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In Memory of Assistant Professor Gordon J. R. Marshall (1973-2025)

On June 21, 2025, we lost an amazing colleague and great friend, Gordon Marshall, whose passing was more than unexpected and untimely.

Gordon Marshall was born on May 24, 1973, in Sudbury, Ontario. He earned his BA degree in History from York University in 1996, his MA in History and Archival Administration from the University of Windsor in 1999, and his PhD in History from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 2009. Following several years of holding different positions, such as education and exhibition assistant at Windsor's Community Museum, assistant archivist at CIBC Archives, and education coordinator at Archives Association of Ontario, fate brought him to İstanbul, Turkey.

From 2006 to 2012, Gordon Marshall worked at Haliç University, İstanbul, in the Departments of American Culture and Literature and Translation and Interpretation. He, then, shifted to İstanbul Aydın University, where he worked from 2012 to 2015. It was in 2015 that he joined us at the Department of American Culture and Literature at Başkent University, Ankara, where we worked together for two years. In 2017, he left to return to Canada, and in the years that followed, he mostly held positions associated with the government of Canada, including National Defense and Library and Archives. More significantly, he devoted his utmost energy to union activism and solidarity throughout those years.

During his assistant professorship at Başkent University, Gordon Marshall demonstrated not only his dedication to teaching and mentoring students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, but also his compassion for everyone he came into contact with. He would not hesitate to spend endless hours and efforts towards "the good of all," from enhancing departmental stature to designing innovative projects. At the same time, he contributed immensely to the ASAT community, especially by serving as the Editor of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* for two years. He was a like-minded colleague, an exemplary teammate, and a source of optimism for the future.

An avid supporter of justice, Gordon Marshall will always be remembered fondly for "the good" he advocated and fervently strove for. I am more than grateful for having had the privilege to work with him, to be in solidarity, to be inspired by the altruism he unwaveringly characterized. I also consider myself extremely lucky for having known Burcu, his amazing wife, and Nefes, his brilliant daughter, through him. Gordon Marshall's passing falls the heaviest on the two of them, undoubtedly, but I am also confident in their strength and their potential to keep his legacy alive by being stronger every day. For he has surely left his lasting mark on them, as he did on so many of us.

Gordon Marshall will always be missed and remembered, through the many lives he has profoundly touched.

Assist. Prof. Defne Tutan

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The "Terrible Turk" Reconsidered: The Transformation of American Views on the "Turk" through Direct Encounters

Abstract
The "Terrible Turk" image originated in Europe and was later transmitted to colonial America through clerical writings and church culture. After independence, Americans adopted this perception and repeated European descriptions of the "Turk" in Barbary captivity narratives following the enslavement of American seamen by the North African states. Since the region was ruled and populated by Muslims, the negative image of the "Turk" continued to serve as a general label for Islam. The Greek War of Independence further reinforced this perception, depicting "Turks" as cruel oppressors and portraying the conflict as a holy struggle of the Cross against the Crescent. American newspapers circulated and amplified Philhellenism through letters, literary texts, and accounts arriving from Europe, many of which emphasized Ottoman atrocities. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of American missionaries, travelers, diplomats, and merchants visited Anatolia and encountered "Turks" in person. Their writings—some published as travel narratives and personal letters, others preserved in archives—show how first-hand experience challenged earlier assumptions. These texts presented a more favorable view of the Turks without European intervention or second-hand mediation, introducing a more balanced representation into American discourse.
Keywords: Image, travel narratives, captivity narratives, Turkish-American relations, Ottoman Empire

"Korkunç Türk" İmgesinin Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi: Doğrudan Karşılaşmalar Yoluyla Amerikan Kamuoyunda "Türk" Algısının Dönüşümü

Öz
"Korkunç Türk" imgesi, kökenini Avrupa'da bulmuş ve özellikle dini metinler ile kilise geleneği aracılığıyla Koloni dönemi Amerika'sına aktarılmıştır. Amerikalıların bağımsızlıklarını kazanmalarının ardından, Kuzey Afrika devletlerinin Amerikan denizcilerini esir almaları üzerine, Avrupa kaynaklı bu tasvir esaret anlatılarında yeniden üretilmiş ve "Türk" imgesi büyük ölçüde Avrupa'daki söylemle uyumlu biçimde sunulmuştur. Bölgedeki yöneticilerin ve halkın Müslüman olması, olumsuz "Türk" imajının dini çağrışımlarla birlikte sürdürülmesine ve etnik boyutu aşan genel bir kullanıma zemin hazırlamıştır. Yunan Bağımsızlık Savaşı ise bu olumsuz algıyı pekiştirmiş; "Türkler" zalim ve baskıcı bir güç olarak temsil edilirken, savaş "Haç'ın Hilal'e karşı yürüttüğü kutsal mücadele" şeklinde betimlenmiştir. Buna karşılık, sayıları artan Amerikalı misyonerler, gezginler, diplomatlar ve tüccarlar Anadolu'yu ziyaret ederek "Türkler" ile doğrudan temas kurma olanağı bulmuşlardır. Seyahat anlatıları ve kişisel mektuplar şeklinde yayımlanan ya da arşivlerde saklanan bu metinler, Amerikalıların ilk elden edindikleri deneyimlerin önceden oluşmuş yargıları sorgulamaya başladığını göstermektedir. Böylece Amerikalılar, Avrupa'nın etkisinden ve ikinci elden bilgi dolaşımından bağımsız biçimde, Türkler hakkında daha dengeli ve yer yer olumlu bir imge oluşturarak Amerikan anlatılarına daha ölçülü bir bakış kazandırmışlardır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: İmge, seyahat yazıları, esaret edebiyatı, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu

Ayşegül Avcı

The "Terrible Turk" Reconsidered: The Transformation of American Views on the "Turk" through Direct Encounters

Introduction

The first American encounters with the Turks date to the early years of the United States, though Americans' familiarity with them long predated independence and was rooted in European experience. In Europe, the Catholic Church often portrayed Islam as blasphemous and hedonistic to discourage conversion (Servante 31-36), giving the term "Turk" a negative connotation. In this article, the word "Turk" is used broadly to refer to Muslims, encompassing the peoples of the Middle and Near East under Ottoman rule. However, a distinction will later be made between the use of "Turk" to refer generally to Muslims and its use to designate specifically Anatolian Ottoman Muslim subjects.

Roderic H. Davison argues that this unfavorable image was based more on caricature than reality. He links it to Ottoman expansion, which initially produced fear and horror but later gave way to romantic curiosity after the Empire's seventeenth-century stagnation (1). Subsequent military defeats, internal conflicts, and economic decline produced a different yet still negative representation, now emphasizing corruption, ineptitude, and decadence. Filiz Turhan identifies this process as the creation of an "Eastern Other," whose identity was constantly reshaped (1). Nevsal O. Tiryakioğlu similarly notes that eighteenth and nineteenth century Orientalist texts cast Turks as indolent, ignorant, despotic, or backward.

American views largely reproduced this inherited European imagery, which was intensified by US experience in the North African states in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Çağrı Erhan highlights the rise of Turcophobia in response to both domestic and international crises of the Ottoman Empire. News of the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s further strengthened negative portrayals in American newspapers, missionary reports, and travelers' accounts. Although American enthusiasm for the Greek cause later waned, increased travel to Anatolia in the mid-nineteenth century introduced a more favorable, if brief, image, discussed in this article. However, this positive turn did not last. Özlem Madi Şişman and Cengiz Şişman attribute the renewed hostility to missionary activities among Armenians, which emphasized alleged Turkish atrocities in the late nineteenth century (23-25). Older stereotypes (despotic, cruel, murderous) resurfaced and circulated widely in American print and conversation. Only after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish War of Independence did a more positive view reappear, later reinforced during and after the Second World War, when the Republic became a modern state and a United States ally.

After the Greek Revolution, when the Cross against the Crescent rhetoric diminished, a relatively peaceful interlude followed until new conflicts in the Balkans and eastern provinces revived religious divisions. This calm period allowed a more favorable image of the Turk to appear in American accounts. This article, therefore, examines how that image was inherited from Europe, duplicated in Barbary captivity narratives based on American experiences, reinforced during the Greek War of Independence, and later reshaped by Americans who traveled or lived in Ottoman lands as diplomats, missionaries, merchants, or visitors. Freed from the pressures of enslavement in North Africa and from intense Philhellenism, Americans were increasingly able to observe Turks through direct encounters rather than inherited stereotypes, contributing travel narratives written from a distinct American perspective. The study focuses on the transfer of the European image of the Turk to the United States from the colonial period through the 1850s, when American missionaries shifted their attention from Greek and Jewish Ottoman subjects to the Armenian population. This periodization demonstrates how direct encounters gradually complicated the

highly negative "Terrible Turk" stereotype and introduced more nuanced, sometimes even sympathetic, representations. As American interest in Ottoman regions grew alongside expanding missionary work and new commercial opportunities, many travelers expressed surprise at finding people who differed from preconceived notions, thereby acknowledging the limits of earlier depictions.

European Inheritance and Duplication of the Barbary Captivity Narratives

The first direct encounter of the Americans with the Turks happened after American seamen began to travel to the Mediterranean under the American flag. Before the Revolution, Americans sailed under the British flag and thus benefited from any commercial agreements between the North African States and Great Britain, although they were no strangers to the 'Barbary' threat. While there were only a few instances of captivity before independence, American colonists mostly learned of the challenges of sailing along the coast of North Africa through the sermons of the clergy and from Barbary captivity narratives written by Europeans. For the British, the African coast was the home of "petty states and tribal powers," populated by "a bewildering variety of people," and they "tended to lump these peoples together under the broad headings of "Turk" or 'Moor,' portraying them as altogether given to tyranny, cruelty, lust, chicanery, immoderate passion, and superstition" (Snader 132-133). When Americans, as people of an independent nation, met the North African privateers, they primarily repeated similar notions, descriptions, and attitudes about the "Turks." Furthermore, their experiences as slaves recounted stories of hard labor without rest, torture and murder, poor and decayed food, dehydration, and black masters.

Reciting the unfortunate experiences of the captives was common in American colonial churches, which was one of the most widespread and effective methods of transferring the "Terrible Turk" image from the Old World to the New. A famous example of this type of image-transfer is Cotton Mather's sermon, given in March 1703, in which he explained the hardships faced by Christian slaves taken captive in the North African States:

> A Great number of Our Good Subjects peaceably following their Employments at Sea, have been taken by the Turkish Pirates of *Algiers, Salley, Barbary,* and other places on the Coast of *Africa*, and now remain Slaves, in Cruel and Inhumane Bondage, without any *Dayes of Rest*, either on the *Turkish Sabbath* or Ours, except Four Dayes in a Year; being kept to Extream *Labour*; from which, some endeavouring a little Rest, several of them were barbarously Murdered. Neither is their *Diet* any more tolerable than their *Labour*; Great Numbers being allow'd not other Food, than decay'd *Barley*, which stinketh so, that the Beasts refuse to eat it. And ofthen they are not permitted to go from their Labour, to fetch Water, which is their only Drink; and sometimes driven about by *Black-a-moors*, who are set over them as Task-masters; and some of them have been so severely Whipp'd, that they have dropp'd down Dead. (61-62)

It should be noted that Mather frequently brought up this issue based on Joshua Gee's account in his sermons. Gee was captured in 1680 and gave one of the first American Barbary captivity narratives. Although Gee's narrative was not printed until 1943, it is thought that Cotton Mather was among the many who heard the story from Gee himself, or his son who bore the same name (Fowler).

Privateering constituted a major source of revenue for the North African states. They seized cargoes, enslaved captives, collected ransoms, and demanded tributes and presents from foreign nations, often regardless of existing agreements (Paullin 24-26). The United States lacked a naval force strong enough to protect its commerce in the Mediterranean, and the young republic's armed forces were "tiny and

weak" (Cole 27). After the Revolution, American merchants entered what contemporaries described as "a tribute-demanding world," while North African powers quickly recognized the arrival of a new flag (Lambert 4). In 1784, Morocco seized the American brig *Betsy* but released it six months later to establish friendly relations with the United States. Soon after, the schooner *Maria* of Boston and the ship *Dauphin* of Philadelphia were captured by Algerian pirates, and twenty-one Americans spent several years in captivity. Similar incidents followed, leaving hundreds of Americans imprisoned; many later published accounts of their experiences, forming what became known as the Barbary captivity narrative.

Although some of the captives were aware of and explained the ethnic stratification in the North African States, the word 'Turk' was extensively and frequently used to describe their captors, irrelevant of ethnic origin. Jonathan Cowdery, a surgeon on the USS *Philadelphia*, captured on October 31, 1803, by Tripolitan privateers, explains how the lives of American captives were challenged during the martial conflict between Tripoli and the US, mirroring the barbarities described by Cotton Mather:

> The wind from the desert was very heavy and hot. The men almost perished in the sand, which flew and drifted like a snow storm in our country. They stopped through fatigue, and asked the driver, who was a Turk, for liberty to drink at a well which was near them. The Turk replied, that they were *Romo kelps*, Christian dogs, and said they should have no water. He gave them all a severe beating with a large club, which he always carried with him to drive them with, and made them go on with the cart, which the poor fellows had to drag, loaded wi[t]h timber, through the burning sand. They returned towards night almost perished. (182)

Although Cowdery never defines what he means by "Turk," his tone and descriptions clearly construct a cruel image. Whether the figure he describes was ethnically Turkish is not clarified. The term Turk sometimes referred to ethnicity or political status, but it was more commonly used as a label for non-Christians. Because religion played a central role in defining the meaning of "American," renouncing Christianity and converting to Islam was perceived as a profound threat. Almost all the Barbary captivity narratives include a story of how the captives were urged to convert to Islam (Sayre 350). Through conversion, the hardships experienced by the captives would be eliminated, and all their problems would be solved, for if they accepted Islam, they would be set free. Because converting to Islam promised relief from hard labor, hunger, and constant physical and psychological abuse, some Christian captives "turned Turk" (Baepler 220), while others viewed conversion as an indignity that betrayed an essential part of their identity. Captives were presented as victims, and the inhumanity of their "Turk" captors was emphasized to reinforce American virtue and identity (220). Religious belief thus became the key criterion for classifying people as "civilized" or "barbaric," a distinction that ignored the existence of *renegados* (Christians from supposedly "civilized" nations who had turned Turk themselves).

