Ending Bid for Presidency, Vilsack Cites Fund-Raising	2/24/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 10
Early Stops on the Sweet-Talk Circuit	2/24/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 11
In Clinton's Backyard, It's Open Season, As An Obama Fund Raiser Lines Up Donors	2/24/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 11
Surveying Presidential Field, Governors Urge Moderation	2/26/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 18
Substance Over Image (Editorial)	2/26/2007	Negative	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 21
Mud, Dust, Whatever (Editorial)	2/26/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 21
As Candidate, Obama Carves Anti-War Stance	2/26/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 1
Ozone Man Sequel (Editorial)	2/28/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 19
Competing in the Money Marathon	2/28/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 18
Senators Regret Remarks on Troops	3/2/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 14
McCain and Obama in Deal On Public Financing	3/2/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 15
Orphan No More, California Enjoys Electoral Muscle	3/2/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 15
Obama Had Slaveowning Kin	3/3/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 11
Where's His Right Hook? (Editorial)	3/3/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 15
Neither Clinton, Nor Obama (Editorial)	3/4/2007	Neutral	Section 4; Column 1; Pg. 12
Recalling Struggle for Civil Rights, Democrats Battle for Black Votes	3/4/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section 1; Column 5; Pg. 1

Bring Back the Politics of Personal Destruction (Editorial)	3/4/2007	Neutral	Section 4; Column 2; Pg. 12
Clinton and Obama Unite, Briefly, in Pleas to Blacks	3/5/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 14
Off the News, The Show Goes On	3/6/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 19
Disinvitation by Obama is Criticized	3/6/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 3; Pg. 19
Obama: Man of the World (Editorial)	3/6/2007	Positive	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 21
Obama, in Brief Investing Foray In '05, Took Same Path as Donors	3/7/2007	Neutral-Negative	Section A; Column 5; Pg. 1
Obama Says His Investments Presented No Conflicts of Interest	3/8/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 16
DEMOCRATS RALLY BEHIND A PULLOUT FROM IRAQ IN '08	3/9/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 6; Pg. 1
Out of Spotlight, Edwards Seeks Momentum in Iowa	3/10/2007	Neutral	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 10
Obama's Back Fund-Raising In New York, Not Quietly	3/10/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 10
Stung by Remarks, Nevada Democrats Cancel Debate on Fox	3/10/2007	Neutral-Positive	Section A; Column 1; Pg. 10



# HOW ARE THEY RACIALIZED? RACIAL EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS

*Ying Wang*  
*University of Maryland, College Park*

In recent years, the population of students coming from China to pursue higher education, especially graduate education, in the United States has increased significantly. The annual statistics gathered by the Institute for International Education (2009) show that during the 2008-2009 academic year, there were 98,235 Chinese students at institutions of higher education in the United States. Chinese students are the second largest group of foreign students in the United States—only one country, India, sends more students to American campuses (IES 2009). Compared to earlier waves of Chinese immigrants, today's Chinese students have two new characteristics: Chinese students come to the United States in search of education, while earlier Chinese immigrants left their home country for political and economic reasons (Segal 2002); moreover, Chinese students are not yet Chinese Americans, and they are excluded from many ethnic studies.

There have been studies on Asian American students, but most were focusing on high school students and undergraduate students, and no one has particularly looked at Asian international students in graduate schools (Louie 2004; Lee 1996; Pyke and Dang 2003). Although the population of Chinese graduate students is exploding and they are present in every part of the United States, the issues Chinese graduate students face in terms of their racial experiences in the United States remains absent in the literature. My research project not only fills the gap by exploring micro-level racial experiences of Chinese graduate students, but also provides a unique window to the experiences of Asian graduate students in a southwest urban setting, which has a small Asian population.

Because their home country, China is a racially homogenous country, Chinese students do not encounter race and racial discrimination until they come to the United States. Through their interactions with people of other racial groups such as White, Black, and Latino, Chinese students begin to realize a great change in their racial identity and status. In their home country, they identified as “Chinese,” but once they came to the United States, they became “Asians” or “Asian Americans.” Not only do

they receive a new identity, but they confront the stereotypes given by the dominant society to Asians such as the “model minority,” “math nerds,” etc. While they used to belong to the dominant group in their home country, now they encounter a downward mobility in their racial status—from the dominant group to the racial minority in a white-dominated society. Along with experiencing the change in identity and status, some of them experience unequal treatment, prejudice and discrimination during their time of study in the United States (Fong 2002; Andrea Louie 2004; Tuan 1998).

The current research utilizes the racial formation framework (Omi and Winant 1994) because it works best to explain how race occurs at the micro-level. Within this framework, I am trying to explore how race shapes the experiences of Chinese graduate students by using the ethnographic research method. This paper has several aims: (1) to explore the racial experiences of Chinese graduate students have; (2) to analyze those experiences in terms of the dynamics underlying them; (3) to seek a solution for any possible problems.

#### METHODOLOGY

The setting of my study, Southwestern University, is one of the largest public higher institutions in the United States. It has a diverse student population especially widely known as a Hispanic-Serving institution, representing a wide cross-section of cultures and backgrounds. Until 2005, the racial breakdown of all students and of graduate students at Southwestern main campus is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

<b>Race/Ethnicity of Students</b>		
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>All students</b>	<b>Graduate students</b>
Non-Hispanic White	48.1%	52.0%
Latino/a	30.0%	17.5%
American Indian	5.8%	4.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.4%	2.3%
African American	2.6%	1.6%
International	3.3%	13.5%
No Response	6.8%	9.1%

Since I want to present the process of racial formation at the micro level, I used qualitative methods to explore lived experiences and perceptions of individual Chinese students. The data for this paper comes from interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and observations conducted in 2004

and in 2005. I entered classrooms and labs including sitting in undergraduate-level classes taught by Chinese Teaching Assistants (TA) and spent some time observing Chinese Research Assistant (RA)'s work and activities in the lab. Fieldnotes and informal conversations with those Chinese students I observed were taken. I conducted 11 in-depth, semistructured, open-ended interviews with Chinese graduate students from different Southwestern departments. Eight are male and three are female. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions on racial identity, understandings of the "model minority" stereotype, racial experiences as graduate students at Southwestern and in public places, feelings about being a Chinese student in America, and their future career plans. The format of the interviews was designed to allow people the flexibility to speak about their experiences and perceptions in ways that are significant to them.

All of the interview subjects were selected from Southwestern Chinese graduate students. My selection of interviewees is based on a targeted "snowball" procedure. I randomly selected my interviewees from the list of Chinese graduate students provided by a Chinese student association at Southwestern. Diversity of departmental origin, gender, and length of staying in the United States were ensured when the selected was conducted. However, to ensure the anonymity of my informants, I generalized their departments to be "Natural Science" and "Social Science" in the narratives instead of disclosing specific information.

#### "WHO AM I?": UNDERSTANDINGS OF RACE AND RACIAL IDENTITIES

When Chinese students come to the United States, not only do their racial identities change, but they also encounter different racial dynamics. Race used to be viewed as something "far from real life" when they were in China, but it now becomes something related to everyday life. Coming from a racially homogeneous country where people do not have much phenotypical differences, Chinese students get used to people with "black hair, black eyes" around them, and get used to be a member of majority. Now they are in a multi-racial country, where they are minorities, this great change makes them feel shocked, frustrated and confused. They are confused by race and ethnicity—many Chinese students I interviewed could not see the differences between race and ethnicity; also they are confused by new terms others use to identify them. In the United States, people from all Asian countries witness their different national identities disappear into a narrow racial categorization, which is subsumed by the Asian/Asian American label (V. Louie 2004).

Chen (female, from a Social Science department) told me her understandings of race. She never thought about race when she was in China because she "did not have to." When she watched TV or listened to the radio, she heard racial conflicts, racial wars, racial problems going on in

America and Africa, she felt that race was far from her life, because that was “something that happened elsewhere.” Although Chinese students “did not have to” think about race in China, they cannot avoid encountering race in the United States. When asked about understandings of race in America in particular, Chen said, “I know some minority people are discriminated against here. . .this is unfair. I feel race is no longer far away, it’s in my everyday life now.”

Feng (male, from a Natural Science department) said, “Unlike China, there are racial problems in the United States. I think the U.S. government needs to take time to solve them. And I became minority since I got here. . .you know what? Chinese is the group with the largest population all over the world. . .how come we Chinese became minority in America? I’m frustrated. ”

Wu (male, from a Natural Science department) described his feelings of first impression of America, “Los Angeles airport was my very first stop. When I was walking at the airport, from a terminal to another. . .I was shocked. . .shocked to see people of all skin color. . .various kinds of people. . .various hair colors, skin colors, eye colors . . .all kinds. I got used to black hair, black eyes around me, so I was really shocked.”

When I asked them what race other people (including Whites, other Asians, Hispanic, African American people, etc) thought they were, answers were very similar. They told me that many American people could not tell the differences among Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, so they were always thought to be from some Asian groups. From my interviews, Chinese students prefer to be identified as “Chinese” rather than “Asian” mainly because that they are unwilling to overlook the differences among Asian groups. Hence, they are reluctant to accept the general racial categories that are given by the American mainstream society as they said they would identify themselves as Chinese if they “have a choice.” Do they have a choice? As stated by Omi and Winant (1994), racial dynamic “establishes often contradictory parameters of racial identity into which both individuals and groups must fit” (Omi and Winant 1994, 3). Therefore, Chinese students “must fit” into the summary racial category in the United States, and also “fit” into the stereotypes associated with that racial category. This process of “fit,” which is indeed the process of their racial awareness, is their first stage of racialization. They are racialized as “Asian”—a minority group in the white-dominated society; they are no longer members of a majority, instead, they become minorities; and they also have to encounter racial stereotypes, racism and racial problems associated with their new racial identities.

“THAT IS RACISM”: ENCOUNTERING THE “MODEL  
MINORITY” STEREOTYPE

When I questioned about understandings and reflections of the “model minority” stereotype, five of eleven Chinese students never heard of it. Other six students heard about this term and knew the meaning of it before I interviewed them. After I introduced and explained the “model minority” stereotype to those who never heard about it before, most of them seemed to reject it. Zhao, a male Chinese graduate student from a Natural Science department, who had not heard the “model minority” stereotype before, had these reflections:

I don't like to be viewed as “model minority.” It is inaccurate. Working hard is a habit, and many Chinese students are studious. I spend more time on schoolwork than my Anglo American classmates do, but I don't often get better grades. Anglo students are also smart, some of them are as studious as Chinese. They can get better grades than me and other Chinese.

Feng and another Chinese student Li, both of them had heard about “model minority” before; they reject the “model minority” stereotype not only because it “is not accurate” or “does not fit,” but because of something behind the stereotype. In Feng (male, from a Social Science department)'s words: “sometimes we (Chinese) are good, but not always. Model minority is such a big hat, it's too large and too heavy, I don't like wearing it. It (model minority) reflects racism. Just think about it, why the Whites have the rights to judge who is good and bad, who is model minority and who is not model minority? Who make the criteria? They themselves created the criteria and they are using the criteria to evaluate us! Isn't that racism?” Li (male, from a Natural Science department) said, “This (model minority) is ridiculous. Whites are using this “model minority” as an excuse when they don't do well. The whole stereotype thing is just their trick.” Similarly, Chen (female, from a Social Science department) mentioned that when some White students did worse than her in a math class, they said, “no wonder, you are Chinese!”

However, I also noticed that the impact of the model minority stereotype is not always negative, but both Lee (1996) and Louie's (2004) work only present the positive part of the model minority stereotype. From Zheng's narratives, her classmates assumed that she might be good in math since she was Chinese, and finally she helped them out and “felt good.” To Zheng, the model minority stereotype provided her an opportunity to show her talent and to gain confidence—the consequence is positive. On one hand, we should be aware of the negative impacts of the model minority stereotype such as great pressure and racial conflict, but

on the other hand, we also should admit that there are possible positive impacts of this stereotype. For example, Chinese students are considered a model to African Americans and Latinos who are assumed to be less intelligent, particularly in math and science.

I asked the participants whether they were not satisfied with current grades and many of them felt “it could be better.” Feng and Zheng’s answers were very similar. They thought that they deserved better grades because they worked so hard. Both Zhou and Zhao mentioned “Chinese” as a reason. Zhou’s response was, “I’ve been studying this major for seven years (since undergraduate school). I’m really into it. I don’t want others, I mean Americans, to say something like. . . hey, you are Chinese, and this is the major you are supposed to be good at, but you got this grade?” Zhao said, “I came all the way from China so I need to prove that I’m distinct. Always, always distinct. . . otherwise I can’t get a job after graduation, because opportunities are rare for us.” Zhou and Zhao are two examples of being “compelled to excel.” Zhou struggled because he did not want “Americans” to look down on him and Chinese people; while for Zhao, who realized as a Chinese, if he wanted to seize the “rare” opportunities, he had to be “distinct.” This resonates with Louie’s finding that part of the reason why Chinese students and their families were compelled to excel was that they knew they would be discriminated against because of their race (V. Louie 2004).

Again, I cannot help thinking: what pushes them? Studies show that traditional Chinese culture (i.e. emphasis of education, respecting authority, etc), family (i.e. strong family ties, strict control from parents, family investment on education), and self-devoting into education all have significant positive effects on academic success of Chinese students (Kao 1995; Lee 1996; V. Louie 2004). But the effect of external pressure, especially the pressure from the model minority stereotype, remains an unanswered question in the literature, and it is very difficult to measure the effect. Moreover, as some Chinese students implied, they came all the way here to study so they had to seize the chance and to be distinct. This view may be common among international students from all over the world, because they have clear motivation and purpose when they come to the United States, and compared to American students, these international students are highly selected.

As stated by Vivian Louie, “the model minority stereotype powerfully informs everyday lives of Chinese American students, by shaping how people of other racial and ethnic groups view and interact with them, especially in school” (V. Louie 2004, 87). From my interviews, I found that this stereotype is playing an important role in disguising the difficulties and problems that Chinese students have encountered. With the model minority stereotype, professors and school administra-

tions often assume that “Chinese students are doing well because they are Chinese” (V. Louie 2004). At Southwestern University, there are special programs with aims of helping and supporting Hispanic students, Native American students and African American students, however, there is no such a support program targeting Chinese or Chinese American students.

Pyke and Dang (2003) found that the racial beliefs, meanings, and stereotypes of the mainstream society shape how these Asian Americans think about coethnics, local identities deflect stigma from themselves. My findings are in accordance with Pyke and Dang’s statements. As in Feng’s words, he believed that “model minority” was a “racist” stereotype, so that he is very likely to feel offended when being called “model minority.” Li, by viewing “model minority” as “ridiculous” and an “excuse” of Whites, is likely to reject this stereotype as well. In contrast, Zheng, who feels good after solving math problems for her classmates, is likely to have a positive attitude toward the stereotype. Eventually, their views will shape their relations to the institutions and other people (Omi and Winant 1994), and may have an impact on their future plans.

