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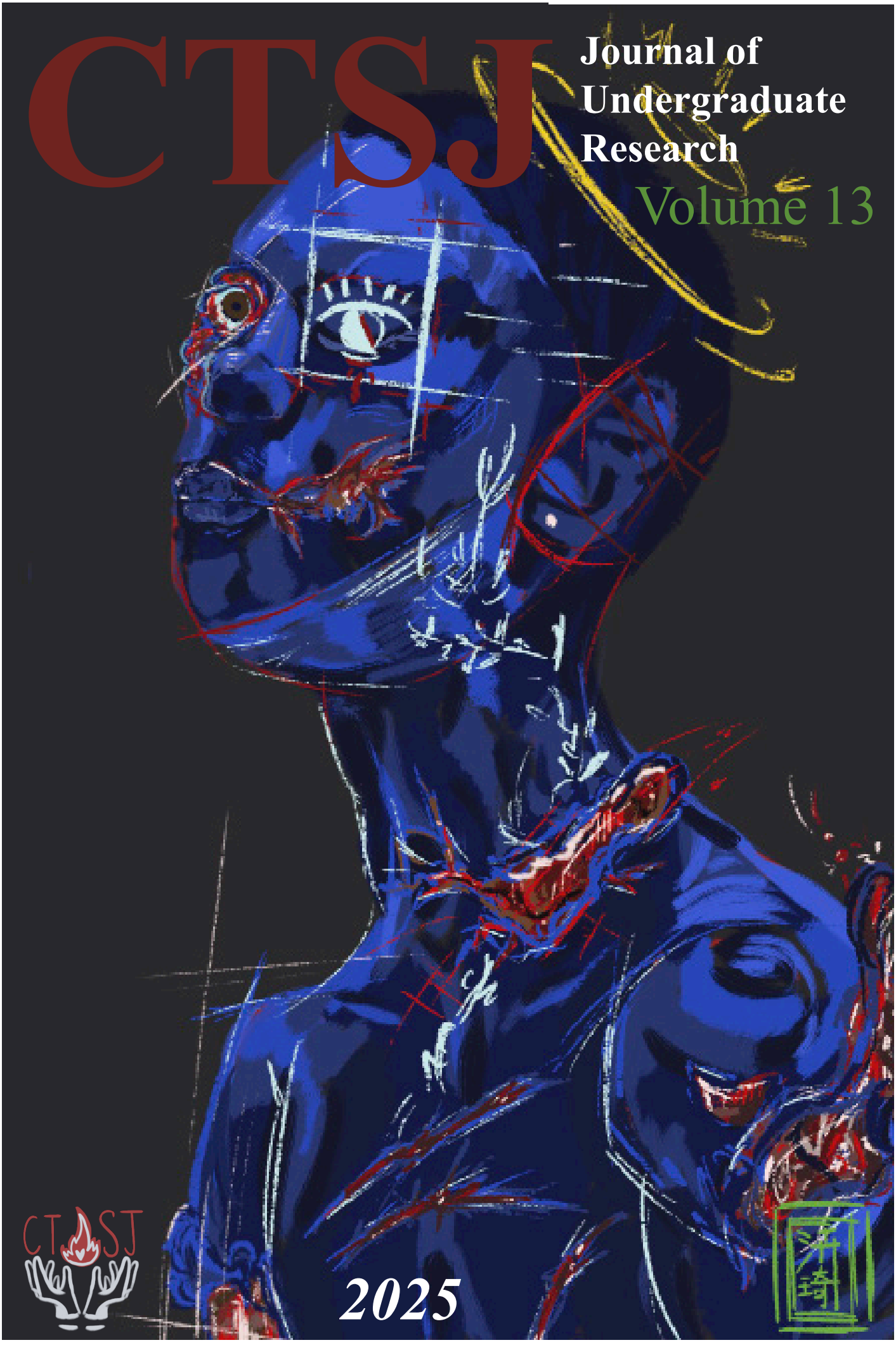

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Critical Theory & Social Justice
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Saint George

Digital Painting, 2024

Levi Lee

Saint George is a venerated saint and widely accepted not only among traditional Christian texts, but Muslim ones too. This rendition of Saint George portrays the different ways he is martyred in various regions. These wounds aim to reappropriate his legacy and emphasise the resilience of all oppressed peoples, a feature found in variations of Saint George's stories told in colonised areas and amongst previously enslaved populations.

Introduction to Volume 13

By The Editorial Board

The Critical Theory and Social Justice: Journal of Undergraduate Research seeks to uplift the voices of emerging scholars whose engagement with both theoretical frameworks and practical applications allows us to rethink and reimagine our world. Through their work in this volume and beyond, these students act as a powerful force for driving change by demonstrating how we can and must confront the violence embedded within our widespread ideologies and social systems. Our publication analyzes a variety of issues — capitalism and gender, race and sexuality, both past and present, in fiction and real life. Nevertheless, all are grounded in the belief that our relations with each other, the world, and ourselves must be questioned in order to intervene in the reproduction of injustice.

The creation and publication of this volume correspond with the second Trump administration's attack on the United States Department of Education — an attack inherently against the mission of our journal. The amazing insights put forth by the contributors to our journal could not be possible without the education and support we have received — opportunities that everyone deserves to have to their fullest potential, regardless of their identity. Education in the U.S. has been a contested issue in the past, and it will continue to face challenges in the future; however, we urge readers to consider what interventions could be possible for protecting students with marginalized identities, alongside the other openings presented here in the multilayered discourse and activism against oppression both in the U.S. and internationally. Thank you for taking a moment to pause and consider the ideas developed within these pages as a way of honoring the power of education in fostering students' potential.

Nevertheless, this same education is complicit in the structures that perpetuate genocide in Gaza, where Palestinians are deprived of more than just their own education, but their rights and lives. We hold them in our hearts and minds as we put together this volume in the colors of the Palestinian flag, and present the critical discourse applied within these pages to encourage further discourse against oppression. Our work — not just as scholars, but as people with the power to take action and fight for political change — will never be over while such violence still takes place.

Amid the intense ideological and physical struggles occurring both domestically and abroad, we must acknowledge and thank the amazing educators that have helped make our team possible and continue to give us hope. We particularly would like to thank our faculty advisor, Professor Malek Moazzam-Doulat, for his insights, guidance, and humor throughout the publication process. We also want to extend our gratitude to him and the other members of the Department of Critical Theory and Social Justice at Occidental College for informing our search for knowledge and guiding us in developing our understanding of justice. Finally, thank you to the Editorial Boards' graduating seniors: Aminah Gassama, Ananda Ravdandash, Chloe Ford, Ella Armstrong, Karina Smith, Mollie Barnes, and Sophia Merrill. Your commitment to social justice is truly inspiring and we gladly celebrate your invaluable contributions and achievements. We are grateful for your leadership in demonstrating how to start these discussions in the classroom, take them into the field, and carry them into the future, exemplifying how critical reflection can bring about meaningful change.

Contributors

Editorial Board

Aminah Gassama

Ananda Ravdandash

Chloe Ford

Eliza Bodden

Ella Armstrong

Karina Smith

Levi Lee

MJ Jones

Mollie Barnes

Sophia Merrill

Tessa Calado

Vivian Ko

Faculty Advisor

Malek Moazzam-Doulat

Contact Information

Email:
ctsj-journal@oxy.edu

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"Life in Plastic, It's Fantastic": Commodity Feminism and the Illusion of Activism in *Barbie* (2023)

Amaya Boulanger | Smith College

ABSTRACT: The 2023 *Barbie* movie was a defining moment in media and culture, generating widespread discourse and breaking industry records. This paper critically examines *Barbie* through the theoretical framework of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's concept of the "culture industry" as presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[1] While the film appears to engage with feminist and anti-capitalist themes, its positioning within capitalist structures complicates its ideological stance. This paper argues that the film effectively performs anti-capitalism and anti-patriarchy on behalf of its viewers, allowing them to consume its message without actively challenging the systems around them. Furthermore, *Barbie* reinforces gender essentialism and the homogenization of culture by promoting a narrow definition of individuality. Finally, the paper argues that the film masquerades as a subversion of the culture industry while effectively neutralizing any critique, thereby maintaining the hegemony of the culture industry.

Barbie was, without a doubt, the defining "culture industry" production of 2023. It broke countless industry records, including being the highest-grossing global opening for a female-directed film.[2] In the months leading up to the release, predictions, memes, and general discourse dominated the internet, engaging mostly teens and young adults. *Barbie* completely captivated global consumers, even getting attention–albeit negative–from right-wing icons Ben Shapiro and Tucker Carlson.[3] However, even disregarding the viewers who may lack a measure of media literacy, the true ideologies behind the seemingly progressive *Barbie* movie are difficult to pin down. As one *New York Times* subtitle put it: "Some critics viewed the highly-anticipated movie as satirically capitalistic, while others saw it as capitalistically satirical."[4] The reviews are emphatic on both sides, which raises the question of what *Barbie* actually is. Is it a postmodern work of art? Is it a two-hour Mattel advertisement that promotes

[1] Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 1944. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.
[2] Mendez, Malia. 2023. "'Barbie' Streaming: Records Broken at Box Office." *Los Angeles Times*. September 12, 2023.
[3] Shapiro, Ben. 2023. "Ben Shapiro DESTROYS the Barbie Movie for 43 Minutes." *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynU-wVdesr0.
[4] Jacobs, Julia. 2023. "'Barbie' Reviews Are In: Slickly Subversive or Inescapably Corporate?" *The New York Times*, 19 July 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/19/arts/barbie-movie-reviews.html.

complacent consumerism? Or, as many people seem to think, is it a poignant work of feminist criticism? With themes of corporate greed, consumerism, gender, being, and mortality, *Barbie* is ripe for theoretical analysis.

To understand the many moving parts of the film, I want to consider Horkheimer and Adorno's conceptualization of the "culture industry" from their 1944 book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* On a basic level, the culture industry can be defined as the constellation of media and entertainment companies that are the driving producers of what we might consider "art." How the culture industry operates, however, is another matter: Horkheimer and Adorno's Marxist approach contends that Western society has reached a point at which the production of all mass art – television, film, and radio – can be traced back to the simple generation of capital; that media can no longer exist separately from the capitalist system in which it is situated.[5]Furthermore, the culture industry necessitates a relationship of control over its consumers, where the promise of entertainment binds consumers in mindless acceptance of the systems, ideas, relationships, and characters presented in the media.

Barbie, then, is one such product of the culture industry. The high-budget production by Warner Bros. with unlimited access to the best technology, costumes, actors, and creative minds makes it the epitome of the culture industry, at least from a technological standpoint. Nearly 80 years after Horkheimer and Adorno critiqued the then-emerging popular culture, *Barbie* seems to be a perfect fulfillment of their fears – in all but one area. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Horkheimer and Adorno gesture towards a symptom of culture industry media consumption being a "suppression of happiness," primarily illustrated through a metaphor of sexual desire and subsequent deferment of pleasure. In this essay, I will first be using *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a framework to dissect the particular case of *Barbie* as a product of the culture industry. Then, I will examine how, under the guise of promoting individuality, it suppresses happiness by distracting viewers from desiring true liberation from patriarchal systems and the gender binary.

From the outset of the film, *Barbie* disarms viewers through the mechanisms of pure entertainment. The premise of culture industry media permeates the film down to the genre as comedy. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Horkheimer and Adorno write, "the spectator must need no thoughts of his own: the product prescribes each reaction, not through any actual

[5] Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 1944. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.

coherence–which collapses once exposed to thought–but through signals."[6] The comedic moments of *Barbie* come from precisely this kind of signaling. One such moment is after the dance party where Barbie's existential crisis begins. Ken asks to stay over because they're "boyfriend girlfriend," and Barbie counters with, "To do what?" Ken responds, "I'm actually not sure."[7] Of course, the joke here is that Barbie dolls don't have genitals, but what makes the audience laugh at this moment is not the fact that dolls don't know about sex, but the long pause and awkward smiles: the signals that it is *supposed* to be a joke. Thus, the reaction of the audience is both anticipated *and fabricated* by the filmmakers. These prescribed reactions to culture industry media, however, are not unique to Barbie. What *is* unique is the film's blatant adherence to the mechanisms of mindless consumption.

The film further enables thoughtless viewing by presenting a false replication of reality. Barbie doubles as a comedy and fantasy film, but even its fantastical elements support this false replication of reality. Horkheimer and Adorno write, "the more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema."[8] The film industry has long had the technology to capture empirical objects; *Barbie* demonstrates that this duplication of reality is now done through the narrative itself. In the film's universe, there are two worlds: "Barbieland" and "The Real World." In the beginning, Barbie believes Barbieland is the only reality, but in traveling to The Real World, she learns that it had just been a false matriarchal reproduction. In The Real World, Ken discovers the power of patriarchy, Barbie gets sexually harassed, and there is absolutely no "girl power" at the construction site. Los Angeles, California, is the geographical choice of representation of the real world, where some of its worst qualities are condensed into a few hours of Barbie's life and a few minutes on screen. This world, in contrast with Barbieland, is recognizable to the viewers; it feels like an extension of *our* real world. The contrast between the two in-film worlds, then, is the mechanism of making the viewer believe that "The Real World" is the real world. The irony in this is that The Real World, despite its titular conviction, is *not* the real world. The culture industry, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, "trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality. The

[6] Leitch, Vincent B., et al. 2018. "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY, 2018, pp. 1,039.
[7] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 14:45.
[8] Leitch, Vincent B., et al. 2018. "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY, 2018, pp. 1,036.

withering of imagination need not be traced back to psychological mechanisms. The products themselves, especially the most characteristic, the sound film, cripple those faculties through their objective makeup."[9] Of course, patriarchy exists in the real world, but it is significantly exaggerated in the film. Through this false replication of patriarchy and its systems, the viewers don't have to see the problems at work themselves, let alone think deeply about them. Thus, we blindly accept the representation handed to us, where "our imagination withers" alongside our ability to act on these problems.

The problem, then, is that viewers are encouraged to believe watching the *Barbie* film is enough to combat the problems it depicts. This "withering of imagination" from the false reproduction of reality aligns with Mark Fisher's evaluation of the 2008 Disney/Pixar film *WALL-E.* The *WALL-E* narrative implies that the physical destruction of the earth and depreciation of human minds to a vegetative state has come about at the fault of consumer capitalism and a mega-corporation called "Buy n Large." One wouldn't have to look hard for the anti-capitalist message in the film, but Fisher argues that the viewers don't have to engage fully with the message to watch or enjoy the film. Here, "subjugation no longer takes the form of a subordination to an extrinsic spectacle, but rather invites us to interact and participate."[10] The viewer may understand that the destruction depicted in the film is a real potential outcome of our capitalist systems, but the thinking ends there: "the film performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity."[11] The message, then, is null: it spurs no action. The same goes for *Barbie*. We see our own subjugation through the replication of reality, but it asks us to do absolutely nothing about it. The film plays out a "gender war" (Barbies versus Kens) that brings to the fore all the very *real* problems with patriarchal systems, even naming exactly what strategies can dismantle this falsely replicated patriarchy: Barbie says, "by giving voice to the cognitive dissonance required to be a woman under the patriarchy you robbed it of its power!"[12] Therefore, viewers imagine that they have participated in a real dismantling of patriarchy, when in reality, nothing outside of the film has changed. *Barbie* performs both our anti-capitalism and our anti-patriarchy for us, allowing us to continue to participate in these systems with impunity.

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[9] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,036.
[10] Fisher, Mark. 2022. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zer0 Books. pp. 12.
[11] Fisher, Mark. 2022. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zer0 Books. pp. 12.
[12] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:15:00.

What makes the *Barbie* film so hard for the average viewer to critique is that it builds its own criticism into itself. The film is acutely aware of itself as a film, with countless meta moments that break the fourth wall, use the actors' real names, or otherwise reference its own cinematography. An example of this meta-cinematography is when Barbie is complaining about no longer being "stereotypically Barbie pretty." The narrator interjects with, "Note to the filmmakers: Margot Robbie is the wrong person to cast if you want to make this point."[13] And yet, they *did* cast Margot Robbie, and they *did* make this point. If they hadn't included this line, viewers might have had the space to question the irony of an A-list actress complaining about how she had become "ugly." Instead, the film undermines its own logical holes by pointing out the problem. The hallmark of culture industry productions, then, is the fact of their own self-consciousness: "art now dutifully admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods."[14] In addition to calling attention to its inability to critique beauty standards, *Barbie* is quite literally about dolls, the symbolic epitome of useless commodities intended to be purchased and re-purchased exponentially. The film, then, suppresses the inspiration of any critical thoughts about consumer capitalism by increasing the visibility of itself as a commodity. The film includes jokes about strange discontinued dolls like pregnant Midge, highlights a wardrobe of Barbie's "archival" outfits, and animates sparkles around Barbie's car and Dreamhouse, masquerading as a false advertisement by deliberately drawing attention to the very commodities it promotes. This metacommentary, as Fisher argues, is ultimately a tool for maintaining the viewers' unwavering commitment to the entertainment of the film.

In addition to using its own self-consciousness to maintain the attention of the viewers, *Barbie* actively maintains the hegemony of capitalist systems through self-critical anti-capitalism. The film appears to be fundamentally pro-woman; it explicitly draws attention to the felt impossibility of living as a woman in today's world, particularly in America Ferreira's monologue towards the end of the film. In contrast, Ken is depicted as having incredible power in The Real World just by being a man. This plotline arguably contains a feminist message, where viewers are meant to see the inequities of gender in the Western world. However, the film constantly ties its feminism to anti-capitalism. Sasha's fierce criticism of Barbie is this: "You

[13] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:13:15.
[14] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,048

represent everything wrong with our culture: sexualized capitalism, unrealistic physical ideals? Look at yourself! [...] You set the feminist movement back 50 years. You destroyed girls' innate sense of worth, and you're killing the planet with your glorification of rampant consumerism."[15]Sasha criticizes consumer capitalism, patriarchy, and beauty standards, but just like the comment about casting Margot Robbie, inserting the criticism that could very well be applied to the film itself is how Warner Bros. gets away with making the film in the first place. This anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist message continues throughout the film, which is rather ironic for a film whose production relies on the continued functioning of these very systems. In their book, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello explore how capitalism as a system has adapted to ensure its own survival despite more and more people becoming aware of its faults. They write that, "to maintain its powers of attraction, capitalism therefore has to draw upon resources external to it, beliefs which, at a given moment in time, possess considerable powers of persuasion, striking ideologies, even when they are considered hostile to it, inscribed in the cultural context in which it is developing."[16] When the CEO of Mattel is caricatured as an evil capitalist man interested only in maintaining his own power, for example, our desire to be anti-capitalist and dismantle the system that hurts us is satisfied without substantially threatening the power of the corporation or real CEO. Adorno and Horkheimer predicted this in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Those in charge no longer take much trouble to conceal the structure, the power of which increases the more bluntly its existence is admitted."[17] For this reason, the executive board is fundamental to the plot of *Barbie*. After Will Ferrell says, "now thanks to the Barbies I can relieve myself of this very heavy existential burden while hanging on to the real title of CEO," and a cheeky joke about "just wanting to have a tickle fight in board meetings," the board's presence in the film, and thus any real accountability, falls away with no resolution.[18]Thus, the *real* executive board walks away with their jobs intact, the profits of the film, and an audience who believes they have participated in anti-capitalist activism.