The inherited and distorted understanding of Islam stood in opposition to the many features that the United States wished to build its young republic upon. Islam meant "barbaric despotism," created "immoderate sensuality," "easy indolence," and "irrational fatalism," while Americans pledged "Christian purity," "enlightened democracy," "public chastity," "hard work," and "progressive reform." Through this opposition, "the Islamic world served as a distant mirror of foreign alterity that revealed and embodied anti-American models deployed to caution citizens about their excesses and remind them of the worldly importance of their enterprises" (Marr 10). American seamen, officers, and travelers experienced this threat, and the American people "witnessed" it through their narratives. For example, James Leander Cathcart (captured in 1785 and serving the Dey, Algiers ruler) notes that as he was in the presence of

the Dey, he did not suffer from worn-out clothing or decayed food, yet believed his labor in the gardens to be humiliating. “I was convinced,” wrote Cathcart, “that the honor of our country was connected with redemption” (121). The expected redemption, however, would not materialize for another decade. Living more than ten years in captivity, he experienced “every indignity that Barbarians could invent to render the life of a Christian miserable in the extreme” (191). Concerned with national honor but emphasizing religion as the source of humiliation, Cathcart, like other captivity narrators, treated religion and nationality as interchangeable markers of identity in the early republic.

In this regard, “religion was an intrinsic part of the formation of the American image of the Turks,” shaping and reflecting American views (McCarthy 9). The term “Turk” was used for Muslims in the Barbary States and was later applied to the Ottoman Empire by Americans who experienced captivity, carrying the negative connotations with it. After the War of 1812, the United States decided to end tribute payments to the Barbary States and used military force to do so. Yet within five years, Americans were hearing accounts of Greeks being tortured, enslaved, or killed by the Turks, which reinforced these negative associations. This period also solidified the use of Turk to refer broadly to Muslims, blurring religious and ethnic distinctions.

Consolidation of the ''Terrible Turk'' during the Greek Revolution

Myrtle Cline argues that, influenced by literary revivalism in the late nineteenth century, Greek patriotism gained strength, and in 1821 the Greeks revolted against Ottoman rule, a struggle that continued for nearly a decade (9-10). The uprisings created a strong sensation in the United States, where support for the Greeks was celebrated and where Turkophobia intensified. American reports frequently framed the conflict in religious terms, calling it “the War of the Crescent against the Cross.” Yet American sympathy was rooted not only in shared Christianity but also in devotion to democratic ideals. For Americans who were “justly proud of their new democracy,” the Turks represented “the epitome of the despotic” (McCarthy 9).

However, the "despotic" Turk did not originate in the US, nor did Philhellenism. Lord Byron was one of the pioneers in generating pro-Greek sentiment, especially after his first visits to the region in 1809 and 1810. Following his return, he published the first two of his most famous cantos of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,* and on the 73rd, he voiced his desire for a free Greece:

> Fair Greece! Sad relic of departed worth!
> Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!
> Who now shall lead thy scatter’d children forth,
> And long accustom’d bondage uncreate? (*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*)

Byron’s call for the liberation of the Greeks found enthusiastic support in the literary world. Although he was not the first poet to express Philhellenic sentiment, his works were the first to become bestsellers (St. Clair 17). A decade after the verse cited above, Byron voiced his longing for a liberated Greece once more, now identifying himself as a proud Greek descendant, in “The Isles of Greece” from Canto III of *Don Juan*:

> The mountains look on Marathon-
> And Marathon looks in the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dream’d that Greece might still be free;

For standing on the Persian's grave,
I could not deem myself a slave. (*Don Juan*)

Byron was not a stranger to Greek culture, and by referring to the Battle of Marathon, where Greeks defeated Persian forces in 490 BC, he expressed his desire to see the Greeks revolting against the Ottoman "slavery" like the way they resisted Persian rule. Victory and freedom were inherited in Greek culture, according to Byron, and the struggle against dominance would eventually meet with success.

Byron's passion spread throughout Europe and eventually crossed the Atlantic. In the United States, Philhellenic sentiment shaped by Byron is visible in the newspapers and literary columns of the 1820s. Although his rhetoric permeated "the themes, images, feelings, language, and attitude of American poets," some writers gradually began to adopt more diverse creative strategies in both theme and expression (Schonia 2). Nevertheless, the literary representation of the war and its actors did not fundamentally transform. On the contrary, the polarized portrayal of Turk and Greek only intensified. American poet Samuel Woodworth's emphatic appeal to the American public, reminding them of the Greeks' suffering and sacrifice, illustrates this tendency: the "turban'd" Turk is rendered through heavily stereotyped imagery of physical appearance:

A year ago, and Greece was all the rage,
That is, we felt enraged against the Turks,
And every daily paper had a page
Filled up entirely with their bloody works,
With battles, massacres, heroic deeds
And self-devotedness of patriot men,
And cruelties at which the bosom bleeds,
When memory calls the picture back again –
Wives, mothers, maids, compelled to slay themselves,
Or yield to these infernal turban'd elves. (qtd. in Raizis and Papas 8)

It was a period of brutal violence on both sides. The Ottomans responded swiftly to uprisings on the Greek mainland and islands, and Greek officials and civilians were attacked or executed either by decree or individual action. Smyrna, densely populated by non-Muslims and Levantines, became a central site of such violence and appears in nearly all contemporary travel accounts and correspondence. Like the Barbary captivity narratives, depictions of the conflict drew heavily on European representations. Yet, public information at the time was essentially "biased," and with no American correspondents in the region, editors relied on British reports, often publishing exaggerated or melodramatic accounts they simply "hoped to be the facts" (McCarthy 19-27). Americans in Smyrna were not better at furnishing complete and correct information than British papers. Pliny Fisk, the first American missionary who was stationed in Smyrna (modern İzmir), gave one of the harshest accounts, claiming that 50 to 200 Greeks were killed in the city within 24 hours. Although he confesses later to the fact that some of the reports were exaggerated at the end of the entry dated June 18 (150-154), another American, George Rapalje, described, matter-of-factly, that "assassinations are matters of daily occurrence" (285). It is important to note that there is not an official or a standard account nor an official number of casualties, and that journals and individual accounts contain differing information.

The violence in Smyrna and elsewhere was closely linked to events in Chios. In March 1822, revolutionaries from nearby Samos landed on the island; while a small number of residents joined them,

most sought neutrality, yet attacks on local Turks followed. Later that month, Kapudan Pasha Nasuhzade Ali led a mass assault against the Greek population, with many survivors enslaved and transported to Smyrna for sale. News of these events circulated widely as European reports and Greek letters were reprinted in American newspapers. One of the authors described the atrocities towards the islanders as “but what will you say of these innocent young children who have fallen victims to the most horrible death caused by the brutal conduct of those monsters into whose possession they fell!” (“Copy of a Letter”). Another Greek wrote “these tigers” were “a thousand times more cruel than those of the forest” because “they opened the tombs, and threw into the streets the bones of our fathers, and the corpses of their own victims were dragged by the feet through the brooks” (“Extract of a Private Letter”). Such anonymous accounts emphasizing the Turkish barbarity were frequently published in the European press without a formal or counter view of the events.

Americans conveyed the words and emotions of the Greeks largely through European sources, circulating them not only in newspapers but also in travel writing, diaries, and letters. Yet this transmission was far from neutral. Authors frequently embedded their own reactions and assumptions into their narratives. Reverend Justin Perkins, for example, described the captain and crew of his ship, natives of Chios, as expressing grief and hatred toward “the Turk,” although they could communicate only through “signs and gestures.” He wrote, “their countenances, as we passed, bespoke their tender recollections of country and home. They used their utmost efforts, by signs and gestures, to give me an idea of Turkish barbarity, and uttered the name of Turk with the deepest disdain” (67), interpreting their expressions as unambiguous evidence of suffering. Because Perkins neither witnessed the event, the modern reader has no means of assessing how far his interpretation shaped the story.

Clemuel Green Ricketts of Pennsylvania, who traveled in the region between 1841 and 1842, defined what happened in Chios, following the arrival of Kapudan Pasha, as “an unparalleled work of destruction” (167). Like Perkins and Ricketts in terms of relying on witness accounts, John Lloyd Stephens offered an approach more intense and denunciatory towards the Turks. After explaining the violence, murders, and slavery, Stephens wrote, “my feelings were so wrought upon, that I felt my blood boil at the first Turks I met in the streets. I felt that I should like to sacrifice him to the shades of the murdered Greeks” (34). In a period when the British held a leading position in the production of travel literature, Stephens’ book was a rare example of American travel narratives in the first half of the nineteenth century, as it became “phenomenally successful” (Finnie 5), and thus was probably influential in further shaping American readers’ opinions about the Turks. Yet, Stephens also relied on what he had heard from others, who might not have witnessed the events themselves. His travelogue often recounted second or even third-hand narratives and represented regions, events, and peoples he never personally encountered. In doing so, he transmitted this information to the United States through his feelings, prejudices, and interpretive insights.

Apart from travelers, the diplomatic corps and their relatives took note of the violent events at Chios. John Holmes Offley (son of David Offley, the first American resident-merchant and future US consul in Smyrna) was on a trip to Chios for business right after the attacks. As he narrated what he heard and saw, he wrote, “one of the first and most heart-rending sights we witnessed that horrible day was the body of a murdered female” (52). Their guide told the story of this young woman, who was suspected to have been no more than eighteen, captured by two Turks, who could not decide their ownership of her, as she was from a wealthy family, and neither was willing to give her up. While the Turks were arguing, she captured a moment to run away. Realizing this, the two Turks shot and wounded her:

> They came near and discharged their pistols at her fallen body. Even this did not seem to allay their demoniacal fury, for they drew their yataghans and literally minced her into a hundred pieces, leaving the face alone untouched, the beauty of which seemed still retained in all its fullness, as if to draw from the passerby a tear of sympathy for her memory, and anathemas upon the heads of her cruel destroyers. The awful tragedy closed, said our guide, by the two Zebecks shaking hands and making their peace over her mutilated remains. (52)

Offley's account demonstrates the signs of a stereotypical "terrible Turk" who lacks any form of sympathy and understanding but instead performs sheer cruelty with fury that gushes from the depths of hell into this world. His use of the regional term "Zebeck" suggests knowledge of western Anatolia, yet it may also work to legitimize a narrative drawn largely from secondary sources. More likely, such stereotypes were already so ingrained that neither Offley nor other travelers recognized their preconceived assumptions.

The travelers' condemnation of the Turks and pity for the Greeks was unsurprising, given that the events in Chios stirred strong pro-Greek sentiment abroad. Yet American writing was based mostly on indirect reports rather than firsthand observation, with only rare exceptions such as Pliny Fisk, who later acknowledged the limits of his information. American sympathy for the Greek cause was nonetheless vigorous. Because the origins of American democracy and culture were traced to ancient Greece, many readers drew parallels between the Greek revolt against Ottoman despotism and the American Revolution against Britain. Religious rhetoric also proved central, as the conflict was cast as Christianity being oppressed by Islam. These ideas circulated through public meetings, gatherings, and newspapers, repeatedly emphasizing the "barbarity" of the Muslim Turk. In stressing religious unity with the Greeks, American poets likewise criticized the indifference of other Christian nations and depicted the Turk as a "heathen" enemy.

> Shame on the nations that calmly look on,
> While freemen in torrents are shedding their blood;
> View the crescent wave where the cross has shone,
> And a heathen's tower where the Christian Stood! (qtd. in Raizis and Papas 47)

Glorifying Greek Christianity (yet ignoring fundamental differences between Greek Orthodoxy and American Protestantism) and despising Turkish infidelity, the Europeans, as well as Americans, used religious beliefs and culture as a form of polarization in placing the Western World on the side of Greek rebels against their Muslim oppressors. While the news of Greek victories was given under headlines such as "Glorious News from Greece!" or "Greek Skill and Heroism," Ottoman victories were presented under titles like "Turkish Barbarities," "Massacre of Greeks," or "Horrors of Greece." Largely dependent on letters written by people who resided in the region, or who visited the Mediterranean ports, these articles emphasized the "sufferings of Greeks" who "will all rather die than submit, whilst there is a ray of hope" ("Extract of a Letter Received"). Attacks on Greeks enjoyed extensive publicity with such words, which depicted the actions of the Turks as "murders," who committed "massacres," "destruction," or those that depicted them as "barbarians" and "inveterate masters." On the other hand, the Greeks were known for their "bravery," while also being portrayed as "defenseless," "innocent," "poor," and "victims" (respectively quoted from the following papers: *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 14, 1822; *Louisville Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1826; *Maryland Gazette*, January 13, 1825; *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phoenix*, February 16, 1822; *The National Advocate, for the Country*, February 12, 1822; *Christian Watchman*, March 2, 1822). Beyond such general usage, some texts depicted the Turkish cruelty in detail,

like the one written by an American officer on the *USS Erie*. This account is an important exception to the generally indirect accounts given by the Americans, although the name of the officer and the details of the account are not provided:

> I saw a sight one morning, as I was walking in one of them, which disgusted me more than anything I had seen of the Turks. Close by a shop that I was passing, I came near to stumbling over a dead body; it was so much mangled that at first, I did not perceive what it was. The people informed me that a Greek shopkeeper had been reported to the Bashaw, for having in his possession some bad money. Without any thing in the form of a trial, the Bashaw sent his executioner, who dragged the poor wretch right in front of his own door, and there, before his family and friends, put his head off and placed it on the other extremity of the body as the greatest insult he could add. No one dare to touch the body until the Bashaw was petitioned for permission to have it buried. I went away as soon as possible; but had not gone far when I saw another who had been treated in the same way, and for the same reason. Thus, it is the poor Greeks are treated like dogs. (“Extract of a Letter from an American Officer”)

Despite the “Greek fever,” the US government did not support the Greek revolutionaries. Following George Washington’s footsteps in maintaining a policy of isolation, President John Quincy Adams refrained from sending government aid. His intention was also to have the European countries recognize the Monroe Doctrine. However, this policy neither stopped public aid nor Americans in Smyrna from helping the Greeks. As American interest in the Turkey opium trade increased, the number of Americans residing in Smyrna rose, and by the mid-1820s, there was a limited but considerable American community in the city.

One of the most common ways that individuals pursued action on behalf of the Greeks was to purchase and then free Greek slaves sold in Ottoman slave markets. David Offley wrote to his sister about a brutal story of a Greek girl whom he freed by paying $320. “This child” whom Offley took into his home “was in the hands of a particularly ferocious and bad Turk. He had her tied up and beaten to force her to renounce her religion” (“Letter Written to Mary Offley Sharpless”). John Holmes Offley also gave an account of his experience with a slave girl. While he and an unnamed American gentleman were touring the bazaars, they came across two Greek girls held by “a barbarous looking Turk.” Writing that the Levantines were forbidden to purchase slaves, they had to use a Turkish mediator, and through their porters, they were able to purchase these two girls. He purchased one, Marigo, and took her to his stepmother. Marigo lived with them until she was sent to her mother, who was later found in Syria (54-55). Taken together, these accounts illustrate how the image of the “Turk” circulated in the United States primarily through second-hand information, was shaped by European political agendas, and became a symbol around which American Philhellenism could develop.