#### THE EXISTENCE OF DISCRIMINATION: LIVED RACIAL EXPERIENCES

The racial experiences I reveal in this paper include unfair treatments they received from others, uncomfortable experiences they confronted, and discrimination against them, all because of their race. What is the difference in their experiences between different contexts? I hope not only to unravel and describe the sad, miserable, angry, disappointed aspects of Chinese students’ life—the life which the institution and the society may not know about, but also explore how their experiences differ as contexts change.

Since all the Chinese students I interviewed hold assistantships, at Southwestern, they are not only students but also workers. As Chinese Teaching Assistants, they lack power, and do not have enough respect from the students they taught. While as Research Assistants, they are “exploitable workers”—they overwork, but do not earn much (some of them even earn very little). More importantly, compared to their White lab-mates/co-workers, Chinese students work much harder and are treated unequally. Two Chinese RAs believed that they have experienced discrimination.

Legal systems of discrimination such as “de jure” segregation had been eliminated since the 1960s, thus, today’s racial discrimination and racial inequality were problems to be confronted only at an individual level (Omi and Winant, 1994, 131). My findings are in accordance with Omi and Winant’s statement. None of Chinese students mentioned the institutional level discrimination (i.e. if the school refuses accepting stu-

dents of color or puts them in less advanced programs). Rather, their experiences of discrimination are all at individual levels, such as being discriminated against by advisors, by store staffs and by doctors.

From the words of International Office staffs, there is only one incident about discrimination reported by Chinese students. However, from my interviews, several Chinese students felt discriminated against by their advisors but all they could do was switch to another advisor and change from RA to TA. By doing this, they were escaping from problems instead of solving them. Worrying about their legal status would be one of the reasons that Chinese students chose not to report their uncomfortable experiences. Moreover, racial discrimination is a sensitive issue, and today, we hardly see and encounter direct discrimination. All the discrimination experiences that Chinese students encountered were subtle and indirect. Chinese students doubted that whether they should “call it discrimination or not,” not surprisingly, they hesitated to report the uncomfortable experiences.

Discrimination is a feature of U.S. society, the product of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities (Omi and Winant 1994, 69). The roots of discrimination are in the racially organized social order. When Chinese students are in their home country, they never receive unfair treatment because of their race. Since they are the dominant group in China, they have the privilege. But they lost their privilege in the United States. Regardless of the type of discrimination—subtle or direct, racial discrimination is based on white supremacy. Receiving unfair treatment and racial discrimination, Chinese students are undergoing an important stage of racialization—they are racialized as exploitable workers, perpetual foreigners and the unprivileged racial group members.

#### FUTURE OUTLOOKS: PLAN AFTER GRADUATION

Unlike Asian Americans, Chinese students could be sojourners or permanent residents of the United States—they have the choice to go back to China or to stay after completing their study. United States is often viewed as the “dream place” in China, since Chinese students finally made it here, will they choose to stay or go back to their home country? Will the unhappy experiences affect their choice?

Certainly, it is a hard choice. When asked whether they would stay in the United States as permanent residents or they would go back to China after graduation, all of the Chinese students said they were “not sure.” They used a lot of “maybe,” “probably,” and “I guess” in their narratives. Ten out of eleven Chinese students preferred working in the United States for a few years after graduation. Only Sun said he would probably go back to China to work if Chinese companies could offer him



a good position. However, all of them said they were likely to eventually end up in China, because “China is home” and because their families are in China.

It is interesting that Chinese students hold up the importance of education along the lines of racial discrimination. Even if some Chinese students had uncomfortable experiences and felt unhappy, all of the Chinese students showed confidence about their future plans. They believed in meritocracy, they insisted that education would help them achieve social mobility, and they also believed that their race would not harm their careers as long as they were “good enough.”

Although Zhao had the unhappy experience of being discriminated against by his advisor, he still believed that education would be his “way out.” In his words, “I know it’s hard for Chinese people to get a job in America, but I’ll try my best. I think if I’m good enough, I’ll be successful no matter what racial group I am from.” Qian, the other Chinese student who had been discriminated against, said similarly, “finding a job would be hard after graduation, but I think there are some opportunities for Chinese. You can get the opportunities if you’re distinct.” Chen (female, from a Social Science department) said she was “not sure” whether she could find a job in the U.S. after graduation or not. In her words: “I know it would be really hard to find a job, as Chinese and as an international student. But I would like to try. You know, having a few years U.S. working experiences and then going back would be great. Well, if I can’t get any job offer after graduation, I’ll go back to China to work.”

Chinese students’ accounts are in accordance with Ogbu’s characterization of the Chinese as having positive views on education because they are voluntary immigrants (Ogbu 1991; V. Louie 2004, 86), and also reflect their belief in education as being a necessary condition of social mobility and economic advancement (V. Louie 2004, 56). However, their racial terrain cannot be overcome by their hard-working or educational achievements. Much scholarly work shows that Asians/Asian Americans receive a smaller return on their educational achievement and have fewer chances for career advancement than white counterparts, and they encounter “glass ceiling,” occupational segregation, and underrepresentation of Asian Americans at administrative positions (Suzuki 1980; Takaki 1998; San Juan 2000; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Fong 2002; Segal 2002; Tuan 2003; V. Louie 2004). According to the findings of the U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, the salary of Asian Americans is lower than that of whites in many occupational categories: 10 to 17 percent less for Asian American men compared to whites and 40 percent less for Asian American women (Tong 2003, 147; Wu 2002, 50).

From my interviews, Chinese students said they were likely to go back to China eventually. Although they did not provide clear plans, I

found the decisions of Chinese students are significantly different from previous stream of Chinese students and Chinese immigrants.

As pointed out by Vivian Louie, some (if not most) Chinese people do not “come to their realizations about the importance of race through social scientific research, any more than they use such research to make their conclusions about the accessibility and payoff of education” (V. Louie 2004, 56). Even though some of them have their own experiences of racial discrimination, and most of them are aware that they have entered a society with a prevailing racial hierarchy that privileges whites, Chinese students still hold up the belief that education is their way out.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With a purpose of finding out the role that race plays in Chinese graduate students' life, I explored the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students at Southwestern University. My guiding questions were: how do Chinese students experience race in everyday life? What are their interpretations of race, racial identities and racial experiences? How do racialized experiences shape their life perceptions of education and job opportunities?

To answer these questions I interviewed eleven Chinese graduate students at Southwestern, and observed two classes taught by Chinese teaching assistants and lab work of a Chinese research assistant. I found that race plays an important role in Chinese students' life through their lived experiences. Most of them have noticed race and some of them have experienced racial discrimination. However, Chinese students still hold up the importance of education and believe that education will blunt the racial edge. Despite race, language barriers and cultural differences also shape Chinese students' life. Large part of their difficulties and uncomfortable experiences are related to language barriers and cultural differences rather than racialization. It is hard to measure which indicator has the most significant effect on Chinese students' experience because they cannot be quantified. But my sense is that Chinese students may encounter language barriers more often since this relates to their everyday communication.

Racial formation theory states that most racial projects are quite benign such as color consciousness, only a few are racist. According to the experiences of my interviewees, I found the directions of racial formation are in three ways: positive, negative and neutral. In my study, in fact most of their experiences are benign. For instance, when they are aware of their race and associated racial meanings, most Chinese students do not find this bothering them. Only when some of them encounter racial discrimination, they begin to consider race a burden. To those who have

never experienced any racial discrimination, race and racial formation remain neutral.

Before coming to the United States, Chinese students viewed race as “something far away” and “issues other countries face.” After their arrival in America, Chinese students encountered a great change in racial identity and status. Used to be “Chinese,” Chinese students now have to accept the new and generalized racial identity, namely, “Asian/Asian American.” Their racial status also has changed—from the majority in their home country to the minority in a white dominated society. Their skin colors and phenotypes now become obstacles of their achievements, as they are racialized to be Asians, rather than whites, in the United States.

Moreover, Chinese students also face stereotypes such as the “model minority” stereotype associated with their new racial identity. Most Chinese students expressed negative views of that stereotype. Some of them considered it the academic pressure, and they thought they were “not good enough” to be the model minority. Some others pointed out that it was “racist” and the “excuse of Whites,” which indicates that some Chinese students are conscious about race and racial projects. I also looked at Chinese students’ academic performances, and I noticed that at graduate level, grades were no longer a significant indicator of a student’s performance and achievement. Despite grade and coursework, research and teaching performance need to be addressed. This is not related to racialization, but it reflects the lived experiences of all Chinese graduate students.

Since all of the Chinese students I interviewed hold either teaching or research assistantships, I took their life as TA/RA into account. From observing two classes taught by Chinese TAs and interviewing both of those TAs, I found that Chinese TAs were lacking power. Their students did not show them enough respect. While from observing lab work of Chinese RA and interviewing him and other Chinese RAs, I noticed that there was an imbalance between their workload and salaries. More importantly, two Chinese RAs reported that they were discriminated against by their advisors. Another Chinese TA had uncomfortable experiences with his instructor. Besides, three other Chinese students talked about discrimination, prejudice or unfair treatment they received in public places including hospital, neighborhood, and super market.

Despite the racial experiences Chinese students had, they held up the belief that education would overcome their racial obstacles. They hoped that they could find jobs in the United States after graduation. Since Chinese students knew that opportunities were rare for them, they wanted to seize the chance by proving that they were “good enough” or

“distinct,” but by holding this belief, they put more pressures on themselves.

Overall, Chinese students are treated differently by different people and in different contexts. On campus, some of them are discriminated against or overworked by their professors; some of them are regarded as “model minority” by their peers. Within a context of institution of higher education, performance standards and identities of Chinese students are unique—within the school context, they could be treated unequally, but as long as they behave themselves, no one would yell at them “go back to China.” However, in public spaces, when they are no longer known as graduate students, they are assigned different racial meanings—they are perceived “forever foreigners” and “outsiders.” There must be differences in views and experiences between Chinese students and workers, therefore future research should include contexts other than institutions.

In addition, future research focusing on the differences in experiences among students from different Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and China is needed. There are differences among those Asian countries, but they also share a great number of similarities in phenotype and culture, therefore it will be interesting to explore the similarities and differences in their racial experiences in the United States. Moreover, international students who are not native English speakers but racialized as White (i.e. German, Italian) can be included as comparison group in this project to find out if there are any similarities or differences in their experiences. If possible, it will also be interesting to explore the experiences of Chinese students from places where Asian proportion is larger such as California and New York City. In that case, I will be able to study a larger sample size and to examine the differences in experiences of Chinese students in different contexts.

School administrations should make themselves more open to complaints such as discrimination and unfair treatment, and announcements need to be made to encourage students report their problems. I found that many Chinese students had no idea there was an Equal Opportunity Program where they could go and report discrimination. The reporters’ anonymity and safety need to be guaranteed. This is especially important for international students, because they are so worried about being in trouble or losing their legal status after reporting, they choose to keep silent when they are discriminated against.

Moreover, language support programs need to be set up. The college, university and the department can set up special programs to help Asian students with their English language. For example, paper-revising workshops, mentor groups and English classes can be provided. In addition, Asian peer study groups can be conducted. Mentors from Asian

countries can help fellow nationals with their learning and also help them adapt to the U.S. life.

#### WORKS CITED

- Fong, Timothy P. *The Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority. 2nd Edition.* Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002.
- Institute of International Education. 2009. "Open Doors 2009: Report on International Education Exchange," Accessed November 2009, <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=150811>
- Kao, Grace. "Asian American as Model Minorities? A Look at Their Academic Performance." *American Journal of Education* 103, 2 (1995): 121-159.
- Lee, Stacey. J. *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1996.
- Louie, Andrea. *Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Louie, Vivian. *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Ogbu, John. U. "Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities in Comparative Perspective." In *Minority status and schooling: A comparative study of immigrant and involuntary minorities*, edited by M. Gibson and J. U. Ogbu, 3-33. New York: Garland, 1991.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.* New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Pyke, Karen and Tran Dang. "'FOB' and 'Whitewashed': Identity and Internalized Racism Among Second Generation Asian Americans." *Qualitative Sociology* 26, 2, Summer (2003): 147-172.
- San Juan, Epifanio, Jr. "The Limits of Ethnicity and the Horizon of Historical Materialism." In *Asian-American Studies: Identity, Images, Issues, Past and Present* edited by E. M. Ghymn, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000.
- Segal, Uma. *A Framework for Immigration: Asians in the United States.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Suzuki, Bob H. "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the "Model Minority" Thesis." In *Asian-Americans: Social and Psychological Perspectives* edited by R. Endo, S.

- Sue, and N. N. Wagner, 155-175. Ben Lomond: Science and Behavior Books, 1980.
- Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.
- Tong, Benson. *The Chinese Americans*. Revised Edition. Boulder: the University Press of Colorado, 2003.
- Tuan, Mia. *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Wu, Frank H. *Yellow: Race in American beyond Black and White*. New York: Basic, 2002.
- Zhou, Min and Carl Bankston. *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998.

# HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ETHNICITY: HOW SIGNIFYING THE PAST INFLUENCES THE FLUCTUATIONS IN ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

*Paul Zanzanian  
Concordia University*

When theorists touch upon the role of 'history' in the dynamics of ethnicity, they usually tend to place its potential within the confines of what is generally understood as collective memory. Neglecting moments of historical thinking as a modern cultural mode of recollecting past experiences, 'history's' potency is thus restrained to discerning the processes involved in the formation and rigidity of group boundaries rather than to fully comprehending how the capacity to historicize past events correlates with their overall maintenance and porosity. While ethnic boundaries are always permeable, they usually tend to be more so during certain periods more than others, notably when the general interests underlying intra- and inter-group power relations overwhelmingly converge (Weber 1968, Barth 1996, Juteau 1996, Jenkins 1997). This convergence paves the way for either potential assimilation into the more dominant culture or for a restructuring of the power system so that dichotomies and boundaries between two opposing 'ethnic' groups persist into the unforeseeable future, albeit in different forms and possibly even in content (Weber 1968, Barth 1996, Juteau 1996, Jenkins 1997). Of importance here is how essentialized visions of past inter-group relations are mobilized for political or other social gains. For it is arguably these manipulated, pre-given narrative configurations of the past that are mistakenly held as solely consummating 'history's' role in individual negotiations of ethnicity rather than equally considering the importance of the contributions of historical thinking.

A look at recent conceptualizations of historical consciousness allows to better appreciate the relationship between history and ethnicity, especially since they hold notions of historical thinking on a par with those of collective memory. Fundamentally referring to how past events are signified for purposes of self-identification and temporal orientation in moral relationships with the 'significant Other' (Rüsen 2005), historical consciousness offers the possibility to better understand how the capacity to historicize past events underlies social actors' autonomy in their

negotiations of ethnicity, thereby better elucidating the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance.

As a contribution, this article aspires to elaborate on this process. By proposing a repertory of tendencies of historical consciousness to clarify how awareness of past inter-group relations informs individual ethnicity negotiations, it suggests that the significations given to past events and the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance mutually affect each other. An initial section calling for a universal understanding of history is followed by a conceptualization of both historical consciousness and the repertory of its main tendencies. An ensuing discussion on the allusions made to historical consciousness in constructivist perspectives of ethnicity then leads to connecting the repertory of tendencies to the different fluctuations in ethnic boundaries. This will then open the way for a final analysis of the role that the capacity to historicize plays in these processes.