In summary, by making capitalism *fun, Barbie* limits the ability of its viewers to perform any real anti-capitalism. Through comedic entertainment, a false replication of reality,

[15] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 48:00.
[16] Boltanski, Luc, and Ève Chiapello. 2018. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso.
[17] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,033.
[18] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:37:50.

self-criticism, and false anti-capitalism that is unconventionally girly, colorful, and hilarious, *Barbie* safely maintains its role as an ultimately damaging product of the contemporary culture industry. Horkheimer and Adorno argue cynically about the power of fun: "Fun is a medicinal bath which the entertainment industry never ceases to prescribe. It makes laughter the instrument for cheating happiness."[19] I have demonstrated how *Barbie* maintains the power of its creators, but it does more than *be fun* to cheat its viewers of happiness.

Barbie, under the guise of promoting individuality, actively aids in the process of homogenizing society and limiting individual freedoms. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, another symptom of the ascendance of the culture industry is the homogenization of culture, by converting the individual subject to a mere consumer. As customers, people "are regaled, whether on the screen or in the press, with human interest stories demonstrating freedom of choice and the charm of not belonging to the system [...] they remain objects"[20] As a product, *Barbie* is marketed to women regardless of class, race, or other designations of identity. It takes no real political stance that might divide them, and in this way creates a consumer body unified under the singular premise of "girl power." To mask this generalization, a final message of the film is that to find comfort in being imperfect beings, we must find our individuality. The solution to the Barbies versus Kens gender war comes when Barbie encourages Ken that "you're not your girlfriend, you're not your house, you're not your mink."[21] Instead of "Barbie and Ken," she suggests, "maybe all the things you thought made you *you* aren't really you. Maybe it's *Barbie* …and it's *Ken.*" The irony of this message lies just below the surface: millions of consumers watch this scene equally, perhaps even inspired to find who they are apart from their own habits of consumption. What's more is that with the medium of film, there is what Horkheimer and Adorno called "no mechanism of reply" – there is no way for viewers to respond or interact with this scene; no way for their individuality to actually be validated.[22] Instead, viewers sit silently in front of the screen, universally uplifted through the false promise that they have power as the individuals they are.

Furthermore, *Barbie* activates the desire for liberation from patriarchy, then subsequently denies it. Horkheimer and Adorno notice a pattern within the film industry of

[19] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,041.
[20] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,044.
[21] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:35:40.
[22] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,034.

provoking desire for happiness then denying it, which they explain with a mildly crude analogy of sexual desire (or perhaps it *is* literal, but applicable regardless). They conclude: "the mass production of sexuality automatically brings about its repression."[23] While media constantly shows us ideas of happiness, as consumers, we are never able to take the happiness out of the film and claim it for ourselves.

As a viewer of the film, *Barbie* often feels as though it is building to a climax where the women are liberated from the oppression of the patriarchy, and they are – but only in Barbieland. In Barbieland, men (Kens) finally leave women (Barbies) alone, satisfied with discovering who they are without relying on the subjugation of women. This is nice to watch, of course, but this happiness is only fulfilled in a fantasy replication of the real world, suggesting, perhaps, that this resolution is not actually possible in *our* real world. Again, the film hardly hides this denial of happiness. Early in the film, Barbie confesses to Ruth, the creator of Barbie: "The real world isn't what I thought it was." She responds, "It never is. And isn't that marvelous?"[24] This line is perplexing because this conversation directly follows Barbie's discovery of the true violence of patriarchy. The implication is, then, that we are supposed to be satisfied with a perpetual possibility for this violence to occur–and that that variety is "marvelous." The *Barbie* movie assures us that we will always be subject to the control of the patriarchy and, in so doing, suppresses the desire to be freed from it.

Finally, by portraying gender as an inherent boundary of being human, *Barbie* enforces what theorist Marquis Bey calls a "violence of circumscription." Much of the second half of the film is spent convincing the viewer that what makes women *women* is that they can "be anything." Gloria asks the CEO of Mattel to create an "ordinary Barbie"–one that is "just a mom, because it's okay to just want to be a mom."[25] Womanhood is converted to a concept, rather than something innate – but *Barbie* ends on an oddly essentialist note: Barbie chooses to move to The Real World and become a Real Woman, which she substantiates in the final scene by going to the gynecologist. To truly be a woman, she must have a vagina. The gendered violence does not end here, however. In their essay, "The Coalition of Gender Abolition," Marquis Bey explains why they think gender should be abolished: "underlying it is a violence of separation and

[23] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,040.
[24] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 50:50.
[25] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:38:00.

exclusion, a violence of circumscription."[26] Labels like "woman," "man," or "non-binary" constitute a kind of "prison," which "requires that those for whom the identity is definitional only *be* inasmuch as they measure up to the identity and, most crucially, do not permit themselves to be other than the identity which commits an atrocious monopolizing of how one can emerge as a subject."[27] The *Barbie* movie is fundamentally invested in upholding these limitations to subject formation because its selling point that all viewers are individuals, not a single mass of consumers, is founded on the idea that "it's *Barbie* …and it's *Ken.*"[28] There is no in-between, experimentation, or individualization allowed. Barbie and Ken represent the only two models for how to emerge as a subject (excluding the excuse for LGBTQ+ representation that is Allan), and the "pseudoindividuality" that emerges from the dominance of the culture industry relies on the existence of these boundaries. The film, and the culture industry as a whole, enforce boundaries of being in the interest of maintaining its power.

Everything in the *Barbie* movie is deeply entrenched in capitalist ideology, and though we can hope the feminist and anti-capitalist messages are genuine, Horkheimer and Adorno demonstrate that they never will be. They write, "The power of their true master is the purpose of all films, regardless of the plot selected by the production directors."[29] The power of Mattel is the true purpose of *Barbie*; the power of patriarchy, capitalism, and subject binaries is the true purpose. The framework of the culture industry helps us think about how a film like *Barbie* uses specific mechanisms, now pervasive in the entertainment industry, to hide the fact that maintaining power is the fundamental purpose of its creation. In doing so, films like *Barbie* continue to repress desire for liberation from the capitalist and patriarchal structures.

Finally, it is important to note that *Barbie* did have real material consequences. In the weeks following the film's release, Mattel reported a 16% rise in sales, marking somewhat of a revival of their product. However, as Mattel CEO (the real one, not Will Ferrell) noted in an interview, "this was not about making a movie, this was about creating an iconic cultural

[26] Bey, Marquis. 2022. "The Coalition of Gender Abolition." *CISTEM Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC. pp. 130.
[27] Bey, "The Coalition of Gender Abolition." pp. 134.
[28] *Barbie*. 2023. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. 1:35:50.
[29] Leitch, "Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno." pp. 1,035.

moment."[30] The film was never about selling Barbie dolls. It was about selling ideas. Some might, and many have, argue that including explicit feminist and anti-capitalist rhetoric into a blockbuster film is a step in the right direction of overthrowing systems of inequality and violence. I would counter, however, with Audre Lorde's pervasive motto: the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.[31]

[30] Richardson, Drew. 2023. "Mattel Says Barbie Sales Grew 16% as Blockbuster Movie Became a Phenomenon." *CNBC*, 26 Oct. 2023, www.cnbc.com/2023/10/25/mattel-mat-q3-earnings-barbie-sales-surge.html.; Coleman, Julie. 2023. "Mattel CEO Talks Barbie's Official Big Screen Debut: 'This Was Not about Making a Movie, This Was about Creating an Iconic Cultural Moment.'" *CNBC*, 20 July 2023, www.cnbc.com/2023/07/19/mattel-ceo-talks-barbies-official-big-screen-debut.html.

[31] Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister Outsider*, Penguin Books, New York, NY, 2020.

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Feelings

Digital Painting, 2025
Levi Lee

Inspired by the Class of '25 CTSJ senior comprehensives, 'Feelings' explores the sense of righteousness one feels when faced with injustice. The image aims to invoke the same sense of discomfort often faced when confronting something unfathomable and encourages the viewer to both engage and embrace that feeling within themselves.

From Francoism to Neoliberalism: An Exploration of State Formation in Twentieth-Century Spain

Seamas Pragnell | *University of Sydney*

ABSTRACT: *This article explores how neoliberalism emerged from Spain by the* Partido Socialista Obrero Español *(PSOE) out of the Franco era and following the Transition to Democracy. This article will build off Nicos Poulantzas's work on exceptional states and other contributions of Antonio Gramsci to understand the organization of the Francoist state and Spanish capitalism. By gaining a clear understanding of the Francoist state and Spanish capitalism, a basis for an investigation of the Transition to Democracy and the neoliberalisation of Spain will be better understood. In presenting such an analysis this article will also seek to provide a nuanced critique of the liberal account of the Transition to Democracy and PSOE by José María Maravall and Julián Santamaría in "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy" from the 1986 book* Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*. In doing so, this article will demonstrate the insights gained by engaging with Gramsci and Poulantzas in the context of twentieth-century Spain and the lasting impact of the Franco regime on the Transition to Democracy and Spanish neoliberalism.*

Introduction

Francisco Franco's death in 1975 was not the end of Spain's suffering. The exploitation and inequality embedded in the Francoist state continued existing after the Transition to Democracy[1], transforming to fit the conditions of a new "democratic" Spain, as post-Francoist Spain was not a 'clean break' from the Franco era. In this paper, I will investigate how the formation of the state and Spanish capitalism during the Franco era impacted the emergence and organization of neoliberalism in Spain. I will also demonstrate how prevailing narratives surrounding the Transition and neoliberalism in Spain have failed to recognize the lasting influence of the Franco regime.

This article will consider the life and death of the Francoist state and its lasting impact on the ascendance of neoliberalism in Spain under the helm of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE). To aid in this analysis, I will be drawing on the work of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci and Greek-French Marxist sociologist Nicos Poulantzas and their

[1] For the sake of readability, the Transition to Democracy may be referred elsewhere in this article as simply "the Transition".

theories of state composition and transition. I will use these theorists to challenge José María Maravall and Julián Santamaría's chapter "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy" from the 1986 book *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*. María Maravall and Santamaría present a prominent liberal account of the Transition and early years of PSOE governance in Spain.

I will open this paper by providing an overview of both Gramsci's and Poulantzas's state theories. This theoretical base will help demonstrate how the Francoist state acted and functioned as an explicitly capitalist state. From this point I will explore how the Francoist state's status as a capitalist state laid the seeds of its own downfall for the sake of preserving the interests of capital. I will then explore how the preservation of capital's interest in Spain continued following the rise of the PSOE and how this ushered in the era of neoliberalism in Spain. Finally, I will conclude with a critique of the analysis of the Transition and rise of the PSOE provided by María Maravall and Santamaría.

Establishing Theory

To understand the rise of neoliberalism within Spain and the preservation of capitalism following the death of Franco, we must first understand how the Francoist state functioned as an explicitly capitalist state. The contributions to state theory by both Gramsci and Poulantzas have been influential in understanding capitalist states and their role in the reproduction of relations of production. The work of Poulantzas has been fundamental to the theorizing of the peculiarities of what he deems 'exceptional states.' Additionally, given that Poulantzas wrote from a structural-Marxist perspective and was a peer of Louis Althusser, his writings on exceptional states are also closely linked to Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony.[2]

An exceptional state is a capitalist state which utilizes overt repression to maintain the state and relations of production. They are intrinsically capitalist states which are formed "corresponding to the needs of a political crisis," such as civil war.[3] For Poulantzas, there are several forms of exceptional states, including fascist states and military dictatorships. These states hold unique characteristics which distinguish themselves from each other, despite their

[2] Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, trans. Judith White (London: Verso, 1974), 299–300.
[3] Poulantzas, 310.

shared status as exceptional states.[4] Importantly, the theory of exceptional states is built out of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, as a defining feature of exceptional states is how coercion and consent is administered. We can look towards Gramsci's theory to help us understand how exceptional states function.

Through his theory of cultural hegemony, Gramsci aims to explain the lack of socialist revolutions in Italy and other Western European states in the early twentieth century. For Gramsci, the lack of revolution was due to dominant ideologies and the cultural hegemony held by the ruling bloc, which deliberately hid capitalism's class contradictions.[5] He argues that ideology inhibited the potential development of class consciousness, or the realization of the working class' true place within the exploitative system of capitalism.[6]

The proliferation of a dominant ideology both inhibits class consciousness as well as prepares citizens to partake in relations of production. This preparation, which Althusser stresses, can be seen through the role of schools and education in inoculating children with pure ruling ideology and 'know-how' in order to function within capitalist relations of production.[7] The role of ideology in maintaining control and preparing workers is necessary under capitalism as "political domination cannot in fact be maintained through the use of physical repression alone, but demands the direct and decisive intervention of ideology."[8] Thus, a combination of both repression and ideology are crucial to reproducing capitalist relations of production.

However, the combination of repression and ideology differs between exceptional states and other capitalist state forms.[9] Gramsci specifies, "the 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary régime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent."[10] Typically, consent under bourgeois liberal democracy is achieved primarily through the proliferation of ideology by the state, resulting in a reassertion of the state's hegemony. Conversely, Poulantzas claims that exceptional states differ fundamentally from liberal-capitalist states. Under conditions of exceptional statehood, the aim of the state to inhibit

[4] Poulantzas, 331.
[5] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 12–13.
[6] Gramsci, 12–13.
[7] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 1971), 29.
[8] Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, 302.
[9] Poulantzas, 318.
[10] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 80, n. 49.

the development of class consciousness and to reproduce capitalist relations of production remains the same, although the way in which this is achieved changes drastically. There is no longer a reciprocal balance of consent and force but instead the supplanting of force over consent, as under an exceptional state, overt repression becomes the dominant way hegemony is maintained. However, Poulantzas suggests that "the increased role of physical repression is necessarily accompanied by a particular intervention of ideology to legitimize this repression," reflecting the still-important role that ideology plays in upholding the hegemony of exceptional states.[11] This repression involves directly confronting the populace of the exceptional state through violent, yet ideologically justified, means. Under exceptional states, there is also a noted lack of electoral politics and class representation among political parties, as they often only have a sole political party.[12] There is no concealed prospect of changing the organization of the state for the populace of the exceptional state, but instead increased physical repression (mostly through the military and police).

As opposed to liberal democracies, under exceptional states there is a formal attribution of ideology and repression as direct arms of the state.[13] This public attribution and centralization of oppression and ideology results in the creation of a unified enemy for the working class. Exceptional states, like all capitalist states, must respond to the risk of mass struggle and revolution — and do so through the "duplication and overlapping" of repression and ideology.[14] This demonstrates that while both liberal and exceptional states, as capitalist states, attempt to continue to exploit labor and hinder the realization of class consciousness among the working class, the way they go about it differs significantly.

The Two Eras of the Exceptional Francoist State

The Francoist state that arose in 1939 following the Nationalists's victory in the Spanish Civil War marked the beginning of a long and brutal regime. Despite the state's repression of its citizens both physically and ideologically, there were noted differences between the early and later stages of the regime. These differences are generally split between two key epochs: '*el primer franquismo*' (the first Francoism) from roughly 1936 to 1959 and '*el segundo*

[11] Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, 316.
[12] Poulantzas, 327.
[13] Poulantzas, 315.
[14] Poulantzas, 330.

franquismo' (the second Francoism) from roughly 1959 to 1975.[15] The *primer franquismo* was marked by the Civil War and the post-Civil War era, and saw the orientation of the state towards an autarkic agrarian capitalism[16] through the substantial influence of the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (Falange).[17] The Falange were a fascist party originally formed by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and while they were influenced by Nazism and Italian fascism, they were still what Ellwood described as "a peculiarly Spanish phenomenon."[18]

Alternatively, the *segundo franquismo* saw the shifts of the Francoist state towards the interests of banking, financial, and industrial capital, with the growing influx of American foreign capital and the rising political influence of technocrats from the Catholic institution of Opus Dei.[19] The Opus Dei, a socially conservative and elite institution of Catholic laypersons, grew in considerable influence and power over the course of the Francoist regime.[20] The Opus Dei technocrat's "central creed… was that growing prosperity and economic development could be a sufficient surrogate for ideological politics and validate the survival of Francoism."[21] The political makeup and status of Spain during the *segundo franquismo* differed significantly from the *primer.* As the Cold War began developing more substantially, the Francoist state notably lessened the Falange's role. This led Franco to alternatively develop an explicitly anti-communist position, an attempt which sought to remove Spain from its more fascistic history while gaining political favour with the United States and Western Europe.[22] The move towards the Opus Dei and US saw the corresponding decline of the Falange.[23]

While both eras are marked by the transfer in the hegemonic leadership from one fraction of capital to the other, the exploitation of the Spanish working class remained. As Poulantzas

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[15] Glicerio Sánchez Recio, ed., *El Primer Franquismo (1936-1959)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1999), 11; Eduardo Bueno-Vergara and Enrique Perdiguero-Gil, "La Seguridad Social Llegó al Campo: Resistencias y Limitaciones En La España Del Segundo Franquismo (1959-1975)," *Interface (Botucatu)* 25 (2021): 2.
[16] A self-sufficient capitalist state where wealth is predominantly derived from agrarian production.
[17] Sánchez Recio, *El Primer Franquismo (1936-1959)*, 32–35.
[18] Sheelagh M. Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era: Falange Española de La Jons, 1936-76* (New York, N.Y: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 7.
[19] Sánchez Recio, *El Primer Franquismo (1936-1959)*, 11–12.
[20] Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (London: Arnold Publishers, 1997), 54.
[21] Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, European History in Perspective (New York, N.Y: Palgrave, 1999), 150.
[22] Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain* (London: Routledge, 1995), 46; Antonio Cazorla-Sanchez, "Beyond 'They Shall Not Pass'. How the Experience of Violence Reshaped Political Values in Franco's Spain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 519.
[23] Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi Aizpurua, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 26.

points out, the state always seeks to reaffirm the political interests of capital, with it shifting such interests dependent on which specific class fraction within the bourgeoisie is dominant.[24] The economic structure of the *primer franquismo* is characterized by an attempt to create an autarkic agrarian capitalist society. This economic structure was notably legislated with the creation of the National Wheat Service and National Institute of Industry, both of which protected landowners and industrialists from foreign capital with technical and control services.[25] This protection, in conjunction with both the ideological and physical repression of the working class, enabled vast amounts of capital to be accumulated by the domestic bourgeoisie of Spain.[26] Spain's international position within post-war Europe only contributed to this strengthening of the domestic bourgeoisie, as Franco's links to Nazi Germany and fascist Italy influenced the exclusion of Spain from the US's Marshall Plan in 1947.[27] [28]

On the other hand, the *segundo franquismo* was defined by the liberalization and opening of the Spanish economy to foreign markets, notably the United States and Western Europe, through the technocratic leadership of the Opus Dei. This was formalized with the rising influx of US aid, Spain's joining of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation[29] and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1958, along with the legislation of the Stabilization Plan of 1959.[30] These measures, led by the Opus Dei technocrats, aimed to control inflation, normalize trade, and encourage foreign investment into Spain.[31] The policy prescriptions, as proposed by said technocrats, involved the reduction of public expenditure and the devaluation of the peseta to incentivize foreign investment.[32]

Foreign investment into Spain was predominantly American, with some Western European investment also present. The character of Spain's relationship with the US can be

[24] Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: NLB, 1978), 127–28.
[25] Ana Cabana and Alba Díaz, "Agricultural Techniques and Modernization in Franco's Spain" (Rural History 2010, Sussex, UK, 2010), 4; Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 126–27.
[26] Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain*, 46.
[27] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 138.
[28] While the state during the *primer franquismo* was not given the same support as the rest of Western Europe, they still did gain some aid, albeit substantially less, with the Pact of Madrid of 1953.
[29] Now the 'Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development'
[30] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 147–48.
[31] Romero Salvadó, 148.
[32] Romero Salvadó, 148.

summarized as one of dependence, where US "foreign imperialist capital" subjugated the working class of Spain, enabled by the Spanish state.[33] Poulantzas explains that:

> The Portuguese, Spanish and Greek regimes systematically promoted the investment of foreign imperialist capital. This capital is invested in the countries concerned both to directly exploit the popular masses there, and to use these countries as a staging-post in the exploitation of other countries.[34]

Additionally, American firms in Spain were given "tax exemptions, almost unlimited opportunity of repatriating profits, capital grants, monopoly privileges, leonine contracts[35] with national firms," as well as access to a labor force which was repressed by the state, notably through the inability to strike and organize.[36]

It was in the direct interests of the financial, banking, and commercial sectors of the bourgeoisie to engage in a trade relationship with the United States.[37] This relationship was facilitated by the Francoist state of the *segundo franquismo* in order to assist the dominant forces within the ruling bloc. Thus, the exceptional Spanish state was not just influenced by internal dynamics but by international dynamics. The United States and Western Europe supported the sustained reproduction of exploitative relations in Francoist Spain, as the Francoist regime's coercion and repression ultimately benefited the global financial bourgeoisie.[38] As we can see, the internal organization of Spanish capitalism was directly influenced by the external forces which surrounded it, with the *segundo franquismo's* realignment to financial capital working in tandem with the growth of global financial capital, specifically in the United States. The Francoist state cannot be understood outside of this global context and should be understood alongside other world trends of US global expansion, Cold War politics, and the growing predominance of international finance capital.