Reproduction of the “Turk” in American Travel Narratives

The American public praised the Greek struggle in 1823-24 and again in 1827, when the combined forces of Britain, France, and Russia destroyed the Ottoman navy at Navarino. American charitable organizations intensified aid in 1828, but with the end of the war, public interest declined. Although American enthusiasm for the Greek cause waned, attitudes toward the “Turks” largely remained unchanged. These accounts also reminded readers of earlier American experiences in the North African states, and the idea of the “Turk” formed in those years continued to shape public perceptions.

By the nineteenth century, Americans were traveling more frequently, and many who visited the Ottoman Empire, especially Constantinople (modern İstanbul) and Smyrna, encountered Ottoman Muslims firsthand. While noting cultural differences, often in a humorous tone, travelers also described Turks as trustworthy and honest, contrary to earlier expectations. Such narratives occasionally included favorable remarks on Islam, which surprised American readers. Because "Turk" and "Muslim" were treated as synonymous, these positive depictions drew attention. For example, a few years before the Greek Revolution, David Offley wrote to his sister that he "admired" Islam, describing it as a religion of love:

> To believe in God, that there is but one God, & that Mohamet is his prophet, is their [Turks'] whole creed. Their prayers might be cited as examples to Christians as most perfect . . . on the Goodness of God; that he never punishes but thro' love, and as he knows what is best, that no attention may be paid to the longings of their hearts, which are so often after bad. A good Musleman will see himself bereft in one moment of wife, children & fortune, and bear it above what we can suppose human nature capable. When he regards it as a punishment of God, he is then consoled in the assurance of his love. ("Letter to Mary Offley, 10 July 1818")

The difference in religious beliefs was one of the fundamental distinctions between Turks and Westerners. Although Offley's opinion about Islam came as a shock to his sister, the positive opinions were not exceptional in travel narratives. One of the first travelers, George Barrell from Boston, offered his views in sympathy with Islam, "notwithstanding their religion differs from ours, still I cannot help respecting it!" He understood that Muslims also pray to Jesus and accept his prophecy; they pray "with a sincere heart" and, realizing the traditional factors of ancestral belief, he defends Muslims by asking "how can we blame them for preferring it to ours?" (20). Both letters were written before the Greek Revolution and associated Islam with sincerity, love, and understanding. Yet neither author explains how this association emerged, or which encounters shaped it, making it difficult to trace the development of their ideas about Turks and/or Muslims. Whether they held prior prejudices or relied on secondhand information remains uncertain. In some cases, these questions remain unanswered, but in others a gradual shift is visible. Ricketts, for example (although he judged the Turks based on reported atrocities in Chios), still acknowledged and even celebrated their merits: "The honesty of the Turks must strike every observant traveler . . . The Greek [referring to his guide] will tell us, as a reason why the Turks are so honest. That the Turkish religion forbids stealing." Describing truth as "the twin sister of honesty," Ricketts concludes that "the pervading character of this people, is entire devotion to their religion" (209). Although it is possible to come across negative accounts referring to the backwardness in the Ottoman Empire in terms of technology and lifestyle, the Americans who came into contact with Turks of Anatolia in the first half of the nineteenth century gave positive accounts, especially emphasizing their morality, and sometimes forming a connection between their virtues, especially righteousness, and their religion.

The honesty of the Turks also shines through in the travel narratives, letters, and diaries in relation to their bravery. One such account is given by Reverend Daniel Temple, who resided in the Ottoman Empire between the years 1833 and 1844 as part of the American missionary community. Not long after he came to the Ottoman Empire, a fire broke out in Smyrna, which forced Temple to leave his house until the danger had passed. Taking advantage of the fire, a group of Jews and Greeks, according to Temple's narrative, tried to break into the Reverend's house. He writes that in return, "a Turk acted a most noble part" by standing with a large bat in his hand in front of Temple's storeroom to protect his belongings from "the pilfering Jews and Greeks, with a dignity and firmness that filled me with admiration, and them with fear." Moreover, this Turk did not return to ask for a reward for his service or bravery, which also surprised Temple as an act of pure heart (134). By the 1840s, American missionaries in Anatolia had

already diverted their attention to the Armenians, abandoning their former target group, the Greeks, as they concluded that that group had no interest in Protestantism. Partly for this reason, and partly because of disappointment with the outcome of the Greek Revolution, Americans began at times to criticize the Greeks, even comparing them unfavorably with the Turks. James E. DeKay, who visited the Ottoman Empire in 1831-32, made such a comparison while also noting how European prejudices could easily pass into American discourse:

> A Scotch traveller, who has written an amusing romance about Turkey, alludes frequently to the prevalent passion for gaming; but, during our residence here, we have witnessed nothing of the kind, unless he alludes to a game resembling our chess, which is not a game of hazard, but of skill, and which is rarely played for money. The veracious traveller has in all probability mistaken Greeks for Turks and imputed to the latter the notorious propensities of the Hellenic race; it would not be the most serious mistake which he has committed in the course of this work. (361-62)

Such accounts were shaped by prejudices about both Turks and Greeks. In rare instances, however, the authors went far enough to compare Turks to Franks (the term is used to describe foreign resident merchants, mainly Europeans, in the Ottoman Empire), favoring the former. One such example is given by Walter Colton, who was assigned to the *USS Constellation* as a naval chaplain, during its course to the Mediterranean until November 1834. In *Ship and Shore*, Colton maintains a positive tone, as exemplified by one of his encounters with Turkish sellers in Smyrna:

> I must not, however, be too severe on the Turk, as he atones in some measure for his want of gallantry in never recommending his articles for what they are not – and never in his change cheating his young customers. This is more than can be said generally of the Franks; they are all smiles and deception, politeness and imposition. So, the Turk, though vastly less attractive and engaging, is the safer man to deal with; yet among the shopping ladies of my own country, he would not sell the value of five farthings a year; for he holds no chat, exchanges no smiles, no glances, and pays no compliments. He coolly presents the articles inquired for, if you purchase, well, if not, it is a matter of your concern, not his. Our ladies would undoubtedly call occasionally at his shop, but it would be to look at his beard, disturb the slumber of his goods, vex his indolence, and laugh at his self-complacent taciturnity. But though ever so silent and supercilious, there are at least two things in which you may trust a Turk all lengths – money and malice – in both he will be sure to render you your full due, be the consequences what they may to himself. (290)

In this colorful representation of the Turkish seller, while qualifying as an uncorrupt and fair person, Colton nevertheless does not ignore the darker side of his character. Whether it is vengeance or violence, Turks would certainly secure “justice,” although their methods of doing so created astonishment in Americans who were witness to the process. George Barrell also took the act of comparing Turks to other people one step further, and situated them against his own countrymen, again admiring their honesty in matters pertaining to the respect for property and ownership, by emphasizing their devotion to Islam. Once again emphasizing their virtuousness, he states that “HONESTY, so often sought, and rarely found among the enlightened and religious communities of Europe and America, in this part of Asia, and in the Turkish dominions west of Hellespont, stands unrivalled” (45).

Ottoman lands also carried a reputation for dangers awaiting foreigners. Travelers were advised to hire protection, usually former Janissaries, for fear of robbery, harassment, or even murder. According to

DeKay, such dangers may once have been real, but he claims they were no longer present during his 1831-32 visit (250). Throughout his narrative, he compares what he had previously heard about Turks with what he observed. Stereotypes cast the Turk as an opium-eater and gambler who secluded women and denied religious toleration. Yet, DeKay repeatedly expresses surprise at finding the opposite. He suggests these prejudices existed on both sides and continued to obstruct mutual understanding. Spending a day with European friends and a group of Turkish soldiers of various ranks, he writes:

> As the jest and the laugh freely circulated, someone observed that in America we had been led to believe that a Turk never smiled, and that they regarded the slightest jest with aversion; but that from what we had already seen we were agreeably surprised to find them a set of jolly dogs. The colonel [a Turk], with great readiness, immediately replied, that he also had been surprised to find the Americans such polished and agreeable people, and not, as he had been informed, complete savages. "But I suppose," he added with a significant smile, "the mutual misrepresentations about each other may be traced to the same kind of source. Let us hope, that when we come to be more intimately acquainted, the result will be reciprocal esteem and respect. (63)

Aside from drawing a cheerful character, this excerpt also recognizes the existence of prejudice against the Turks. Others also share DeKay's outlook, and his self-critical approach, in relation to the widespread bias in the United States. An American who visited Smyrna wrote a letter to the editor of the *National Gazette* in a similar fashion: "The unfavorable impression, which is generally prevailing in America against the Turks, is very erroneous, for they are much more correct and honest than the Greeks, Jews, and any other nations in this part of the world." In defense of the Turks, he continues, "a great deal has been said about the barbarity and oppression which the Turks exercise over the Christians; but I have found them an honest, obliging, and even generous people" ("The Following Extracts"). A common emphasis in these narratives is the existing negative prejudice against the "Turk" and while drawing a more positive image, they unwittingly draw a line between the North African "Turks" who enslaved Americans and the Anatolian "Turks" who performed no such power struggle with the United States.

Conclusion

By the mid-nineteenth century, missionary, diplomatic, commercial, and touristic activities brought growing numbers of Americans into direct encounters with the world. In this regard, the Ottoman Empire hosted Americans from all these fields in increasing numbers, which led to the foundation of a perpetual communication between the two peoples. This direct engagement gradually modified the inherited image of the "Turk," which had first been shaped by North African captivity narratives during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and later reinforced during the Greek Revolution through European reports emphasizing Ottoman brutality. With little possibility today to verify these one-sided accounts, largely based on European papers or hearsay, their consistency nevertheless points to the dissemination of a preconceived stereotype that conflated all Muslims in the region under one "Turk" identity.

The role of travel narratives written by Americans who had the opportunity to engage in direct contact with Ottoman society—particularly during periods of peace and without the indirect influence of European intermediaries—was essential both in revealing their own biases and in formulating independent definitions of "the Turks" based on personal encounters, experiences, and interactions. While Turkophobia reached its height during the Greek War of Independence, American support for the Greek cause was also nourished by European accounts. Although Philhellenism declined after the 1830s, pro-Greek representations in American literature did not disappear. After the war, not only newspapers but also literary works depicting Greek suffering continued to circulate, many of them relying on European sources

and authors. Bahar Gürsel notes that Catherine Maria Sedgwick wrote her famous story "Marietza" on the basis of second-hand information, most likely obtained from the writings of the Irish author Anna Jameson and from compilations "of biased and/or impartial first-hand accounts of European and Greek names who witnessed the aforementioned rebellions" (69-70). Unsurprisingly, "Marietza" depicts the Turk/Ottoman people as "ruthless, violent, greedy, bloodthirsty and religiously fanatic barbarians" (Gürsel 76).

The "Terrible Turk" did not disappear in American narratives; rather, it solidified into a persistent stereotype that resurfaced in response to evolving political conflicts, particularly toward the end of the nineteenth century in relation to the Armenian massacres. It repeatedly reappeared and was reinvented according to changing socio-political conditions. At the same time, however, shifting circumstances occasionally produced highly positive depictions of the Ottomans and of "the Turk" in the United States. These contradictory representations coexisted, were modified, and were continually recreated throughout the long history of American interaction with the Ottoman Empire and with Turks. Political considerations, as well as personal and direct encounters, reshaped the image of the "Turk" and continued to influence its formation into the twentieth century and beyond. Yet one of the earliest turning points in American narratives emerged from Americans themselves (missionaries, travelers, merchants, and diplomatic representatives) whose own experiences and encounters in Anatolia in the first half of the nineteenth century began to complicate inherited stereotypes.

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Survival Politics: Liquid Modernity and the State of Nature in *The Last of Us*

Abstract
Post-apocalyptic narratives imagine worlds where catastrophic collapse forces survivors to renegotiate the foundations of social life. The first season of *The Last of Us* (2023-) is structured as a journey through five communities, each presenting a distinct yet ultimately flawed model of collective survival. This article examines how these communities negotiate the ideological tension between individual autonomy and collective responsibility, drawing on Hobbes's conception of the state of nature, Rousseau's belief in innate compassion, and Bauman's theory of liquid modernity. By analyzing five radically different post-apocalyptic social formations, from authoritarian governance and revolutionary retribution to communal self-sufficiency, religious cultism, and utilitarian science, this article argues that the series systematically rejects the possibility of a stable or sustainable community. Instead, *The Last of Us* presents survival as a fundamentally liquid condition marked by uncertainty and the prioritization of personal attachment. Joel's final decision to privilege individual loyalty over the collective good encapsulates the show's broader skepticism toward all forms of social organization. Ultimately, the series becomes a meditation on the fragility of community and the moral ambiguities that shape human survival in times of crisis.
Keywords: Post-apocalyptic narrative, liquid modernity, *The Last of Us*, state of nature, individualism, collectivism

Hayatta Kalma Politikası: *The Last of Us*'da Akışkan Modernite ve Doğa Durumu

Öz
Post-apokaliptik anlatılar, felaket sonrası çökmüş dünyalarda hayatta kalanların toplumsal yaşamın temellerini yeniden müzakere etmek zorunda kaldıkları evrenler tasavvur eder. *The Last of Us*'ın (2023-) ilk sezonu, her biri farklı fakat nihayetinde kusurlu bir kolektif hayatta kalma modeli sunan beş topluluğa doğru yapılan bir yolculuk şeklinde yapılandırılmıştır. Bu makale, Hobbes'un doğa durumu kavrayışı, Rousseau'nun insanın doğuştan merhametli olduğuna dair inancı ve Bauman'ın akışkan modernite teorisi ışığında, söz konusu toplulukların bireysel özerklik ile kolektif sorumluluk arasındaki ideolojik gerilimi nasıl ele aldığını incelemektedir. Otoriter yönetimden devrimci intikama, komünal öz-yeterlilikten dinsel tarikat yapılanmasına ve faydacı bilime uzanan beş çok farklı post-apokaliptik toplumsal oluşumu analiz ederek, dizinin istikrarlı veya sürdürülebilir bir topluluk olasılığını sistematik biçimde reddettiğini ileri sürmektedir. *The Last of Us*, hayatta kalmayı belirsizliğe ve kişisel bağların öncelik kazanmasına dayanan, temelde akışkan bir durum olarak sunar. Joel'in bireysel sadakati kolektif iyiliğin önüne koyan nihai kararı, dizinin her tür toplumsal örgütlenmeye yönelik daha geniş şüpheciliğini özetler niteliktedir. Sonuç olarak dizi, topluluk fikrinin kırılganlığını ve kriz zamanlarında insan hayatta kalışını şekillendiren ahlaki belirsizlikleri konu alan bir tefekküre dönüşür.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-apokaliptik anlatı, akışkan modernite, *The Last of Us*, doğa durumu, bireycilik, kolektivizm

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Survival Politics: Liquid Modernity and the State of Nature in *The Last of Us*

Introduction

When the first season of *The Last of Us* (2023–) was released by HBO in January 2023, it immediately created a sensation, gaining popularity among both viewers and critics, and winning 8 Primetime Emmy Awards out of 24 nominations. It currently holds 94% freshness on Rotten Tomatoes and a remarkable 8.5 rating from more than seven hundred thousand user votes on IMDb (the ratings slightly dropped after the second season was released), making it one of the highest-rated TV series of the last decade. Based on the video game of the same name released by Naughty Dog in 2013, it appealed not only to hardcore fans of the game but also to a broader audience unfamiliar with it. Although it received mild criticism, mostly for its "threadbare world building" (Poniewozik), its success has been attributed, beyond its high production values and the allure of its actors, to its faithfulness to the original material, which satisfied fans (Bonaime; Langmann; Tallerico), and to the chemistry and connection between the two main characters, Joel and Ellie (Poniewozik; Nicholson). Beyond its commercial popularity, what makes *The Last of Us* worthy of critical attention is its narrative structure, which merges the narrative of siege-fortification with that of the journey and thereby enables a comparative exploration of urgent ideological anxieties about human nature, moral choice, individualism, and collectivism.