#### UNDERSTANDING 'HISTORY' BY BRIDGING DISCIPLINARY HISTORY WITH COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Since time immemorial, individuals have referred to significant past experiences to moor their bearings for purposes of surviving in the world. In the West, such speculation about the meanings of one's existence in temporal reality, inherent in general strategies of remembering, is today immersed in the specific patterns of consciousness and thought that a given culture constantly sets and refines. As these ways of doing 'history' are as numerous as those able-bodied individuals capable of and interested in such activities, they are moreover influenced by various elite interests and whims that gate-keep what is deemed permissible to think and to act upon in a given society (Weber 1968, Lowenthal 1985, Chartier 1988, Connerton 1989, Halbwachs 1992, Ricoeur 2004). Consequently, while significations given to the past are essentially subjective, differing political imperatives of group power holders as well as philosophers' and historians' century-old debates over 'history' have nonetheless come to influence both the perceptions of the past and the interpretive filters humans use for discerning it. As notions of historical thinking have seeped into our collective consciousness, so have a certain number of narrative configurations of the past infiltrated and guided our thought patterns. It would thus not be wrong to posit that such a symbiosis informs the vast array of possibilities for imbuing temporal reality with significance (Chartier 1988, Assmann 2001, Ricoeur 2004, Rüsen 2005). As this may be true for the average layperson, the same can be said of group elites, who themselves are likewise socialized with similar cultural mores, thereby suggesting that those who have vested profes-



sional or political interests in producing knowledge(s) of the past mutually influence one another when remembering it.

Following this logic, it would be hard to deny that both collective memory and disciplinary history, as two main Western modes of remembering that stretch beyond the time-span of human life, build on and nourish one another while also influencing how various elites and laypersons apprehend both temporal change and their own temporality (Chartier 1988, Assmann 2001, Ricoeur 2004, Rüsen 2005). For as the first primarily offers narrative frameworks within which the patterns of historical thought can be developed, the other permits criticizing, deconstructing and reformulating the contents of the past, that in turn are reified for guiding human agency.

Having slowly developed since the nineteenth century as a professionalized mode of Western thought and consciousness, disciplinary history basically comprises a form of investigation with its own established research methodology that seeks, finds and signifies the past (Black and MacRaild 2000, Lemon 2003). Among other dimensions, its thinking patterns include the ability to decipher what is historically significant, to properly use evidence from the past, and to understand such notions as continuity and change, cause and consequence, progress and decline, and presentism or hindsight (Lowenthal 2000, Seixas and Peck 2004). Guided by a community of academic historians who among themselves ideally vie for high methodical engagements, disciplinary history rigorously aims to produce plausible interpretations of past events by ultimately weaving all of its available traces into coherent and cogent narrative emplotments (Mink 1987, White 1987, Ricoeur 2004). Although fundamentally an artistic mode of expression, such a configuration of past events differs from fiction in that it is limited by the records and traces of the past and is furthermore 'commanded by an intention and a principle of truth' (Seixas 2000, 28). While the domain of disciplinary history primarily concerns academics, many of its aspects do engage other power elites as well as the general public. More specifically, this refers to the production of contents of the past as well as of notions of historical thinking, which are mostly transmitted through books, history textbooks, schools, universities and museums (Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg 2000, Seixas 2004).

For its part, collective memory generally relates to how a group, society or nation remembers and narrates itself (Connerton 1989, Halbwachs 1992, Wertsch 2002). As a potent tool for various power elites (including historians) and even for certain grassroots movements, it involves a process through which particular visions of a group's past are endorsed, reiterated and even revisited and reconstructed for purposes of offering a sense of unity or community and even change to a given group

so as to maintain it in perpetuity (Connerton 1989, Halbwachs 1992). Consequently, while certain moments of the past (real or imagined) are remembered, others are forgotten or occluded (Halbwachs 1992, Wineburg 2001), thus rendering the production of historical narratives that try to best encapsulate it highly controversial, especially during times of social tension. Similar to the production of disciplinary history, narratives that configure such pasts and their concomitant symbols are furthermore transmitted to group members through different apparatuses of socialization, such as schools, universities, museums, community centres and the family, as well as through public monuments and various other state symbols, like the national flag or anthem (Lowenthal 1985, Connerton 1989). Overall, collective memory permits individuals to establish both who they are and what their relationships with society, the 'Other' as well as with life in general consist of. In this logic, the 'past' risks becoming sacred, offering group members a pre-determined future (Létourneau 1986). Ironically, though aspects of historical thinking may contribute to questioning and even replacing such rigid memories of the past, the new narrative configurations that emerge nevertheless hold the potential to also become static, especially when power elites or grassroots movements control both the framework and outcome of relevant social debates.

Within this mindset, reducing our understanding of history to its lowest terms elucidates how collective memory and disciplinary history are intimately related, where both amount to parallel yet interdependent manners of remembering. As 'the memory of things said and done', history ultimately consists of the 'ideal' sequencing of a series of events that have unfolded 'objectively' in the past (Becker 1932, 223). With regard to an 'anthropologically universal function of orientating human life by culture', this ideal sequencing, held and affirmed in our memory, renders history as 'meaningful and sense-bearing time'. 'As a process of reflecting the time order of human life', it thus is 'grounded on experience and moved by outlooks on the future' (Rüsen 2005, 2).

In this logic, my working definition of history, as it pertains to human quests for living life, basically resembles current conceptualizations of historical consciousness. This stance not only reflects but also contributes to disciplinary history's new drive for recasting its main objectives from seeking historical 'truth' into investigating how people generally remember the past (Assman 2001, Lavielle 2004, Rüsen 2005). In other words, academic historians no longer search 'for the true and verifiable' or 'for realities in the past with an eye to understanding and explaining it and to interpreting its impact on the present'. Instead, they are more interested in focusing 'on the perceptions held in the present day, accurate or not', thereby making way for histories of 'the collective

imagination' by vying to 'understand meanings' rather than merely 'seeking causes' (Laville 2004, 172). Herein arguably lies the one main connection between both disciplinary history and collective memory that underlies my understanding of history: their common interest in the general expressions of human configurations of both temporal change and one's own temporality. As such, this provides the necessary step towards better investigating and theorizing the role of historical consciousness in issues pertaining to ethnicity, and more particularly to the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance.

#### HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CAPACITY TO HISTORICIZE THE PAST

A rather new concept in the social sciences, historical consciousness permits inquiring into 'history's' role in informing human identity and agency. It fundamentally refers to an individual's capacity to mobilize notions of the past for making the necessary moral choices in a social relationship for purposes of living life (Rüsen 2005). By epitomizing personal interaction with temporality through which both lived and eternal time are signified, it imputes coherency to the multifarious and bountiful past. Helping to understand, appropriate and construct social reality, it also involves the structuring of a scheme for remembering events strategically or purposefully for knowing and guiding oneself. Thus, offering individuals temporary assurances for surviving in the world, historical consciousness consists of a stream of knowingness that links individual existence with future horizons (Straub 2005). As such, consciousness in the present of the usefulness and meaningfulness of things past affords security for tomorrow.

This approach to historical consciousness views humans as moral and historical beings who, inserted in time and using value principles to both signify and justify their existence, conscientiously and actively contribute to the making of history (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Chartier 1988, Ricoeur 2004, Gergen 2005). As a result, the motivations of historical consciousness may be ethical, practical or political, depending on the time, space and context of the moral situation and the values incurred in the social relationship at hand (Becker 1932, Scheider 1978, Marcus 1980). Of importance, while signifying past events is fundamentally negotiated at an individual level, its form, content and limits nonetheless bathe in the collective consciousness of the group(s) as well as of the wider culture(s) to which the socio-historical actor belongs. Accordingly, historical consciousness is located within the confines of what is deemed possible for human recollection, thought and action, circumscribed by the limits of culture or of human ingenuity itself. More particularly, it is influenced by both the patterns of historical thinking and the different

narrative configurations of the past that the various elites transmit through such outlets of socialization as the media, university, family, community centre or officially-sanctioned state history (national history programs in schools) (Becker 1932, Seixas 2004, Straub 2005). As such, historical consciousness consists of a dynamic and flexible process that adjusts to the situational imperatives of an individual's biological age, generation and cultural moment.

Both the value and contentiousness of historical consciousness for research arguably resides in its underlying capacity to 'historicize' or to place past events into socio-historical context. At a first glance, this process implies seizing the different dimensions of historical thinking that enable one to differentiate and distance current social and political realities, values, morals and mentalities from those of the past. For certain authors, this leads to ultimately possessing historical consciousness in and of itself, especially if the individual comes to recognize the historicity of one's own thought processes and thereby accepts the idea of one's insertion in the historical process or in the flow of time as a moral or historical actor (Lukacs 1985, Gadamer 1987). However, when viewing historical consciousness as a mode of human orientation in time, where dimensions of historical thinking intermingle with collective memory and other forms of human commemoration, an important precision needs to be made. While historicizing would still pertain to placing the past into socio-historical context, a more profound understanding would permit a better appreciation of the many ways in which individuals apprehend and mobilize the temporal experience of their moral values for living life.

According to my reading of Rösen (2005), to historicize would thus refer to a more specific manner of 'doing history', suggesting an individual's capacity to see meaningful (moral) life patterns in the course of time. In other words, it consists of establishing a rapport with temporal change when interpreting past events, where the individual would see emerging significant life forms that offer a sense of responsibility and conscience for living life. In this sense, historicizing has more 'praxis' connotations than merely being a sum total of theoretical or disciplinary understandings of history, thereby implicating a tendency not towards doing history for history, but rather towards making necessary moral choices to orient one's actions in social relationships. Since different forms of historicizing can thus take place, an individual's capacity to recognize one's own historicity and thus the historicity of the present in the flow of time consequentially amounts to only one tendency among others of historical consciousness (Rösen 2005, Straub 2005).

TOWARDS A REPERTORY OF TENDENCIES  
OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Rüsen's (2005, 28-34) fourfold typology of historical consciousness serves as a good starting point for discerning the different ways in which humans historicize the past, or mobilize significant moral life patterns in time, for knowing and orienting themselves. I will first look at the main characteristics of this typology, and then propose some changes that support my recommendation of a repertory of ideal tendencies in its place. This will become even more pertinent for relating my understanding of historical consciousness to the different fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance inherent in constructivist views of ethnicity.

Regarding the patterns of historical significance for individuals, the first two types that Rüsen proposes, the 'traditional' and the 'exemplary', amount to two different forms of mobilizing and orienting human agency and identity in a manner that resembles collective memory. Furthermore, they insinuate a way of apprehending the past as imposed from above, or as interiorizing what has been gained through processes of socialization. Accordingly, the first type refers to historical consciousness as partly functioning to keep traditions alive, where selected events of the past ultimately aim to preserve a group's cultural norms and values in time. This is done through reminding individuals of their origins and through the repetition of obligations (i.e. through narratives or symbols that confirm and reaffirm an individual's connection to his or her peers) (Rüsen 2005, 30). By incarnating one's group, the individual thus honours and maintains preconfigured narratives of the past by using history to reinforce them rather than to question their veracity.

In the same vein, the second type ultimately refers to using the experiences of the past as guidelines for conduct, orienting individuals toward either what course of action to take or what to refrain from doing (Rüsen 2005, 29). Of importance here is the regularity of life patterns or of moral principles that transcend time and that serve as the basis for historical arguments that explain temporal change. History thus contains a message or becomes a lesson for the present and serves to legitimize the validity of one's roles and values in time.

Moving onto Rüsen's third 'critical' type, as a refusal of the prior types' continuity and timeless guidelines, it consists basically of criticizing the dominant historical narratives that have been held as 'true' or 'real' by authoritative sources. In a way, such an apprehension points to transgressing a priori held notions of the past as handed down through collective memory. No longer deemed convincing, individuals do not recognize the validity of preconfigured narratives in connecting both past and future together; a binding obligation no longer exists, their validities are no longer pertinent. Individuals transgress elements of preconfigured

narratives with historical arguments that lessen the weight of their moral obligations to the past. They further offers elements of a counter-narrative to establish the plausibility of this refusal based on historical reasoning, explaining either why existing preconfigured narratives were used for understanding the past or, by focusing on certain aspects of the past that have changed, to describe their temporal evolution. Of importance here is a rupture in the flow of time where history serves to question life patterns and values systems in the present.

Finally, the 'genetic' type fundamentally consists of recognizing the complexity of understanding human life. By noticing both the temporality of human thought processes and the variability of time, individuals realize that their moral obligations to the past vary according to different temporal contexts and thus can constantly be adjusted. They adapt elements of preconfigured narratives to current ethical considerations, all the while knowing that these could change tomorrow, thereby reflecting recognition of the constant evolution of both the variability of the moral context and the pertinence of elements of preconfigured narratives for living life. Consequently, by always perceiving these elements by following new means of apprehending social reality, it is the notion of change that comes to give history its meaning. As such, in contrast to the other types, new narratives of the past are envisaged in a dynamic manner of perpetual transformation according to time, space and context, permitting individuals to construct social reality in all its complexity. Accordingly, they manifest a sincere openness to different viewpoints so as to better understand their own vision of things and to integrate them into a more complete perspective of temporal change. It is thus fundamentally the recognition of one's own historicity that encourages humans to accept and respect the moral and historical agency of others. History here serves to transform unfamiliar life forms into those of one's own.

Although Rüsén admits that these types of historical consciousness are hard to concretize because they may appear simultaneously in mixed forms among individuals and may vary in context, he nonetheless embeds his typology in a theory of ontogenetic development, starting with the traditional and ending with the genetic. The different types of historical consciousness come to constitute the different stages in their growth of complexity, each being the pre-condition for the following, more complex one. In this development there is growth in complexity in terms of imbuing the past with historical significance, of its concomitant intellectual processes and skills, as well as of its pertinence in orienting individual identity and agency (Rüsén 2005).

Putting aside the ingenuity in constructing such a typology, the notion of ontogenetic development does, however, have its limits. Firstly, the underlying idea of offering rigid categories for determining the pro-

gression of individual historical consciousness is counter-productive because it does not recognize the fluidity of human agency when making sense of the past for living life. As active moral and historical actors in their own right, individuals' historical consciousness may vary, contradict itself and even regress according to the social context in which they are located and thus cannot be seen as forming distinctive stages.

Secondly, as pointed out by Lee (2004), Rösen fails to offer a comprehensive correlation between the acquisition of substantive ideas of the past (the 'real' content or 'practical' concepts of historical knowledge) and the apprehension of second-order notions of history. In other words, Rösen's typology solely allows for the registering of individuals' rapports with historical content knowledge when signifying the past for temporal orientation while neglecting how their understandings of the functioning of disciplinary history intimately pertain to their mobilization of such knowledge. This neglect becomes all the more important given that the different dimensions of historical thinking do not necessarily evolve at the same rate in each person, thereby leading to confusion when associating the development of what one knows about the past with that of how one goes about knowing it.

Thirdly, Rösen's notion of ontogenetic development also suggests that some types of historical consciousness are inherently better than other ones. This leads to questioning whether a 'better' type of consciousness fundamentally does exist and if it does, whether, for example, recognizing the historicity of one's own thought processes and thus of others' is fundamentally 'better' than blindly accepting preconfigured narratives for living life. Importing such a value judgment further suggests the potential manipulation of historical consciousness toward political or ideological ends, especially when power elites or grassroots movements use it to garner particular identities or visions of the past (Macdonald 2000, Laville 2004).