Instead of characterizing Franco's regime solely with respects to its authoritarian nature, the theory of exceptional states highlights the reason *why* the Francoist state was repressive. Francoist Spain did not achieve the consent and coercion of the Spanish populace for no reason, but rather did so to reproduce capitalist relations of production and maintain hegemony in service

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[33] Nicos Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, trans. David Fernbach (London: NLB, 1976), 19.
[34] Poulantzas, 24.
[35] An agreement between parties where one party has significantly greater bargaining power than the other.
[36] Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 24–25.
[37] Poulantzas, 42–45.
[38] Poulantzas, 47.

of the global bourgeoisie. This would lay the ground for the Transition and growth of neoliberalism in Spain.

Francoism as an Ideology and Franco's Coercion

Like many other exceptional states, Francoism placed an emphasis on the history of Spain as a unified Catholic state — a mythic past that his regime was to return to. Historians Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi describe Franco's view of Spanish society and history as "Great Spain, the Spain of the Catholic kings and their vast American empire, had been destroyed by democratic parliamentarianism based on universal suffrage."[39] Franco's interpretation of history was a foundational aspect of his ideology, as his incessant call backs to what he saw as the glory days of Spanish history and a return to such history were key narratives pushed by his state. For example, in a speech given to the Spanish Parliament in November 1966, Franco argued, "How was Spain before our crusade? It was a poor nation, an old nation that had seen better days- so much better."[40] Here, Franco explicitly argued that the Spanish Republic destroyed Spain's prestige, and it was his duty to return Spain to its previous glory.

Beyond the historical glory of Spain as a key source of ideology, the history of the Civil War and the victory by Franco and the Nationalists also provided immense utility in suppressing the Spanish populace. The Francoist regime consistently reasserted the fact that they had won the Civil War and utilized their conception of the history of the Civil War as a means to continue their depiction of the Republican forces as enemies of Spain, with the Francoist regime purportedly 'safeguarding' the Spanish people from what it saw as the scourges of communism, leftism, and social liberalism.[41] The policy of reasserting the Nationalists victory in the Civil War created a Manichean division between the victors and vanquished, with the victors holding the positions of power and influence.[42] Francoism was fundamentally positioned as an ideology distinct from both the workers' movements that were present at the time and the liberal government that preceded it, presenting itself — an exceptional state — as a third mode of governing that was the ideological and historical continuation of a mythical imperial past.

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[39] Carr and Fusi Aizpurua, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, 15–16.
[40] Franco, as quoted from: New York Times, "Excerpts From Franco's Speech Presenting Constitution to Spanish Parliament," *New York Times Company*, November 23, 1966.
[41] Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain*, 34–37.
[42] Carr and Fusi Aizpurua, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, 18–19.

This control over historical discourse allowed for the Francoist state to sustain its hegemony. Historian Paul Preston points out that for the Francoist regime, history "was a direct instrument of the state, written by police, soldiers, and priests, invigilated by the powerful censorship machinery."[43] This censorship machinery, through the Church, education system, and press, guided the views of the Spanish populace, ideologically repressing any dissenting views, as the only views that could be expressed publicly were those of the Francoist state.[44] This ideological control created a broader consent from the population of Spain for the Francoist regime, maintaining the state's hegemony and facilitating the continual reproduction of capitalist relations of production without the interference of a strong, unified, anti-capitalist movement.

While ideology was important for the Francoist regime to retain power, the more predominant aspect of exceptional states — coercion — solidified Franco's rule. This took the form of overt physical repression, which was used to inhibit the development of class consciousness and reproduce capitalist relations. The Francoist state employed martial law and state repression to directly quell the attempt of working-class organization and resistance. This involved the banning of all political parties and trade unions except for those approved by the state.[45] The limitation of legal means to organize coincided with the treatment of strikes as sabotage, with attempts to strike being punishable by considerable prison sentences.[46] In this way, martial law and physical coercion silenced those voices that did manage to exist outside of Franco's ideological control, taking a key part in quashing working-class organization — which was often left-wing in orientation — while strengthening the political control of the bourgeoisie and Francoist state.

The brutal Francoist regime also ordered the execution of tens of thousands of Republicans and the sequestration of 12,000 children of Republican parents, with those children being indoctrinated by Francoist ideology through state and religious institutions.[47] Additionally, the state also oversaw various horrific medical experiments, including those whose eugenic basis sought to find "the links between Marxism and mental deficiency."[48] These acts — brutal in

[43] Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain*, 30.
[44] Carr and Fusi Aizpurua, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, 14; Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain*, 30.
[45] Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era: Falange Española de La Jons, 1936-76*, 60–64.
[46] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 126.
[47] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), xi, 513–14.
[48] Preston, 514–15.

nature — served as clear deterrents for any budding left-wing movements and indoctrinated younger generations with Francoist ideology. Franco, as the defender of capitalism, did not view the bourgeoisie as a threat to his rule, but recognized the necessity to coerce former Republicans who did not consent to his regime. Franco did not partake in material and ideological repression for no reason. Rather, he did so to ensure consent and coercion were achieved to reproduce capitalist relations of production.

Beyond the punishment of working-class organizing and the execution of Republicans, the Francoist state also administered its oppressive force through the creation of forced labor battalions, notably during the construction of the gargantuan mausoleum dedicated to Nationalist soldier casualties of the Civil War, *El Valle de los Caídos*[49] (The Valley of the Fallen).[50] This mausoleum, which still functions as a Catholic Basilica and is dominated by a one hundred and fifty-meter-high cross, symbolizes both the domination of the Francoist regime following the Civil War and its fundamental tie to Catholicism. Between the years of 1941 and 1959, during the *primer franquismo, El Valle* was erected with the use of forced labor.[51] These forced labor battalions were comprised of the Republican political prisoners from the Civil War, with roughly twenty thousand of them being coerced to construct *El Valle.*[52] In a deliberately humiliating and dehumanizing gesture, these workers were set to work to create a monolith celebrating their own defeat: coercion used to generate further consent. As Poulantzas points out, "[P]olitical domination cannot in fact be maintained through the use of physical repression alone, but demands the direct and decisive intervention of ideology."[53] Physical coercion and ideological repression were combined in a way that solidified the power of the Francoist state, as it used forced physical labor to reassert and entrench the historical victory of the Nationalist forces over the Republicans in the Civil War. In this way, the construction of *El Valle* shows us that ideological and material repression cannot be considered as separate phenomena, but as dialectically entangled processes that solidify the apparent legitimacy of exceptional states.

It is also vital to note that the apparent coercion continued beyond the early decades of Francoist rule. The most notable example of the enduring repression into the *segundo franquismo*

[49] Elsewhere referred to as "*El Valle"*.
[50] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 127–28.
[51] Jeremy Treglown, *Franco's Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory since 1936* (New York, N.Y: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 59.
[52] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 127.
[53] Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*, 302.

is the Francoist state's treatment of the revolutionary socialist Basque separatist terrorist group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) (Basque Nation and Liberty).[54] The Francoist state, despite the liberalization of the economy during the *segundo franquismo*, employed "state-sponsored paramilitary death squads with the intention of hunting down and killing ETA leaders."[55] Even though the economy seemed to be liberalizing and integrating with an international financial order, the Franco regime continued to utilize tactics of physical repression and violence — even when outsourced to non-state actors — to quell class struggle and political opposition.

The Fall of the Francoist State

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Francoist regime's armor began to rust. While the death of Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco's right-hand man, is traditionally presented as the cause of the fall of the Francoist state, this assessment begins to falter once an investigation of the later years of the *segundo franquismo* is explored.[56] By instead focusing on the mounting discontent of the Spanish populace and alignment of the interests of capital, I will demonstrate how the key internal and external dynamics present in the Transition led to the formation of liberal democracy, and later neoliberalism, in Spain.

The student and working-class movements, most notably in the late 1960s and early 1970s, placed immense pressure on the Francoist state. The development of groups like the *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers Commissions) (CC.OO) out of various state-sanctioned Catholic groups facilitated the formation of a space where working-class politics could be advanced.[57] The infiltration of these state-sanctioned unions by the *Partido Comunista de España* (Spanish Communist Party) (PCE), enabled further grassroots expansion of working-class organizations and the beginnings of a more defiant worker struggle.[58] Incidents of such struggles are vast but include examples such as the October 1971 strike of the state-owned SEAT automobile factory in Barcelona, where eight thousand workers stopped work in the biggest industrial plant in Spain.[59] This strike was eventually broken up by the Spanish police, where numerous workers were shot

[54] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 153.
[55] Omar Encarnación, "Democracy and Dirty Wars in Spain," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2007): 960.
[56] Duncan Wheeler, "Basque Separatists ETA Set a Car Bomb That Helped Build Spanish Democracy," *Jacobin*, December 20, 2023.
[57] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 150–51.
[58] Romero Salvadó, 150–51.
[59] Grugel and Rees, *Franco's Spain*, 89.

at and one killed.[60] Similar strikes would ramp up in 1974 and 1975 and continued into 1976, after the Transition.[61]

Beyond strikes, another important avenue for insurrectionary upheaval was the role of students, who were a significant anti-Francoist force in the dwindling years of the regime. Spanish students often utilized "[f]ree assemblies, sit-ins and demonstrations [that] ended in ritual clashes with the police."[62] These students proved to be a substantial portion of the anti-Francoist forces, as the state struggled to gain favor among the younger generations. Additionally, many of these student movements, while having their own concerns, also showed support for the workers strikes across Spain, demonstrating a degree of unity among the country's dominated classes.[63] Aside from these two key popular groups, more violent organizations existed, such as ETA, the *Frente Revolucionario Antifascista Patriótico* (Revolutionary Anti-Fascist Patriotic Front) (FRAP) and the *Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre* (First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups) (GRAPO).[64] These militias, among others, actively partook in armed revolutionary violence against the Francoist state.

Despite the significant power wielded by the working class, many of the gains from the anti-Franco uprisings would be significantly neutered by the Transition and ascendancy of neoliberalism to come, as the Spanish state would remold itself to weaken the political fervor. Fundamental to the internal organization of exceptional states is the alignment of various forms of capital. As previously mentioned, capitalist states seek to align with the political interests of capital, with these interests shifting based on which specific class fraction within the bourgeoisie is dominant.[65]

The various stances of capital and Francoist officials during the final years of the Franco era can be broadly split between two camps: the *aperturistas* (openers) and the *continuistas* (continuers). The *aperturistas* were the group which saw the writing on the wall of the Francoist regime and identified the shift towards liberal democracy as the most beneficial option for

[60] Grugel and Rees, 89–90.
[61] Javier Tusell, *Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy 1939 to the Present*, trans. Rosemary Clark (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 222.
[62] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 152.
[63] Carr and Fusi Aizpurua, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, 148.
[64] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 158–59.
[65] Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 127–28.

Spanish capitalism (and themselves).[66] On the other hand, the *continuistas* were those who sought to reaffirm the status of Spain as an exceptional state and wished to do so through the persistence of autocratic rule that had defined Spain for the previous four decades.[67] These *continuistas* were firmly aligned with Luis Carrero Blanco and his policy of maintaining the Francoist state's status quo.[68] Although, despite the immense power held by Carrero Blanco, the mounting antagonisms felt against the Francoist state led to the *aperturistas* eventually winning out, with King Juan Carlos siding with the *aperturistas*. The *aperturistas* recognized the rising discontent from the Spanish working class and saw an opening of the regime to liberal democracy being not only beneficial for capital but also as a necessary precaution to stop the destruction of the Francoist regime.

The nature of the Francoist state as an exceptional, and therefore capitalist, state facilitated its collapse. The regime's primary function was to preserve capitalist relations of production in Spain. Preston reflects on this self-destruction by arguing that "it was inevitable that the dissatisfaction of the business class would eventually have its effect on the political structure."[69] The bourgeoisie reformed the regime themselves once the Spanish working class had pronounced their discontent and pushed for its destruction.

Beyond the influence of the Spanish working class' grievances, the position of the *aperturistas* was also informed by Spain's placement within the wider international context. The preference of the *aperturistas* towards the financial bourgeoisie saw them aligning in favor of both a 'more open' political system, as well as a more open economic system. Spain's international trade relations could be more easily extended if Spain was considered a fellow member of liberal Western Europe. While the *segundo franquismo* also saw a policy shift towards international trade, Spain's status as a dictatorship notably inhibited its entry into both the European Economic Community (EEC) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).[70] Spain's status as a pariah of Western Europe was further exemplified by the removal of fifteen European ambassadors to Spain following the execution of three FRAP and two ETA militants on the 17th of September 1975.[71]

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[66] Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 2, 16.
[67] Preston, 50–51.
[68] Preston, 2.
[69] Preston, 17.
[70] Grugel and Rees, *Franco's Spain*, 172; Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 152.
[71] Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: Politics and Society in Spain, 1898-1998*, 159.

Given both the growing discontent among the Spanish populace and the potential to further economic relations, the *aperturistas* firmly supported the transition of Spain to a bourgeois liberal democracy. The external placement of Spain directly informed the internal position of the financial bourgeoisie, exhibiting the relationship between national and international dynamics that influenced the stance of the financial bourgeoisie. It was due to the realignment of the Francoist state towards the financial bourgeoisie during the *segundo franquismo* and Franco's role as the defender of capitalism in Spain that provided the potential for the *aperturistas* to emerge and facilitate the transition of Spain towards liberal democracy. Additionally, the position of the *aperturistas* in opening Spain towards liberal Western Europe later proved crucial for the emergence of neoliberalism under the PSOE.

The Prospects for Revolution: Dead in the Water

There were other currents among leftist organizations which eventually facilitated the Transition and the later consolidation of neoliberalism. The large amount of working-class and student struggle created circumstances from which a revolutionary rupture had manifested. The working class' struggle was largely in support of the PCE's insistence of a *ruptura democrática* (democratic rupture) which sought to have a clean break from the Franco era and the creation of a new, anti-Francoist and democratic state.[72] The principle of a *ruptura democrática* echoes Poulantzas's assessment of the necessity to 'smash' the apparatuses of the capitalist state in order to bring about socialism.[73] The PCE, like Poulantzas, sought to not just change the figurehead of the Spanish state, but rather, fundamentally transform the organization of the Spanish state.

Despite the large number of strikes, protests, and revolutionary violence, the PSOE's position was that of reform from within.[74] This can be most clearly seen by their failure to join the PCE-led *Junta Democrática,* a group of broad-left anti-Francoists who insisted on a *ruptura democrática.*[75] This was further cemented with the PSOE's formation of the *Plataforma de Convergencia Democrática,* a group that was more willing to cooperate with regime reformists than the *Junta Democrática*.[76] The lack of support for a *ruptura democrática* and the creation of an alternate broad-left front by the PSOE created the circumstances from which revolution did

[72] Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, 80–81.
[73] Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 92–93.
[74] Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, 65.
[75] Preston, 63–64.
[76] Preston, 74–75.

not erupt. Although the working class is crucial to revolutionary politics, the importance of a unified political agenda is reflected by Gramsci's belief that "[n]o mass action is possible, if the masses in question are not convinced of the ends they wish to attain and the methods to be applied."[77] Without a unified anti-Francoist force, the revolutionary demands expressed by the Spanish working class could not be adequately pursued.

The PCE and other members of the anti-Francoist left, needed the large and influential PSOE to support the *ruptura democrática* before the potential of revolution could be realized. The disagreement between the PSOE and PCE was eventually overcome with the formation of the *Coordinación Democrática* in March 1976, also known as the *Platajunta.*[78] However, the creation of the *Platajunta* necessitated that the PCE drop their insistence on a *ruptura democrática.* With the inability to form a unified left bloc that insisted on a *ruptura democrática,* the PCE accepted the inevitability of internal reform of the Francoist state, doing so to achieve the prospects of a more democratic, yet still capitalist, state.[79]

Relevant here is Poulantzas's view that divisions among the left weaken the power of popular struggles and subsequently contribute to democratization processes being steered by the bourgeoisie.[80] Poulantzas's perspective rings true for the position of the left in Spain. Without the PSOE supporting a unified leftist group, the impact of the popular struggles and potential for revolution was dead in the water. Instead of working with the PCE to develop a revolutionary program, the PSOE was actively "wresting the hegemony of the left from the PCE," further inhibiting the potential for a popular bloc to be formed.[81]

Despite the mounting revolutionary pressure from the Spanish working class, the PSOE chose to not partake in revolutionary politics with the PCE and other members of the Spanish left. However, we should consider whether there was ever any real potential for revolution to take place in Spain. The answer to this is clearly shown in the attitude of the bourgeoisie in Spain towards the rising discontent of the Spanish populace. Preston assesses that the threat of popular militancy and violence led liberal members of the regime to pivot towards political liberalization

[77] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)*, trans. Quintin Hoare (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 448.
[78] Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, 85.
[79] Preston, 96, 106.
[80] Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 162.
[81] Joan Ramon Resina, *The Ghost in the Constitution: Historical Memory and Denial in Spanish Society*, Contemporary Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 219.

to "prevent a serious challenge to the existing order."[82] If there was no potential for revolution then the liberal members of the regime would not have felt pressured into liberalizing and transitioning the regime.