Joel is the roughened, disillusioned drifter who failed to save his daughter, Sarah, during the 2003 outbreak when a soldier, suspecting she was infected, shot her; Ellie is a 14-year-old girl who may hold the key to solving the world's deadly problem. Together, they are on a quest to save a world that has been infected for twenty years by a fungus called cordyceps, which takes control of the human brain, turning its host into a blindly violent creature, a clear variation of the zombie. Its popularity, however, can also be attributed to the explosion of post-apocalyptic narratives that have proliferated on both the big and small screens in the last two decades (e.g., the *Resident Evil* series, *The Walking Dead*, *Silo*, *Fallout*, *The Leftovers*), possibly reflecting a generalized anxiety fueled by an overflow of catastrophic images and narratives involving environmental disasters, extreme social inequalities, a never-ending series of wars, and the long-lasting socioeconomic and political repercussions of the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

The post-apocalyptic genre offers imaginings of survival in a world that has collapsed. The world can end in numerous creative and horrifying ways, but the nature of the catastrophe often shapes the narrative and the kinds of actions that unfold in the new reality. For example, if the end of the world is triggered by an environmental catastrophe, then stories may revolve around individual survival or sacrifice (for example, *The Day After Tomorrow* [2004], *The Happening* [2008], *2012* [2012], and *Moonfall* [2022]) as resistance against the overwhelming force of nature appears futile. If the cause is an alien invasion or a technophobic fear of machines and artificial intelligence, then post-apocalyptic worlds often become spaces of resistance and heroism (for example, The *Terminator* franchise [1984-2019], *War of the Worlds* [2005], *Independence Day* [1996] and *Nope* [2022]). Zombie narratives, on the other hand, since Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which set the benchmark for all subsequent zombie imaginations, have specific characteristics that privilege certain themes over others. Zombies are numerous and their numbers grow daily, infesting every corner of the world as the human population decreases. They are predators with very low intelligence, and although they lack strategic thinking, they can, depending on the story, cooperate or communicate. They can survive for a very long time, and they are extremely persistent and resilient (Paffenroth 1-21). These characteristics imply that human survival is a long-term endeavor, raising the dilemma of whether it should be pursued individually or achieved more effectively through collective action. Traditionally, due

to the nature of the threat, the most reliable and efficient strategy against a zombie plague is fortification, which in turn requires living in a community, as in Romero's movies of the *Living Dead* that introduced and popularized narratives of invasion/fortification (Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, 94-128). However, as Bishop points out when revisiting the zombie genre, there has been an interesting shift in zombie narratives over the last couple of decades. While earlier stories used to focus on siege and fortification, post-9/11 narratives increasingly focus on the hero's extensive journeys through fluid, unstable environments ("The New American Zombie Gothic" 42-45).

What makes the first season of *The Last of Us* particularly interesting in relation to this theme is its narrative structure, that of a journey with various stops in different communities. In this way, it blends the two tropes, the fortified settlement and the post-apocalyptic road trip. This combination allows multiple models of survival to be imagined within the same world. As Ellie is immune to the fungus, Joel takes on the task of escorting her across the country to a research center where it is hoped that a group of doctors will be able to create a vaccine using her DNA. During their journey, they encounter five communities, each offering a distinct model of survival in a post-apocalyptic setting. The first (episodes one and two, "When You're Lost in the Darkness" and "Infected") is a state-run military zone in Boston, operated by the Federal Disaster Response Agency, also referred to as FEDRA. The second (episodes four and five, "Please Hold to My Hand" and "Endure and Survive") is in Kansas City, Missouri, where a group led by Kathleen Coghlan has overthrown the government. The third (episode six, "Kin") is in Jackson, Wyoming, a secluded commune where people live harmoniously. The fourth (episode eight, "When We Are in Need") is a cult-like community led by a preacher named David. The fifth, in Salt Lake City, Utah (episode nine, "Look for the Light"), is the Fireflies' hospital-laboratory, where a group of resistance fighters has set out to develop the vaccine.

There is one episode that has been excluded from the discussion of the five communities: The third episode ("Long, Long Time"), which follows the story of two side characters, Frank and Bill. It is a moving love story between two men, one of whom is a survivalist whose long preparation for the end of the world has actually paid off. The episode is excluded from this analysis because it does not depict a large enough community, but rather presents a long-term partnership built on compassion, love, understanding, and mutual support. It exists in isolation from the rest of the world, untouched by the political and ideological tensions explored in the other episodes. It does offer a glimpse of emotional fulfillment in the post-apocalyptic world by reconfirming the idea that love conquers all, but not a model of collective survival.

Each of the aforementioned five communities encountered in *The Last of Us* offers a distinct model of survival and a negotiation between individual needs and the collective good. The series is skeptical of all such possibilities: The states collapse into authoritarianism and repression, revolutions are driven by vengeance, faith communities slide into blind obedience and moral depravity, science sacrifices autonomy, and even the most promising communal alternative seems viable only in isolation. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the series dramatizes this tension between individualism and collectivism, ultimately hinting at the impossibility of imagining a sustainable solid structure as a solution in a post-apocalyptic world. To develop this argument, I will examine the first season of *The Last of Us* through the lens of Hobbes's and Rousseau's opposing visions of human nature combined with Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity around adaptability, liquid and solid structures. This approach may also open the field for future comparative analyses with similar works that feature a range of post-apocalyptic communities, such as *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022), *The 100* (2014-2020), and *Snowpiercer* (2020-2024), to name a few.

At this point, I would like to clarify that although the series originates from a video game, it is not within the scope of this article to analyze it through the lens of adaptation studies. Instead, I have chosen to treat *The Last of Us* as a self-contained post-apocalyptic narrative, as my aim is to focus on the ideological tensions between individualism and collectivism in survival scenarios. While its status as a video game adaptation may be understood as part of a broader cultural trend, where science fiction and fantasy games are adapted for the small or big screen (e.g., *Resident Evil*, *Tron*, *Fallout*, *Halo*, *Warcraft*, etc.), such an analysis lies beyond the intent of the present article.

Furthermore, I would like to clarify that the scope of this analysis is limited to the first season of the series, as it offers a self-contained narrative with a clear journey structure and distinct stops, each presenting a different model of survival. This design makes a comparative analysis informed by the ideas of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Bauman particularly appropriate. Although the second season also features multiple communities, its focus shifts toward large-scale warfare and character-driven revenge, making it less suitable for the purposes of this article.

Liquid Modernity and the State of Nature

The post-apocalyptic genre, through its visions of the end of the world, reflects the anxieties of its time. After WWII and during the Cold War, a period of "unremitting banality and inconceivable terror" in Sontag's words (42), films about ultimate catastrophes reflected the fear of nuclear disaster and the end of life as we know it. Meanwhile, alien invasions expressed "powerful anxieties about the condition of the individual psyche" (47), the fear of becoming "impersonal," and of losing one's individuality. In many such narratives, science, despite being the origin of the threat, also appears as the potential savior. Others focus on survival long after a nuclear disaster, imagining not only how life could continue but how human beings might be physically or psychologically transformed after prolonged exposure to radiation (Broderick 370-72).

Post-apocalyptic films in the 1970s reflected a growing concern about environmental degradation and the unreliability of authorities (Glawson 80). In the 1980s, there was a shift toward genre conventions (81) and heroic individualism (Broderick 373); the post-apocalyptic landscape became a space for the hero's journey, redemption, or revenge, as they navigated between hope for a viable future and the fear of losing whatever remained (376). Contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives reflect different fears: The anxiety of the individual existing in a world dominated by corporations, artificial intelligence, and the relentless saturation of images from mainstream media that feed on catastrophe and disaster. It is a world of endless uncertainty, a world of liquid modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman defines it.

Liquid modernity is contrasted with solid modernity. Solid modernity is characterized by stable social structures in which institutions like the family, government, and religion, along with hardware technology, create an illusion of stability and safety. There is a sense of predictability and routine that provides, to a certain extent, a feeling of security. Solid modernity also involves the possibility of "enforced homogeneity," as it is "a sworn enemy of contingency, variety, ambiguity, waywardness, and idiosyncrasy" (Bauman 25). Liquid modernity, by contrast, defines our current era, an age of uncertainty. In a time of abundance and countless options, "uncertainty is bound to remain forever a rather nasty fly in the otherwise tasty ointment of free choice" (87). It is the age of software technology, which "allows capital to be exterritorial, volatile, and fickle" (121), intensifying the sense of insecurity for those excluded from capital circulation. While working life has always had a degree of instability, today's uncertainty is "of a strikingly novel kind" (148). Similarly, romantic relationships are marked by temporariness and

unreliability (164). In this constantly shifting environment, which lacks points of reference and in which community loses its power, the individual is granted the illusion of freedom. This freedom comes with increased responsibility but less security, as security requires sacrificing a portion of one's autonomy. The absence of security breeds fear: Fear of change, fear of the future, and fear of the unknown that hides within the cracks of uncertainty. Survival in liquid modernity depends on individualistic flexibility, adaptability, and fear. *The Last of Us*, like other contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, mirrors these anxieties. The old world has collapsed, and the new world becomes a battleground between the need for individual autonomy, that is demanding resourcefulness in a chaotic environment, and the security that comes from joining a community that attempts to create solid structures, often in dystopian and oppressive ways. Thus, on the one hand, there is the necessity of individual autonomy and the sense of freedom it provides, which comes at the cost of constant uncertainty. On the other hand, there is a longing for connection and the struggle to build a community without slipping into totalitarianism and oppression in the name of false security.

Bauman's notion of liquid modernity has been widely explored in cultural, media, and political studies, particularly in relation to postmodern identity, consumerism, and the evolving nature of the globalized capitalist economy. For example, David Lyon, an expert in surveillance studies, shows how Bauman's ideas can help us understand the politics of surveillance in contemporary consumer societies. The concept has also been applied in film and media studies. Kristen Whissel, for instance, employs Bauman's notion to explain how the digital spectacle of *Life of Pi* (2012) mirrors the conditions of liquid modernity, emphasizing volatility, uncertainty, and the fragility of stability. Matt Hills, on the other hand, argues that in the era of liquid modernity, the popularity of cult cinema acts as a form of resistance to the rapid fluidity of technological change (101). In post-apocalyptic studies, although Bauman's liquid modernity highlights systemic fragility and the collapse of stable institutions, it has not been explicitly employed to describe post-apocalyptic settings. My intention is to use Bauman's framework to illuminate the ideological tension embodied in Joel and Ellie, two liquid survivors navigating the solid, often authoritarian structures of the communities they encounter. This emphasis on the fluidity of characters within otherwise rigid frameworks, hopefully offers a new way of connecting Bauman's theory with the narrative mechanics of post-apocalyptic narratives.

Post-apocalyptic narratives are also invested in offering ideological responses to the existential question of human nature. If all structures collapse, if law and order dissolve, and life reverts to a pre-technological state in which humans are in pure survival mode, are we more likely to be compassionate or to give in to violent instincts? In barren post-apocalyptic landscapes, traditional political systems have failed. Even when some fortified communities retain political hierarchies, the space between them is lawless, and humans roam freely, exposed to their true selves. What does this true self look like? How do we imagine humans free from the constraints of civilization?

There are two opposing answers to this question, both formulated centuries ago but still relevant, especially when it comes to imagining the end of the world. The first was given by Thomas Hobbes in 1651 in his influential chapters XIII and XIV of *Leviathan*. According to Hobbes, in the state of nature, "if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies" (Ch. XIII). In the absence of government and authority, the dissolution of hierarchy brings liberty, specifically, the liberty of every person "to use his own power ... for the preservation of his own Nature" (Ch. XIV). Hobbes also assumes that people will never intentionally hurt themselves. This means that, in the struggle for survival, people will naturally do whatever is necessary to preserve themselves. Thus,

a battle for dominance and subjugation ensues. For Hobbes, social structures are necessary to prevent society from descending into chaos, competition, and violence.

This bleak, pessimistic view was countered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau over a century later, in 1755, in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Rousseau speculated that humans in the pre-social state acted to satisfy basic needs and were not necessarily violent. In fact, they would be idle and lacking in self-awareness (17-19). Contrary to Hobbes, Rousseau claimed that humans possess "an innate repugnance at seeing a fellow-creature suffer" (23), insisting that although people are capable of doing harm, compassion is a universal human virtue (24). In this way, Rousseau's view, which was later echoed in Romanticism's turn to nature as a source of goodness and authenticity, offers a diametrically different take on the state of nature, one that does not necessarily require external social/political control or strict rules to be tamed.

Post-apocalyptic narratives oscillate between two visions, one of darkness and one of hope. On one side stands the Hobbesian pessimism about human brutality, the violent and greedy nature of humans. On the other side is the more romantic, Rousseauian belief in innate goodness and compassion. As Claire P. Curtis argues in her study of post-apocalyptic fiction through the lens of political theory (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls), such narratives provide an opportunity to examine contemporary understandings of the state of nature (10). Curtis reads Hobbes and Rousseau against a range of novels showing how post-apocalyptic settings offer a space for political thought to be explored. From a Hobbesian perspective, she explains, survival in these settings demands "eternal vigilance" (43): Violence is celebrated, civilization breaks down, and, most importantly, the worldview is affirmed that "without rules, violence is inevitable and only a political authority, created and chosen by people, can produce security" (44). In contrast, Rousseauian post-apocalyptic narratives do not necessarily view the end of the world as a predicament but instead imagine the possibility of authenticity through a return to nature and the formation of communities that elevate human potential rather than limit it (93-98). Armand Boudreaux has extended this approach directly to *The Last of Us*, offering a Hobbesian reading of the series' first season. His analysis focuses primarily on the actions of individual characters, particularly David, the cult leader of the Silver Lake community, and Ellie. According to him, while the series at first appears to affirm a bleak view of human nature as violent (62), that claim is undermined by Ellie's confrontation with David (64). My own analysis departs from both by shifting the emphasis from individual figures to the communities themselves and by examining how characters negotiate their place within these collectives. In doing so, I add an additional interpretive layer through Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity, which illuminates how survival in *The Last of Us* is not only a matter of Hobbesian fear or Rousseauian compassion but also of navigating the instability and fluidity of a world where variations of solid structures consistently fail to offer protection, sustainability, and growth.