If the underlying notion of progression, the discrepancies between historical thinking and historical content knowledge as well as the ideological implications inherent in Rösen's ontogeny were resolved, addressed or recast in another light, his typology would arguably be more useful for conducting research, especially with regard to the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance. In light of these concerns, it would thus be plausible to suggest making some adjustments. For example, by replacing his notion of ontogenetic development with that of a general repertory and by viewing his rigid 'types' as tendencies instead, a dynamic framework emerges, forming a new starting point for studying the role of historical consciousness in orienting human identity and agency.

Transforming Rösen's typology into a repertory of four main ideal markers or tendencies of historical consciousness thus serves as an ade-

quate heuristic tool for analysing social actors' mobilization of historical content knowledge when negotiating their ethnicity. Likewise, the traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic types should be seen as parallel tendencies that co-exist in a general repository of interiorized propensities that act as possible filters or lens an individual may inter-changeably use to signify the past. As dynamic phenomena, these different tendencies should furthermore be seen as interacting together according to time, space, context, values, and the historical situation under scrutiny. Not only does this suggest that individuals possess parallel manifestations of consciousness regarding different aspects of the past simultaneously, but it also permits the adding of different markers or tendencies to the general repertory along the way. Adopting such a repertory also opens the door for eventually developing new strategies for better understanding the ways in which different dimensions of historical thinking influence general human tendencies of signifying the past for purposes of living life. And finally, its fluidity also suggests and respects both the equality between the many forms of human conscience and the freedom of thought and expression that underlie modern democratic states.

Within the framework of such a repertory, analyzing historical consciousness enables answering such questions as why, how and when individuals remember certain historic events over others, acquire and maintain values for making moral judgments, employ historical thinking when imagining and narrating the past, negotiate their identity in light of past and recurring power struggles, and interiorize or reject the narratives of group trendsetters and state institutions. In terms of inter-ethnic relations, such a repertory moreover points to better grasping in-group attitudes toward significant out-groups, past, present and future, thereby ultimately permitting to apprehend the processes involved in the negotiation of one's ethnicity, or more specifically in both boundary formation and the fluctuations in its maintenance.

#### UNDERSTANDINGS OF ETHNICITY THAT DEAL WITH HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Despite its subtle and scant presence in the literature, references to historical consciousness in more or less constructivist models of ethnicity greatly mirror the first two types of Rösen's typology. These are reminiscent of how an ethno-cultural group's collective memory creates and maintains group identity at the conjunction of group interaction. As such, it brings to the fore the interplay of both internal and external sides of ethnic boundaries; the first referring to the cultural content of a given group and the second to the locus of the power struggle with the 'significant Other' that ultimately serves to differentiate and dichotomize mutually significant groups as indefinitely as possible in time (Barth 1996,



Juteau 1996, Jenkins 1997, Malesevic 2004). Such a reminder of collective memory moreover correlates with Weber's understanding of ethnicity as a social communal relationship, arising once a common feeling for a common situation leads to mutual orientations of behaviour, be they purely emotive, traditional or even partly motivated by rational common interests (1968, 40-42).

In this mindset, a foremost basic reference to historical consciousness involves the fundamental promotion of both the subjective belief in common, real or putative ancestry and the ensuing shared historical memories of group experiences that permit members to know and narrate themselves as well as to acknowledge and narrate their peers. Regarding sustained contact between groups, such memories specifically refer to whether relations, at the time of contact between migrant and indigenous groups, involved the colonization of indigenous ones or rather the assimilation of migrant ones, and whether these processes occurred voluntarily or through force (Weber 1968, Schermerhorn 1978, Hutchinson and Smith 1996).

Concomitant to the first, a second reference to historical consciousness is the manipulation of these shared historical memories for political ends of mobilizing group sentiments and group formation. Carried out by various group power elites and or grassroots movements, it can garner a solid base, grounding members in a strong sense of common ethnicity, albeit in an illusionary manner through imagined membership or presumed identity (Weber 1968, Peel 1989, Hutchinson and Smith 1996). If these shared memories are to be effective in the political present, they need to nonetheless resonate with group members' actual experiences. By establishing a symbiosis between the imperatives of the present and the experiences of the past, the visions of the common past that a group's various political communities put forth need to be meaningful to group members in order for them to be properly mobilized (Peel 1989). Similarly, in order for ethnic groups to interact with each other across the external side of the boundary, these shared historical memories also need to form a sort of mutualism with those of the significant out-group. The historical narratives of both the dominant and subordinate groups thus need to resonate (even in their opposition) with each other if they are to fundamentally interact at all (Eriksen 1993). In both instances it becomes clear that while narrative visions of the past demand plausibility and correlation for in- and out-groups respectively so that ethnicity becomes politically functional, the manipulation of shared historical memories (or the use of historical consciousness) in boundary maintenance is in and of itself a historical phenomenon that varies depending on time, space and context (Schermerhorn 1978).

A third reference to historical consciousness is its role in giving group members a sense of cohesion between the past, present and future (Weber 1968, Buckley 1989, Davis 1989, Nash 1989, Eriksen 1993). By keeping shared historical memories of group origins and other important experiences of the collective past alive, history offers ethnicity “‘streams’ of tradition’ within which group members ‘are to differing degrees located and of which they differentially partake’ as historical actors (Barth in Jenkins 1997, 52). In this sense, ‘tradition’ (as a form and use of historical consciousness) can be seen as a cultural construct giving an authoritative direction to a group based on its survival, pastness, and continuity into the future (Nash 1989). By affording cultural beliefs and practices a legitimacy and pertinence for group members, this forward orientation of tradition binds personal life trajectories to that of the group, giving them a sense of unity and connection throughout generations by permitting them to ‘identify with heroic times, great deeds, and a genealogy to the beginning of things human, cultural and spiritual’ (Nash 1989, 14).

In contrast to these aforementioned references to historical consciousness, Juteau’s (1996) constructivist model of ethnicity goes a step further when dealing with the role of history. Her model will permit us to see how notions of historical thinking may play a leading role of equal importance as those of collective memory for better grasping the relationship between historical consciousness and the fluctuations in boundary maintenance. To this end, Juteau basically emphasizes the centrality of the manipulation and mobilization of ‘historically produced attributes or memories’ in the symbiosis between both the internal and external sides of ethnic boundaries. Of importance here are the imposition of and resistance to ‘essentialized’ or ‘stereotypical’ visions of the past, where historical memories become an asset as well as a weapon for pushing the various political, economic, societal, ideological or cultural interests of both intra- and inter-group power elites and even grassroots movements.

According to Juteau, in the power structure regulating group interaction, the stronger or more dominant group will usually attempt to deter members of the weaker one from determining their historical agency according to idiosyncratic historical specificities, preferring that they instead interiorize a simplistic framework of their past experiences that the stronger one usually imposes. Some members of the weaker group may yield to such ‘essentialized’ definitions, eventually adopting a static sense of self (i.e. rigid boundaries and a simple and homogenous history). Others, however, will not, and may instead mobilize their own interpretations of their group’s historical memories (and other cultural markers) to counter such attempts, which in turn also entails a process of essentialization, where reduced aspects of a reclaimed past are used as

ammunition for group action or even resistance. Underlying such a process of communalization, is the weight of a group's shared historical experiences that may corroborate the current realities of its social status and agency. As such, the more negative the shared memories of these experiences are, the more essentialized visions of historical memories are prone to being mobilized for purposes of attaining various objectives. Even if power elites and grassroots movements may compete amongst themselves to promote their own besieged historical outlook among group members in this process, the intensity of mobilizing essentialized historical visions nevertheless evolves according to the time, space and context of a group's social relationship with the 'significant Other'.

As this mobilization again relates to Rüsen's traditional and exemplary types when signifying past events for self-identification and orientation in time, Juteau's promotion of an 'inquisitive mind', as a preponderant means of deconstruction, instead points to social actors' capacities of 'liberating' themselves from imposed visions or narratives of past inter-group relations. By likewise being open to questioning the rigidity of essentialized and reclaimed group histories, she suggests that individuals can better understand the processes involved in the construction of ethnic group identity when negotiating their ethnicity (Juteau 1996, 57).

Accordingly, Rüsen's critical and genetic types immediately spring to mind. For if group members were to individually and effectively question past inter-group relations and consider their various possibilities for narration (especially by recognizing the value of multiple viewpoints of the past), they would most probably be able, at the very least, to unmask what has been interiorized as true or self-evident. Furthermore, they would most likely be able to deconstruct and better apprehend the issues of the underlying power struggle inherent in ethnic communalization that rigidly mobilizes a group's historical and cultural specificities. Depending on both their outlook on current inter-group relations and adherence to various power holder interpretations of the past, social actors could thus either accept, simply criticize or outright reject the general historical visions that narrate their group and its relations with the 'significant Other'. As a consequence, they could either promote already established narratives or eventually even recite new ones that reconfigure inter-group relations both in their complexity and according to modern ethic considerations.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD THEORIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FLUCTUATIONS  
IN ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

In bringing my repertory of historical consciousness together with these constructivist accounts, a particular understanding of ethnicity emerges, which permits correlating the different tendencies of signifying past inter-group relations with the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance. When social actors negotiate their ethnicity, they are fundamentally faced with making moral decisions in a social relationship with the 'significant Other'. By thus reasserting their values in the construction of inter-group reality, they resort to their historical consciousness of past events so as to structure both a scheme for connecting their personal identity to that of their larger 'ethnic' in-group and for guiding their actions towards the out-group. To these ends, they may reaffirm, criticize or re-adapt already available historical visions that ultimately configure who they are and what their group's relationship with the 'significant Other' consists of.

As these tendencies of historical consciousness variously presuppose social actors' structuring of group boundaries, it is important to remember that the historical visions they engage with are nevertheless manipulated and essentialized by different group power elites and even grassroots movements. Having been interiorized through similar processes of socialization, these trendsetters appropriate the same filters for making sense of the past, as have other group members, in order to advance their own personal or other interests, such as improving their group's social status or access to scarce resources. In this sense, when regular individuals refer to their historical consciousness for negotiating ethnicity, they are actually mediating between two processes: the many ways in which different group trendsetters both manipulate patterns of historical thought with pre-configured narratives of past events and mobilize essentialized historical group attributes. It is thus through these in-group complexities in engaging with the 'significant Other', at the conjunction of group interaction, that ethnic boundaries are either rigidly maintained or become more porous than usual.

Based on my understanding of Rüsén's genetic type, two further important points emerge that need to be carefully emphasized. Firstly, social actors' recognition of the historicity and thus variability of human thought processes can fundamentally 'liberate' them from what group power elites and grassroots movements deem permissible to think and act upon. So, as individual expressions of historical consciousness in ethnicity negotiations are ultimately dependent on the state of the current power structure between both intra- and inter-group trendsetters, social actors' ethical, practical and political motivations for accepting the 'sig-

nificant Other's' moral and historical agency may fundamentally counter those of their peers or even of their power and grassroots elites. This, in turn, leads to the second point. In light of the mechanics of boundary persistence, even if individuals tend to recognize the historicity and variability of human thought processes, it should not immediately be taken for granted that the 'significant Other' will be cast in a positive light or that their historical experiences and social realities will be taken into consideration when constructing inter-group reality. In all then, not only does the capacity to recognize human moral and historical agency imply 'autonomy' from various in-group influences, but it also suggests that social actors may choose to perceive the power structure regulating group interaction as they please, be it equitable and conducive to in-group regeneration or rather unequal and antagonistic so as to indefinitely maintain inter-group dichotomies.

Regarding these two points, if one were to concede that the underlying motivations to recognize human moral and historical agency could ultimately counter the different historical visions of past inter-group relations that various trendsetters try to impose on group members, the fluctuations in ethnic boundary maintenance can become clearer. While this moves beyond grasping the role of history in these processes as mere static notions of collective memory, it also points to the necessity of further elaborating on the genetic tendency's contributions. For while traditional and exemplary inclinations toward signifying past events in a moral situation with the 'significant Other' suggest the preservation of exclusionary 'ethnic' visions of in-group identity and inter-group agency, and while critical ones rather question the pertinence of such claims, genetic tendencies instead seem to be more complex. This is so because of the latter's many motivations for readapting the past to the changing circumstances of the present, which notably open up new possibilities for facing inter-group challenges dynamically without forgetting stories of old. For while individuals would see themselves as well as members of the 'significant Other' as moral and historical actors who are in a perpetual state of transformation, and would thereby appreciate multiple viewpoints of the past when assessing and negotiating upon current inter-group relations, individuals' ethical, practical and political motivations may, however, discourage them from doing so.

Accordingly, at least four different moments that relate individual expressions of historical consciousness to ethnic boundary fluctuations can be suggested as a starting point for further debate and theorization. When power relations between two groups are overwhelmingly portrayed by intra-group trendsetters as having transformed for the better, group members may be motivated to recognize the 'significant Other's' historicity and to readapt pre-given historical visions to these changing

realities of inter-group dynamics, thereby rendering their boundaries more porous and open to the 'significant Other'. Under the same circumstances, they may instead decide to nevertheless continue to maintain inter-group dichotomies and thus rigidly preserve inter-group boundaries. Conversely, when inter-group power relations are depicted as staying constant or as not having greatly improved, group members may accordingly decide to not recognize the historicity of the 'significant Other' and to rather reaffirm the historical visions that various trendsetters diffuse to again rigidly maintain boundaries (similar to the first two tendencies of my repertory). Or finally, group members may instead decide to recognize the 'significant Other's' historicity irrespective of various in-group interests of maintaining dichotomies, thus rendering their boundaries more permeable to the 'significant Other'.

With these moments in mind, it is however important to note that such an understanding of the capacity to recognize the historicity and variability of human thought processes in individual negotiations of ethnicity should be seen as an iterative work-in-progress, for such historicizing will always consist of a sort of internal battlefield between group members. For while its instances may be salutary for some group members, depending on the time, space and context of the social relationship at hand with the 'significant Other', it may also at times be seen as constituting a danger to the group's preservation for others. Thus, as ethnicity persists according to the evolution of intra- and inter-group dichotomies, so do the parallel tendencies of historical consciousness, which sometimes demand the self-conscious use of the capacity to recognize human moral and historical agency in a manner that may be deemed unthinkable.

#### REFERENCES

- Assman, Aleida, "History and memory," in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Pauk B. Baltes, Volume 10, 2001. 6822-6829.
- Barth, Frederik, "Ethnic groups and boundaries," in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollor (New York: New York University Press, 1996). 294-324.
- Becker, Carl, "Everyman his own historian," *The American Historical Review* 37.2. (1932): 221-236.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967.
- Black, Jeremy and Donald D. MacRaild. *Studying History. 2nd ed.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000.