This demonstrates that, despite the genuine potential for revolution in Spain, the PSOE leadership decided to not participate in revolutionary politics. It was the deficiency of the PSOE in joining the *Junta Democrática* and not insisting on a *ruptura democrática* which neutered the potential for a popular revolution in Spain. By siding with Adolfo Suárez's centrist *aperturista* party the *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD) — and by extension the financial bourgeoisie — the PSOE used their standing as a popular party across broad sectors of the Spanish populace to perpetuate capitalist relations of production. The repressive Francoist state therefore played a crucial role in the Transition, as it fostered the emergence of revolutionary struggles from the Spanish working class. Additionally, the Francoist state's rearticulation of Spanish capitalism towards financial capital during the *segundo franquismo* gave way to a powerful fraction of the bourgeoisie which was in favor of opening the Spanish state towards liberal democracy to further develop ties with international capital.

Socialist Victory, or the Rise of Spanish Neoliberalism?

While the PSOE aligned themselves with capital and the UCD during the Transition in the late 1970s, their push for liberal democracy and neoliberalism in Spain did not wholly materialize until their victory in the 1982 general election. The electoral victory of 1982 by the PSOE under the leadership of Felipe González saw a dramatic shift in the Spanish Parliament. This parliamentary transformation saw a swing from the UCD majority after the 1977 and 1979 elections to a PSOE majority of 57.7% of seats in the 1982 general election.[83] This sweep by the PSOE inaugurated the era of Spanish neoliberalism.

We must understand the preconditions in Spain that facilitated neoliberalization. While the UCD were decisively pro-capital, their recognition of the revolutionary ruptures of the Spanish working class resulted in them implementing some labor market protections and welfarist policies.[84] These welfarist policies sought to manage the fragile composition of class

[82] Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, 81.
[83] Richard Gunther, José Ramón Montero, and Joan Botella, *Democracy in Modern Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 205, 207.
[84] Cornel Ban, "Spain's Embedded Neoliberalism," in *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 33.

relations during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Despite such policies being administered, the neoliberal turn would not be too far around the corner. Following the victory of the González government in the 1982 general election, Spain adopted an IMF stabilization package alongside financial deregulation and public expenditure cuts.[85] However, unlike the Reagan-Thatcher neoliberalism which traditionally defines the term, the PSOE's implementation of neoliberalism had a social-democratic character.[86]

Essential to the administering of neoliberal policies was the role of the technocratic elite, many of whom were trained at the Research Service of the Bank of Spain.[87] Many of these technocrats occupied influential positions within the Ministry of Finance and Bank of Spain and were the same technocrats from the Franco era.[88] Like Gramsci's claim that "[t]he historical unity of the ruling class is realised in the state," the post-Francoist state maintained this unity, and enabled neoliberalism, partially through the continued reliance on pro-capital ex-Francoist technocrats.[89] Beyond the influence of these technocrats, key ministers in the PSOE cabinet, like Miguel Boyer and Carlos Solchaga, helped consolidate neoliberalism in Spain with their support for supply-side explanations of unemployment and labor market deregulation.[90] The substantial trust of Solchaga and Boyer held by González enabled the ministers to drastically influence the macroeconomic policy of Spain.[91] The centralized power held by the executive enabled González to suppress ideological dissent from within the party, purging various left-wing members of the party.[92] This enabled neoliberal ideology and policy to further embed itself within both the party structure of the PSOE and the policy of the government of Spain.

The implementation of neoliberal policies was also substantially influenced by the accession of Spain into the EEC. The participation in the EEC was promoted by the financial bourgeoisie and entered Spain into the European Common Market.[93] Along with financial deregulation, this significantly benefited the banking and commercial industries of the financial

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[85] Ban, 34.
[86] Ban, 33; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22–26.
[87] Sofía A. Pérez, "From Labor to Finance: Understanding the Failure of Socialist Economic Policies in Spain," *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no. 6 (1999): 681–82.
[88] Ban, "Spain's Embedded Neoliberalism," 41–43.
[89] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 52.
[90] Ban, "Spain's Embedded Neoliberalism," 45.
[91] Ban, 50.
[92] Pérez, "From Labor to Finance: Understanding the Failure of Socialist Economic Policies in Spain," 682.
[93] Mustafa Kutlay, "Internationalization of Finance Capital in Spain and Turkey: Neoliberal Globalization and the Political Economy of State Policies," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 47 (2012): 121.

bourgeoisie.[94] The reinforcement of neoliberalism would reach new heights with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 by the PSOE. The Maastricht Treaty saw the creation of a single currency, the euro, in the European Union (EU). The creation of the euro is regarded as a foundational event in the reinforcement of neoliberalism in the EU as it "undermined the economic constitutional controls of the Eurozone states and restricted their political possibilities."[95]

The catastrophic impacts of neoliberalisation in Spain through the euro most obviously occurred during the Eurozone crisis. Spain's lack of monetary sovereignty led to the forced imposition of austerity measures by the EU to combat the crisis. The substantial reduction in public expenditure resulted in a wage freeze, an increase in the retirement age from 65 to 67, and various cuts to the public sector, including health and education.[96] Austerity measures also saw a substantial rise in unemployment, poverty, and inequality in Spain.[97] These policies demonstrate how Spain's participation in the Eurozone, as signed by the PSOE, directly influenced the consolidation of neoliberalism in Spain and led to the further exploitation and atrophy of the dominated classes of Spain.

The realignment of the Francoist state towards the international financial bourgeoisie laid the foundation for their continued dominance and influence during the neoliberal era. Furthermore, the PSOE fundamentally preserved conditions for capital accumulation entrenched by Franco, along with ushering in Spanish neoliberalism through both internal policy in Spain and the neoliberalism of the EU.

María Maravall and Santamaría's Analysis of the Transition and PSOE

To further illustrate the strength of Poulantzas and Gramsci's contributions to interpreting changes in capitalist state form, I will contend with the notable liberal account of the Transition, 'Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy,' by José María Maravall and Julián Santamaría in the 1986 book *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*. María Maravall and Santamaria's contribution to democratization studies has led this article to be a

[94] Luis Buendía, "The Spanish Economic 'Miracle' That Never Was," in *Crisis in the Eurozone Periphery: The Political Economies of Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61.
[95] Fernando López-Castellano and Fernando García-Quero, "The Euro System as a Laboratory for Neoliberalism: The Case of Spain," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 78, no. 1 (2019): 174.
[96] Buendía, "The Spanish Economic 'Miracle' That Never Was," 66.
[97] Buendía, 67–68; López-Castellano and García-Quero, "The Euro System as a Laboratory for Neoliberalism: The Case of Spain," 179–81.

prominent liberal interpretation of the Transition in Spain and the early years of PSOE governance. The analysis done by María Maravall and Santamaría presents a contrasting interpretation of the Transition which I will counterpose with the perspective I have given thus far in this article. Their account covers the Transition and what they perceive as the consolidation of 'democracy' following the electoral victory of the PSOE.[98] Their account of the Transition is relatively fair, with them explaining the concessions made by the left, to Suárez and the UCD, as wishing to not provoke the *continuistas* and armed conflict.[99]

However, their analysis begins to falter beyond this general account. Of note is their interpretation that "[t]he initiation of the transition was entirely unconnected with any external stimulus, in contrast to the transitions of Portugal and Greece."[100] This assertion by the authors is questionable in the context of Spain. The lack of Spain's entry into the EEC, and the West more broadly, hindered the ability of Spain's financial bourgeoisie to expand into new markets.

While at first glance the position of the financial bourgeoisie may seem to be solely an internal influence on the Transition, this is sorely misunderstood. Like Gramsci claims, "[I]nternational relations react both passively and actively on political relations (of hegemony among parties)."[101] By focusing on both national and international dynamics, it can be recognized that it was the international pressure of liberal Western Europe to disavow Spain's entry into the EEC which led to the positioning of the financial bourgeoisie in favor of the *aperturistas*. The financial bourgeoisie's stance as being in favor of a transition to liberal democracy reflects how Spain's international status and the attitude of other Western European countries towards Spain were substantially connected to the Transition. This clearly conflicts with María Maravall and Santamaría's claim that there was zero international influence on the Transition.

Another key avenue from which María Maravall and Santamaría's liberal analysis of the Transition has proved limiting has been their perspective of the role of the PSOE following the Transition. In their analysis of the consolidation of 'democracy' in Spain, María Maravall and Santamaría claim that:

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[98] José María Maravall and Julián Santamaría, "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 71.
[99] María Maravall and Santamaría, 82–84.
[100] María Maravall and Santamaría, "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy," 91.
[101] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 176.

> There were also new opportunities to develop a rigorous economic policy directed toward bringing the sectors in crisis back to economic health and the reindustrialization of the country…and to develop the constitutional rights and liberties of individuals and groups.[102]

The attitude of both authors towards the policy of the PSOE demonstrates their support of the neoliberalization of Spain. Their belief that the policy of the PSOE was reforming the economic legitimacy of Spain and supporting individual liberties is particularly problematic. Both authors fail to mention the harm done to the Spanish populace by the neoliberal policies established by the PSOE.

However, perhaps even more questionable than their appraisal of the neoliberal policies of the González government is their commendation of the supposed reform to "civil, legal, and military administration" achieved by the PSOE under González.[103] The González government's policy in Spain would not lead to legal and military reformation, but rather the renewal of Francoist policy from years prior. Most illustrative of this reawakened Francoist policy was the counter-terrorist protocol conducted by the PSOE regarding insurgencies committed by ETA in the Basque Country of Northern Spain. Between the years of 1983-1987, a year after González's electoral victory, the PSOE would embark on a violent campaign to curb ETA violence.[104] The Dirty War committed by the PSOE saw the state-funding of the *Grupos Anti-terroristas de Liberación* (GAL), a coalition of far-right paramilitary groups who assassinated, bombed, and kidnapped members of ETA with the goal of eradicating ETA.[105] However, despite the attempt to solely combat ETA, a third of all deaths caused by GAL activities were people who had zero connection to ETA terrorism.[106]

The reasoning behind this counter-terrorism project by the PSOE was their desire to 'act tough' on terrorism, as well as the institutionalized counter-terrorist policies from the Francoist era.[107] The González government, rather than confronting the capitalist relations of production that ETA was fighting, decided to re-establish hegemony in the Basque Country with direct coercion. González and the PSOE, unlike Santamaría and María Maravall's claim, did not reform

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[102] María Maravall and Santamaría, "Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy," 103.
[103] María Maravall and Santamaría, 103.
[104] Encarnación, "Democracy and Dirty Wars in Spain," 951.
[105] Encarnación, 951, 954.
[106] Encarnación, 951.
[107] Encarnación, 952.

the civil, legal, and military institutions of Spain, but rather continued the violent and repressive tactics of the Franco regime.

Additionally, it is also important to mention who both María Maravall and Santamaría were. Along with being a Professor of Sociology at the Complutense University of Madrid, María Maravall was also a noted politician in the PSOE, acting as a Deputy in parliament and Cabinet Minister between 1982-1988 under Felipe González.[108] On the other hand, Santamaría served as the President of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) from 1983-1987 under the González government.[109] The CIS, at the time of Santamaría's presidency, was a government research institute for the social sciences. Santamaría also became the ambassador for Spain in Washington D.C. shortly after the publishing of the book.[110] María Maravall and Santamaría thus can be considered what Gramsci termed 'Organic Intellectuals.' The theory of Organic Intellectuals was used by Gramsci to describe the particular sect of intellectuals, organically linked to a specific faction of society, who give their respective faction "homogeneity and awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields."[111] The function of Organic Intellectuals under conditions of bourgeois hegemony is to legitimize the hegemony of the ruling bloc, doing so through the construction of the ideological conditions for gaining the consent of the working class.[112] Under conditions of neoliberalism, Organic Intellectuals justify and legitimize the implementation of neoliberal policies despite the harm they cause to the popular masses. This intellectual legitimacy helps facilitate the consent of the popular masses to support neoliberal policies that are at odds with their material standing as the dominant classes.

Santamaría and María Maravall's functioning as Organic Intellectuals of the PSOE is quite clear, given that they outwardly support, and intellectually justify, the Transition and the policy of the González government. While they may be Organic Intellectuals, it is important to mention that their academic work, while used to justify the PSOE's hegemony, is not done so in a conspiratorial way:

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[108] José María Maravall, *Demands on Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6 n. 8.
[109] Rosa Conde et al., "Julián Santamaría, Un Politólogo Singular e Inquieto," *El País*, January 1, 2021, sec. Sociología.
[110] Conde et al.
[111] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 5.
[112] William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 42.

> Ideology and its production are generally spontaneous (intellectually reflexive) and should not be confused with deliberate falsehood. It is not necessary to assume a conspiracy among scholars in service of hegemony.[113]

Additionally, María Maravall and Santamaría's position as Organic Intellectuals has led their analysis to presuppose capitalist relations of production and subsequently be insufficient in adequately incorporating the role of the working class.[114] This investigation by both authors has led them to reassert the legitimacy of capitalist relations of production in Spain and justified the consolidation of neoliberalism and Francoist policies by the PSOE.

In engaging with María Maravall and Santamaría, I have further demonstrated the utility of engaging with Poulantzas and Gramsci. The death of Franco and the Transition did not mark the creation of a democratic and equal society but rather fundamentally ensured that capitalist relations of production were maintained. The policy of the González government also presented the continued problems facing the working class of Spain following the Transition. Rather than confronting the very exploitation faced by the dominated classes, the González government intensified the capitalist social relations of Spain in their formation of Spanish neoliberalism. The PSOE also failed to create a truly anti-Francoist state, with them further relying on Francoist technocrats and the use of extra-governmental death squads to brutally murder and coerce those against the state, along with being aligned with the financial bourgeoisie of the Franco era. Engaging with Gramsci and Poulantzas has facilitated a clear investigation of the organization and fall of the Francoist state, as well as the formalization of Spanish neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Through my investigation of twentieth-century Spain, I have sought to not only provide an understanding of Spanish history but also further our knowledge of modern Spain. By understanding the rise of neoliberalism in Spain and the continued legacy of Francoism, I have provided relevant context in which we can interpret the functioning of modern Spain. Spain, despite transitioning to a liberal democracy nearly 50 years ago, has yet to remove itself completely from Francoism. To this day, the contemporary political economy of Spain was built

[113] Robinson, 43.
[114] Richard Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984): 276.

out of the Francoist state following the Transition. Additionally, neoliberalism, which was consolidated shortly after the Transition, continues to persist in Spain.

The ideological support of neoliberalism by the two major parties in Spain, the *Partido Popular* (People's Party) and PSOE, would mean little change to the status quo. However, the Eurozone and subsequent mortgage crisis in Spain saw the rise of struggle by the populace, notably with the anti-austerity 15-M movement. This struggle can largely be understood as a response to the neoliberalization of Spain. The EU's response to the Eurozone crisis forced Spain to adopt austerity policies, with their lack of monetary sovereignty further limiting the ability to undertake alternate responses to the crisis.

In engaging with Poulantzas and Gramsci, I have examined how neoliberalism and exceptional state forms are not mutually exclusive, nor does neoliberalism only materialize in the traditional Thatcher-Reagan instances. This is particularly relevant in our modern political climate with a seeming shift towards authoritarian and reactionary politics alongside the reassertion of neoliberal doctrine, notably with figures like Javier Milei and Narendra Modi. We are seemingly at the precipice of more crises around the world, many of which may be exacerbated by the growing Trump-led trade war and threat of climate catastrophe. These moments of crisis, which so often lead to the emergence of new state forms and reassertion of bourgeois hegemony, are the very context where the works of Poulantzas and Gramsci are insightful and supportive in resisting exploitative structures.

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PALESTINE
LIBERATION ZONE

Liberation Zone

Linocut Print, 2024

Hannah Lieberman

No one is free until we're all free. From the river to the sea.

This linocut, printed in the Japanese bokashi (gradation) style with the colors of the Palestinian flag and entitled "Liberation Zone," was created as a reflection on Oxy's college encampment in the Spring of 2024. It was an act of devotion, patient reflection, and affection to carve out details of the loving community we built, and also a statement on how the beauty of this action was filtered upwards through our institution into the naive rage of children, or hateful words imagined by those who stood far outside our tented borders.

Whispers in the Medina: Moroccan Women and the Echoes of an Unfinished Business

Amira Meshchyshen | *Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane*

ABSTRACT: *This research paper explores the changes in legal and constitutional landscapes that occurred in Morocco in 2011 and analyzes how these shifts altered women's status and role in the country. The paper acknowledges that while the 2011 constitutional reforms have brought some significant progress regarding Moroccan women's rights, further efforts remain essential as these changes are not sufficient to face the deep-rooted issues that women still encounter in the society, including the persistence of economic disparities, lack of political representation and participation, and the resistance and backlash stemming from conservative and patriarchal forces. Using policy papers, media sources, and legal documents, this paper aims to investigate and compare the pre-2011 vs. post-2011 constitution and the obstacles women still face nowadays despite these reforms. By identifying implementation gaps, cultural resistance, and diverse and unique experiences of women, the research aims to contribute to understanding ongoing struggles for gender equality in the country. The findings highlight the urgent need for further legal improvements, policy implementation, and societal shifts to ensure women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life.*

Chapter 1: Introduction to the "Unfinished Business"

Open your browser, and search for thousands of cases of Moroccan women sharing their harsh stories and obstacles they encounter throughout their lives. Distinct from the tales of Scheherazade, and in the absence of a powerful and tyrannical figure like Shahryar in their actuality, their narratives originate from the whirl of inequalities and the loops of paradoxes in their lives, from the family to the school, university, workplace, street, mosque, and even cyberspace... as if their femininity carried a co-existing shame, inherited from one generation to the next. Since they cannot alter the sex they were born with, and since there is no going back, they are faced with multiple options from which they must choose the less detrimental.

Women's lives are not characterized by ease, routine, or security. Instead, they are fraught with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. The other does not view the woman with contentment and does not appreciate her being "female." He, whether an individual, a group, or society at large, accuses her of all the hardships he has endured and is still experiencing. A woman's social standing, regardless of how high she climbs in her education or career, does not exempt her from the challenges of reconciling her life as it should be with her actual life, which is marked by

disparities. As Sara Ahmed introduces the idea of the *feminist killjoy*, a figure who disrupts social harmony by pointing out systemic oppression, Moroccan women who demand full implementation of their legal rights are often seen as disturbing tradition rather than seeking justice.[1] Rather than being welcomed, their demands are often met with resistance and accusations of threatening family and societal stability, accusing them of 'seeking public attention.'