First Community: Totalitarian Nightmare

The first post-apocalyptic community presented in the series is located in Massachusetts and addresses the fate of the State after the apocalypse. It imagines how political and governmental structures adapt to new apocalyptic conditions, whether they are capable of providing protection to citizens, and whether they respect individual liberty. In post-apocalyptic narratives, if the State has not been entirely dissolved (as in *The Road*) it is rarely portrayed as a solution. More often, it is transformed into a dystopian, militarized regime of surveillance, as seen in *The Hunger Games* franchise or *Children of Men*, among many others. This reflects a widespread sentiment that current governments are increasingly incapable

of preserving citizens' well-being or ensuring a space for decent existence. But it's not only about the failure to protect; the post-apocalyptic State often becomes a mechanism of oppression, treating its citizens as expendable.

In the first episode of *The Last of Us* ("When You're Lost in the Darkness"), we see that the primary condition for the community's existence is fortification and protection enforced by armed troops. The scarcity of goods adds yet another layer of competition. In times of crisis, those with power are the ones who control essential resources and their distribution. Once the setting is established, the viewer witnesses a public execution by hanging. Two men and a woman dressed in rugged clothes, their hands tied behind their backs, stand on a scaffold. A soldier announces to the gathered public that they are being punished for "unauthorized exit from a Quarantine Zone" (40:16), as ruled by a military court. It becomes immediately clear: This is a highly militarized environment, where the state is represented by the Federal Disaster Response Agency (FEDRA). There are rationed provisions, Martial Law, public executions, a culture of fear, and the constant presence of military uniforms. The hierarchy is absolute and rigid. All citizens are equal at the bottom, and above them stand the ranks of the military. As Captain Kwong tells Ellie in a flashback in episode seven, there are only two paths: Be ordered around and live in poor conditions, or follow the rules, rise through the ranks, and secure better food and housing ("Left Behind"). The only avenue for upward mobility is a military career. This is a post-apocalyptic version of a solid structure; it offers security from external threats, but at the cost of personal freedom.

And yet, even in this authoritarian reality, there is resistance. The Fireflies, an underground, armed network, oppose FEDRA's strategy of control through quarantined zones and constant surveillance. FEDRA's survival as an institution depends on the continuation of the current status quo. In fact, the zombie becomes a kind of necessary enemy, as "the replicating zombie constitutes the perfect metaphor for the dangers of the age, from the biological to the natural, to the nuclear, to the terrorist" (Simpson 32). The Fireflies' long-term strategy to undermine FEDRA is to find a cure. A vaccine would not only bring hope to the people, but would also render FEDRA obsolete. Without the infected, there is no need for martial control. Depending on one's perspective, the political identities of FEDRA and the Fireflies are fluid. The Fireflies consider themselves freedom fighters and refer to FEDRA as fascists. In return, FEDRA sees the Fireflies as terrorists. As Boudreaux points out in his Hobbesian reading of the series, FEDRA's ideology aligns closely with Hobbes' concept of the state of nature, viewing military order as essential to prevent people from killing each other (60). This idea is clearly expressed in Captain Kwong's conversation with Ellie. When she asks why he cares so much, he replies: "I care because no matter what anyone out there says or thinks, we are the only thing holding this all together. If we go down, the people in the zone will starve or murder each other" ("Left Behind," 06:11-06:19). Captain Kwong's words reveal FEDRA's, and by extension the State's, ideological proximity to Hobbes's conviction that strict authority is the only protection against chaos. The solution offered is a return to what Bauman terms solid structures: Fixed hierarchies and rigid control that promise stability. Yet such structures inevitably come hand in hand with the sacrifice of individual freedom in exchange for the illusion of security. Within the liquid and fragile conditions of the post-apocalypse, this reliance on rigidity seems to be particularly problematic, as it does not give space for adaptability and eliminates the possibility of trust.

Second Community: Uprising and Revenge

The second community, located in Missouri, offers a speculative response to the first: It imagines what occurs when people manage to stage a successful uprising against FEDRA's authoritarian rule.

The narrative explores this possibility and considers whether the new leadership might be more compassionate, more egalitarian, or more adaptable to a constantly changing environment than FEDRA's state structure. One might assume that a successful uprising would be a hopeful turn. However, *The Last of Us* presents a far more cynical outcome.

The anxiety reflected in the representation of the second community is that even if the uprising succeeds, things will not improve. Power shifts, old hierarchies collapse, and new ones rise, but the mechanics of power (control, violence, fear) remain the same. The slogans may change, but the structure of authority still relies on domination. In this second community, another militarized group has taken control, replicating many of FEDRA's oppressive tactics. The leader is Kathleen, whose brother was executed by the previous regime. Her leadership is driven not by vision or long-term planning, but by a singular desire for revenge. Kathleen occasionally shows care for her wounded followers, but she is merciless when it comes to retaliation. Her orders are chillingly simple: "Find every collaborator and kill them all" ("Please Hold to My Hand," 28:54). The logic she employs is based on a strict binary: Us versus them. Those who are not part of the group, or who once collaborated with FEDRA, must be exterminated. Dissent must be silenced. This is leadership built on retribution and terror. The phrase "We the People" written on the side of a military truck (28:58), carrying her armed followers' echoes with bitter irony, highlighting the gap between revolutionary rhetoric and authoritarian reality.

The fifth episode ("Endure and Survive") opens with a flashback showing the immediate aftermath of the revolution. People are cheering for "freedom," the city is in flames, and FEDRA soldiers (along with presumed collaborators) are tortured, lynched, and executed by a frenzied mob. A loudspeaker blares from a passing car: "Kansas City belongs to the people. Collaborators, surrender now and you will receive a fair trial" (02:00–02:08). This scene is juxtaposed with the image of a corpse being dragged by the car, impaled with spikes. The contrast between the language of justice and the spectacle of violence makes it clear that the new order is no less brutal than the one it replaced.

There is, however, an important distinction between this second community and the FEDRA-controlled one. The first regime's violence was bureaucratic and impersonal. It deprived people of their freedom but offered a kind of security as long as they complied. At least the threat of infection was largely contained. In contrast, the second community offers no such stability. Its leader is driven by personal pathos, and there are no protective walls separating them from the infected. Kathleen's obsessive hunt for Henry, whom she blames for her brother's death, blinds her to the greater, external threat. Her followers, too afraid or too loyal to question her, follow her commands without resistance. This dynamic becomes the reason for the community's downfall. When the infected emerge in a massive attack, the unfortified city is completely overwhelmed. Even in the final moments, as chaos unfolds and death surrounds them, Kathleen clings to her obsession, pointing her gun at Ellie (whom she sees as a collaborator) rather than defending herself or her people. Her refusal to prioritize the collective good over her personal revenge seals her fate. She is killed, and her entire community is destroyed, not by FEDRA, but by the very threat they failed to address.

One might expect that, after the dystopian authoritarianism of FEDRA in the first community, the Kansas City uprising could open up a Rousseauian possibility: That once tyranny is overthrown, people might govern themselves with greater compassion and equality. Yet the new regime collapses almost immediately into a Hobbesian cycle of violence and retribution, driven by the personal pathos of its leader. The implication here is that liberation alone does not secure stability. From Bauman's liquid/solid perspective, although the state has lost its authority, it is replaced by another rigid structure centered

on the domination of a single figure. Although authority shifts hands and old hierarchies are gone, the reliance on fear and domination persists, leaving the community unable to adapt to the external threats that ultimately destroy it.

Third Community: A Commune in the Frontier

The third community, introduced in Jackson, Wyoming, explores the intriguing possibility of a functional, content, and secure community existing in a post-apocalyptic world. It raises the prospect of people living well without resorting to authoritarian rule and oppressive structures. Consequently, it imagines a community that survives in a post-apocalyptic setting without reliance on what Bauman would call solid structures. This community stands in stark contrast to the previous authoritarian models. It is a peaceful, self-sustaining commune of approximately 300 people, living fortified and in isolation. Unlike the militarized societies seen elsewhere in the series, Jackson is governed through a structured, egalitarian system. It operates under a democratically elected council and appears to function efficiently within the post-apocalyptic context. There is a school, space for different faiths, and an apparent balance between personal freedom and collective responsibility.

Two elements make this community especially compelling. The first emerges during a scene in which Joel and Ellie are shown around by Tommy (Joel's brother) and Maria (Tommy's partner). In their conversation, the community is described using a term that carries heavy ideological weight in American discourse. Typically associated with Cold War anxieties, Soviet antagonism, or conflicts like the Vietnam War, communism is rarely portrayed from an American perspective as the basis for a functional society in American Cinema. Yet here, the word is used openly.

Maria explains that there's no need for banks, that everyone contributes according to their ability, and that resources and labor are collectively owned and managed. Tommy, somewhat reluctantly, states: "Everything you see in our town, greenhouses, livestock, all shared. Collective ownership" (22:54–22:59). Joel bluntly replies, "So, communism" (23:00). Tommy tries to refute the label, but Maria corrects him: "It is that. Literally. This is a commune. We are communists" (23:05-23:07). This exchange quietly subverts the ingrained cultural assumption that communal systems are inherently dysfunctional or anti-American. It pushes back against the idea, as Tally Jr. argues, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than "a transformation of the present socio-economic system" (125). Jackson presents such a transformation, not as utopia, but as a rare and viable model of survival. However, the narrative adds a safety valve. It reassures the audience that this model only works because it is small, isolated, and unlikely to scale. This becomes clearer in a conversation between Joel and Ellie after they leave the commune. Ellie, born after the collapse of civilization, wonders aloud: "So the way they run stuff in Jackson, was that how things used to be?" (48:00-48:02). Joel replies, almost like a civics lesson: "No. The country was too big for that" (48:03-48:05). His comment implies that a communal model might work in a small community, but not across a vast and diverse nation like the United States. The implication is that for such a system to succeed, it would require closed borders, limited mobility, and strict regulation, conditions that are antithetical to the American ideal of freedom.

The second element that makes this commune particularly interesting is its aesthetic and cultural identity, as it carries visual and symbolic markers of the American West. Cawelti asserts that essentially "the Western setting is a matter of geography and costume" (19), independent of time. Chronology is not important as long as the mythology of the frontier is alluded to through the grandeur of the Great Plains and the clothes that reflect "the ideological tendency of Americans to see the Far West as the

last stronghold of certain traditional values" (23). Jackson carries all the signifiers of a quintessentially American town, the way it has been mythologized in the Western genre: Horses, saddles, rifles, wooden houses, cowboy hats, scarves, boots, a saloon called "The Tipsy Bison," a shop called "The Settler's Cabin," the waving American flag, and, if this is not explicit enough, a wooden sign that affirms, "This is Jackson Hole, the last of the Old West" (22:11). Furthermore, it is situated in the middle of the wilderness, surrounded by the majestic open space of Wyoming, thus situating the community within an unmistakably American background.

An interesting addition to the communal frontier-like town of Jackson is that it does not comply with the stereotypical whiteness and male heroism of the Western genre. As Lavigne suggests, post-apocalyptic narratives associated with the Wild West "explore anxieties about the breakdown of civilization while simultaneously reinscribing the straight white male privilege at its root" (11). However, this is not the case in Jackson. Although it is an egalitarian commune, the one who functions as a spokesperson explaining Jackson's politics to Joel and Ellie, and who seems to have the weight and the qualities of a leader, is Maria, a Black woman. The only other character who is given space in the narrative is Tommy, a Hispanic man. The underlying assumption here seems to be that if a communal society were to exist in America, it would have to be so deeply intertwined with traditional American imagery that it becomes, in a sense, a reinvention of the frontier. This commune is not just a socialist experiment; it is presented as a return to an older, more nostalgic version of America. It is a place where individualism and democracy, as stressed by Frederick Jackson Turner in his emblematic essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," coexist with collective ownership, blending the mythology of the Wild West with the principles of communal living. This fusion of frontier imagery and communal ideology suggests that for such a society to be accepted within the American imagination, it must be framed not as radical, but as a return to something essentially American. In the end, the episode provides both a critique of capitalism and a reassurance: It presents the commune as a functional alternative to capitalism and post-apocalyptic totalitarianism, but ultimately limits its viability to small, self-contained environments. And surely enough, the only way for it to exist is if it is Americanized through a nostalgic romanticization of the frontier.

In conclusion, in contrast to the authoritarian models of FEDRA and Kansas City, Jackson initially appears to represent a Rousseauian vision of cooperation and mutual compassion, standing out as the only community in the first season that offers an optimistic take on the state of nature. Its egalitarian structures and emphasis on collective ownership suggest that solidarity can provide both security and freedom. Yet Joel's observation that such a system could not function on a larger scale, along with the community's reluctance to accept newcomers, highlights its limitations. From Bauman's perspective, Jackson represents an attempt to recreate solid structures within a liquid world, offering stability through communal bonds. These solidities are reflected in the compliance demanded of individuals, the restrictions on membership, and the nostalgic ties to frontier mythology that supply a sense of stable identity. The question raised in the episode is whether such solidity can exist beyond a tightly contained setting, and it is answered with skepticism.

Fourth Community: The Cult

The fourth community, located in Silver Lake, Colorado, revolves around two central ideas: The viability of social unity through religious belief as both a survival strategy and a method of control, and the extreme lengths (with their moral implications) to which humans may be willing to go in order to

endure the harsh conditions of the post-apocalypse. This community is essentially a cult led by David, a self-proclaimed prophet who began believing in God after the outbreak; a math teacher in the old world, a preacher in the new one. In some ways, this community shares similarities with the one led by Kathleen: In both cases, the unity of the community depends on obedience, and the leadership of one individual is undisputed. In both cases, the power structure is rigid, which also implies fragility; dissidence cannot be tolerated if the system is to remain functional. However, whereas Kathleen was driven by passion, David represents the ultimate dystopian patriarch. He has convinced the community that he is the messenger of God and abuses the power given to him. He holds the Bible and claims sole authority to interpret its meaning. The motto, written in capital letters on a white banner in the community's common area, reads: "WHEN WE ARE IN NEED HE SHALL PROVIDE" (02:08). He guides with alternating calmness and violent outbursts, punishes and comforts, presents himself as both father and shepherd, and bases his power on the community's collective fear of survival. The winter is ruthless, food is scarce, and he offers hope, protection, and sustenance. This is where the question, about the lengths to which one might go to survive, comes into play.