- Buckley, Anthony, "‘We’re trying to find our identity’: uses of history among Ulster Protestants," in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, Mayron McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). 183-197.
- Chartier, Roger. *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Davis, John, "The social relations of the production of history," in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, Elizabeth Tonkin, Mayron McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). 104-120.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1993.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "The problem of historical consciousness," in *Interpretive Social Science. A Second Look*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987). 82-140.
- Gergen, Kenneth J., "Narrative, moral identity and historical consciousness: a social constructionist account," in *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Jürgen Straub (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005). 99-119.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.
- Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith, ed., *Ethnicity*. New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Jenkins, Richard. *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1997.
- Juteau, Danielle, "Theorizing ethnicity and ethnic communalizations at the margins: from Quebec to the world system," *Nations and Nationalism* 2.1. (1996): 45-66.
- Laville, Christian, "Historical consciousness and historical education: what to expect from the first for the second," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). 165-182.
- Lee, Peter, "Understanding history," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). 129-164.

- Lemon, M.C. *Philosophy of History. A Guide for Students*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Létourneau, Jocelyn, "Historiens, sociogrammes et histoire: l'interaction complexe entre mémoire collective, mémoire individuelle, passé construit et passé vécu," in *Étude de la construction de la mémoire collective des Québécois au vingtième siècle. Approches multidisciplinaires*, ed. Jacques Matthieu (Québec: Cahiers du CELAT, 1986). 99-108.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Lowenthal, David, "Dilemmas and delights of learning history," in *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History. National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000). 63-82.
- Lukacs, John. *Historical Consciousness or the Remembered Past*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.
- Macdonald, Sharon, ed., *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations*. Hamburg: Koerber Stiftung, 2000.
- Malesevic, Sinisa. *The Sociology of Ethnicity*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2004.
- Marcus, John T. *Sub Specie Historiae. Essays in the Manifestation of Historical and Moral Consciousness*. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1980.
- Mink, Louis. *Historical Understanding*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Nash, Manning. *The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Peel, John David Yeadon, "The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis," in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. Elizabeth Tonkin, Mayron McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). 198-215.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Rüsen, Jörn. *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.
- Schermerhorn, Richard. *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.



- Schieder, Theodore, "The role of historical consciousness in political action," *History and Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History* 17.4. (1978): 1-18. *Beiheft 17 Historical Consciousness and Political Action*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Seixas, Peter and Carla Peck, "Teaching historical thinking," in *Challenges and Prospects for Canadian Social Studies*, ed. Alan Sears and Ian Wright (Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press, 2004). 109-117.
- Seixas, Peter, "Schweigen! Die kinder! Or, does postmodern history have a place in the schools," in *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History. National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000). 19-37.
- Seixas, Peter, "Introduction," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). 3-20.
- Stearns, Peter N., Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg, ed., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History. National and International Perspectives*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2000.
- Straub, Jürgen, "Telling stories, making history: toward a narrative psychology of the historical construction of meaning," in *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Jürgen Straub (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005). 44-98.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.
- Wertsch, James. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987.
- Wineburg, Sam. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts. Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.



# POETIC ECONOMICS: PHILLIS WHEATLEY AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE BLACK ARTIST IN THE EARLY ATLANTIC WORLD

*Rochelle Raineri Zuck*  
*University of Minnesota Duluth*

To what extent did black artists in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world shape the literary and cultural forces we know associate with romanticism? Although scholars of literature and culture must acknowledge that categories such as *enlightenment* and *romantic* were created after the fact and have been used to forge artificial distinctions between authors and between works, we must also be careful not to assume that such categories have nothing to offer beyond helping to structure undergraduate curriculums and literary anthologies. The abandonment of such categories of analysis threatens to efface the role that black artists played in the development of what we think of as romanticism and obscure certain aspects of their participation in transatlantic literary culture. The life and work of Phillis Wheatley makes a compelling case that black artists played a crucial role in reformulating the late-eighteenth-century literary marketplace and restructuring the relationships between author, text, and reader in ways that become more recognizable to twenty-first-century readers when we position her work against a backdrop of burgeoning romanticism.

This essay reads Wheatley as a key participant in the shifting economic and emotional relationships between artists, audiences, and texts that we now associate with romanticism. To recover facets of the role that the black artist played in the romantic movement(s), I examine three “portraits” of Wheatley—the poetic spectacle managed by her promoters, the actual portrait that appeared as the frontispiece for her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), and the portrait that Wheatley herself created through her poetry. These portraits chart the tensions that circulated around the figure of the black African artist in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, tensions between genius and “barbarity,” originality and imitation, exteriority and interiority, and artistic expression and commodification. These binaries have often characterized

---

Thank you to Steven W. Thomas and Grégory Pierrot, who were fellow panelists at the 2009 meeting of the Society of Early Americanists, and offered feedback on the conference paper that became this essay. I also appreciate the feedback of current and former colleagues at the University of Minnesota Duluth, including Carol Bock, Evan Brier, Jeffrey Hole, and Abram Anders.

the terrain of Wheatley studies, marking opposing positions and points of contention. I argue for a different way of reading, one that sees the figure of Phillis Wheatley as produced through the interplay of all of these forces within the context of the early black Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> Wheatley and her work exposed both the emphasis on “authentic” self-expression through art and the ways in which the mental life of the artist became available to the reader as a consumer product. The promotional efforts of Susannah Wheatley, who along with her husband, John Wheatley, purchased Phillis when she was just a child, drew readers into a complicated economy in which they were positioned not only as consumers of Wheatley and her poetry, but co-producers of this black authorial figure (a category of identity that was being written into existence in the eighteenth century). This poetic economy included a set of relationships between reader, text, and author that was reinforced through the paratextual portrait of the authorial frontispiece. Wheatley herself created a different vision of the black artist, one that fused Christian discourse with romantic elements of imagination, Nature, and the poetic sublime, yet remained distant from and somewhat inaccessible to white readers. What has been taken to be a lack of emotionality in Wheatley’s verse may be read as a kind of strategic distance, which is represented in her work as both emotional and spatial distance from the reader and the literary marketplace.

The argument of this essay speaks to broader concerns in eighteenth-century scholarship, which is currently experiencing a “Wheatleyan Moment” (to borrow a phrase from David Waldstreicher).<sup>2</sup> Recent publications such as Vincent Carretta’s biography of Phillis Wheatley, John Shields’s *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics* (2010), Helen Thomas’s discussion of Wheatley in *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (2000), and a number of other critical reevaluations of Wheatley’s life and work, have generated new ways of thinking about the poet and her work within the transatlantic world in which she lived and wrote. Challenging the notion that cultural influence

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheatley is only briefly mentioned in Gilroy (17, 79, 152), but his discussion of how “the intellectual traditions of the European Enlightenment” functioned as “both a lifeline and a fetter” for diasporic black writers (30) can certainly be seen in contemporary reactions to Wheatley’s work and later criticism such as May (49-63); Marren (94-105); Carretta (217-18); and Gates and McKay (95-100). Shields (“Phillis Wheatley and the Sublime,” “Phillis Wheatley’s Use of Classicism,” and “Phillis Wheatley’s Subversive Pastoral”) offers close readings of Wheatley’s poetry and contextualizes those readings within eighteenth-century poetic traditions. Erkkila discusses Wheatley alongside her female contemporaries in “Revolutionary Women” (189-223). For a specific comparison with Mercy Otis Warren, see Cima (465-495). Wheatley is discussed in the larger context of African American women writers in Bassard’s *Spiritual Interrogations: Culture, Gender, and Community in Early African American Women’s Writing*.

<sup>2</sup> Waldstreicher (522-551) classifies the period from 1772-1784 as a “Wheatleyan moment” because of Wheatley’s contributions to literary and political culture. He also notes the renewed attention to Wheatley in contemporary literary scholarship.

came from Britain and the Continent to America, Shields suggests that Wheatley's poems were read by and exerted influence on writers such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and that she should be read a "a late-eighteenth-century romantic" (Shields 2010, 63). In response to his own question—was Wheatley the "progenetrix" of romanticism—Shields provides a close reading of her poetry to argue in the affirmative. By focusing on the production of the black artist in the eighteenth-century transatlantic world, as seen through the lens of various "portraits" of Wheatley, this essay concludes that Wheatley, like Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, and other writers of color, occupied a subject position that was always already romantic, and worked to restructure the ways in which readers imagined their relationships to authors and texts.

## I.

The first portrait of Wheatley was the one created by her promoters as part of their efforts to market her book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Black Atlantic writers such as Phillis Wheatley entered a complicated literary marketplace where elements of the patronage system and salon culture coexisted with what we think of as a more "modern" capitalist version of the book trade in which the author negotiated various relations with printers, booksellers, and the general public in the promotion and sale of her/his works.<sup>3</sup> Mass publication was changing the nature of exchange between reader, author, and text, and reader tastes and expectations of authors were in transition as well. There was a growing emphasis on reading the work as an extension of the author, which both freed writers from the weight of literary conventions and exploited them as consumer products. For Wheatley, as for Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, negotiating these shifting marketplace conditions demanded that they operate both in the private world of drawing rooms and salons and as public figures to be consumed by a larger reading public.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say, however, that black writers were merely acted upon by the forces associated with the literary marketplace; rather, the presence of black writers and artists produced several effects that we associate with the book trade of the late eighteenth century. They put additional pressure on already waning notions of the genteel and anonymous author and participated in the commodification of art

---

<sup>3</sup> There are numerous studies of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace and competing notions of authorship. See, for example, Rogers (233-240), Chartier (25-60), Woodmansee (35-56), Deutsch (1-3), Rose (1-30; 67-91), Ingrassia (1-16), and Haynes (287-320). Haynes offers a succinct historiographical summary of the study of authorship over the last ten years. Wilcox (1-29) talks specifically about how Wheatley was marketed to the public.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Equiano in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace, see Carretta ("Property of Author" 130-150).

and artist the promotion and sale of their works. This section will contextualize Wheatley within this literary and cultural milieu, suggesting how the promotional efforts of Susannah Wheatley and the various publishers of Wheatley's work in London and Boston created a marketable vision of her by emphasizing Wheatley's poetic process as a kind of spectacle, a performance that drew readers into an economy of poetic consumption in which her poetry was framed as a service to and extension of her readers' own emotionality.

Black writers in the Atlantic world commanded audiences' attention if not always their respect. In her discussion of Wheatley's publication history, Kirsten Wilcox asserted that "in the late eighteenth century, the fact that this enslaved woman wrote at all took precedence in the public mind over anything that she said" (1999, 1). Wheatley's gender and racial identity may have heightened the public's emphasis on her "self" rather than on her work, but this emphasis was also part of a larger trend toward a privileging of authors and seeing their works, as Mark Rose put it, as an "objectification of a personality" (1988, 75). Within this transatlantic literary marketplace, the figure of the anonymous *gens du letters* existed alongside that of the strategically self-fashioned and named artist. Helen Deutsch has noted that the challenge for eighteenth-century white poets such as Alexander Pope was to create "a bridge between life and art" so that readers would find them relatable and appealing (1993, 1). She traced the ways in which Pope's physical "deformity" provided such a bridge: "The body that exposes him to a reader's derision provides Pope with the means to orchestrate that reader's response to his literary performance" (Deutsch 1993, 1). Building on Deutsche's points, Pope's physical differences, in some sense, gave the otherwise privileged male poet some traction in the literary marketplace, allowing him to speak a unique "truth" about himself to which the reader could relate, and to make visible his physicality in ways that his whiteness and maleness would have otherwise obscured. Through his poems and correspondence, Pope worked to create a "self" who could be represented on the page, an acknowledgement that some readers were reading his works because of a desire to know *him*, not merely because of an interest in neoclassical verse. In a shifting literary economy, one characterized by the emergence of what Foucault calls the "author function," white writers such as Alexander Pope were impelled to embody their work, to make visible, in the case of Pope, those physical differences that could be read as proof of authenticity/uniqueness and could be used to classify and interpret the work.

By virtue of her subject position, Wheatley's physicality, like that of fellow black writers, was always already visible to readers. Promoting her work required managing the connections that readers made between

her life and physical body and her body of work, which was achieved, in part, through the strategic staging of Wheatley and her poetry. The sense of spectacle that such performances created was amplified by the use of two available discourses of black poetics—exemplary genius and the “uncultivated barbarian” who could merely imitate white models.<sup>5</sup> Both were part of a romanticizing iterative process that had already been used to describe another black Atlantic poet, Francis Williams (1700–1770), born in Jamaica, who, as Vincent Carretta has argued, was “arguably better known than Olaudah Equiano” (2003, 213). Sponsored by the Duke of Montague (patron of Ignatius Sancho) and “introduce[d] to the stage” by slavery apologist Edward Long in his *History of Jamaica*, published in London in 1774, Williams and his poetry were framed as part of a larger debate about African potential for literary genius and famously dismissed by David Hume in his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.<sup>6</sup> Like Wheatley, Williams was produced, in part, through the seemingly oppositional, yet mutually reinforcing binaries of genius and “barbaric” imitation, and critics focused on his authorial identity rather than his poetry.<sup>7</sup> During Wheatley’s public displays of her poetry and her visit to London, she was framed as an embodiment of these tensions, with her poetry presented not only as an extension of her “self” (the “self” imagined in the dialogue between genius and “barbarian”), but also as an extension of readers’ emotions. Through this transference of poetic meaning and emotion, readers entered into a kind of poetic economy, both as consumers and producers of Wheatley.

From the outset, Wheatley was both celebrated as a singular genius and denigrated as someone merely mimicking established artistic conventions. Early discussions of her in colonial newspapers praised her as an “ingenious Negro Poet” and an “extraordinary Negro Poet.”<sup>8</sup> In his discussion of her reception by colonial American and British audiences, Mukhtar Isani asserted that Wheatley was frequently mentioned by colonial newspapers, which, while they were less detailed than later British reviews of her book, still testify to her fame in America (2000, 260). Her poems were republished numerous times through the nineteenth century, introducing new generations of readers to her work. They were appended to Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* in 1814, published

---

<sup>5</sup> This phrase appears in the proposal for Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects* published in the *Boston Censor* in 1772 and in the letter of attestation that accompanied published editions of the work. See Robinson (*Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* 309, 405).

<sup>6</sup> Hume writes, “. . . ’tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly” (qtd in “Who Was Francis Williams,” 214).

<sup>7</sup> For more, see Carretta (“Who Was Francis Williams” 219–220).

<sup>8</sup> See announcements in the *Boston Evening-Post* (3 May 1772), the *Boston News-Letter* (6 May 1772) and the *Connecticut Journal and New Haven Post-Boy* (7 May 1772). All references quoted in Isani (“Contemporary Reception” 267). For more on the reception of her poems in Britain, see Isani (“British Reception,” 144–49).

serially in *The Liberator* in the 1830s, and included along with the only full-length biography of Wheatley published before the twentieth century, Margaretta Matilda Odell's *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (1834). Wheatley also appears as a character in Hezekiah Butterworth's *The Patriot Schoolmaster* (1894).<sup>9</sup> One particularly enthusiastic writer for *The Critic* wrote in 1888 that Wheatley's book "easily surpasses that of Mrs. Bradstreet's" and "remains the principal achievement of the colored race in America" (Richardson 1888, 34).