These harsh realities starkly contrast the promises enshrined in Morocco's Family Code. Two significant ones were introduced to society: the 1958 Personal Status Code and the 2004 Family Code. However, these changes did not translate to reality as much as they should have. For instance, the Ministry of Justice disclosed in 2019 that 32,000 requests to marry an underage girl were submitted and 81% of them were approved, highlighting the practice's continued popularity in Morocco. Several factors prevent women's agency such as cultural norms and traditions, the lack of knowledge of their legal rights, and even the concept of "Hchouma" which intends to silence women to never speak up about their daily struggles or invoke their basic demands. As Saba Mahmood questions the idea that empowerment needs to be portrayed as a constant struggle against patriarchal convention, many Moroccan women are conditioned to accept restrictions on their rights as a virtue rather than an oppressive practice because of the traditional concept of shame – Hchouma.[2] Hence, they climb a mountain of difficulties negotiating ingrained social norms and state-led reforms.

Despite its groundbreaking nature, I argue that the 2004 Moudawana maintained patriarchal structures and limited women's agency, and despite the strong emphasis of the 2011 Constitution on gender equality, challenges remain, therefore necessitating further reforms as discussed in the 2024 Family Code to address those limitations and finally grant women their freedom. As mentioned by the Minister of Justice Abdellatif Ouahbi this year's reforms will be "the final fight to end the exclusion and mistreatment of women, which has accumulated in our country for years." I contend that true progress requires a strong commitment to further advancing women's agency by putting more effort into this "unfinished business" as I shall name it.

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[1] "The Feminist Killjoy Handbook and a Complainer's Handbook — Sara Ahmed."
[2] Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt."

My interest in this topic stems from my belonging to Moroccan society. As a mixed young female who has lived in Morocco since childhood, I had the opportunity to observe and question what women struggle with. I acknowledge that the term 'women' is not a monolith due to the different life experiences through the intersections of race, class, and even minority status, be they Arab, Amazigh, Jewish, Muslim, or otherwise. As Sara Ahmed's emphasis on *intersectionality,* the intersections of multiple identities, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, create unique experiences of oppression that cannot be understood through one-dimensional analyses.[3] This understanding informs my approach, but for the purposes of exploring these challenges, I will be using the word 'women' in a general sense. I grew up in a privileged household and was given every fundamental right a female can aspire to. I studied in a prestigious school, where we met once a week with an expert to teach us "Civics Education." Yet, this course never included a talk about women's rights, nor did it ever introduce us to the Moudawana. Is it because they were afraid to expose the flaws within it? This silence robbed us of a critical opportunity to learn about our rights and grapple with the realities women face in Morocco. Consequently, I promised myself to dig deep into this topic one day and thoroughly research it.

Building on the background information provided in this introductory chapter, the second chapter will cover the historical background of the 2004 Moudawana and the factors behind its reform. Chapter 3 will analyze the flaws in the family code's articles and the challenges to its implementation, ranging from economic to social attitudes towards it. The following chapter introduces the second milestone in acquiring women's rights, consisting of an eye-catching article in the 2011 Constitution. This chapter will discuss whether the inclusion of a gender equality principle represents a significant step or a symbolic gesture only. Chapter 5 will present the ongoing discussion regarding the potential reform of the Moudawana in 2024. It will also analyze the specific areas targeted for change. Finally, Chapter 6 will serve as a concluding chapter, synthesizing the key findings and arguments presented throughout this exploration of women's rights in Morocco, emphasizing the necessity for further legal reforms, and suggesting potential future directions for research on this topic.

[3] Barr and Barr, "Exploring the Philosophy of Sara Ahmed: Feminism, Intersectionality, and Queer Theory - WeChronicle."

By answering the following research question "What limitations hinder the effectiveness of previous legal reforms, including the Moudawana and the 2011 Constitution, in achieving gender equality for women in Morocco?" this paper seeks to unveil the gap between legal frameworks and the lived realities of Moroccan women, examine the interplay between legal advancements and ingrained social attitudes, and identify areas for further legal reforms for Morocco to balance the 'Moudawana stick' between the reformists and conservatives across the country.

Chapter 2: One Million Signatures, One Step Forward: The Story of Morocco's Family Code

In his speech, "The Major Orientations of a New Project that should improve in a Substantial Way the status of Moroccan women and their place in the society by giving them new rights," his Majesty King Mohamed VI outlined his interest in reforming the Moroccan family code, also known as the Moudawana.[4] However, this need for change has deep roots in the country's quest for a unified legal system, precisely after Morocco's independence in 1956. Two years after this major shifting event, and precisely on the 1st of January 1958, the Personal Status Code (PSC), which encompasses family matters, marriage, divorce, and inheritance, was crafted based on the Maliki school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence.[5] Yet, despite the significant changes, little to no rights were assigned to women, as the latter placed them in subordinate roles within their family structure and in their everyday lives. From allowing men to engage in polygamy without their wives' consent, strictly restricting a woman's right to apply for divorce, to obligating her to obey her husband, these policies sparked attention among feminists in the country from the 1960s until the 1980s.

By the early 1990s, the reformist movement for the Moudawana was led by l'Union de l'Action Feminine (UAF), which considered the Moudawana to be oppressive and limiting and therefore launched a campaign named "the One Million Signatures" as a response to gather support to reform the family code once again.[6] Manifested as a letter to the parliament, l'UAF convinced His Majesty King Hassan II to create a Commission of Ulama (which stands for religious scholars) to propose changes. It is worth mentioning that the board members comprised

[4] Nour-Aissaoui, "The Current Debate on the Moroccan Family Code Mudawwanat Al-Usra in Morocco."
[5] Morocco World News, "The Moudawana: A Look Into Previous Reforms."
[6] "Reforming Moroccan Family Law: The Moudawana."

only men. While slight modifications were made to the PSC in 1993, they were perceived as a step backward for women, especially when it comes to custody, allowing men to gain full custody if the mother decides to remarry.[7]

However, liberal feminists were beamed with pride as this slight yet disappointing change meant centralizing the debate about the family code on the national level, and thus resisted surrendering. Their voices were undeniable that the new king, his majesty Mohamed VI inaugurated a progressive era: "How can society achieve progress, while women, who represent half the nation, see their rights violated and suffer as a result of injustice, violence, and marginalization, notwithstanding the dignity and justice granted them by our glorious religion?"[8]

Consequently, the 2004 Moudawana was introduced to the Moroccan people as a landmark towards gender equality, providing women the freedom to use their agency. It discussed several key points such as the share of the family's responsibility between spouses, raising the age of marriage to 18 years for both sexes, eliminating the need for tutorship for a woman to get married, leaving space to exercise her self-guardianship, granting her greater autonomy to initiate and finalize her wedding, increasing legal restrictions for polygamy. However, these reforms only emphasized the *duality of Islamic feminism* both as a tool for liberation and as a means to reinforce patriarchal structures, as theorized by Leila Ahmed.[9] Although they gave women more legal rights, they also strengthened theological defenses of persistent gender inequality – inheritance restrictions and the continued acceptance of polygamy under specific circumstances.

Chapter 3: The 2004 Moudawana: A Code of Good Intentions, Marked by Rough Roads

Following the Moudawana's implementation, women burst with joy. Statistics show that 47% of men and 60% of women expressed satisfaction with the new law in 2010.[10] These numbers portray a promising future, yet this data was gathered from higher socio-occupational groups living on the urban corridor between Rabat and Tangier, neglecting the rest of the population. The root cause of that is women's little to no knowledge about the new code in

[7] Sadiqi, "The Central Role of the Family Law in the Moroccan Feminist Movement."
[8] Ibid.
[9] "Women and Gender in Islam : Historical Roots of a Modern Debate : Ahmed, Leila : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive."
[10]Murgue, "La Moudawana : Les Dessous D'une Réforme Sans Précédent."

forgotten areas of the country, as 87% of them in six rural regions never heard of the Moudawana, preventing them from invoking their rights.[11] Broadcasting the family code in classical Arabic was also a big hurdle, due to half of the Moroccan population's lack of understanding of it, especially since 62% of women were illiterate.[12] One could only admit that feminist frameworks, as Mahmood argues, should not presume that women everywhere see legal equality as the principal means by which they are empowered.[13] Women in those abandoned regions might not find the Moudawana to be a fix for their problems. Instead, their agency is sometimes manifested in religious or familial responsibilities, therefore confounding attempts for consistent legislative changes.

Moreover, women's optimism faded as the gap between legality and reality widened. Beginning with the resistance to implementation by some judges who considered these laws not aligned with Islamic values. Magistrates hold a background filled with conservative views on the role of a woman in family, society, religion, and law. These intersections of personal beliefs and interpretations created significant obstacles for women. Additionally, insufficient training was provided to them, as only 30 judges in the country were selected to undergo a brief one-week program, leading to the incorrect or harmful application of the law by others.[14] For instance, several cases were handled quickly to maximize the number of files terminated, and little to no attention was given to the new regulations.

The application of the code, consequently, resulted in many decisions that were made in contradiction to the spirit of the code, involved discrimination towards women, and lacked a well-founded justification. A good example mentioned by Khadija Rougany, a famous lawyer in Casablanca, is related to child custody in this inadequate system, which orders some high-earning fathers to pay as little as 300 dirhams per month, an amount that fails to account for the pre-divorce living standards that his child is used to, along with medical and educational needs.[15] It is undoubtedly apparent that unjust court decisions may devastate a child's life, especially when there is a longstanding shortage of qualified professionals to handle these

[11] Sadiqi, "The Central Role of the Family Law in the Moroccan Feminist Movement."
[12] Murgue, "La Moudawana : Les Dessous D'une Réforme Sans Précédent."
[13] Mahmood, "Agency, Gender, and Embodiment."
[14] Ibid.
[15] Moha, "Women's Activism and the New Family Code Reforms in Morocco Women's Activism and the New Family Code Reforms in Morocco."

situations. Thus, the power remains in the hands of the judge, who prefers to stick to a traditional conservative mindset.

Let me remind you that the precise use of words is crucial, particularly within such a critical document where every word carries a weight that shapes lives. Yet, former Deputy Director Katie Zoglin emphasizes that language in the Moudawana was purposely vague, as part of a "political compromise."[16] The latter contradicts the need for a clear and precise legal document, potentially manipulating the laws in favor of men. For instance, failing to address the expulsion of a wife from her marital home leaves her unprotected, since no article in the code clearly discusses this aspect. Referring to the child custody example, if a minimum yet precise amount was set, judges would have less discretionary power in applying the law. Concerning divorce cases, even though the new code allows women to initiate marital termination, the circumstances to do so differ for men as they retain the unilateral power to divorce through repudiation. In contrast, women fall into two complex situations: financially compensating their husbands or meeting specific criteria to dissolve their marriage.

Raising the minimum marriage age was a positive step, but a loophole remains. Despite elevating it to 18 for both sexes, as I mentioned previously, article 20 of the code still empowers judges to approve child marriages with justification instead of altogether abolishing it. For instance, data shows that there is more work to be done, as 29,847 cases of minor marriages were registered in 2007, which is a rise of 12.55% in comparison with 2006.[17] As to polygamy, while it is still legal, it is subject to several restrictions under the family code. Two of these consist of his wife's consent and the court's approval. This curtailed the practice of polygamy, leaving women with a renewed sense of security. The Ministry of Justice confirms this success, with numbers showing a decrease below 700 polygamy cases across the country in the past two decades.[18] However, this does not reflect the effectiveness of the law, as some men manipulate the system and obtain fake wives' consent.

The difficulty in implementing the 2004 Moudawana is also on the social level, as Moroccan society is deeply embedded with cultural traditions and ignorance that still govern it.

[16] "Morocco's Family Code: Improving Equality for Women on JSTOR."
[17] Moha, "Women's Activism and the New Family Code Reforms in Morocco Women's Activism and the New Family Code Reforms in Morocco."
[18] Ibid.

For instance, the survey of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems on the status of women in Morocco conducted in 2009-10 reports that 71% of women and 85% of men believe "that a good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees."[19] These high percentages shed light on the significant gap between the legal reforms and the societal attitudes in Moroccan society. Thus, the 2004 Moudawana's story is one of both progress and setbacks. Celebrating this code seems premature, as the reality for thousands of Moroccan women reveals a system that keeps neglecting their needs, favors men at a significant human cost, and fails to address power imbalances that extend gender imbalances across the country.

Chapter 4: Fixed Values vs. Evolving Equality: The Thorny Path of Gender Equality in Post-2011 Morocco

The series of protests under the name of "the Arab Spring" that occurred in several countries in the Arab region in late 2010 influenced King Mohamed VI of Morocco to implement a new constitution, published on the 29th of July 2011. As an active and dedicated member of international organizations, the monarchy reaffirmed its commitment to the "Rights of Man" recognized universally through subscribing to the principles, rights, and obligations outlined in their conventions. For instance, article 19 of the Constitution states the following:

"*The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character, enounced in this Title and in the other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in the international conventions and pacts duly ratified by Morocco and this, with respect for the provisions of the Constitution, of the constants [constantes] of the Kingdom and of its laws.*

The State works for the realization of parity between men and women.

An Authority for parity and the struggle against all forms of discrimination is created, to this effect."[20]

An initial glimpse at this article results in a sense of optimism. Article 19 was the first in the Moroccan constitution to deal with gender equality. It also points out that the monarchy derives its legitimacy from traditional values, including religion, since the king is said to be a

[19] Elliott, "Morocco and Its Women's Rights Struggle."
[20] "Morocco 2011 Constitution - Constitute."

descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Precisely, the use of “constants” refers to the unchanging religious traditions. However, this one word makes it harder to improve women’s rights since it creates confusion as there is no clear explanation of how the country is committed to achieving this goal. As Leila Ahmed points out, legislative changes in Muslim-majority countries may uphold patriarchal systems under the cover of growth.[21] Despite being revolutionary, the Constitution's mention of "fixed Islamic values" limits the inclusion of gender equality.

The state can look progressive while guaranteeing that reforms do not fundamentally undermine male power, thanks to this deliberate ambiguity. Emphasizing the importance of traditions therefore creates friction with the aspirations for gender equality enshrined in the same article. It also implies that even if laws change due to the social, political, and economic situation of the country, religion is seen as more permanent. This ambiguity highlights the unclear path Morocco must take to achieve both, especially since no additional article tackles the same aspect of gender equality.

It is evident that this article is the second historical juncture of women’s rights, but it is also an extension of the inconsistencies already introduced by the Moudawana previously. Thus, women’s position in post-2011 Morocco is disturbing. For instance, between 2011 and 2018, 85% of underage marriage requests resulted in authorization.[22] Judges sanction this “child rape,” as coined by Dr. Harbon, by assessing a girl’s physical appearance under the belief that it reflects her capability of assuming marital responsibilities. In 2020, 7% of marriage contracts were of minor girls deprived of their childhood. What is also shocking is the high fertility rates among girls aged 15 to 19, nearly 20% of total births in 2018, according to the Ministry of Health, indicating child marriage is prevalent.[23]

Additionally, a 2015 report by Morocco's National Council of Human Rights revealed gaps between legal protections and women's lived experiences. Key findings included the high rates of court-approved polygamy (43.41%), unequal access to communal lands for women, significant illiteracy rates, particularly among rural women (55%) and urban women (37%), and

[21] “Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate : Ahmed, Leila : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.”
[22] El-Sadany and Jamali, “The Moudawana: Morocco’s Nearly 20-Year Old Family Code - the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.”
[23] Belhaj, “Moroccan Women: Protected by Law and Oppressed by Reality | عائشة بلحاج.

victim blaming of rape survivors based on marital status and virginity.[24] Are these statistics a reflection of the Morocco enshrined in its 2011 constitution, which guarantees gender equality and non-discrimination? Clearly not.

The contradictions and inconsistencies in committing to women's rights in Morocco endure. The Muslim Sovereign state ratified progressive international conventions like CEDAW, but it also emphasized the supremacy of "fixed Islamic values" that can conflict with these conventions, raising doubt about the country's true intention to commit to such a convention. Furthermore, Morocco's withdrawal of reservations to CEDAW during the Arab Spring raises serious questions about their commitment to women's equality, a move that likely intended to improve their image as a progressive nation, especially considering the victory of the Islamist party PJD (the Party of Justice and Development) in the upcoming elections.[25]

While the information provided highlights significant challenges, Moroccan women's everyday realities and subtle limitations go far beyond what this data reveals. On top of these issues, even Moroccan proverbs used until today intend to diminish women and neglect their rights. Take the famous saying, "The homes of women are soon desolate," arguing that women are fleeting presences, subordinate to men from father to husband.[26] To me, this 7-word composed proverb exemplifies the concept of 'the personal is political' as a woman's struggles expose the broader gender inequalities embedded in Moroccan society. This ongoing disparity stresses the urgent need to revisit the Moudawana and address its shortcomings through comprehensive legal reforms.

Chapter 5: He Said, She Said, They Said Reform: The 2024 Moudawana's Controversial Debate

Two decades later, the conversation about the reform of the Moudawana sparked attention on the national level again. Leading protests in front of the United Nations Square in Casablanca, the Moroccan feminist movement known as "7achak" strongly demanded to heat the

[24] Sabah-Manal, "Women's Rights in Post-2011 Morocco - The Divergences Between Institutions and Values."
[25] Ibid.
[26] Belhaj, "Moroccan Women: Protected by Law and Oppressed by Reality | عائشة بلحاج."

debate by mirroring l'UAF's pre-2004 advocacy efforts as they argued, “The time for change has come… 19 years after the last reform of the Moudawana, women still do not have the same rights as men.”[27] Thus, due to the urgent need to meet the evolving societal norms and the desire to align with international human rights standards to reflect modern institutional demands, his Majesty King Mohamed VI ordered a series of modifications of the family code in September of 2023, setting a period of 6 months to reform and get approval from the parliament.

These discussions, with numerous stakeholders such as religious leaders, legal experts, and civil society professionals, are centered around the need to address specific aspects of the Moudawana that are considered outdated, as they belong to Morocco’s position 20 years ago. Hence, the targeted revision areas include several topics, ranging from inheritance rights to underage marriage. Under the current family code, the former emphasizes that women are allowed only half of what their male counterparts inherit. On the one hand, conservatives firmly reject changing this regulation, as it falls under the religious text “Sharia,” while reformists, under the Minister of Justice Abdellatif Ouahabi, consider this opportunity as an attempt to minimize and even cancel injustice and discrimination against women. In contrast to theological needs, patriarchal interests have traditionally influenced how Islamic law is interpreted, as noted by Leila Ahmed.[28] Conservatives use religious dogma to defend current disparities, while reformists urge for gender equity in the 2024 inheritance law discussions. This illustrates how, rather than challenging male power, Islamic feminism is frequently used in ways that uphold it.

Concerning child custody, the new family code is set to prioritize the child’s best interests, such as their emotional and physical needs, the stability of each parent's home environment, the child's existing relationship with each parent, and the maintenance of their living lifestyle pre-divorce, instead of diminishing the father’s responsibility and throwing the child’s expenses on the shoulders of his mother alone. Moreover, the leaked reforms include simplifying divorce procedures for both spouses with more focus on the women’s side, excluding the marital house from inheritance through recognition of the wife’s right of usufruct, since most women are left in a vulnerable financial position due to limited access to marital assets after divorce. One other important aspect of reform is underage marriage which is still exercised

[27] Morocco World News, “After Nearly 20 Years, Morocco Discusses Family Code Reform.”
[28] “Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate : Ahmed, Leila : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.”

nowadays in the country. Hopes arise to abolish this form of child rape, as such an act deprives minor girls of their childhood, education and extinguishes the flame of hope for a brighter future.