Their survival depends on cannibalism, something many community members are unaware of. Even though the actual practice of cannibalism is taboo in Western societies, as Jennifer Brown argues in her study of cannibalism in literature and film, it is quite popular in fiction, because it carries rich metaphorical value offering a vehicle "to explore issues of colonialism, human appetite, overpopulation, consumerism, madness, sexuality, and power relations" (7). This metaphorical dimension partly explains the fascination with depictions of human flesh being devoured. Zombie narratives, since the notorious scene in Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead*, when the living dead feast on the roasted bodies of a young couple, have popularized such imagery. But what if the ones eating human flesh are not zombies, but survivors? What if this is the only way to endure? What if cannibalism becomes a normalized practice, a survival strategy? The question has surfaced multiple times both in real-life survival stories, such as the 1972 Andes airplane crash which was fictionalized in *Alive* (1993) and more recently in *Society of the Snow* (2023), and in post-apocalyptic narratives like *The Road*, *The Book of Eli*, *Delicatessen*, and *The Bad Batch*, which are not hesitant to explore this disturbing possibility.

When Ellie, imprisoned by David, discovers the truth about the community's cannibalism and confronts him, he responds: "It was a last resort. You think it doesn't shame me? But what was I supposed to do? Let them starve?" (37:12-37:18). As Evans suggests, in post-apocalyptic narratives, cannibalism "becomes a political and moral decision" (463), and this becomes evident in the confrontation between Ellie and David. Ellie represents a Rousseauian approach to the state of nature, one grounded in compassion, and for her, eating human flesh would mean losing her humanity. David, on the other hand, as Boudreaux suggests, represents a resignation to the Hobbesian belief that, without order, humans are inherently violent (59-60). "I have always had a violent heart and I struggled with it for a long time" (38:28-38:35), David admits, before claiming that he found clarity in the very nature of cordyceps: "What does cordyceps do? Is it evil? No. It's fruitful. It feeds and protects its children and it secures its future with violence, if it must. It loves" (38:46-39:05). According to David, moral justification is unnecessary; survival is the only law, and human nature mirrors the fungus that caused the apocalypse. It is ruthless and instinctive. However, it is important to state that David's ultimate transgression is not cannibalism but his attempt to take Ellie as a partner and later sexually assault her. His downfall is symbolic: Ellie stabs him repeatedly while screaming and lets him burn in the very place where he preached.

The cult in Silver Lake presents itself as a community bound together by faith, yet it ultimately exposes the dangers of authoritarian dependence on a single figure, as already seen with Kathleen in Kansas City. While Kathleen's drive for retribution was transparent, David is marked by ambivalence: He presents himself as a benevolent leader while simultaneously resorting to violence, manipulation, and cannibalism to secure his authority. This façade, which gestures toward Rousseauian compassion, in fact echoes Hobbes's conviction that survival depends on domination. In practice, his rule once again demonstrates the fragility of rigid structures in a liquid world: Obedience is enforced through fear, dissent is suppressed, and even the taboo of cannibalism is normalized under the guise of necessity. From Bauman's perspective, the cult illustrates how liquid uncertainty invites authoritarian promises of stability, but these promises rest on coercion and eventually collapse once their moral legitimacy is exposed.

Fifth Community: The Dilemma

The fifth and final community, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Fireflies' laboratory introduced in the ninth episode ("Look for the Light"), addresses two crucial issues. The first, a broad ideological one, is whether science can provide the solution. The second, more personal and central to the narrative, concerns Joel's decision regarding Ellie's sacrifice. Beneath the surface, the latter also becomes a political issue, as his decision lies between favoring the collective good and prioritizing the personal.

Up until the final episode of the first season, Joel has exemplified the archetype of a liquid man, a survivor who adapts fluidly to an unpredictable, often Hobbesian world, where life is brutal, uncertain, and survival depends on flexibility. At the same time, he has undergone a gradual transformation, evolving from a hardened, emotionally detached figure into a protective, fatherly one. His journey has been one of redemption, an attempt to atone for his past failure to protect his daughter, a loss that shaped the man he has become. With the arrival at the laboratory, it seems that his journey has reached its logical conclusion, the mission has been accomplished, the destination reached. By contrast, Ellie's coming-of-age journey is one of learning to adapt alongside Joel. Beginning as someone in need of protection, she gradually proves her resilience, ultimately demonstrating her ability to survive on her own, most powerfully in her confrontation with David in the fourth community. Unlike Joel's hardened pragmatism, Ellie is defined by kindness, compassion, and a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good, suggesting that adaptability does not have to be equated solely with individualism.

Once in the laboratory, Joel disagrees with the priorities of the Fireflies and the doctors. From their perspective, the end justifies the means. Their goal is clear: They must create a vaccine in order to reverse the global catastrophe and make FEDRA's authoritarian rule obsolete. The logic follows a utilitarian framework: If the sacrifice of one person is required to save the many, then the sacrifice must be made. The end is unquestionable, and individuals are dispensable in pursuit of the greater good. In their decision-making process, the individual has no voice. Moreover, in a paternalistic expression of compassion, they withhold the truth from Ellie, sparing her the fear and anxiety that knowledge of the operation's fatal outcome might produce (24:40-26:34).

Joel's dilemma is, at its core, a clash between collectivism and individualism. Accepting the necessity of Ellie's sacrifice would mean prioritizing the collective. His personal cost in this scenario would be to endure yet another unbearable loss, to give up what has become the main source of meaning in his life: His role as Ellie's protector. Choosing the greater good would mark his final transformation from a self-interested survivor into a true hero, one willing to sacrifice what he loves for the benefit of others. The

alternative is to reject the Fireflies' plan, refuse to participate in their solution, take Ellie away from the hospital, and continue his journey with her. This choice would be the ultimate assertion of individualism, placing personal loyalty above the needs of the many. Choosing Ellie over saving the world would confirm that Joel remains driven by personal relationships rather than abstract causes.

One might expect that heroism in a post-apocalyptic setting, where survival depends on cooperation, would be defined by embracing collectivism. One might assume Joel would, however reluctantly, surrender to the logic of Ellie's sacrifice. One might also assume that, although she is not given a choice, Ellie would willingly give her life if it meant offering a future to humanity, thus easing Joel's burden. Yet Joel chooses individualism. What is even more surprising, what makes this the most shocking and morally complex moment of the season, is that he is willing to do so at any cost. He does not just take Ellie and escape. He kills everyone in the hospital, including unarmed doctors, and executes Marlene, the Firefly leader who originally entrusted him with the mission to deliver Ellie safely. And then, in the final twist, he lies to Ellie. He tells her that there were dozens like her, immune to the fungus; that the Fireflies were unable to find a cure and had abandoned their efforts; and that raiders had attacked the hospital, forcing him to flee with her (35:23-36:50). His lie is ultimately an act of self-preservation. Admitting the truth would risk irreparably damaging their relationship and cost him the one thing he cannot bear to lose: His newfound role as her father.

All in all, the Fireflies' laboratory in Salt Lake City poses the final dilemma: Whether the sacrifice of one individual can be justified for the collective good. On the surface, this utilitarian logic appears Rousseauian, assuming a willingness to act out of compassion for humanity as a whole. Yet the absence of Ellie's clear consent and the paternalistic withholding of truth point instead to a Hobbesian structure, where individuals are reduced to expendable lives in the name of salvation. Joel's rejection of this logic reflects the adaptability of the liquid post-apocalyptic survivor: Rather than submit to solid structures of science and utilitarian calculation, he prioritizes his personal bond with Ellie, though he does so by deceiving and manipulating her. From Bauman's perspective, Joel exemplifies how, in a liquid world, emotional attachment can outweigh ideological commitments, even at the cost of undermining collective salvation. At the same time, Ellie's development suggests a different possibility: Her resilience, compassion, and willingness to sacrifice align more closely with Rousseau's faith in innate human goodness, offering an alternative model of adaptability that resists equating survival solely with individualism. Taken together, Joel and Ellie embody the series' central tension between Hobbesian self-preservation at any cost and Rousseauian compassion, a tension seen through Bauman's liquid modernity, where survival is negotiated in the space between security and freedom.

Conclusion

The narrative of *The Last of Us* unfolds as Joel and Ellie navigate a post-apocalyptic landscape, encountering five distinct communities, each offering an alternative imagining of how people might organize themselves. Each community balances between the need for individual freedom and the need for safety. At the same time, they each respond to a series of what if scenarios: What if the government ruled? What if a revolution took place? What if belief and faith were the solution? The answers the series offers to these questions are consistently bleak and pessimistic. No community emerges as a clear solution; all suffer from serious inadequacies, some more than others. Whether it is totalitarianism, personal pathos and retribution, cultish fanaticism, or a patronizing application of utilitarian logic, these communities suggest that in times of crisis, when all old-world structures have collapsed, there is little hope for building something truly novel and functional.

In many ways, the post-apocalyptic landscape of *The Last of Us* becomes a space of ideological negotiation between Rousseau's idea of innate human compassion and Hobbes's belief in a competitive, violent state of nature. The series leans more heavily toward Hobbes's pessimism, while still offering Rousseauian glimpses, most notably through Ellie, who instinctively relies on compassion and what she perceives as humanity in order to survive. The only community that provides a positive example is the one in Jackson, which is likened to communism and framed as a nostalgic reimagining of the American frontier. However, even Jackson's collaborative community functions as a solid structure as its survival depends on fortification, strict boundaries, small scale and compliance to the rules. All five communities reveal the limitations of solidity offering security by constraining mobility and growth.

In this sense Bauman's theory of liquid modernity is instructive in understanding the dynamics of the setting. In a world defined by endless threat and uncertainty, the series implies how difficult it is to imagine liquid structures in a post-apocalyptic context. Every community Joel and Ellie encounter is solid to varying degrees, offering safety only at the cost of freedom and mobility. Liquidity, then, is not represented collectively but individually, through the two protagonists. Joel embodies liquidity in his ability to adapt, adjust, and prioritize individualism over abstract ideals, while Ellie, in her coming-of-age journey represents another form of liquidity in her capacity to learn, grow, and to reimagine survival through compassion and sacrifice. Their choices expose both the promise and the peril of Bauman's liquid modernity: Adaptability is needed for survival, but it comes at the expense of building lasting, functional structures/communities.

Perhaps what makes the first season of *The Last of Us* such a compelling story is that it raises many questions while offering no satisfying answers. It simply exposes the paradoxes and ethical tensions of the human condition and the price that comes with every decision, whether it is made for the individual or for the greater good.

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From Sheer Racialization to Utter Weaponization: Framing the Islamophobic Discourse in the United States and France

Abstract
This article aims to unpack the intersectionality of race and Islamophobia. It takes the United States and France as cases in point, not only because they differ as to the way they accommodate their Muslim minority groups, but also in the way they define and racialize their identity. In such a context, the concept Islamophobia, which has been the focus of a vast range of scholarly literature over the past few decades, takes cognizance of an overarching trend that casts Muslims as the threatening "other." Despite claims that the West has definitively crept into a post-racial era after it dropped the biological canon used previously in race categorization, a new type of racism warranted by cultural and religious underpinnings started to target Muslim communities because their "Islamic culture" is nefarious to Western civilization. What is more, besides the Orientalist rhetoric painting Islam as a foreign creed and constructing Muslims as ominous subjects, Islamophobia has become a kind of subliminal racism, or racism without race, legitimized and trivialized by mainstream media.
Keywords: Islamophobia, intersectionality, Muslim identity, racial profiling, media

Salt Irkçılıktan İdeolojik Silaha: Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Fransa'da İslamofobik Söylemin Çerçevelendirilmesi

Öz
Bu makale, ırk ve İslamofobi arasındaki kesişimselliği açığa çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Fransa, yalnızca Müslüman azınlıkları topluma dahil etme biçimleriyle değil, aynı zamanda Müslüman kimliğini tanımlama ve ırksallaştırma yöntemleriyle de farklılaştıkları için karşılaştırmalı örnekler olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, son birkaç on yılda geniş bir akademik tartışma alanına dönüşen İslamofobi kavramı, Müslümanların tehditkâr bir "öteki" olarak sunulduğu kapsamlı bir eğilimi ortaya koymaktadır. Batı'nın, biyolojik temelli ırk sınıflandırmalarını terk ederek ırk sonrası bir döneme geçtiği iddialarına rağmen, kültürel ve dinsel gerekçelere dayalı yeni bir ırkçılık biçimi ortaya çıkmış ve Müslüman topluluklar, "İslami kültürlerinin" Batı uygarlığına zararlı olduğu gerekçesiyle hedef haline getirilmiştir. Ayrıca, İslam'ı yabancı bir inanç olarak tanımlayan ve Müslümanları potansiyel tehdit olarak kurgulayan Oryantalist retoriğin ötesinde, İslamofobi, ana akım medya tarafından meşrulaştırılan bir tür gizli ırkçılık ya da ırksız ırkçılık haline gelmiştir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: İslamofobi, kesişimsellik, Müslüman kimliği, ırksal profil, medya

Lanouar Ben Hafsa

From Sheer Racialization to Utter Weaponization: Framing the Islamophobic Discourse in the United States and France

Introduction

This study seeks to explore the intersectionality of race and Islamophobia beyond mere definitional conceptualization. Then, to capture the essence of the two constructs, it takes the United States and France as case studies to demonstrate that while both countries converge to exhibit prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes toward their Muslim communities, they diverge as to the rationale as well as the strategy they deploy to integrate them into the fabric of their respective societies. Because it addresses polemical questions that continue to nurture political and ideological antagonisms, the issue under investigation has, over the past decades, generated a vast range of scholarly literature that promotes both pro- and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The article centers around three major axes. The first section attempts to define the construct Islamophobia, which, because of its ever-changing nature, has come to lend itself to diverse interpretations. The concept takes cognizance of an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims perceived as a lingering threat, not only to the fundamental core values of the Occident, but also to Western nation-states' security. It also posits that, even though etymologically distinct, Islamophobia and racism have been interpreted as two interconnected facets of prejudice. Finally, by mapping out Muslim racialization as an intersectional project, the first section suggests studying the phenomenon beyond the constraining bounds of conceptualization. Consistent with new research standards bearing upon race and religion, the second section mobilizes intersectional patterns of thought and analysis to frame the racialization process in the United States by targeting Islamic groups and associating them with terrorism. The third section proposes to gauge that, contrary to American community-based multiculturalism, French republican universalism and the model of integration seek to hamper any form of communitarianism or group separatism. To this end and to protect the neutrality of the public space, successive French governments sought to implement restrictive policies meant to ban the deployment of cultural and religious signs such as the headscarf and the *burqa* (full body and face cover), perceived as outright violations of the 1905 *laïcité* law. The last section argues, ultimately, that, counterintuitive as it might sound, the instrumentalization of secularism in France has manifestly not been utilized to construct a form of Islam that is in harmony with the principles of the French republic, but has rather been instrumentalized by French officials and national mainstream media to marginalize Muslims further and cast them as the group that does not belong.