Critiques of Wheatley as derivative emerged not long after the publication of her first volume of poetry. While many of the British reviews of her work were positive, a writer for the *London Monthly Review* offered the following in December of 1773: "The poems written by this young negro bear no endemial marks of solar fire or spirit. . . They are merely imitative" (qtd in Isani 2000, 271). This point of view was reiterated in a subsequent edition of the *Monthly Review*, which referenced Wheatley's "talent for imitation" and refuted more glowing reviews of her poetry (qtd in Isani 2000, 272). Thomas Jefferson famously dismissed her work in *Notes on the State of Virginia* as the product of religion, rather than true poetry ([1781-2] 1975, 189). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, readers and reviewers increasingly noted Wheatley's indebtedness to neoclassical themes and forms, with one uncharitable reader dubbing her a "third-rate Pope" (Thurman 1928, 555) and another claiming that she produced "pious platitudes, colorless imitations of Pope, and some murmurs of a terrible theology" (William Long qtd in Watson 1996, 104).<sup>10</sup> The implications of a black woman being able to imitate white artistic practices were not lost, however. In an article for the *North American Review* published in 1878, James Parton classified her poems as "the merest echo of the common jingle of the day," but also remarked that "[s]he was a poet only as Christophe and Toussaint L'Ouverture (those colored caricatures of Bonaparte) were generals and emperors" (1878, 489). While ostensibly dismissing her work, Parton also acknowledged the revolutionary potential of black art, which had the ability to destabilize aesthetic categories and hierarchies and effect political change.

---

<sup>9</sup> In an article for *The Ladies' Home Journal* in 1895 Butterworth likened his meeting of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to a meeting between Wheatley and George Washington. He writes, "A few evenings alter found me at the poet's [Longfellow's] door at his Cambridge home. . . I paused at the door before ringing the bell. I felt like Phillis Wheatley, as I can imagine, when the poor colored poet stood at the same door in response to an invitation from George Washington (10).

<sup>10</sup> Watson (105-107) surveys twentieth-century evaluations of Wheatley as imitative, from the harsh critiques of the Black Aesthetic movement to the more mild criticism of Wheatley scholars such as John C. Shields, William H. Robinson, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.



To counter attacks on her poetic ability, Wheatley made several public performances in which she composed poetry on the spot. While these performances were ostensibly arranged to dismiss doubts about her authorship and poetic capabilities, they also functioned to stage the “act” of Wheatley writing as the event of her art. In the words of William Robinson, Susannah Wheatley invited many of Boston’s leading figures to witness performances by her “little black genius” (1984, 24) and accounts of Wheatley’s “impromptu composition[s]” appeared in newspapers such as the *New York Journal* and the *Newport Mercury* (Isani 2000, 262). Robinson noted that “[i]t was Mrs. Wheatley who eagerly circulated Phillis’s growing reputation by arranging for the touted girl to visit and be visited by the most prominent ministers and merchants and politicians, Whigs and Tories, in town” (1984, 23). Perhaps the most famous example of one of her public performances was the composition of her poem “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth,” the writing of which was witnessed by Thomas Woolridge, who was visiting the colonies in the service of Dartmouth. Woolridge later recounted to the Earl of Dartmouth his amazement at Wheatley’s abilities and dubbed her “a very extraordinary female slave,” but also “a poor untutor’d slave” (qtd in Robinson 1984, 454). Performances such as this one showcased not so much Wheatley’s poetry, but the spectacle of a black woman *producing* poetry in which the poet was understood through the interplay between familiar discourses of genius and a kind of barbarism (as denoted by her servitude and lack of education). Woolridge emerged here as a consumer of the poetic labor, but also a co-producer in that his account of the event served to create it as an *event* for Dartmouth, a kind of staging of Wheatley’s poetic persona through which the poetry he forwards can be rendered meaningful.

Wheatley’s on-demand performances were documented in more detail in a biography of Wheatley written by Margaretta Matilda Odell, who described herself as a “collateral descendent” (1834, 29) of Susannah Wheatley:

Phillis never indulged her muse in any fits of sullenness or caprice. She was at all times accessible. If any one requested her to write upon a particular subject or event, she immediately set herself to the task, and produced something upon the given theme. This is probably the reason why so many of her pieces are funeral poems, many of them, no doubt, being written at the request of friends. Still, the variety of her compositions affords sufficient proof of the versatility of her genius. We find her at one time occupied in the contemplation of an event affecting the condition of a whole people, and

pouring forth her thoughts in lofty strain. Then the song sinks to the soft tones of sympathy in the affliction occasioned by domestic bereavement. Again, we observe her seeking inspiration from the sacred volume, or from the tomes of heathen lore; now excited by the beauties of art, and now, hymning the praises of nature to 'Nature's God.'" On one occasion, we notice her—a girl of but fourteen years—recognizing a political event, and endeavoring to express the grateful loyalty of the subjects to their rightful king—not as one, indeed, who had been trained to note the events of nations, by a course of historical studies, but one whose habits, taste and opinions, were peculiarly her own; for in Phillis we have an example of originality of no ordinary character. She was allowed, and even encouraged to follow the leading of her own genius; but nothing was forced upon her, nothing suggested, or placed before her as a lure; her literary efforts were altogether the natural workings of her own mind. (Odell 1834, 14-15)

Through the mediating voice of Odell, Wheatley was rendered accessible to nineteenth-century readers who were not privy to her poems in their original context (the use of her first name, Phillis, heightened this sense of intimacy and familiarity). More than that, however, this passage illustrates several important points about how Wheatley's public performance reinforced a poetic persona that spoke to the interests of contemporary readers. She was, as Odell phrased it, "at all times accessible," working on demand to serve the emotional needs of those who asked for occasional poems (many of which were funeral elegies). Rather than working for a single patron, Wheatley was in the service of many of Boston's elite residents, and, through the mass publication of her poems, a larger body of colonial readers. These scenes of production, while glossed over with images of "contemplation" and "lofty strains," documented on a small scale the poetic economy that existed between Wheatley and her contemporary colonial audience: Wheatley was asked to write a poem and she "immediately set herself to the task, and produced something on the given theme." According to Odell, Wheatley did not indulge in emotionality herself (no "fits of sullenness or caprice," traits that would be associated with the male romantics), but was able to channel and synthesize various influences—the Bible, "heathen lore," art, nature, politics—so as to meet the emotional needs of others through her poetry. Her abilities, readers were told, were not the result of formal training and "historical studies," but her own "habits, taste and opinions." Wheatley here appeared as disciplined, inventive, and unique, but the implied message is

that her uniqueness was the result of lived experience rather than training, which is, of course, at odds with what we know of her education and the rigorous neoclassicism of her poems. Associating artistic production with experience, habits, opinions, and so forth makes not only the poet, but also the process of artistic production, accessible to the readers, who were here framed not just as passive consumers, but instead as co-creators of poetic meaning. Readers were not being taught by an Old Master, but instead having their own emotions translated into art, making them, by extension, part of the creative process. Wheatley's writings were only part of the larger poetic performance that was represented, both in her own time and by later biographers as a kind of poetics of service, in which Wheatley transformed the emotional raw materials of others into poetic performance.

While drawing room performances and the composition of occasional poems for members of Boston society were enough to win Wheatley local fame, the publication of her poems in book form required not only the support of a powerful patron (the Countess of Huntingdon), but also a promotional tour in which London audiences could be drawn into the economy created by Wheatley and her work. After her book proposal failed to generate enough subscribers for publication in Boston, Phillis Wheatley traveled to London along with Nathaniel Wheatley, the son of John and Susannah Wheatley. This was no mere pleasure tour, but a chance for Wheatley to circulate in the drawing rooms of British elites and garner support for a London edition of her works. While Wheatley was en route to London, Susannah Wheatley wrote to the *London Chronicle* to announce the poet's arrival:

You have no doubt heard of Phillis the extraordinary negro girl here, who has by her own application, unassisted by others cultivated her natural talents for poetry in such a manner as to write several pieces which (all circumstances considered) have great merit. This girl, who is a servant to Mr. John Wheatley of this place, sailed last Saturday for London, under the protection of Mr. Nathaniel Wheatley: since which the following little piece of her's ["Farewell to America"] has been published here. (qtd in Robinson 1984, 34)

Here the poetic persona, one that is characterized by race and servitude as well as "extraordinary" and "natural talents," is foregrounded, while the poetic accomplishments are diminished. It is Wheatley herself, rather than her poetry, that readers are expected to know and appreciate.<sup>11</sup> She

---

<sup>11</sup> Like Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano's work was also talked about in the press in the larger context of his deportment. A profile of Equiano that appeared in *The Morning Chroni-*

is “extraordinary,” yet her poetry is framed as diminutive; “Farewell to America,” the poem that followed, was dubbed a “little piece.” It was Wheatley herself that was the product offered to London readers.

In the proposal to the London edition of her poems, as in the Boston proposal, Wheatley as author is produced by the mutually constitutive relationship between the two roles of “unassisted genius” and “uncultivated barbarian.” There does not seem to be a temporal shift from one image to the next (i.e. a fixed progression from barbarism to civility) or a geographical shift (i.e. the poems were marketed as a work of genius in London, but not in Boston).<sup>12</sup> Rather, both images exist together, forming a picture of Wheatley, and by extension, the black artist, through their dialogic performance for the reader. While readers of the Boston proposal were expected to accept the book based on the approval of local dignitaries, as Wilcox has noted, the London version emphasizes the “evaluative power of the print consumer” (1999, 12). Near the conclusion of the proposal, publisher Archibald Bell declared, “But the publisher means not, in this advertisement, to deliver any particular eulogiums on the present publication; he rather desires to submit the striking beauties of its contents to the unbiased candour of the impartial Public” (Robinson 1984, 405). Wilcox argues that this proposal “turns the purchase of Wheatley’s *Poems* into an opportunity for every reader to replicate the validating power of Dartmouth and Lyttleton” (1999, 12). To this I would add that through its account of Wheatley’s circulation among “many of the principal Nobility and Gentry of this country,” the proposal rehearsed Wheatley’s poetic performances for London readers who were not able to view them first hand and refigured *Poems* as a kind of textual performance. In purchasing the book, readers were not just buying “validating power,” but consuming a poetic performance that had previously occurred only in the drawing rooms of the upper class, the meaning of which depended on the reading not only of the poems, but of the competing discourses of Wheatley as artist that the proposals offered.

“Selling” Wheatley to the British public required rendering her “natural” talents and poetic “self” visible, through printed discussions of her poetry, through the figure of Phillis herself, and through the visual representation of her that would accompany her poetry. Susannah Wheatley was well aware of how dress could reinforce Phillis’s performance abroad. In a letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, Susannah Wheatley mentioned that while time had not permitted Phillis to obtain new cloth-

---

*cle* in 1788 noted that “besides having an irreproachable moral character, [he] has frequently distinguished himself by occasional essays in the different papers, which manifest a strong and sound understanding” (qtd in Carretta, “Property of Author” 131).

<sup>12</sup> For alternative readings of the ways in which Wheatley was marketed see Nott (21-32) and Wilcox (1-29).

ing in Boston, she had given Phillis money to purchase whatever clothing the Countess thought would be “most proper.” As a caveat, she added, “I like she should be dress’d plain” (qtd in Robinson 1984, 33). For Susannah Wheatley, modest and “plain” clothing was part of staging Wheatley in that it constantly reiterated for the public the contrast between her African body and social position as a “servant” and the “extraordinary” literary achievements that provided the occasion for her visit. Her dress served to amplify and enhance these discursive tensions rather than to resolve them and reinforced the subtext of her poetic compositions and performances as a kind of service to her literary patron, the Countess of Huntingdon (a relationship that was reinforced in the dedication to *Poems on Various Subjects*).<sup>13</sup>

Wheatley’s body and literary work were collapsed into a consumer product and performed for readers against a backdrop of enlightenment discourse, with its juxtaposition of “genius” and “barbarism.” Wheatley, like her contemporary Williams, was packaged in a way that anticipated the emergence of the “romantic” artist; she emerged as an extraordinary and singular artist communicating a “truth” about herself and evoking an emotional response in her audiences that was necessary to the production of meaning in her poems. The enlightenment themes and forms contained in her verses often were overshadowed by the romantic elements of her poetic persona. Her poetry, much of which was occasional verse that relied in part on emotional input from readers positioned reader/viewers within an economy of poetic meaning as not only consumers, but also as participants. Through their accounts of her poetic performances, audience members also functioned to create “Phillis Wheatley” as literary figure. The vision of Wheatley that emerged from the publication of her poems would reiterate the portrait of the artist that was circulated in promotional materials and performed by Wheatley herself both in theme and function.

## II.

The portrait of Wheatley that was presented in her first and only published volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*, resonated with a growing emphasis among visual artists on depicting black individuals and echoed the poetic persona that she performed in London. This portrait, based on a painting likely done by Scipio Morehead, an artist of African descent who lived in Boston, was added to the book at the suggestion of Wheatley’s patron, Selina Hastings, Countess of Hunting-

---

<sup>13</sup> Wheatley’s dedication read, “To the Right Honorable the/COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON,/THE FOLLOWING POEMS/Are Most Respectfully /Inscribed./By her much obliged/Very humble,/And devoted Servant,/Phillis Wheatley (“Complete Writings” 4)

don.<sup>14</sup> In its suggested interiority and emotionality, Wheatley's image departed from the conventions of eighteenth-century frontispieces and anticipated images of romantic artists such as Lord Byron and Percy Shelley. *Poems on Various Subjects* was published along with an authentication of her authorship signed by many of Massachusetts's leading figures and by her "master," John Wheatley. This document, addressed "To the PUBLICK" introduced Wheatley as someone recently brought from Africa as an "uncultivated barbarian." Walt Nott notes the contrast between how Wheatley was presented by this document ("uncultivated barbarian") and the *Boston Gazette's* description of her upon her return from London as "the exceptional Poetical Genius" (Nott 1993, 21). Several scholars, including Nott, have pointed to the importance that Wheatley's frontispiece, played in audiences' readings of Wheatley not as "barbarian," but as "Poetical Genius." Seen another way, however, it is not that the frontispiece *replaces* the idea of "uncultivated barbarian" with that of "Poetical Genius"; rather, as this section will suggest, the frontispiece played on the tensions between the two readings of Wheatley—the "barbarity" that some eighteenth-century readers would associate with her Africanness and the "genius" of her poetic achievements—and the two readings reinforced one another. The visual rhetoric of the frontispiece, with its depiction of Wheatley's poetic labor and contemplation, also connected her inner life with the consumer product of the poems, suggesting that her interiority itself was available for consumption.