If there is anything that you should already conclude after laying out all the necessary details for you, reforming the family code is a crucial step for the country to move forward. Resistance from conservatives and other concerned parties only reflects Sara Ahmed's analysis of *affective economies*—how emotions like shame, honor, and fear shape social behavior.[29] Emotions are cultural factors that support societal institutions as well as individual experiences. Because the feminist movement *7achak* challenges the emotional attachment to conventional gender roles, it encounters resistance. The use of emotive narratives as a weapon to block change is demonstrated by the accusations made against reformists for disrespecting cultural and religious values.

It is joyful to see data about women holding 13% of ministerial portfolios, 20% of the seats of the lower Chamber of the Parliament, and 11.7% of the seats of the upper Chamber.[30] Even if these numbers are not as high as they should be, they still empower us to strive for more change. However, political participation is not just about holding positions of power but creating a society where women are free to plan their own futures and participate equally in all aspects of life. If there is anything I believe in, it would be to acknowledge that even small acts, such as educating girls, advocating for fair wages, or simply speaking up against gender bias, are also forms of political participation. Hence, holding a parliament seat is not enough. Protesting with posters delivering strong messages such as "Real men are feminists," "Same duties, same rights," and "She wants rights, not flowers"[31] is also insufficient. A new Moudawana can be the most significant milestone for women's empowerment, achievement of social justice, and alignment with international norms. Thus, it is necessary to finalize this 'unfinished business' once and for all.

Chapter 6: From Silence to Solidarity

It is evident that the 2004 Moudawana introduced advancements like raising the minimum marriage age and reducing polygamy, but its challenges included no implementation,

[29] Ahmed, "Affective Economies."
[30] "Facts and Figures - Maghreb."
[31] Morocco World News, "After Nearly 20 Years, Morocco Discusses Family Code Reform."

bad implementation, lack of awareness, and even unclear language in the code, in addition to cultural traditions and societal attitudes emphasizing male dominance that hinder progress. Moreover, the 2011 Constitution, which was supposed to be a step forward to gender equality, remains ambiguous due to references to "fixed Islamic values." The key to overcoming these challenges? A reformed Moudawana prioritizing women's empowerment, social justice, and international alignment.

Comparing Morocco's attitude towards gender equality with that of other Arab countries represents a seed planted with the potential to blossom into a more fair and equitable society for women. The monarchy underwent two shifting yet necessary steps to pursue its goal, yet the fight is far from being over. I assert that to implement a new family code, Morocco should benefit from the flaws and challenges contained within the previous one and address them.

Gone are the days of a young me, confused by the silence in civics education class about women's rights and the family code. Now, at 20 years old, everything is clear: this silence perpetuates inequality. It is time to break it. This paper is not dedicated to Moroccan women only but to every human being connected to the Moroccan monarchy geographically, mentally, and spiritually. We cannot remain passive bystanders. We all have a role to play in demanding transparency and building a more just future.

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Chapter 1: Fresh

"Starting fresh! A blessing in disguise!"
. . . .That's what the little wired box advertised
"Starting fresh" (a blessing, for most),
but not for me

<u>How can one start fresh?</u>

Fairy tales make it look so easy...
How even the dullest of [main] characters
Can be given hundredths of second chances,
Until the unlucky numbers seem more desirable

Fairytales are the true villains.
Telling stories of *Riches, Righteousness, Respect, and Romance*
In reality its, **Rags, Rudeness, Racist, and Radioactive**

It's a crime that a figment of imagination can experience love
Expressed in so many ways, but has the same results
sorrow.
A sucker who falls under its spell
is destined for sorrow

So why do I keep falling for its candy coated lie?
rather than the prickly truth...
So flawed,
So ugly,
So cruel

Confusions—Conclusions

Ok! Let's go backwards

No I'm not mixed
No I'm not straight as a stick
No I'm not silver or gold, my heart is a wooden soul
No I'm not baggy or bedazzled, I'm a Boho Queen
No I'm not a fitness trendsetter, look at me
No I'm not tall, my platforms do the talking
No, I'm not a lover of a God who can't even figure out “His” own identity; just be a luminous spheroid of plasma held together by self-gravity and SHUT UP colorless man!
phew
No I'm not a Mammal star sign
No I'm not into the political war of an orange vs. a pear
No I'm not a wig, weave, shave-it-all-off-and-let-it-breathe kind of girl—but I still love em
No I’m not angelic or devilish, I’m a chaotic construct of my own finitude
And no, I don’t like talking about the past..it's the past

phew Ok! Let’s start!

Hi! I’m JayBee!
A milk chocolate woman
Surviving in this thing called Life
With weird being my new normal

My Chocolate Roots

Didn't have a spot within the 21st century (patriarchal) workplace...

I was turned away today.
Not because I was too wide nor too tall,
too business nor too casual,
too feminine nor too masculine,
too loud nor too quiet,
too uninspired nor too creative,
too dark nor too pale,
and neither too ghetto (Black) nor too White washed.
I was turned away today,
because the Man labels my hair as
"Too difficult," "Too distracting," and "Too.....much"
I had too much curly hair.
.
.
My 7 inch,
3c,
Thick and frizzy,
Soft to the touch, like cotton candy
Espresso
Hair.
.
.
.
My Hair.
My pride n joy, bundled with care
(shown through its volume)
insulted the Man himself

where to be "normal"
Is to mask my curly hair, with straighten roots,
bleached to the color of wheat,
And have my hair pulled into a bun
so tight
it would strain the color out of my colored roots

How colorless the Man's idiotic commentary sounded
When deeming what is "proper hair"
(I wished my ears were bleached in that moment)
.
.
.
Is this what it feels like?
For my Chocolate Roots to be decolored?
In front of a colorless man..?

Poetry, 2025
Jane Brinkley

Glitter, Gay Identity, and Gender-Policing: The Conservative Reality of American Figure Skating

Ian Scruton | *Purdue University*

ABSTRACT: *To many, figure skating is a radical sport. Flamboyant men and graceful women hurl themselves or each other across the ice at speeds close to 20 miles per hour. The sport seems to be the pioneer of pushing gender stereotypes away from the hegemonic heteronormativity that has encompassed contemporary society. It is a perfect balance between gender identity, sexuality, and all the gray areas in between. In actuality, figure skating has a long history of silencing Queer athletes, pushing very traditional outlooks of gender identity representation, and an oppressive culture manifested through a subjective scoring system. So, how did this oppressive culture start, what caused its change, and how does theory apply? In this research paper, I will explore the historical background of figure skating, analyze how the sport intersects with modern interpretations of sexuality and gender, and finally apply theoretical discourse on gender and sexuality theory to the case study of contemporary American figure skating.*

A Brief History of Figure Skating

According to the International Olympic Committee, skating originated as a form of transportation between Dutch villages in the early 13th century.[1] However, it was not until the 1800s that the sport gained its artistic background, thanks to two Americans, Edward Bushell and Jackson Haines, who introduced balletic aspects to the sport. By the 1920s, figure skating had reached the international stage at the Olympics, was one of the oldest Olympic sports, and allowed women to compete.[2] Despite the lack of segregation, the social culture at the time still viewed sports as dominantly masculine. According to historian James R. Hines, "[F]igure skating was originally considered a totally masculine pastime." Because of this, it was not until the early stages of globalized society that skating became the sport we think of today.

According to sociologist Mary Louise Adams's book entitled *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport*, the culture of masculinity started shifting during the Victorian era due to the emphasis placed on sports as a training place for the discipline of

[1] Nd, "Figure Skating: Olympic History"

[2] Eschner, "A Brief History of Women's Figure Skating"

young boys.[3] The changing culture of sports was also connected to changing times as Britain's global power and influence grew. As a result, masculinity moved away from the morally rigid Victorian masculinity toward the Muscular Christianity movement, which was fueled by middle-class instability around Britain's continuing global conquest. Victorian masculinity defined manliness as "suggested strength of character in the face of adversity, the ability to stand up for one's rights, or sometimes just not succumbing to the pressures of life."[4] This means that unlike today, masculinity was more connected to the morality of character and what constitutes "gentlemanliness," and less about raw power or penetration. It is important to understand that the concept of masculinity at the time was built around the patriarchy, and critiques of masculinity and its manifestation in misogyny were not popular or regularly talked about.

The Muscular Christianity movement refers to the intersection of sports, Christianity, and masculinity, such as the claim "that participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and 'manly' character."[5] As Britain's global conquest continued, a cultural shift occurred which removed emphasis on traits that women also performed. What resulted was extreme patriarchal hegemony, which in turn created a crusade against masculinity that was perceived as effeminate. The turn to violence was scapegoated through religion, hence the name: "[G]odliness was compatible with manliness and viewed manliness as an 'antidote to the poison of effeminacy.'"[6] This manifested notably in duels, which were legal at the time, and led to an increase in upper- and middle-class violence. Muscular Christianity is essentially the blueprint for the performance of contemporary masculinity today, and marked the shift into the connection between sports and masculinity. While this is an oversimplification of sociopolitics in Victorian England, it does point to the larger cultural shift occurring at the time. Given the Eurocentric influence of Western powers, American figure skating would be influenced by the hegemonic interpretations of English masculinity.[7]

A Closer Look at the Social Culture of Modern-Day American Figure Skating

[3] Adams, *Artistic Impressions*, 82

[4] Boyd, "Victorian Manliness ," 45

[5] Watson et. al., "The Development of Muscular Christianity," 1

[6] Watson et al., "The Development of Muscular Christianity," 1

[7] Masterson, "Dueling, Conflicting Masculinities"

Contemporary figure skating (post-1980s), I would claim, is defined by three key social and cultural changes. First, there was a significant scoring change within the sport toward a more subjective type of scoring. Second, the post-World War II radical culture around self-expression and peace in the United States ended after the Vietnam War. Third, as the AIDS epidemic rose, a sport that was viewed as "gay" became more blacklisted, less publicly accessible, and less acceptable. As it is most applicable to this paper, I will be focusing primarily on the scoring system change; however, it is important not to overestimate the intersectional application of the other two as well.

In an interview with two-time Olympic champion Dick Button given to CNN in 2018, the skating star said a shift in scoring created a more confusing environment for watchers and failed to establish any form of benchmark: "The newer system doesn't have a defined highest score. 'The old 6 point system was understandable and one could hear folks in a bar cheer and argue about whether someone should have had a 5.7 or 5.8.'"[8] This shift in the scoring of skating also shifted the culture away from individualized skaters.

The forced assimilation into this system can be best contextualized by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and symbolic power, which essentially states that social capital is built off of what is hegemonically dominant at the time.[9] If one fits into this category, then they have more cultural capital, and therefore social mobility; if one does not, then they do not have the social mobility to be seen outside of that cultural hegemony. This can be intersected with the organizational communication theory of constitutive communication, which breaks down societal groupings like gender, sexuality, and race as social constructions. The way we communicate within society is therefore governed by these social constructions through James Paul Gee's framework of Big D discourse and little d discourse.[10] Big D discourse refers to the larger hegemonic oppressive ideals or constructions like gender or race, while the little d discourse refers to the rhetoric that upholds these constructions.[11] The Big D discourse in this context is the oppressive notion of gender or sexuality, in which those that are not heterosexual or cis gendered are "abnormal and different." The little d discourse is the way we communicate that upholds these social constructions. Bourdieu argues that we want to gain social capital to

[8] Garcia, "U.S. Figure Skating Used to Be Wildly Popular"

[9] Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power"

[10] Paul Gee, "Discourse, small-d, Big D"

[11] Paul Gee, "Discourse, small-d, Big D"

therefore "fit in" and be seen positively by others. Craig takes this one step further and says we achieve this popularity (social capital) through the way we communicate and what types of hegemony we choose to platform, or perform. These two theories intersect by placing emphasis on the way we communicate[12] and perform our identity to therefore gain popularity.

Button hints that this new scoring system opened the door for a more objective scoring system to be turned into a subjective one, resulting in the death of open, individual skater personalities: "I miss the personalities, all of whom were different," Button said. "Where are the Katarina Witts? The Dorothy Hamills?"[13] By replacing an objective median of communication with a subjective one, it moved emphasis away from the skating itself and allowed for the judging of the specific skater instead of their skating. Because there are no checks and balances of this power in skating, it allowed scoring to be influenced by the oppressive social structure that was then upheld by judges not wanting to lose cultural capital. This shift away from objective scoring disproportionately affected skaters that fit outside of that gender and sexuality norm because judges did not reward that type of skating, whether it was objectively good or not.

There are multiple interviews from both old skaters and new ones that describe the current culture in the sport. In interviews done by *Advocate* Magazine entitled *9 stories from Queer Figure Skaters in their Own Words,*[14] Timothy LeDuc, a gay, non-binary pairs skater, spoke about how this gendered policing ran past just the judges and into coaches and skaters themselves. Because everyone is focused on winning, appeasing the judges becomes standard practice; LeDuc stated, "I've literally had coaches before big competitions pull me into the boards right before you go out and they call your name, and coaches have said to me, 'Timothy, go out and show them how masculine you are, be a man.'" This target at gender identity and its intersection with sexuality is not mutually exclusive to men in the sport either.

Amber Glenn (2024 U.S. National Champion) made headlines in 2019 for coming out as bisexual. She spoke of the same gender-policing as LeDuc did in her interview: "I'm muscular, I'm strong, I'm powerful, I'm a jumper. When I was a novice, I skated to 'I Love Rock and Roll' by Joan Jett, and I had judges that would be like, 'Hey, you need to try something slow and pretty, and be more graceful and stop looking like you are a guy skating.' And so then for years, I

[12] Putnam and Murphy, *Building theories of organization*

[13] Garcia, "U.S. Figure Skating Used to Be Wildly Popular"

[14] Saperstein and Schleicher, "9 Stories from Queer Figure Skaters"

thought I needed to conform to that." It's clear through anecdotes that this change contextualized through theory affected real skaters and led to a clear shift in social culture within the sport. What was once a sport that relied on the diverse identities of its athletes for competition and media popularity became one that censored them instead. Finally, it is important to mention the intersectionality of the other two pieces that define contemporary American skating. While I contextualized the scoring system through theory, it would also easily apply to the post-Vietnam social deradicalization and the up-and-coming AIDS epidemic which manifested fear around non-conforming individuals that identified as Queer.

A Rhetorical Analysis on the Intersection of C.J. Pascoe's 'Fag Discourse' to the Institution of Culture in American Figure Skating

Dr. C.J. Pascoe is the author of *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*.[15] The book works to define how through sexual epithets, American teens are socialized into a hetero-conformative society, where hyper-masculinity and the power and privilege it denotes are placed as the hegemonic power. Pascoe does this by shifting the discourse of the word "fag" away from something mutually exclusive to Queer folk, and more toward an identity of the "penetrated" man, one devoid of masculinity. She states, "'Fag' is not necessarily a static identity attached to a particular (homo-sexual) boy. Fag 'talk' and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships." This take works to highlight how much of contemporary masculinity (what constitutes as straight) is built off of the worry to not be perceived as gay.

Pascoe focuses on how the performance of gendered sexuality is what causes the character of the "fag" on an individual and not how they self identify: "[A]ny boy can become a fag, regardless of his actual desire or self-perceived sexual orientation. The threat of the abject position infuses the faggot with regulatory power." Essentially, "fag discourse" focuses on how sexuality and gender performance are socialized among young men. It places emphasis on the goal of not being perceived as gay and influences how young men police themselves and others through the power of hegemonic masculinity. Because the scoring system places the individual skater's score at the mercy of the judges, the subjective scoring system shuts down individuality that highlights non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered tropes. Pascoe's theory builds upon the

[15] Pascoe, "Dude, You're a Fag," 46

idea that modern masculinity is created out of the fear of emasculation through the epithet of "faggot."[16] However, in figure skating this creates a paradoxical relationship. Even though the sport rewards conservatism, it is still directly affiliated with elements that are perceived as non-masculine, like sparkles, elegance, and artistry. Thus, skaters continue to perform gender in non-conforming ways, like choosing to skate to "masculine" music, while still performing the gender non-conforming aspects of the sport, like grace and artistry.

In this way, a paradoxical presentation of masculinity has become the cultural standard of the sport. The way skaters present themselves athletically and aesthetically are still viewed as Queer and abnormal; however, within the sport, they are in fact conforming to a heterosexual, cisgendered performance of their gender and sexuality. This has most notably come into the public spotlight recently when Ilia Malinin (2024 world champion), commented in an Instagram Live. When the skater was asked if he was straight, he responded, "Let's be honest, I can't be straight anymore because I need those component scores up y'know. I gotta say I'm not straight, that way my components are gonna go up."[17] While this response is rooted in vile homophobia, it also focuses on this paradoxical culture. Malinin, a skater famous for his lack of artistic ability and extreme athleticism, instead places misguided blame on his lack of "gayness" and how his cisgendered identity is unable to appeal to the artistic elements in the sport affiliated with the lack of traditional masculinity.

This showcases that regardless of gender or sexuality identification within the sport, the hegemonic pressure to not be perceived as gay influences skaters' opinions on the scoring system. This influence impacts the way they perform their own gender or sexuality. In Malinin's example, the skater is so focused on performing as a heterosexual man in the sport that he places blame on his lack of Queerness to also be able to perform the "non-traditional" masculine elements, unaware of his own homophobic rhetoric. This showcases very explicitly the complexity of modern day masculinity and its intersection with sexuality.

As we as a society continue to work to dismantle oppressive systems of gender and sexuality, we are left with the new challenging problem of the complexity of masculinity: its intersectionality. If we designate entire sports, subcultures, identities, and individuals as masculine or feminine, we rob individuals of the unique identities that make them people.

[16] Pascoe, "Dude, You're a Fag," 46

[17] CyanSusOfficial, "R/figureskating on reddit"

Individuals and the way they perform identity is socialized through their experiences as people. Rather than using explicit rhetoric or words, modern-day homophobia and oppression are rooted in cultural norms and microaggressions. Without viewing these systems from a systematic, intersectional viewpoint, we can never work to fully dismantle them.

And so, I leave leaders with a challenge. You absolutely should work to dismantle social constructs like gender and sexuality, particularly through an intersectional lens, but I also urge you to think about how you define society. What classifies individuals as morally strong? What constitutes emasculation, and how much of that constitution is rooted in bigoted idealisms? In the case of figure skating, its complexity is rooted in generations of discourse on sexuality and gender. Its power is placed in these abstract notions of scoring, the subjectivity of skaters' individuality, and even humanity. Altogether, figure skating provides a valuable case study on the complexity of modern-day gender and sexuality discourse and how we work to define these in the new age of intersectional holistic academia.