Defining Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a term of recent coinage, and in certain documents, it still appears in inverted commas. By no means and in any way linked to time and space, the label that harbors intersecting forms of intolerance has often been utilized to villainize Muslim individuals and communities, and frame them as the different "other." The term was first used in 1912 by Henri Lammens. Then, with the upsurge of political Islam in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in 1979, especially after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, the use of the construct became widespread, generating an endemic suspicion, further highlighted by Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978). While the complexity of the construct cannot be elucidated by the simple dichotomy of "us versus them," it can be explored beyond an etymological conceptualization to capture the essence of such a phenomenon and foreground questions about racism, social injustices, and exclusionary nationalism. In recent decades, the trope

Islamophobia has come to lend itself to a multiplicity of interpretations that have rendered its use by social scientists and political actors extremely complex, for lack of precision and coherence (Bleich 1581, 1582). What is more, the shifting configurations of such a highly controversial concept across time and space appear to leave little room for an accurate analysis of its changing facets, as it remains unclear whether the negative attitudes and stereotypes stem from opposition to the doctrinal foundations of Islam or from prejudice against its adherents. Given such interrelatedness, it becomes then difficult to identify its key components or to measure with precision its consistency and prevalence within the specific contexts of the United States and France.

Up to the twentieth century, no institution had undertaken an official study to conceptualize the term Islamophobia, theorize its principal facets, or systematically assess its impact on Muslim diaspora populations. In 1997, to counter the increasing intolerance against Muslims in the political discourse and the public sphere, the British NGO Runnymede Trust published a report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All,* which recommended concrete action by the diverse stakeholders (policymakers, legal experts, academics, media pundits, and community and religious leaders) to frame counter-narratives that would discredit the anti-Islamic rhetoric, and reduce the spread of such a centuries-old aberration. Even though not reflective of the whole West, which by no means should it be perceived as a uniform bloc, it principally aimed "to counter Islamophobic assumptions that Islam is a single monolithic system, without internal development, diversity and dialogue" (Runnymede Trust 1), and "to draw attention to the principal dangers which Islamophobia creates or exacerbates for Muslim communities, and therefore for the well-being of society as a whole" (2). Overall, the report highlighted the prevailing attitudes toward Islam perceived by a segment of the British population as immutable and unresponsive to shifting societal dynamics; distinct from other major faiths with which it shares no common values; irrational, barbaric, and inferior to the West; intrinsically violent and supportive of global terrorism; and striving to promote an aggressive political ideology (1-3).

Fear of Islam was further exacerbated by notions of clash of civilizations and war of religions popularized by political scientist Samuel Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996). Based on the belief that Islam is an intrinsically violent religion that preaches hatred of the West, Huntington sought to highlight the inevitability of a cultural collision between the Muslim and Western worlds. Coinciding, ultimately, with the end of the Cold War, epitomizing the collapse of Communism, such a new paradigm signaled the advent of a green menace which came to supplement the red menace as the main driving force of the United States' foreign policy.

Beyond the definition of Islamophobia, the label has generated a sizeable amount of theoretical and empirical literature as it came to be fused with anti-Muslim cultural discrimination. According to Tariq Modood, Islamophobia is more like antisemitism than anti-Judaism. It is more a form or racism than "a form of religious intolerance, though it may perhaps be best described as a form of cultural racism, in recognition of the fact that the target group, the Muslims," are identified in terms of their non-European descent or not being white, and their perceived culture as well as the prejudice against them (Modood 4). Such negative perceptions of the Muslim identity on an ethno-cultural rather than a religious basis seem to be resonant with new power dynamics that tend to approach Muslimness through an intersectional prism, which arguably fuses race and religion. Put another way, the decline of biological racist discourse across the Occident in the 1960s has been offset by a new type of racism that openly stigmatizes Muslims because their "Islamic culture" is fundamentally inferior to the Western one (Husain).

Even though analytically distinct, as they are grounded in two different realms of social behavior, Islamophobia and racism have grown as two interlocked forms of intolerance targeting Arab and

Muslim populations based on both racial and religious underpinnings and generating intersecting systems of discrimination against such marginalized groups. To grasp the range of scholarly rhetoric generated around such an issue and explore the phenomenon beyond the narrow bounds of conceptualization, it is worthwhile to map out Muslim racialization as an intersectional trend to identify the power dynamics operating in both American and French contexts and measure their impact on how to handle their Muslim communities.

The concept of intersectionality emerged in the late twentieth century as an analytical framework for examining the interface between diverse forms of social injustice, including racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and exclusionary nationalism. Coined in 1989 by African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term was developed to account for multilayered forms of individual and group marginalization that could not be adequately explained through single-axis models of discrimination. Rooted in a broader intellectual project, intersectionality sought to expose biases embedded in deep structural and systemic paradigms of social inequality while drawing sustained attention to forms of discrimination produced by overlapping social identities.

Crenshaw first articulated the concept in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989). In this foundational article, she examined how institutionalized legal frameworks systematically marginalized African American women by failing to recognize the compounded effects of race and gender discrimination. She further developed this line of inquiry in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), where she traced the historical and legal contours of intersecting forms of racial and gendered violence in the United States. In 1996, Crenshaw also co-founded the African American Policy Forum, a think tank dedicated to challenging racist and misogynistic public discourse and advancing intersectional approaches to policy analysis (Coaston).

Crenshaw's engagement with intersectionality was inseparable from her broader involvement in Critical Race Theory (CRT), a legal and academic framework that gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. Her interest in CRT predated the formal coinage of intersectionality and developed during her studies at Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Wisconsin. Through this framework, she argued that racism in domains such as education, housing, and employment was not reducible to individual prejudice but was structurally embedded in legal and social institutions designed to preserve white dominance. Consequently, she rejected the assumption that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had eradicated racial inequality, emphasizing instead the persistence of discrimination within ostensibly "colorblind" systems. Responding to conservative critics who accused her of promoting an anti-White agenda, Crenshaw explicitly denied that intersectionality aimed to invert existing hierarchies. Rather, she maintained that its purpose was to correct distorted power relations and foster a public culture free from exclusionary bias. As she argued, "Once the irrational distortions of bias were removed, the underlying legal and socioeconomic order would revert to a neutral, benign state of impersonally appointed justice" (qtd. in Coaston). Even though anchored in Black feminism and CRT, the burgeoning field of intersectionality has moved over the past few decades beyond its initial purpose (that is, eliminating gender disparities and constructing a more egalitarian system) to address new issues across time and geographical boundaries. Indeed, since the publication of Crenshaw's articles, scholars and civil rights activists have sought to broaden the scope of such a research area to expose, articulate, and analyze other forms of social injustice, as clearly asserted by legal expert Sumi Cho, to whom "race and gender intersection merely provided a jumping off point to illustrate the larger point of how identity categories constitute and require political coalitions" (qtd. in Carbado et al. 306). Based on a generalized understanding of intersectionality as a work-in-progress, many academics and equal rights advocates redeployed intersectional mechanisms to explore and investigate other conflicting paradigms, notably the intersection of race and religion.

US Muslims' Racialization as an Intersectional Project

Historically associated with Black feminism and postcolonial discourse in general, intersectional patterns of thought and analysis are equally resonant with new research standards bearing upon race and religious bias. Within an American context, the effects of multiple forms of prejudice often intersect in the lives of disempowered social groups and individuals, depending on their overlapping identities. Such experiences are captured by the term "Islamophobia," which "moved from the fringes of American society to the mainstream" (Council on American-Islamic Relations, v). Yet, it remains worth pondering over whether the racialization of Islam and Muslims draws upon observable elements of culture perceived as incompatible with the American values and mores, or with the tenets and core teachings of such an alien faith, notably the constant fear of "creeping sharia" and the threat it poses to the normative ethos of democratic governance in the United States (Considine 1).

To tie such threads back into the framework of intersectionality and decipher the dynamics underscoring the othering processes targeting Muslim groups and individuals in the United States, it seems pertinent to transcend American national boundaries and anchor the debate within an overall context that fosters the production of Orientalism across the West. As a distinctive feature of an exclusionary rhetoric aimed at propagating a uniform and homogenizing image of Muslims and racializing them as a monolith, Orientalism, according to Edward Said, associates Islam with Arabs and constructs "otherness" based on cultural differences. Said highlights the animosity between the "white Christian Occident" and the "non-Caucasian Islamic Orient" based on a sustained ethnocentric vision that stresses Western moral and cultural supremacy, and frames Arabs/Muslims (used interchangeably) as "aberrant, underdeveloped, and inferior" (*Orientalism* 300-301). Equally salient, the Orientalist perception of Islam as an inferior set of beliefs and cultural practices stems from the assumption that any Muslim or Arab presence in the West poses a real threat, not only to the collective cultural identity and social cohesion, but also to the security of Western nation-states. Thus, in addition to being stereotyped as "uncivilized," "barbarian," "primitive," and "authoritarian," they are demonized as a "fifth column" with a hidden ambition to destroy "Western civilization" and conquer the West (287).

In the same line of reasoning, Jack Shaheen, author of a range of well-known books, including *The TV Arab* (1984), *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (1997), *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001), and *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11* (2012), offers an insightful narrative on how Arab and Muslim populations are stereotyped in the American media and more specifically in the entertainment industry. They are often depicted as "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits and abusers of women" (Shaheen, 172). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, representations of Muslims and Arabs were reconfigured within a new form of Orientalism, often labeled neo-Orientalism (Tuastad 591-92), which portrayed them as warmongers with an inherent propensity for violence. As Edward Said observes in *Covering Islam*, "it is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, and apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists" (26).

In addition to Orientalist tropes which reinforced anti-Muslim prejudice and constructed Muslims as detrimental to Western cultures and societies, disheartening boundaries erected notably around the American national identity further racialized Islam adherents, casting them as the potentially minacious "other." Through such racialization, racism surfaces to vilify Muslims as a lingering threat that needs to be countered by whatever coercive devices, including airport racial profiling, restrictive immigration policies, unequal treatment under the law, and racial discrimination in a wide range of social domains such as housing, education, and employment (Carr and Haynes 28-29).

The new type of racism targeting Muslims because their perceived Islamic culture is at variance with the American mores and way of life (Beydoun 51) has been perceived as a socio-historical construct that hinges more upon cultural features of marginalized cohorts than upon their genomes (Omi and Winant 109). Depicted as "subliminal racism" or "racism without race," it emanates from a new racial ideology labeled "colorblind racism," which became dominant in the late 1960s (Bonilla-Silva 2). Bonilla-Silva maintains, "contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through 'New Racism' practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial" (3).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent "War on Terror" launched by President George W. Bush deepened the racialization of Muslims who became primary targets of intensified surveillance and policing, following the 2001 Patriot Act. Concomitantly, the "otherness" of Muslims took a more institutionalized posture through the construction of "visible archetypes" of Muslim identity based on distinctive features such as name, physical appearance, phenotype, and language (Husain). Furthermore, the association of Islam with violence and terror led to a process of "racialized governmentality" at American airports and in the public space, targeting Muslims as well as "look-like Muslims," notably the turban-wearing members of the Sikh faith (Naber 280-286). One of the highly visible and uncontested manifestations of post-9/11 race-based discrimination is the US airline racial profiling of "look-like Muslims," often singled out since their physical traits (dark complexion, curly hair, foreign exotic accent) for heightened security screening. Justified by the rationale that their ethnicity or national origin augments the risk of perpetrating a terrorist attack, such a tactic has often targeted people of color who are not even Muslim (Sayyid 19). To showcase with just one instance, in January 2016, four "look-like Muslims" (among them one Sikh from India) were removed from an American Airlines flight just because their appearance made the captain "uneasy" (Chandrasekhar 219).

Rushed through the US Congress with unanimous approval just weeks after the 9/11 attacks, the 2001 Patriot Act conferred sweeping authority on the Justice Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the newly created Transportation Security Administration to arrest, detain, or even deport suspects based on secret evidence the substance of which could not be disclosed even to defendants themselves or their lawyers. Framed as a necessary measure to safeguard national security, often at the cost of eroding constitutionally protected civil liberties, the new coercive policy disproportionally targeted airline passengers perceived as "Muslim-looking," irrespective of their American citizenship, social standing, or even advanced age. As indicated in the report authored by the Michigan Advisory Committee on Civil Rights Issues Facing Arab Americans and submitted to the US Commission on Civil Rights in September 1999, three critical issues of concern were identified: "(1) the profiling and detaining of Arab Americans at airports and ports of entry to the country, (2) denial of due process to Arab Americans in deportation hearings, and (3) discrimination against Arab Americans" (US Commission on Civil Rights).

The stigmatization of Muslims and their faith in the United States transcends media and partisan boundaries, reflecting broader societal dynamics in which segments of public opinion internalize and produce unfounded stereotypes strategically mobilized to sustain processes of othering and exclusion. This, at least, is what can be inferred from a *YouGov/Huffington Post* survey conducted before the 2016 presidential contest. The study found that fifty-five percent of the polled sample had "a somewhat or very unfavorable view" of Islam (Kaleem). Even more concerning, a report released by *Zogby Analytics* on 29 July 2014, revealed that forty-two percent of Americans condoned the use of racial profiling by law enforcement agencies, viewing it as a legitimate means to rigorously screen and monitor Muslim and Arab airline passengers (Siddiqui).

French Muslims and the Instrumentalization of *Laïcité*

While they share similar characteristics, namely a common historical and socio-cultural heritage, French and American Muslims differ as to the way they are integrated into the fabric of their host societies, especially the way they articulate their distinctive features in multiethnic and multifaith environments. In this respect, the choice of France in such a comparative study rests upon two major concerns. First, it hosts the largest Muslim concentration in Europe, standing for ten percent of the overall population (INSEE). Second, it developed a different perception of how society should be structured, notably how to make the integration process of its minority groups a successful dynamic that foregrounds republicanism. Beyond divergent frameworks of French ethno-pluralism and American multiculturalism, analyses of Muslim diaspora communities in France and the United States must account for both their distinct immigration histories and the assimilation policies through which these communities are often framed as threats to national cohesion. An intersectional analysis of Islamophobic discourse is therefore complex, as it requires engagement with heterogeneous migration trajectories and with the ways Muslim populations negotiate integration within their host societies.

Since the arrival of the first wave of Muslim immigrants from Algeria in the early twentieth century, French authorities have regarded the community's cultural cohesion, particularly its religious heritage, as an obstacle to assimilation within an overwhelmingly Judeo-Christian environment. At the same time, fearing that Algerian workers' exposure to greater metropolitan freedoms might jeopardize colonial rule, the French state instrumentalized the press to criminalize them, thereby fostering a climate of opinion that came to portray Arabs as violent and morally deviant barbarians (Macmaster 8). From this initial phase onward, and despite Muslims' profound entrenchment within French society, perceptions of their resistance to integration (along with their persistent depiction as a permanently unassimilable group) have continued to fuel contentious debates in both public and intellectual spheres over how best to engage with such communities.