While only one frontispiece depicting a black African writer predated Wheatley's (that of Ignatius Sancho), there was a longer history of black portraiture in the Atlantic world and Northern Europe. According to Peter Erickson, in portraits of the early modern period, African people often appeared only to help constitute the subject position of their white masters (2009, 24). The figure of the black servant functioned, he argued, as a "literal extension and figurative appendage of the white subject" (2009, 34). There were, however, notable exceptions such as Rembrandt's *Two Africans* (1661), which did not feature white people at all. A 1740 portrait of Francis Williams by an anonymous artist (presumed by Carretta to be colonial) demonstrated many of the conventions of eighteenth-century portraiture. Williams, standing in a library, is dressed as a gentleman, with one hand on an open book that sits on the table in front of him. Also on the table are a globe and writing instruments, which, along with the books and Williams's dress, frame him as a literate and worldly gentleman. Although he looks at the viewer directly,

---

<sup>14</sup> For a comparison between the Wheatley portrait and one representing the Countess of Huntingdon, see Franke (224-27).

there is very little interiority suggested by the portrait.<sup>15</sup> Erickson has noted that beginning in the 1760s in England, there was an increased focus on black men as individuals in works such as Thomas Gainsborough's *Ignatius Sancho* (1768) and Joshua Reynolds's *Study of a Black Man* (c.1770). While Gainsborough's depiction of Sancho resonated with many features of conventional eighteenth-century portraiture, Reynolds's unfinished study demonstrated a decidedly more romantic sensibility. The young man is set against a cloud background and does not meet the viewer's gaze, but looked up and away. His expression is, as Erickson has suggested, "contemplative" and the background gives him an "ethereal, floating quality" (2009, 45). Furthermore, there is a sensuousness to the man and his expression that anticipates what we think of as "romantic" portraits, such as George Sanders's 1807-08 portrait of Lord Byron and Amelia Curran's 1819 watercolor of Percy Shelley.<sup>16</sup> Unlike many other eighteenth-century portraits, viewers were not offered representative items—books, globes, furniture, and so forth—which could be used to interpret this man. Any insight viewers get must be gleaned from their reading of his expression and what they imagine he might be thinking and feeling.

Portraiture was linked to poetic productions through the paratextual element of the frontispiece and through the science of physiognomy. Beginning in the seventeenth century, frontispieces that included an "engraved likeness of the book's author within a masonry frame" became a common feature of many books of poetry (Barchas 1998, 261). As Gerald Egan has argued, these portraits conferred a sense of authority and created an imagined relationship between reader and author. Portraits of poets such as Dryden, Milton, and Pope were highly stylized and contained markers of national identity (which was frequently linked with the classical past) and artistic prowess within a formal frame. Egan noted that "[f]rontispiece portraits in eighteenth-century editions of Milton and Dryden are not so much likenesses of their subjects in life as *representations* of likenesses, visual allusions to memorial statuary and monuments" (Egan 2010, 193). Readers did not necessarily get an accurate representation of what an author looked like, a window into their artistic soul, but rather a representation of a type. The implied relationship between author and reader was one of master and student, with the framing, classical allusions, and formal pose denoting the author's authority. Readers were not asked to identify or sympathize with the author, but to respect him and appreciate the poetic productions of the highly trained specialist.

---

<sup>15</sup> For more on Williams's portrait, see Carretta ("Who Was Francis Williams?" 213, 225)

<sup>16</sup> See Egan (185-205).

To understand the visual rhetoric of Wheatley's frontispiece, readers had to process the both the exterior features, including the frame, which labeled her as "Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley of Boston," her dress, and her racial identity, and the suggested interiority of Wheatley herself. Interpreting the portrait hinged on reading the contrasts and tensions it depicted—exterior/interior, enslaved person/"Poetical Genius," formality/intimacy—a new way of reading, required in part by Wheatley's subject position. In this image, Wheatley, dressed in a manner that would have marked her as a servant, is shown in profile, seated at a table, looking up from the page upon which she is writing, as though caught in an unguarded moment of contemplation. Her chin rests in her hand and her elbow rests casually on the table. The portrait is both formal in its frame and setting, and oddly intimate in the way that it presumes to observe the subject in a moment of reflection. Scholar David Grimsted has argued that the portrait of a black woman writing would have served as a "refutation" of some readers' racial prejudices, while Carretta has suggested that readers' sense of their own authority might have been reinforced in comparison to Wheatley's social position.<sup>17</sup> These effects were not mutually exclusive, however, but instead reiterated the dialogic relationship between binaries of "genius" and "barbarism" that circulated throughout print discussions of Wheatley's work. While the exterior markers pointed to Wheatley's racial identity and status as a slave, her contemplative pose emphasized the presence of an interior poetic "self"; the figure of Wheatley as an author was produced through the unresolved tensions between the two. What readers could "know" about her—that which was communicated through the external features of the portrait—was counterbalanced by the suggestion of an inner life that could only be speculated about, or perhaps, it is suggested, accessed through the poems that follow.

By hinting at her interiority and emotionality, the portrait shared some of the romantic elements of Reynolds's *Study*, but was positioned more fully within a consumer economy. Unlike Reynolds's work, Wheatley's portrait was produced to be reproducible, to be engraved and reprinted as the frontispiece for her *Poems*. These engraved likenesses of Wheatley in the act of writing (presumably the poems that follow) made

---

<sup>17</sup> See Grimsted (396) and Carretta ("Property of Artist" 136). In his comparison of Wheatley's portrait to those of Equiano and Sancho, Vincent Carretta focuses on the "modest" nature of the portrait's content and form and impact such modesty has on readers: "The frontispiece displays the aspiring poet very modestly dressed as a domestic servant or slave, depicted in a contemplative pose. Her social status is clearly inferior to that of most of her likely readers, she stares upward, to the viewer's left, as if hoping for inspiration for the pen she holds. The book on the table before her may be intended to represent her own poems, as well as to indicate that her literacy enables her to have been influenced by earlier writers. The artistic quality of her frontispiece is as modest as her status" (Carretta 136).



her inner life, her thinking, at least partially available for consumption. The portrait is, for Grimsted “an icon of the respectable, literary, and thoughtful black” (1989, 396) that challenged racist assumptions about black intelligence and interiority (1989, 396-97). It is crucial to recognize, however, that even as it granted interiority, this image of Wheatley conflated her interiority with the material product of the book, transforming that interiority into a consumer product. Like Wheatley’s public compositions and performances and the advertisements of her work, the frontispiece, which asked viewers not just to “read” symbolic objects, but to imagine the subject’s intellectual life, positioned viewers/readers within a complex economy wherein they were coproducing Wheatley even as they functioned as consumers of her and her work.

The frontispiece to Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects* has been read as resolving, or at least mediating between, the conflicting perspectives on the black African artist that circulated around Wheatley and her work. Yet, as with her other poetic performances, Wheatley as artist emerged out of the dynamic tensions between civilization and “barbarism,” servant and artist, Enlightenment imitator and romantic “genius.” This authorial image shared some similarities with other eighteenth-century authorial portraits, but also resonated with images of black African individuals and looked forward to the frontispieces that would accompany the definitive nineteenth-century editions of Shelley and Byron. Later versions of the frontispiece, such as that which accompanied Odell’s *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (1834) would resolve some of these tensions, portraying Wheatley in an unabashedly romantic way. The masonry frontispiece was removed and the text within it was moved to below the portrait. Wheatley’s name was written in a cursive font, as though to represent the author’s own signature and give a different, more personal kind of authentication to the work that followed than that originally provided by Boston dignitaries. Although her dress still communicated her social position, the written statement that she is “servant to Mr. John Wheatley” was given second billing to her authorial “signature.” This was a portrait characterized by blurred boundaries—between Wheatley and her poetry and between the poet and the reader—created by the removal of the frame that contained the image of the artist, and the shift in style from the rigid lines of steel or copper engraving to the softer and more nuanced contrasts of stipple engraving. The frontispiece, like Odell’s biography, served to make Wheatley accessible to the reader. In the poems themselves, however, the poet worked to maintain a strategic distance from the reader, a space for productivity in which she offered only pieces of her “self” to the reader/viewer.

## III.

The third portrait of Phillis Wheatley was the one that she herself created through her poetry, a poetic persona that was at times emotionally and spatially removed from the reader of the poem. She expressed little of her own emotional life in her poems, scholars have argued, because she “remained marginal” to those for whom she wrote her elegies (Cavitch 2007, 187) or because she was prevented from speaking the truth of her experiences. Wilcox has argued that “[n]ot only did Wheatley’s dependence on white patrons who countenanced slavery make it impossible for her to write unambiguously about her experience of oppression, but the transatlantic promotion of her poetry deliberately directed readers away from the interpretive frame of her servitude” (1999, 8). Put in the language of economic exchange, Wheatley “paid for her public voice,” according to Wilcox, “with her power to represent on the printed page her racialized experience of enslavement” (1999, 2). Such a reading of Wheatley and her work assumes that it was the poet’s desire to narrate her experiences in print, to offer up her inner life and experiences of slavery to the reader, and that she was prevented from doing so by both her white patrons and the market forces of the transatlantic book trade. The previous sections have argued that both Wheatley’s patrons and the literary culture in which she worked were invested in promoting her work as an extension of her “self”—albeit a self that was produced and understood through mutually reinforcing discourses of the black artist not through the exercise of individual artistic agency. In this context, we might question the extent to which Wheatley herself saw her poetry as a means of expressing her inner life. We might then read the lack of interiority in her work as an attempt to maintain a strategic distance so as not to make her own thoughts and emotions fully available for public consumption. What emerges instead in Wheatley’s elegies is a vision of the poet as serving the emotional needs of others in an almost pastoral manner that shielded her own emotions and differed from the economic model offered by her promoters.<sup>18</sup> In several of her non-elegiac writings, readers were presented with a slightly different view of poetic service and a poetic persona that was spatially removed from the reader’s view. Through a fusion of Christian and romantic imagery, the poet was able to ascend beyond the material plane and create, at least temporarily, new worlds in which to dwell. This rhetoric of ascent reinforced the strategic distance between poet and reader, challenging the notion that she was “accessible” to readers and available for public consumption.<sup>19</sup>

Wheatley’s elegiac writings, which account for about one-third of her poetic productions, depended, in large part, on the emotional input of

---

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the “clerical” elements of Wheatley’s poetry, see Cavitch 187-88.

the families of the deceased and the role of the poet within these writings was to both translate their grief into art and offer them some kind of consolation. Whether or not she knew the deceased or the grieving families personally, Wheatley used their situation and what she imagined to be their emotions as the raw materials of her poetry to appeal to a readership that appreciated the established genre of the elegy and showed increasing desire for emotionality and interiority on the part of the poet. As with all elegies, the poet served as a vehicle for the expression of others' loss and filled an almost pastoral role, lecturing the living about their response to this loss. This process, according to Max Cavitch, was a response to the "ungrievable" losses that Wheatley herself suffered. "Not recognized as a mourner, perhaps even by herself," he argued, "Wheatley set about acquiring the means of recognizing and managing the mourning of others" (Cavitch 2007, 187). The poet functioned as a conduit between mourners and readers for the expression of grief and promoted the practice of emotional restraint to the mourners themselves. An example of this kind of call for restraint occurs in "On the Death of a Young Lady Five Years of Age:"

Why then fond parents, why these fruitless groans?  
 Restrain your tears, and cease your plaintive moans.  
 Freed from a world of sin, and snares, and pain,  
 Why would you wish your daughter back again?  
 No-bow resign'd. Let hope your grief control.  
 And check the rising tumult of the soul. (*Complete Writings*, 17, ll. 23-28)<sup>20</sup>

The wording here blended stoic self-control and resignation with the Christian view of death as a release from the sinful world. Even as it asserted that these parents should find comfort in God, Wheatley's poem affirmed that the natural reaction of the parents is one of tumultuous grief. Similar sentiments were expressed in poems such as "On the Death of a Young Gentleman," "To a Lady on the Death of Her Husband," and "To a Lady and Her Children on the Death of Her Son, and their Brother." Unchecked grief, it was implied, is destructive, while grief properly channeled through the voice of the poet could become the building blocks of artistic expression and Christian consolation. The tone and content of these poems subtly changed the poetic economy represented by Wheatley's promoters; the poet served the needs of others, but by providing that service, took a secondary role as facilitator and achieved a kind of strategic distance from the poems themselves, trading on emotionality and interiority, but keeping her own emotions and interior life away from the poems meant for a mass audience.

Wheatley's "Niobe in Distress for Her Children, Slain by Apollo," generally considered to be an epyllion, can also be read as a type of

elegy, for a classical rather than contemporary mother who has lost her children. Thematically, this poem shared some similarities with Wheatley's earlier elegies, reproaching Niobe for emotional excess even as it showed that excess as material that the poet could use. Niobe was, to use the language of the time, overly fond of her children, and the poem suggested "Thou had'st far the happier mother prov'd/ If these fair offspring had been less beloved" (54, ll. 31-2). Her pride caused her to demand sacrifices for herself and her children, instead of for Latona (Leto, mother of Apollo and Aphrodite). The punishment for Niobe's actions was the loss of all of her children, who were, as the title suggests, killed by Apollo. In Wheatley's version of the story, the beauty and charm of Niobe's children was emphasized and she too was "beautiful in woe" (53, ll. 174-5). Niobe's emotionality was both the cause of her downfall and also the source of artistic inspiration. While in Ovid's original, Niobe was transformed into a statue, Wheatley's version ended with the still human Niobe clutching her dying daughter to her breast and crying out for fate to spare her one child. This cry was echoed back to her, thus perpetuating her emotional pleas rather than silencing them. While some "other hand" added lines to the poem to make it align with Ovid's original, that which we know to be Wheatley's ended with Niobe's "streaming eyes" and echoing pleas—maternal grief transformed into art rather than stone. Here as with Wheatley's more conventional elegies, the poet was only present as a vehicle for someone else's emotional expression. While readers can and do speculate about her personal relationship as an enslaved woman to the topic of familial separation and loss, it is the reader who produces such meaning. In the poems published in her first volume, Wheatley did not make her emotions available to the public, but maintained a kind of strategic distance.

Her later elegy to Samuel Cooper, which was to be published as part of her second volume of poetry, marked a departure from her earlier work in that it allowed readers to share in the experience of grief without rebuke, transformed the process of grieving into poetic art, and offered a rare glimpse of the poet's own emotions. It demonstrates a much more romantic sensibility, replete with emotionality and an extended reference to the poetic consciousness. However, the poem remained focused on expressing the grief of all of those who were impacted by Cooper. The opening of the poem reads:

O THOU whose exit wraps in boundless woe,  
 For Thee the tears of various Nations flow:  
 For Thee the floods of virtuous sorrows rise  
 From the full heart and burst from streaming eyes. (97,  
 ll. 1-4)

Here we have not the language of restraint, but the language of emotional excess—"boundless woe," "floods of virtuous sorrows," "full heart. . .[and] streaming eyes." We also get a more personal picture of the deceased than we do of previous subjects; Cooper was loved by his wife and apparently an inspired writer: "Thy every sentence was with grace inspir'd/ And every period with devotion fir'd" (97, ll. 19-20).

Rather than trying to check the grief of its audience, the poem encouraged and reflected that grief. After its description of Cooper, the poem noted that his wife grieved for him, the "gay" and the "sober" respected him, and the "Sons of Learning" were influenced by him. Moving outward from his immediate acquaintances, the poem asserted that Cooper's "Country mourns th' Afflicting Hand divine/ That now forbids thy radiant lamp to shine" (97, ll. 23-4). Cooper, "a resplendent source of light," was compared to the sun who "chear'd our night of gloom" (98, ll. 25-6). Then the poem moved to the grief felt by Cooper's church, who will keep his memory alive. And finally, the poem ended with a discussion of the poet's own grief, which does not detail her feelings as unique, but as connected to this larger community of mourners:

The hapless Muse, her loss in COOPER mourns,  
And as she sits, she writes, and weeps, by turns;  
A Friend sincere, whose mild indulgent grace  
Encourag'd oft, and oft approv'd her lays. (98, ll. 41-4)

This poem is significant because it represents one of the only mentions of personal loss among the elegies that Wheatley produced. Elsewhere described as "Afric's muse," here Wheatley described herself as a "hapless Muse," who alternates between writing and weeping. Artistic production and the expression of emotion are here inextricably linked, yet the grief that the poet felt part of a larger communal experience. Moreover, the speaking subject here is that of writer/poet, which still maintained a slight sense of distance between the reader and Wheatley herself.