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Free Them

Film Photograph, 2025

Marty Valdez

"Free Them" is a digital photo that was taken at an anti-ICE protest in the middle of Downtown Los Angeles. The encapsulation of these 3 signs conveys the general sentiment at the protest: a disdain for Trump and his regime, cops out of our communities, and U.S. Imperialism.


BACON
GREASE
I.C.E.
STREETS
NO ONE IS
ILLEGAL
ON
STOLEN
LAND
DEPORT CRIMINALS
BUT YOU
MADE ONE
NO ONE IS
ILLEGAL
ON

A Girl Paper About My Mom in the Movies: The Exile of Immigrant Mothers in U.S. Film

Moira Tañedo | *Occidental College*

ABSTRACT:This article closely studies the immigrant mothers of *Amreeka*, *Entre Nos*, and *The Namesake*. I frame their experiences through meditations and complications of Edward Said's ideas on 'exile,' arguing that in these films, it is not a political state, but rather, a social imposition, from both the mother's child within the film *and* the viewer outside of it. I use 'imposition' to emphasize how U.S. constructions and imaginations of immigrant mothers – legally and socially, outside of film – provoke viewers to *only* see immigrant mothers' pain and sacrifice. Acknowledging the limitations of immigrant mom representations, I ultimately urge an alternate read of the immigrant mother as a woman with agency, wit, and intellect – all of which remain unthreatened and steady throughout the trauma of immigration.

Films Discussed

Amreeka (Cherien Dabis, 2009): Palestinian mother Muna and her teenage son, Fadi leave the West Bank for the suburbs of Chicago, where Muna's sister, Raghda and her family, live. The dual-family household must learn to navigate the exclusion and harassment they undergo in a post-9/11 American world.

Entre Nos (Paola Mendoza & Gloria La Morte, 2009): Colombian immigrant Mariana follows her husband to New York City, where he leaves her and their two children. The family learns to survive and rely on each other.

The Namesake (Mira Nair, 2006): Based on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel of the same name, the film follows the US immigration journeys of Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Gangul, from Kolkata to New York City.

7 December 2023

In two days, I fly to the Philippines with my mom and brother after 13 years of being away. I've done my due diligence in telling my friends and family that, finally, I am coming home. I keep joking that my brain will combust and splatter all over the plane as soon as we land; my decapitated body will be transported back in a coffin, White Lotus S1E6 style. I've been (badly) masking my anxiety.

The older I've gotten, the easier it has been to forgive my mom for coming to the U.S. Actually, I'd say my teenage years were marked by my realization (or, as I have come to know it, a fabrication) of my anger towards her – anger I only figured out I had when I started going to therapy my junior year. My high school counselor, a white woman who tried her best, managed to tease out eight years' worth of confusion, frustration, and grief out of 16-year-old me. I guess that's her job. I was mad at everything and everyone. Mad at my mom, mad at my brother who didn't seem to care (turns out he did). Mad that I was slowly forgetting what home looked like and mad at people who didn't believe that I even remembered in the first place. Mad at my friends who didn't understand and mad at my friends who did. Mad at how complicated my feelings were and mad that I didn't know how to fix them.

Under the guidance of white therapy, I took it upon myself to "break generational curses" by pushing my mom to talk about her difficult childhood and immigrant sacrifice – because, you know, reliving trauma is necessary for healing (sarcastic). Of course, she shut me down with the classic "I don't wanna talk about that." That meant to never bring it up again, so, like every token immigrant kid-scholar, I wrote about it instead. I laugh at the hyper-awareness and hypocrisy of my own exploitation of my family's immigration…and yet, I am academically and creatively preoccupied with my own experience. I am unable to write about anything else.

My Mom in the Movies

"Exiled poets objectify and lend dignity to a condition designed to deny dignity."

Immigrant mothers inhabit a particularly rigid imaginary in the American conscience: the monolithic Third World woman unwillingly brought to the U.S. and whose liberation necessitates a divorce from her culture, religion, marriage, family, and home. However, as Nawal El Saadawi points out this imagination is flawed as "radical ethics, religious freedom, liberation theology and cultural autonomy have not led to greater freedom or to fundamental and cultural and economic changes that improve ["Third World" women's] lives."[1] In response to similar critiques throughout the Global South, the liberal and neocolonial West created new ways to affirm the imperialist savior. U.S. media imagined a new mother: a woman who consensually left her chaotic home country to find safety in the United States. Unlike her past counterparts, she is

[1] Nawāl Sa'dāwi, "dissidence and creativity," *The Naval El Saadawi Reader* (1997): 165.

the breadwinner of the family – no longer an afterthought to the immigrant man who brought her here, but still an annoyance to her child who seeks to assimilate and a pity to her Western peers. This image perpetuates a problematic and limiting narrative that such security can *only* be found in the U.S.

As U.S. viewers, we have grown accustomed to, and even expect, immigrant mothers' trauma on and off-screen. I grieve for *Amreeka*'s Muna, who may never be able to return to a home she recognizes.[2] I feel anger for *Babel*'s Amelia and *Maid in America*'s Judith, both of whose 'return home' comes in the form of deportation, and is, therefore, a second exile; it is unwanted, violent, and painful.[3] I hold my breath with *The Visitor*'s Zainab who waits until she is justly reunited with her deported husband.[4] *The Joy Luck Club*'s Auntie Ying-Ying is forcibly brought home every day with the trauma of her baby's accidental death in China.[5] I empathize with *Spanglish*'s Flor, whose daughter willingly tosses her mother aside in favor of the new benefits she receives from the white employer's "generosity."[6] *Everything Everywhere All at Once*'s Evelyn hyper fixates on the what-ifs and only finds contentment after she confirms that her alternate life paths were not right for her.[7] *Crazy Rich Asians*' Kerry warns her daughter, Rachel, of the limiting social structure back in Singapore, insinuating that such rigid social contracts matter less in the U.S. and thus, life must be easier here.[8] *Fresh Off the Boat*'s Jessica often conflicts with her sons, who she sees as too Americanized.[9] *Modern Family*'s Gloria has to prove to her new white family that she and her son genuinely love her wealthy husband, Jay, and are not just gold-diggers.[10] *One Day at a Time*'s Penelope is introduced as a mother who fears

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[2] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009).

[3] *Babel*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (Paramount Pictures, StudioCanal, and Summit Entertainment, 2006); *Maid in America*, directed by Anayansi Prado (Impacto Films, ITVS, PBS, and Kanopy, 2005).

[4] *The Visitor*, directed by Tom McCarthy (Overture Films, 2007).

[5] *The Joy Luck Club*, directed by Wayne Wang (Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 1993).

[6] *Spanglish*, directed by James L. Brooks (Sony Pictures Releasing, 2004).

[7] *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinhert (A24, 2022).

[8] *Crazy Rich Asians*, directed by John M. Chu (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018).

[9] *Fresh Off the Boat*, season 1, episode 1, "Pilot," directed by Lynn Shelton, written by Eddie Huang and Nahnatcha Khan, featuring Randall Park, Constance Wu, Hudson Yang, Forrest Wheeler, and Ian Chen, https://www.hulu.com/watch/3ecda132-7410-4403-849b-c06ba948dafd.

[10] *Modern Family*, season 1, episode 1, "Pilot," directed by Jason Winer, written by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, featuring Ed O'Neill, Sofía Vergara, Julie Bowen, Ty Burrell, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet, Sarah Hyland, Ariel Winter, Nolan Gould, and Rico Rodriguez, https://www.hulu.com/watch/c22e8447-4a78-4ab4-ad8f-4df8d90b6bc3.

becoming too "old-school."[11] Even in these contemporary imaginations, immigrant mothers in media only break out of their monolithic identity when they accept American forms of liberation: becoming a literal superhero, fleeing strict society, accepting American-ness, being accepted into a white American family, and embracing modernity. Recent film and TV representations have attempted to redefine the immigrant mother, but for the most part, Asian mothers have barely escaped the detached "Tiger Mom" reputation, Latina mothers are still over-sexualized, and Arab mothers remain the refugee in need of saving. Not to mention the continued absence of Black immigrant mothers. I seek to trouble this very framework.

It should be noted that my critique of the films above is not to say that every film thus far has outright failed to justly present the immigrant mother. As a friend so poignantly put it, "As media scholars, we have to believe that *every movie does some kind of work*."[12] This way of thinking is precisely why, in this essay, I am disinterested in the creation of *new* narratives and instead, urge a revisiting of existing ones – particularly films that emerged in the late 2000s (which is when my own mother came to the U.S.).

Before we, as filmmakers and viewers, reimagine immigrant mothers once more, I believe we have a responsibility to first revisit all the ways we got it wrong. I had to be honest with myself about the box of trauma I limited my mom to, and from there, do my own work of asking, "Why?" and then, "Now, what?" I realized that the issue isn't that these stories of hardship and sacrifice are a lie; the issue is that they are limiting. I assert that by assuming agency, instead of imprisonment, of the moms we see on-screen, we create space for them to present themselves as they are, not how we have been trained to see them.

In this essay, I specifically discuss the films *Amreeka*, *The Namesake*, and *Entre Nos* – works I argue provide us with a plethora of opportunities to visualize immigrant mothers' autonomy as unwavering, nonnegotiable, and strengthened — not weakened — by the traumas they undergo. I particularly complicate the conflicts of each of these films, what I name in this essay as each mother's 'state of exile': the metaphorical death of her legitimacy, her intellect, her marriage, her husband, and even her relationship with her children. I chose these films mainly because they were developed around the same time my mother herself came to the U.S. To be

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[11] *One Day at a Time*, season 1, episode 1, "This Is It," directed by Pamela Fryman, written by Whitney Blake, Allan Mannings, and Norman Lear, featuring Justina Machado, Todd Grimes, Isabella Gomez, Marcel Ruiz, Stephen Tobolowsky, Rita Moreno, and Erik Griffin, https://www.netflix.com/search?q=one%20day%20at%20a%20time&jbv=80095532.

[12] Ada Rosen

frank, there is nothing 'special' about the films I have chosen to discuss here; in fact, what I am trying to express is that if we took a look at any of the other mothers I mentioned in the films and TV shows earlier, we would realize all of their autonomies all the same. In other words, arbitrariness *is* the point. The mothers themselves already know and celebrate their capabilities on their own – *all* mothers do. This essay, this *reflection* is about *us*: their daughters, their sons, their husbands, their partners, their peers. We aren't 'returning' their agency to them; we don't have to. We're just now learning to see it.

I cannot continue without acknowledging our relationship as writer and reader, as filmmaker and viewer, and as 'self' and 'other.' In writing this essay, I invite you to my, my mother's, my family's 'exile,' but I do not seek your pity. Acknowledging that I have no authority to speak on how my mom understands her position in the United States, I have thus assumed an interesting position that Trinh describes as:

> The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out.[13]

In this essay and in my film, I am an "inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at."[14] My insider position allows me to differently understand the representation of immigrant mothers because I have one. However, as an outsider (as a non-immigrant mother) I, like you, have a duty to study and remove my own misconceptions. I wish for you to use this essay to do the same.

Also, I refuse to engage in what Nawal El Saadawi calls "intellectual terrorism." This phrase she uses to describe how academics and intellectuals feel this patronizing "responsibility…towards oppressed people in the Third World."[15] I do not feel, at least not anymore, a drive to liberate my mother. My mother is free; she always has been, just like all the other moms in the movies.

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[13] Minh-ha Trinh, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," *Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse*, vol. 3-4 (1988): 932.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Sa'dāwi, "dissidence and creativity," 164.

A Meditation on Exile

This essay invites the complication of home and the troubling of 'exile,' where home is found *within*, and exile is a social imposition, rather than a tangible state of political trauma and expulsion. Noting the weight and reality of political exile, please know that I do not choose this word for my analysis lightly, especially as we witnessed the genocide and expulsion of Palestinians from their homelands. What I am trying to get at is instead an understanding that in exile, power is not taken away; it is built.

Exile is most commonly understood and 'officially' defined as a forceful expulsion from a place.[16] *Amreeka*'s Muna and Raghda match *this* definition most out of the immigrant mothers I discuss in this essay: Israel forcibly "banished, expelled, rejected" them from their homeland.[17] Their experience is subsequently punctuated by, to borrow from Edward Said, the idea of "contrapuntal consciousness," a phenomenon, he posits, occurs when an individual leaves, or is forced to leave, "its true home," the birthplace.[18] For Said, "exile is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being," where the individual simultaneously experiences being in "both the new and the old environments."[19] This "contrapuntal consciousness" becomes more deeply felt the longer one lives in exile. As Muna looks for a job in Illinois, Raghda shares that the homesickness never goes away, that it feels as though "a tree [has been] pulled out from its roots and planted somewhere else."[20] To try and lighten their spirits, Raghda brings Muna to a Middle Eastern grocery store, where they engage in discourse about Palestine and the U.S.:

[in Arabic]

Raghda: You really think you're going to stay here?

Muna: Why not?

Raghda: I don't know. If it were up to me, I'd get on a plane and go home tomorrow.

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[16] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "exile," https://www.oed.com/dictionary/exile_v?tab=meaning_and_use

[17] Ibid.; *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009).

[18] Said, "The Mind of Winter," 49.

[19] Edward Said, "The Mind of Winter," *Harper's Bazaar*, 1984, 51; Said, "The Mind of Winter," 55.

[20] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 00:35:31.

Muna: You have no idea how much it's changed.

Raghda: I hear about it on the news every day.

Muna: The trip that used to take me fifteen minutes to get to work now takes two hours. I have to go through two checkpoints and drive around the entire wall to get there. Can you imagine what that's like?

Raghda: No matter what, it's home.

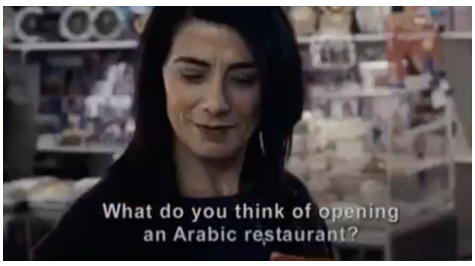
Muna: That's easy for you to say. You haven't lived there in fifteen years.[21]

This conversation reflects one that happens often between new and more *experienced* immigrants. A few things to note in particular: 1) the clear divide among immigrants and their remembering of home, and 2) the subsequent difference in yearning for home. Here, Raghda, the pessimistic and seasoned 'American' (American, loosely used here as Raghda would likely – and understandably – choke me if I referred to her as such) attempts to be transparent about the myth of the American Dream with Muna, the optimistic yet 'clueless fresh off the boat (FOB).' By virtue of the length of her time in the U.S., Raghda feels more deeply than her sister "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place."[22] Muna misses home but not (yet) as much as Raghda.

The difference between their optimism about the United States is further signified to the viewer by the framing of the grocery store scene. It is important to make note of the setting in which this conversation occurs as it is a perfect visual representation of Edward Said's idea of "contrapuntal consciousness." They are in a Middle Eastern grocery store in middle America: the sisters are both here and there. Arabs in Chicago are both here and there. When the sisters first enter the store, Raghda leads Muna inside, reflecting her role as a guide in the new country. Shortly upon entering, they go to separate aisles, talking to each other over a shelf. By the end of the scene, they are in the same aisle but facing opposite directions, illustrative of how differently they each feel about Palestine and the U.S.

[21] Ibid., 00:36:26-00:36:59.
[22] Said, "The Mind of Winter," 49.

Muna and Raghda enter the store



Muna and Raghda converse over a shelf

Muna and Raghda facing opposite directions

Muna's naivety is visually expressed through the goods, always obscuring her view of Raghda. On the other hand, though Raghda is talking to Muna over the same wall, the goods do not block her view, suggesting her clarity over the situation. This also alludes to Muna's more recent experience with apartheid in Palestine, as opposed to Raghda, who hasn't "lived there in fifteen years." The shelf between them also points out the distance between the sisters, which resulted from their time apart. There is literally a wall between them as they talk about their respective dreams for themselves in the U.S. By the end of the scene, Muna catches up to Raghda in the same aisle but faces the opposite direction, showing how although the sisters are now together, they still view the same world (the same aisle) differently (looking at different shelves).

By definition, exile connotes trauma and therefore, "contrapuntal consciousness" must be debilitating, but I posit instead that both invite the creation of a home and thus, we must celebrate the power found through doing so. Despite the exclusion they faced after 9/11, Ragha and her husband, Nabeel, created home in Illinois, even explicitly making it clear to their children that, "As long as you live in this house, you're in Palestine!"[23] No one rescues their family from exile. The banks don't offer Muna a job, the neighbors continue to harass Raghda and her family, and until now, no one has liberated Palestine.[24] Yet, Muna makes Palestinian food at White Castle, and Raghda refuses to hand the American flag outside of their house.[25] This family persists when the state of exile, at least the way we understand it, insists they do not. Muna and Raghda decided for themselves what survival looks like – not Israel, not Illinois, not their children or even (Raghda's) husband. By choosing Palestine every day, they are in charge of their own advocacy. They save themselves.

Oxford also defines exile as an *intransitive* verb, a word that describes an action *currently* being done; I thus consider that the 'intransitive' nature of exile opens up the possibility for us to additionally understand exile as fleeting, rather than permanent – in doing so, we recognize the dignity of the exiled. They themselves dictate their own experience, not their banisher.

The immigrant mother can *and does* win in exile. By assuming she hasn't, we assume and impose a *filmic* kind of imperialism, where we view her victories as inherently connected to the U.S.. Each woman's 'state of exile' is established to be: 1) *Amreeka*: Muna leaving her mother, job, and life in Palestine; 2) *Entre Nos*: the husband's abandonment of Mariana and her children; and 3) *The Namesake*: Ashima's initial unhappiness and subsequent silence in the U.S. We are thus primed to read the 'win' as life *after* exile: Muna's excitement for life in Illinois; Mariana eventually gaining her footing in New York City; and Ashima's final return to India, respectively. However, I instead argue that we should see the 'wins' as occurring within and the state of exile. The immigrant mother has engaged her agency in multiple ways long before each film's 'resolution.'

Within the 'state of exile,' a metaphorical death occurs in the immigrant mother's life: 1) in *Amreeka*, it's the death of Muna's individuality (because she left to find better opportunities

[23] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 00:55:17.
[24] Ibid., 00:36:26-00:36:59.
[25] Ibid., 01:10:09; 00:45:48.

for her son, Fadi, 2) in *Entre Nos*, it's the death of Mariana's marriage, and 3) in *The Namesake*, it's the death of Ashima's autonomy. In each case, the immigrant mother chooses to remain silent, despite the humiliation and grief each 'death' necessitates. When *Amreeka*'s Muna moves to Illinois, she stays with her sister, Raghda, and brother-in-law, Nabeel. She is unable to find a job despite her credentials as an accountant back home in Palestine.[26] In *Entre Nos*, when Mariana's husband leaves "for Miami," Mariana stays inside the apartment, watching from afar. She does not beg him to stay or dictate her children's reactions.[27] Finally, in *The Namesake*, Ashima comes to New York City shortly after her marriage to an academic named Ashoke. In the U.S., her voice comes second to Ashoke's and her intellect is found surprising, as illustrated by two scenes: at the hospital when she gives birth to her son (and the conversation regarding the son's name is only had between Ashoke and the doctor), and later, when her son's wife doesn't expect Ashima to be well-read (at this point, Ashoke has already passed away).[28]

Gogol falls into his mother's arms at the airport, shortly after learning about his father's death.

Out of all the mothers I discuss, Ashima's silence is probably the loudest and most expected by U.S. viewers. In the U.S., Asian/Asian American women are often imagined to be the most submissive; relatedly, women in arranged marriages are usually painted to be completely devoid of agency. The final third of *The Namesake* follows Gogol's (Ashima's son) grief over the deceased Ashoke. This grief plunges Gogol into a journey home, a return to his culture, with his guiding force being his father. This is made apparent through Gogol's

[26] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 00:33:07-00:33:54

[27] *Entre Nos*, directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria La Morte (IndiePix Films, 2009), 00:06:07-00:07:40.

[28] *The Namesake*, directed by Mira Nair (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006), 00:22:32-00:23:49.

flashbacks, which are punctuated by Ashoke's voice, giving Gogol advice. Notably, Ashima *never* has a voiceover, a clear illustration of her literal silence in her son's own mind.

In the West, silence is often read as meekness and a lack of choice, so when silence is expressed in exile, we naturally understand it to be oppressive. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan thoughtfully points out in her book *Real and Imagined Women*, "speech is identified as self-expression and silence as self-extinction…[but] silence is not always an imposition."[29] In the scenes I discuss above, I urge the immigrant mother made an intentional decision to remain silent: Muna chooses to focus on places where she *can* find a job, Mariana accepts her husband's choice to leave, and Ashima does not feel the need to explain herself to the doctor and her son's fianceé. These moments do not define the dignity of Muna, Mariana, and Ashima. What defines their dignity, instead, is their responses to each situation. These mothers do not remain silent because they have no choice, or because they were forced into it. They remain silent because they are uninterested in proving their worth to people who have already decided they are valueless. Silence could easily be seen as a choice to *not* advocate for themselves, but I urge that we should see it instead as a calculated decision. They know their energies are better allocated elsewhere: for Muna, it's moving on to the next application; for Mariana, it's thinking of what's next for her children; for Ashima, it's ignoring people's ignorance. They exercise their power through silence.

By establishing exile as an invitation of power, and silence as an expression of it, home can subsequently be understood as something that exists *within* the immigrant mother, and every signifer of home – through food and language – is an expression of it. Exile, as we understand it, demands pain through the forced leaving of/expulsion from home, but the exiled takes back power by insisting that home is within, and extending it to the outside world. *This* is what every immigrant mother does.

Confronting Exile

The immigrant mother's child lacks the same nuanced understanding of exile as his mother and must realize the same understanding in order to reach maturity. In these films, the 'state of exile' is made visible to the child through racist taunts at school (*Amreeka*'s Fadi) and

[29] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women* (London: Routledge, 1993), 84.

disrespect, disregard for, and eventually, erasure of the immigrant mother's wisdom and intellect. This is what creates the conflict between mother and child.

In the films I discuss, *Amreeka*'s Fadi and *Entre Nos*'s Gabi share a kind of 'oneness' with their mothers, solely based on the fact that they immigrated together; immigration challenged this 'oneness' and thus resulted in conflict and a sever of their closeness. *The Namesake*'s Gogol was born in the U.S., so unlike Fadi and Gabi, he did not witness his mother's journey into and within the U.S. For many reasons outside of his (non)relationship with his mother, Gogol's identity struggles differ from that of Fadi's and Gabi's. Gogol's identity formation does not entail a confrontation with his mother's state of exile because for Gogol, the U.S. was never exile, it was always home. On the other hand, Fadi and Gabi are in the process of understanding home alongside their mothers – a major part of this process is the confrontation. This contrast is why Gogol is not a part of this analysis. In each child's attempts to resolve exile, – whether it be through visible rebellion (in the case of *Amreeka*'s Fadi) or quiet frustration (in the case of *Entre Nos*'s Gabi) – they grow apart from their mothers, a stark difference from their initial closeness with them.

From the perspective of the child in these films, the realization of difference between himself and his mother becomes a conflict based on what the child believes to be a lack of his mother's ability to understand, or even recognize, their state of exile. In *Amreeka*, Muna and Fadi struggle in parallel. Towards the end of the film, when Fadi returns home after a fight with a white classmate, they finally discuss their state of exile (hardship in the U.S.):

[in Arabic]

Muna: In all my life, I never thought I'd see you in jail. Maybe in Palestine. But here?

Fadi: It's not what I expected either, mom.

Muna: You've changed. I don't know who you are anymore.

Fadi: What did you think? You'd bring me here and everything would stay the same?

Muna: Why are you acting like this? What is it that you want? You want to leave? To go back home?

Fadi: At least you had a decent job.

Muna: We're here because of you. You're the one who wanted to come here to study. Or have you forgotten?

Fadi: That's before I knew what it was like.

Muna: You're going to let a couple of stupid kids determine your future.

Fadi: Mom, it's not like that. It's just that we don't belong here.

Muna: If we don't belong here, then where do we belong? We have every right to be here. Just like anyone else. If those boys bother you again, I want you to stand tall. And be proud of who you are.

Fadi: So what? It's not going to change anything. This just sucks.

Muna: Okay. It sucks. So what? Every place sucks. The important thing is that you can't let anyone make you question who you are. Do you understand? Look at me. Do you understand me?

Fadi: Sorry mom.

Muna: It's ok.[36]

Here, Fadi confronts his mother with all of his qualms about the U.S., particularly noting all the ways in which he and his family are unwelcome. Like his white American classmates, Fadi accepts that the difference between him and them can never be bridged. He does not believe that Muna recognizes the exclusion too, so Fadi comes to see his own mother as the clueless, overly optimistic 'FOB,' and he refuses to engage in such embarrassing naivety.

In a similar, though shorter, confrontation with his mother, *Entre Nos*'s Gabi blows up at Mariana, "You always need me. No wonder papi left!"[37] Their responses illustrate each of their

[36] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 01:23:24-01:25:22

[37] *Entre Nos*, directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria La Morte (IndiePix Films, 2009), 00:57:28

attempts at resolving exile: Fadi believes the solution is leaving and Gabi believes it's filling the role his absent father never could. In any case, both children engage in the same infantilization of immigrant mothers that we viewers do by surmising ignorance of their mothers. Fadi and Gabi, in a small, but significant way, mimic the Western savior complex (and practice) of assuming the solution.

Luckily, they have immigrant mothers; of course, the mothers ground them back in reality, by reminding them that this exile is fleeting, a part of life, and perhaps most importantly, survivable. At the point in which the confrontation happens in each film, each family has already adapted to the change in their lives without discussing what has occurred and what is to come. Naturally, the child seeks to feel some kind of control over the change, so in the scenes I discuss, he attempts to discuss the trauma he has undergone on his own terms. Despite the child's hurtful and assumptive remarks, the mother responds calmly: Muna reminds Fadi that what matters is his ability to ignore his classmates and move forward. Mariana even apologizes to Gabi, "Forgive me for all of this," reminding him that she does not need him to step into roles he does not need to.[38] He is entitled to his own childhood.

Fadi hugs Muna

[38] Ibid., 01:14:25

others cannot, supposedly have themselves."[40] And so, the viewer, of course, brings their own assumptions, cravings, and projections onto every film. In other words, we are implicated in the (mis)representation of immigrant mothers in film because we have relationships with them outside of film.

When we take the time to slowly go through these films – though in many ways, they perpetuate the image of the miserable immigrant mother – these stories are still *about* her, and I believe this is what we should focus on instead. These films do not make it difficult to identify tension, hardship, or conflict; in fact, we could even say that each mother's introduction hints at some part of their exile. Each of the opening scenes can easily be read as introducing each woman as tense, complacent, and passive, respectively.

Amreeka opens with a flustered Muna working at a bank. When leaving her work, she hits the car behind her as she reverses out of her spot. While shopping for tomatoes, Muna catches a glimpse of a thinner woman. Clearly signified (and referred to throughout the rest of the film) as some sort of insecurity, Muna finally leaves the store but again nearly hits another car. She remains tense throughout the rest of the opening sequence.[41] In *Entre Nos*, we first meet Mariana's hands, preparing food in the kitchen. When we finally see her face, Mariana serves her husband and their friends freshly made empanadas. She doesn't even sit at the table but rather remains standing, ready to fluctuate between serving in the dining room and preparing more food in the kitchen.[42] In *The Namesake*, we meet Ashima as a talented, young woman heading home from singing lessons. She is situated in the political conflicts of 1977 Calcutta, but she herself appears seemingly uninterested, or at least unengaged, with the protests she passes through. When she arrives home, we learn that she is meeting a family for a potential arranged marriage.[43]

These opening scenes launch the viewer into the most integral part of each woman's day. As viewers, we can easily choose to conclude that Arab women hyperfixate on their weight, Latina women are always in the kitchen, and Indian women put the most effort into preparing themselves for marriage. However, I instead posit instead that these scenes actually prime us to view each woman as an interesting protagonist with her own story, separate from those she has a

[40] Minh-ha Trinh, "outside in inside out," *Questions of third cinema*, (1989), 133-134.
[41] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 00:00:46-00:03:13.
[42] *Entre Nos*, directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria La Morte (IndiePix Films, 2009), 00:00:19-00:03:58.
[43] *The Namesake*, directed by Mira Nair (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006), 00:04:22-00:06:06.

relationship from: Muna is a working woman *before* she is a mother, Mariana is a cook *before* she is a wife, and Ashima is a singer *before* she is a daughter.

Interestingly, the closing scenes of each film show the mothers alongside their families, inviting viewers to conclude that their worth is still connected to, though not defined by, the relationships they deem most meaninful. *Amreeka* ends with the entire family picking up Muna from work and enjoying dinner together.[44] *Entre Nos* concludes with Mariana dropping off Gabi at school and going to work with her daughter, Andrea.[45] *The Namesake* ends with Ashima's farewell speech to her friends and family in New York before she moves to India alone.[46] These endings absolutely celebrate the role each mother has played in their respective families.

I hyperfixate on the beginnings and endings of each mother's story to ultimately (and maybe, cheesily) point us towards the conclusion that their lives are interesting long before and long after the credits roll. My analysis has taken us through key moments of each film, while simultaneously urging an understanding that such moments, though meant to be relished, are not ones meant to be dwelt upon. Again, in order to reimagine, we first have to revisit and celebrate the mothers who started it all.

Ultimately, my goal is to complicate how we, as Western viewers, understand conflict, or rather exile, in film. Throughout this essay, I have pretty much established the period of exile each mother goes through is the length of the film she is in, so this means that the beginning of the film is the start of exile and the end is the end of exile. I urge us to play, though, with this idea of cinematic exile. I encourage thinking through, past, and above exile. Perhaps these mothers have overcome exile; perhaps they've outsmarted it; perhaps they didn't even recognize their experiences to be exilic at all. What I do know for certain is that the narrative allows us to focus on the mother herself – by virtue of being the main character, I propose that she simultaneously transcends, has transcended exile, even if she continues to live within it.

For postcolonial, transnational media scholars, cinema is the foundation for oppressive imaginations, but it also holds much potential for liberation. Stuart Hall helpfully labels the former as "the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West."[47] Although

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[44] *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis (Rotana Studios, National Geographic Entertainment, and Imagenation, 2009), 01:28:02-01:31:32.

[45] *Entre Nos*, directed by Paola Mendoza and Gloria La Morte (IndiePix Films, 2009), 01:14:38-01:16:38.

[46] *The Namesake*, directed by Mira Nair (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006), 01:50:05-01:53:00.

[47] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.

he discusses the Black diasporic experience, I believe his framework can easily be translated across all of the "Third World." He writes how within dominant Western cinema, "They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other.' Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed."[48] So, in the same way that cinematic power remains with white, oppressive storytellers, power can also alternatively be formed in and by alternative – oppressed – spaces and creators.

And finally, theory therapy.

"What kind of condescension lies at the heart of praising someone for acknowledging her experiences of abjection?"[49]

The older I've gotten, the better I understand what people mean when they say we carry generations of pain and resilience within us. I always wondered where my anger came from, and why my white therapist's psychoanalysis of me never seemed quite right. Now I know that I move through this world with experiences that are not just my own. I have run away from my own culture like Gogol, fought with my mom like Fadi, and stepped into roles I didn't need to like Gabi. I suppose there is a strange universality that connects immigrant mothers and their children, even though our experiences are so different. Like all immigrants, my family has mastered the art of polishing this trauma to present a narrative of gratitude. A narrative my brother and I have perfected to get rich, white people to pity us just enough to donate a scholarship without feeling threatened that they're getting robbed (but I've been robbing them since I was 12). If there's one thing I've learned from the private institutions I have been lucky to attend with their generosity (sarcastic), it's to own my voice.

I have since channeled all of this anger into…*scholarly* rage (rage, you have just read). When I was preparing for this essay, one of my advisors, Dr. Katarzyna Marciniak, jokingly called all of this *material* "Theory Therapy." A noun, to describe the release one feels when reading academics, scholars, and theorists who put into words the complexity of being away from, being at, and creating a new home. This essay is my contribution to theory therapy. Know that every sentence in this essay was designed to transfer my anger onto you. In case it wasn't obvious, my brain didn't end up combusting in December, but if it did, I would've been happy to

[48] Ibid., 226.
[49] Katarzyna Marciniak, "Foreign Women and Toilets," *Feminist Media Studies* 8, no. 4 (2008): 339.

know that whatever lightness I felt when I ascended to be with my ancestors, some white ally took on the burden of guilt for *their* ancestors' actions. If the lightness of immigrant mothers results in your shame, then I think your allyship demands it. If you are white, I hope you read this with shame and guilt; use that to uplift voices that are not your own. If you are not, I have written this for you with love and joy. Let's laugh together and then wreck the world. Whoever you are, I truly hope you are leaving this essay with a renewed understanding of every immigrant mother ever. I wish for you to get to know my mother and I as we are: sarcastic, funny, smart, and angry as hell. But also, I guess I don't really care; this will matter to those who matter.

This paper was probably the hardest thing I have ever written. As a creative longing to tell new stories, what I have come to realize is that we have just as much of a responsibility to build new understandings of stories we already know because *every movie does* some kind of *work*. I dedicate this project to Muna and Raghda; Ashima; Aunties Lindo, Ying-Ying, An-Mei, and Suyuan; Amelia; Rosario; Judith, Telma, and Eva; Evelyn; Mariana; Kerry; Jessica; Gloria; Penelope; Flor; Zainab, to all the immigrant moms who *don't* have a movie or show about them (yet), and to every immigrant mom we have yet to welcome. Any of you could have been *and are* my mom. Acknowledging celebratory, sacrificial, long-awaited, forced, unfortunate, and necessary homecomings, I wish you all a peaceful return home – whatever that means to you.

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Oxy's Blood

Digital Photograph, 2024

Marty Valdez

"Oxy's Blood" is a digital photo that was taken on Occidental College's campus during a rally. It shows a couple of students holding up a banner saying how there are no more schools left in Gaza, Palestine. It was a rally targeting the college since their investments directly contribute to the shipment of weapons and collaboration with Israeli companies, which in turn contribute to Palestinian genocide. This photo conveys not only the power students hold at Oxy, but all over the world.

*This Artist statement is for the back cover.


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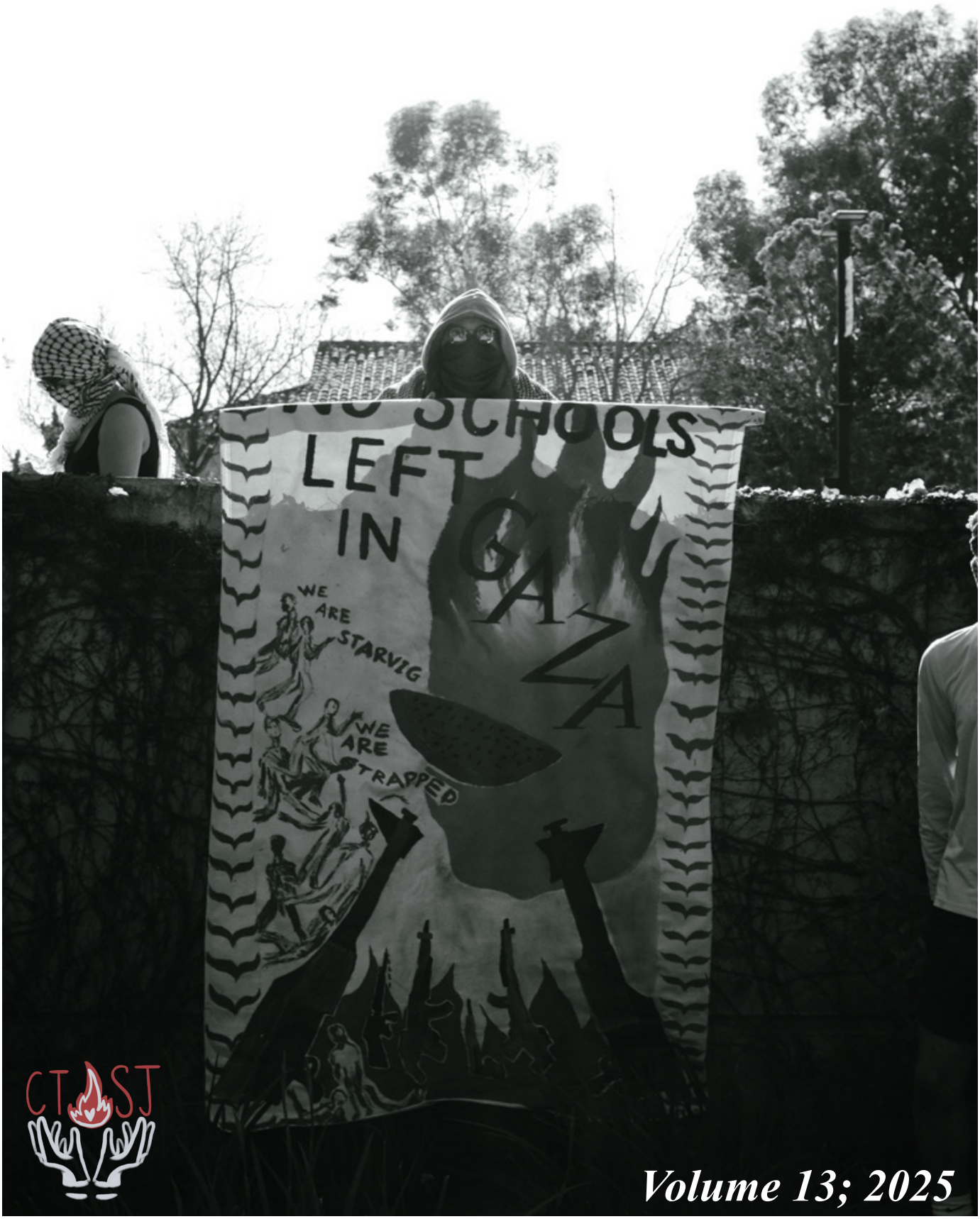

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