In addition to the emotional distance created in her elegies, Wheatley invoked a sense of spatial distance between the poet consciousness and the material world of the reader in several of her poems in which the poet is framed as the servant of God and the servant of imagination or "Fancy." Works such as "Thoughts on the Works of Providence" and "On Imagination" portray God and imagination as the "monarch of the earth and skies" (26 ll. 2) and "the imperial queen" (36 ll.1), and present the poet as serving these sovereign powers. Imagination is framed as wielding a "sceptre o'er the realms of thought" (37 ll. 36) and all, including the poet, bow before her command. In these works, part of the poetic service involves transcending the earthly plane and imagining new possibilities in a celestial or heavenly realm. "Thoughts on the Works of Providence" opens with such a scene of ascent: "ARISE, my soul, on

wings enraptur'd, rise/To praise the monarch of earth and skies" (26 ll. 1-2). The poet's contemplation of providence was described as an "arduous flight," which was guided by the "Celestial muse" (26 ll. 9-10). Similar themes are discussed in "On Imagination," in which the poet and her imagination were depicted as "soaring through the air" to find "Th' empyreal palace of the thund'ring God" (36 ll. 15-16). The poet and her imagination were borne upwards:

We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,  
And leave the rolling universe behind;  
From star to star the mental optics rove,  
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.  
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,  
Or with new worlds amaze th' unburdened soul. (36 ll.  
17-22)

Like her meditation on "Providence," this passage made use of a "poetics of ascent" (a phrase I borrow from John Shields), in which the poetic mind was elevated above every day concerns.<sup>21</sup> The reference to optics has been described by May as an engagement of scientific discourse, but the more dominant theme seems to be the blending of the religious and secular sublime (52-55). The poetic mind, lifted by imagination, can "surpass the wind" and "leave the rolling universe behind." During this poetic ascent, the poet can "in one view. . .grasp the mighty whole" and contemplate "new worlds" which "amaze" and expand the soul. Yet it is also important to note that this elevation of the poet creates a gap between the poet and the reader, who cannot completely share in this transcendent experience and whose perspective on the "mighty whole" is only partial, and mediated by the poet herself. The perspective of the reader is that of one who looks up from the ground.

Even as the poet is able to climb to new heights and imagine alternative possibilities, this perspective is ultimately fraught with images of temporality and of the impossibility of remaining in a world of the mind's creation. "On Imagination" ends on a melancholy note:

But I reluctant leave the pleasing views  
Which Fancy dresses to delight the *Muse*;  
*Winter* austere forbids me to aspire,  
And northern tempests damp the rising fire;  
They chill the tides of *Fancy's* flowing sea,  
Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay. (68, ll. 48-  
53)

---

<sup>21</sup> Shields (189-209), performs a close reading of the "poetics of ascent" within the context of the literary sublime.

The poet cannot remain in this imaginative space and the poem must “cease.” According to John Shields, this poem “foreshadow[ed] Keats” (“Phyllis Wheatley’s Struggle,” 256), and while he did not explain the connection, the ending of Wheatley’s poem does express sentiments similar to those of “Ode to a Nightingale.” Keats’s “Ode” expressed a similar reluctance to leave the poetic world he has created: “Forlorn! the very word is like a bell/ To toll me back from thee to my sole self!/Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well/ As she is famed to do, deceiving elf” (*Complete Poems*, 348, ll.71-4). For Wheatley, abandoning her poetic world and returning to the material one would have been even more poignant, as she was returning to a world that was marked by racism and slavery. Returning to the world of the reader also necessitated an end to the poem, an end to the imaginative flight. But the art, the poetic rendering of the journey, remains, documenting the brief moment in which the poet was able to rise above the material plane and dwell in a world of her own making.

This kind of transcendence is something that artists can share with one another, suggested Wheatley in “To S.M., a young *African* Painter, on seeing his Works,” a poem dedicated to Scipio Morehead. In this poem, Wheatley imagined she and Morehead having a kind of visionary experience, during which she counsels him to look to Christian rather than classical sources:

On what seraphic pinions shall we move,  
 And view the landscapes in the realms above?  
 There shall thy tongue in heav’nly murmurs flow,  
 And there my muse with heav’nly transport glow,  
 No more to tell of *Damon’s* tender sighs,  
 Or rising radiance of *Aurora’s* eyes,  
 For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,  
 And purer language on th’ ethereal plain. (60 ll. 25-32)

Here Christian language (“seraphic pinions” and “heav’nly murmurs”) was fused with a romantic notion of artists as visionaries who can transport themselves to a higher plane of existence in order to gain new insight and perspective on the world. The poet advocated this kind of transcendence for Morehead, because her muse will help him focus on Christian rather than classical materials (she alluded to the story of Damon and Pythias). As with several of her other imaginative poems, the poet provided a service to someone else, but here there is an element of this service in which the reader cannot fully share. Wheatley’s predominantly white readers were kept at a distance from Morehead and the poet, neither being addressed directly nor able to access the world of the “ethereal plain.”

Even in our own historical moment there remains a tendency to disallow the black artist the option of maintaining a critical distance from her or his work. They are expected to speak the “truth” of themselves (which is often understood as the truth of their race) in their work. This was all the more true for black artists living and working in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. What has been seen as a lack of sympathy or personality in Wheatley’s work can also be read as a resistance to this economy wherein she herself must be offered to the public as a spectacle to be consumed and in part, produced, by others. This is not to say that she did not cultivate an authorial persona, but rather that the persona she created was held somewhat aloof from the reader while nonetheless working in an emotional register. Her elegiac writings worked with the emotions of others (people she knew and classical figures), translating familial grief into public occasions, a process that dovetailed with presentations of her poetry as a kind of service to others. In several of her other works, readers were placed in the role of onlookers, watching from below as the poet experiences moments of romantic transcendence. As readers, we are reminded that there are things that we cannot know, and of how dependent we are on the poet’s narration for our understanding. Thus, the poetry functioned, in part, to counteract the other portrayals of Wheatley that presented her physical being and her interiority as already available for reader consumption. While Pope’s challenge was to create connections between his life and work, Wheatley sought in her poetry to renegotiate the terms by which her life and work were understood.

\*\*\*\*

Wheatley as artist was marketed through the interplay of competing perspectives of the black artist that were co-created and consumed by the reading public. Writing from within this literary and cultural milieu, Wheatley worked to create within her writing a space of productivity in which readers were both dependent on her authorial perspective and limited in their access to her poetic “self.” She adopted a pastoral tone, infused with Christian and romantic discourse, so as to make the authorial persona of servant-poet into a mode of agency that would be strategically useful to her and allow her to renegotiate the connections that were made between her lived experiences and poetic productions. She challenged the framing of her as “servant to Mr. John Wheatley” and the “Very humble [a]nd devoted servant” of the Countess of Huntingdon by presenting herself someone who served many—the muse, the Christian God, imagination, the grieving, and a fellow black artist—and offered that service on her own terms. Given her position as an enslaved woman, drawing on rhetorics of poetry as service was not unproblematic, but it allowed her to engage the ways in which she was marketed to and pro-



duced by eighteenth-century readers. In the context of binaries of genius and “barbarity,” imitation and originality, artist and commodity, using service as a metaphor for poetic production helped her carve out a kind of third space from which to offer her poems and speak a “truth” about herself that was not already overdetermined by reader assumptions about black Africans and the creation of art.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barchas, Janine. “Prefiguring Genre: Frontispiece Portraits from *Gulliver’s Travels* to *Millennium Hall*.” *Studies in the Novel* 30 (1998): 260-86.
- Bennett, Paula. “Phillis Wheatley’s Vocation and the Paradox of the ‘Afric Muse.’” *PMLA* 113.1 (1998): 64-76.
- Butterworth, Hezekiah. “How Longfellow Wrote His Best-Known Poems.” *The Ladies Home Journal* 8.1 (1895): 10. American Periodicals Series Online.
- Carretta, Vincent. *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.
- . “‘Property of Author’: Olaudah Equiano’s Place in the History of the Book.” In *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*. Ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001. 130-150.
- . “Who Was Francis Williams.” *Early American Literature* 38.2 (2003): 213-37.
- Cavitch, Max. *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Chartier, Roger. *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the 14th and 18th Centuries*. Trans. Lydia Cochrane. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994. 25-60.
- Cima, Gay Gibson. “Black and Unmarked: Phillis Wheatley, Mercy Otis Warren, and the Limits of Strategic Anonymity.” *Theatre Journal* 52.4 (2000): 465-495.
- Deutsch, Helen. “The ‘Truest Copies’ and the ‘Mean Original’: Pope, Deformity, and the Poetics of Self-Exposure.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27.1 (1993): 1-26.
- Egan, Gerald. “Radical Moral Authority and Desire: The Image of the Male Romantic Poet in Frontispiece Portraits of Byron and Shelley.” *The Eighteenth Century* 50.2-3 (2010): 185-205.

- Erickson, Peter. "Invisibility Speaks: Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Portraiture." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9.1 (2009): 23-61.
- Erikkila, Betsy. "Phillis Wheatley and the Black American Revolution." In *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*. Ed. Frank Shuffleton. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 225-240.
- . "Revolutionary Women." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6 (1987): 189-223.
- Franke, Astrid. "Phillis Wheatley, Melancholy Muse." *New England Quarterly* 77.2 (2004): 224-51.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and Nellie McKay. "From Phillis Wheatley to Toni Morrison: The Flowering of African American Literature." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 14 (1996-1997): 95-100.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Grimsted, David. "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Length'ned Chain,' and 'Knitted Heart.'" *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*. Ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1989. 338-444.
- Haynes, Christine. "Reassessing 'Genius' in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline." *Book History* 8 (2005): 287-320.
- Ingrassia, Catherine. *Authors, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Isani, Mukhta Ali. "The British Reception of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*." *Journal of Negro History* 66 (1981): 144-49.
- . "The Contemporaneous Reception of Phillis Wheatley: Newspaper and Magazine Notices During the Years of Fame, 1765-1774." *The Journal of Negro History* 85.4 (2000): 260-273.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*. Ed.
- Merrill D. Peterson. New York: Penguin, 1975.
- Keats, John. "Ode to a Nightingale." In *John Keats: The Complete Poems*. Edited by John Barnard. London; New York: Penguin, 1973. 346-48.
- Marren, Susan. "Between Slavery and Freedom: The Transgressive Self in Olaudah Equiano's Autobiography" *PMLA* 108.1 (1993): 94-105.

- Mason, Julian D., Jr. Introduction. *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*. Rev. and enlarged ed. Ed. Mason. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 1-22.
- May, Cedrick. *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- Odell, Margaretta Matilda. *Memoirs and Poems of Phillis Wheatley, a Native African and a Slave*, Dedicated to the Friends of the Africans. Boston: Geo. W. Light: 1834.
- Parton, James. "Antipathy to the Negro." *North American Review* 127.265 (1878): 476-492.
- Reising, Russell J. "Trafficking in White: Phillis Wheatley's Semiotics of Racial Representation." *Genre* 22 (1989): 231-61.
- Richardson, Prof. C.F. "Some Early American Poets." *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 234 (1888): 34. American Periodicals Series Online.
- Robinson, William H. *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings*. New York: Garland, 1984.
- . *Phillis Wheatley in the Black Beginnings*. Detroit: Broadside, 1975.
- Rose, Mark. "The Author as Proprietor: Donaldson v. Becket and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship." *Representations* 23 (1988): 51-85.
- . *Owners and Authors: The Invention of Copyright*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- Shields, John C. *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010.
- . "Phillis Wheatley and the Sublime." *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley*. Ed. William H. Robinson. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982. 189-205.
- . "Phillis Wheatley's Subversive Pastoral" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27.4 (1994): 631-647.
- . "Phillis Wheatley's Use of Classicism" *American Literature* 52.1 (1980): 97-111.
- Slauter, Eric. "Neoclassical Culture in a Society with Slaves: Race and Rights in the Age of Wheatley." *Early American Studies* 2.1 (2004): 81-122.
- Smith, Cynthia T. "'To Maecenas': Phillis Wheatley's Invocation of an Idealized

Reader.” *Black American Literature Forum* 23.3 (1989), 579-592.

Thomas, Helen. *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Thorn, Jennifer. “‘All Beautiful in Woe’: Gender, Nation, and Phillis Wheatley’s ‘Niobe.’” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 37 (2008): 233-58.

Thurman, Wallace. “Negro Poets and their Poetry.” *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life* 67.5 (1928): 555-561. American Periodicals Series Online.

Waldstreicher, David. “The Wheatleyan Moment.” *Early American Studies* 9.3 (2011): 522-51.

Watson, Marsha. “Phillis Wheatley: A Classic Case.” *Early American Literature* 31.2 (1996): 103-132.

Wheatley, Phillis, *Complete Writings*. Ed. Vincent Carretta. Penguin Classics. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

Wilcox, Kirsten. “The Body into Print: Marketing Phillis Wheatley.” *American Literature* 71.1 (1999): 1-29.

Woodmansee, Martha. “Genius and the Copyright.” In *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 35-56.

# Ethnic Studies Review Journal Information

## Guidelines for Submitting Manuscripts

ESR uses a policy of blind peer review. All papers are read by at least two reviewers who are experts in the area. Manuscripts must not have been published previously or be under consideration by other publications. ESR seeks manuscripts of 7500 words or less, inclusive of notes and works cited. Endnotes rather than footnotes should be utilized, although these should be kept to a minimum. Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style, double space all text, and use Times New Roman 12 point font. Submissions must include a 200 word abstract, 200 word author biography, and 6-8 key words in order of importance.

Manuscripts should be sent as attachments in Word, pdf, or rtf format to [ESR@ethnicstudies.org](mailto:ESR@ethnicstudies.org).

## Other Correspondence

Other inquiries and correspondences, such as back titles or advertising, should be directed to the National Office:

National Association of Ethnic Studies  
c/o Colorado State University  
Department of Ethnic Studies  
1790 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1790  
Email: [NAES@ethnicstudies.org](mailto:NAES@ethnicstudies.org)

## Subscriptions

Membership in the NAES includes ESR and The Ethnic Reporter newsletter, published in the Fall and Spring. Annual membership dues are based on the following income chart: Up to \$24,000: \$35, \$24,001 - \$36,000: \$45, \$36,001 - \$48,000: \$55, \$48,001 - \$60,000: \$65, \$60,001 - \$80,000: \$75, \$80,001 and above: \$85, Institution/Library: \$65, Patron: \$150, Life Membership: \$500, Associate Members (students/retirees): Above scale up to maximum of \$40.