Despite differing, and at times conflicting, modes of social organization, both France and the United States have developed distinct strategies for managing ethno-religious diversity in pursuit of assimilation, whether at the individual or group level. In contrast to American community-based multiculturalism, which recognizes and protects plural identities, French republican universalism advances an explicitly assimilationist model. This framework discourages communitarianism and group separatism while promoting individual initiatives intended to cultivate allegiance to the state. As political scientist Philippe Marlière observes, "every French citizen must fit, either voluntarily or under duress, into the framework of 'republican values.' Ostensibly, these values are enshrined in the constitutional ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, as well as *laïcité*. But they are actually ill-defined" (Marlière). Concerns over Muslims' perceived resistance to assimilation in accordance with the French integrationist model have generated sustained rhetoric not only about their adaptation to a secular environment, but also about the supposed threat they pose to the long-standing French conception of republican citizenship rooted in the Jacobin tradition of a one and indivisible republic (*la République une et indivisible*). This principle is codified in the first article of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1958), which declares France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic.

Resonating with a broader rejection of American multiculturalism (often dismissed as an "Anglo-Saxon disease") the French state has historically sought to protect the neutrality of the public sphere and to "preserve [it] as a space of uniformity, neutrality and equality" (Silverman 634). Within this framework, visible cultural and religious markers have been constructed as incompatible with French national identity

and as violations of the 1905 law on *laïcité*, which established the strict separation of church and state in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Paradoxical as it may appear, successive post–Second World War French governments—while consistently implementing restrictive policies aimed at discouraging social fragmentation—were also responsible for initiating the creation of bidonvilles (slums) and for reinforcing the ghettoization of metropolitan suburbs as a means of isolating and marginalizing non-European immigrants. This dynamic is articulated by Max Silverman in the following terms:

> Forms of racialized segregation are not absent from French national life, but the role of race in social life is a *de facto* part of everyday life; no effective policy or practice can be put in place to address the situation because, *de jure*, racial categories are profoundly disavowed. At its worst, the Republican model creates the beast but dares not speak its name. (634)

Coincidentally, the American practice of racial profiling in airports finds its counterpart in the French ban on the ostentatious display of cultural and religious symbols deemed threatening to the core foundations of the Republic and to the neutrality of public space, which is expected to remain insulated from overt cultural diversity. Grounded in a strict separation of religion and politics, and justified as a means of preventing proselytism and disorder in public life, successive French governments have adopted a range of measures that effectively stigmatize Muslim residents. These policies form part of a broader effort to construct a secularized "French Islam" aligned with republican values and stripped of ethnic or national markers.

A key example is the law adopted by the French National Assembly on March 15, 2004 (Law No. 2004-228), which sought to apply the principle of secularism in public schools, long regarded as "mills of Frenchness." Although the legislation did not explicitly mention the Islamic headscarf, its underlying intent pointed in that direction. Article L.141-5-1 stipulates that "in public primary schools, middle schools, and secondary schools, the wearing of signs or clothing by which pupils conspicuously manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited." This interpretation was further clarified in the Ministry of Education's 2004 circular, which explicitly referred to the Islamic veil or hijab, the Jewish kippa (yarmulke), large Christian crosses, and Sikh turbans. The first measure of its kind in Europe and across the Western world, this prohibition has since been extended to French athletes, including those participating in the Paris 2024 Olympics, who are barred from wearing head coverings or other "conspicuous" religious symbols.

The resurgence of Islamic radicalism, underscored by a series of terrorist attacks that struck Paris in 2015, including the attack on the satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7 and the Bataclan theater on November 13, which together killed more than 130 people, reinvigorated French officials' determination to advance the state's anti-separatism agenda. Presented as a means of simultaneously safeguarding national security and preserving France's secular heritage, this project sought to curb social movements perceived as undermining nation's secular heritage.

Following the murder of Samuel Paty (a French high school teacher killed after showing caricatures of the Prophet in class), the French government unveiled draft legislation aimed at combating what it termed "Islamist separatism," widely framed as an obstacle to Muslims' integration. President Emmanuel Macron, who spearheaded the initiative, argued that "Islam is a religion which is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world," and emphasized what he described as the urgent need "to free Islam in France from foreign influences" (Talat).

In April 2021, to combat home-grown terrorism and Islamist radicalization, the French National Assembly passed a bill titled "Strengthening Respect for Republican Principles" or the "Anti-Separatism Bill," as it was designated in media coverage, which encroached upon the individual liberties of an

estimated 5.7 million Muslims living on the French territory. The legislation made it incumbent upon law enforcement officials to monitor and curtail any individual or group initiative aiming to hinder the government's anti-separatist and counter-terrorist agenda. It equally underscored the need for Muslim group leaders and grassroots activists to thwart minority politics. Expectedly, the measures announced produced reverse results and reinforced, among the targeted Muslim community members, a sense of exclusion which further marginalized them as the enemies of the Republic. Even though it did not mention by name Islam or Muslims because, according to a French official, "it is not against Islam, [but rather] against people who in the name of a wrong or reconstructed vision of a religion behave in a way contrary to the Republic" (Griffin), the new piece of legislation propagated an anti-Muslim narrative that relegated Muslim citizens to a second-class status.

Max Silverman offers a critical analysis of the French republican model, arguing that successive governments and segments of the mainstream media have instrumentalized secularism in ways that disproportionately affect Muslim populations. In this sense, the tendency to interpret visible religious or cultural signs as threats to the neutrality and uniformity of the public sphere not only departs from the letter and spirit of the 1905 law on *laïcité*—which formally guarantees freedom of conscience—but also sustains an idealized and mythologized conception of the Republic that obscures social realities. Silverman further contends that "by disavowing the other's difference while at the same time fetishizing it through racialization or exoticization, the republican model politicizes difference while proclaiming the opposite" (634). From this perspective, he argues that by erecting symbolic and spatial boundaries and normalizing forms of racialized segregation "in an age of deterritorialized and hybridized identities" (638), French republicanism ultimately produces "a more profound fetishization and racialization of expressions of difference and cultural identity today than those states in which race is institutionalized" (636).

Although this shift may appear contradictory, the movement from a secular understanding of French and Western values toward a more explicitly cultural and civilizational framing—one that, in practice, tends to exclude Muslim populations—has been cited by several scholars as evidence of the evolving role of laïcité in contemporary France. Rather than fostering an interpretation of Islam compatible with the letter and spirit of republican principles, critics argue that laïcité has increasingly been mobilized by state actors to justify restrictive policies affecting Muslim communities. As noted by an international human rights researcher, a legal framework originally intended to ensure the separation of Church and State has, in her assessment, expanded into forms of religious discrimination directed primarily at Muslims (Alouane). This dynamic is illustrated by the sustained public and political controversy surrounding the concept of "Islamo-gauchisme" ("Islamo-leftism" or, more broadly, "wokeism"). Widely circulated in mainstream media and endorsed by segments of the political establishment, the term has been used to challenge scholars associated with postcolonial, decolonial, and critical race studies, who are frequently portrayed as ideological actors undermining academic rigor within French universities (Parvez).

In February 2021, amid growing debates over communitarianism and minority rights activism in higher education, Minister of Higher Education Frédérique Vidal called for an official investigation into what she described as the influence of Islamo-leftism in French universities. Framing this initiative as a means of safeguarding academic standards, Vidal stated that such an inquiry was necessary "so that we can distinguish academic research from activism and opinion" (Darmanin). These concerns echoed broader critiques advanced by former Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer, who warned of what he characterized as an ideological convergence between radical Islamism and far-left movements, asserting that "Islamo-leftism is plaguing our society . . . and the university is part of society" (Darmanin).

In the same year, Blanquer further institutionalized this position through the creation of the *Laboratoire de la République*, a think tank intended to promote republican humanism and universalism and to counter what its proponents described as the growing influence of woke culture. The initiative was presented as a forum for dialogue between scholars and policymakers and, according to Blanquer, as a response to ideological frameworks perceived as originating on North American university campuses. From this perspective, the republican ideal is understood as transcending categories of race, gender, and religion, which Blanquer argues risk reducing individuals to fixed identities and generating social conflict (Caulcutt).

At the same time, critics of wokeism in France frequently acknowledge the transatlantic circulation of ideas associated with what has been termed "French Theory," developed by intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, René Girard, and Jean Baudrillard, and later adopted within US academic contexts. Nevertheless, contemporary anti-woke commentators often frame these developments as an external import incompatible with French traditions of egalitarianism and universalism. Conservative essayist Mathieu Bock-Côté, for example, contends that heightened sensitivities surrounding race and religion are largely an American phenomenon, rooted in a historical experience that France, despite its colonial past, does not share (Caulcutt). Similar critiques have been articulated by other prominent figures. Sociologist Nathalie Heinich has characterized wokeism as a form of "totalitarianisme d'atmosphère," while Gilles Kepel has argued that French secularism, as a republican principle, transcends race, gender, and religion and does not inherently produce discrimination. Kepel cautions against what he identifies as the growing influence of Islamism in France and criticizes segments of the academic community for downplaying this threat while promoting intellectual frameworks of US origin that he views as incompatible with republican universalism (Caulcutt).

Despite receiving support from segments of conservative political and media circles, Vidal's call for an investigation into Islamo-leftism prompted strong opposition from academic institutions, most notably the Confédération des Présidents d'Université (CPU). University leaders rejected allegations of any alliance between progressive academic movements and Islamist groups and denied accusations linking such scholarship to antisemitism. Instead, they attributed the emergence of woke discourses on French campuses to a growing awareness among younger generations of persistent forms of institutional racism and Islamophobia, which they associated with France's colonial legacy (Darmanin).

Finally, debates over Islam, secularism, and national cohesion extend beyond political and academic elites into broader public opinion. A nationwide survey conducted in October 2012 by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique (IFOP) for *Le Figaro* revealed widespread concern regarding the perceived influence of Islam in France. According to the poll, six out of ten respondents viewed the influence of Islam as "too large," while three percent considered it a "threat" to national identity. Only seventeen percent believed that Islam enriched French cultural heritage, and forty percent regarded it as neither a threat nor a benefit. Additionally, three percent opposed the construction of mosques, three percent opposed the wearing of the headscarf in public spaces, and approximately two-thirds of respondents believed that Muslims were poorly integrated into French society, with sixty-eight percent attributing this to a perceived "refusal to integrate" (Guénois).

Conclusion

Overall, analyses of French and American approaches to Islam and Muslim communities reveal patterns that extend beyond simplified or stereotypical portrayals. Political mobilization around issues

such as immigration, secularism, Islamism, and national security has coincided with significant electoral gains for neo-populist leaders and far-right political parties in both contexts. A notable feature of this evolution has been a shift in political discourse from overt antisemitic rhetoric toward a more explicit focus on Islam and Islamism, a transition that has contributed to broader media normalization and redirected public attention toward debates over "Islamo-leftism," increasingly framed as a challenge to liberal democratic values.

Recent events, including Israel's military offensive in Gaza, have further intensified public debate in France and the United States. These discussions have centered not only on the contested boundaries between freedom of expression and state regulation, but also on the political framing of antisemitism and the responses to pro-Palestinian mobilization on university campuses. The resulting controversies have raised broader questions about how to reconcile the protection of academic freedom with efforts to address antisemitism.

Against a backdrop of persistent security concerns and ongoing anxieties over national cohesion, policies designed to promote secularism, equality, and democratic principles of religious freedom have, paradoxically, been associated with the emergence of counter-narratives that further marginalize Muslim communities (Alouane 1). In this context, the appropriation of secular discourse by far-right actors in Europe and the United States—recasting Western ideals in cultural and civilizational terms—has complicated efforts to foster a broadly shared framework of social coexistence. Several scholars argue that sustained marginalization may, in turn, contribute to patterns of social withdrawal and identity consolidation among Muslim diasporas, as communities seek to preserve cultural and religious continuity under conditions of perceived exclusion.

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Revolutionary Road as Representation of Masculinity in Crisis

Abstract
As covered in masculinity studies, American men have been in a crisis about the gender roles since the eighteenth century due to the rapidly changing types of masculinity. The crisis is felt acutely in the Cold War era in particular because of the contrasting forms of masculinity that require conformism and nonconformism at the same time. Frank Wheeler, the protagonist of Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road*, is, too, caught in the dilemma between social conformity and individual authenticity. He is already a man that struggles hard to project certain images of himself so as to look like a man in control, which rendered him a man devoid of an authentic self and a man who must deal with his fragile masculinity by rationalizations and justifications. Benefiting from masculinity studies and focusing on the hegemonic masculinity forms during the Cold War America, this paper will analyze Frank's identity crisis as experienced by a man rather than an individual.
Keywords: Richard Yates, Revolutionary Road, masculinity studies, Cold War America, suburbia

Erkeklik Krizinin Temsili Olarak *Özgürlük Yolu*

Öz
Erkeklik çalışmalarında ele alındığı üzere Amerikalı erkekler, hızla değişen erkeklik türleri nedeniyle onsekizinci yüzyıldan beri toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri konusunda bir kriz içindedir. Kriz, özellikle Soğuk Savaş döneminde, aynı anda hem konformizmi hem de uyumsuzluğu gerektiren zıt erkeklik türleri önermesi sebebiyle, yoğun bir şekilde hissedilmiştir. Richard Yates'in *Revolutionary Road* (*Özgürlük Yolu*) adlı eserinin başkahramanı Frank Wheeler da toplumsal uyum ve bireysel özgünlük ikileminde sıkışıp kalmıştır. Frank çevresine hakim biri gibi görünmek için sürekli olmadığı biri gibi davranmaktadır. Bu da onu kırılgan erkekliğiyle başa çıkmak için sürekli akıl yürütmelere ve gerekçelendirmelere başvuran biri haline getirmektedir. Bu makale erkeklik çalışmalarından faydalanarak ve Soğuk Şavaş Amerikasındaki hegemonik erkeklik biçimlerine odaklanarak, Frank'i, kimlik krizi yaşayan bir bireyden çok bir erkek olarak tahlil edecektir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Richard Yates, Özgürlük Yolu, erkeklik çalışmaları, Soğuk Savaş Amerikası, banliyö

Şenol Bezci

Revolutionary Road as Representation of Masculinity in Crisis

In "Masculinity Studies and Literature" Alex Hobbs rightly points out that American fiction refrains from presenting hegemonic male heroes which cinema and advertising celebrate (387). In the parade of flawed male characters, the obsessive Ahab of *Moby Dick* and the sinful priest of *The Scarlet Letter*, Arthur Dimmesdale, not to mention very many of Poe characters, take the lead. Closer to today, in contrast with the titular celebration, not even Gatsby is great due to his shady business "gonnegtions" (Fitzgerald 77) and obsessive romantic entanglement.

The Great Gatsby happens to be Richard Yates' favorite American novel (Henry and Clark 213) and his protagonist, Frank Wheeler, in *The Revolutionary Road* cannot disown his fictive inheritance and maintains the tradition: Frank Wheeler, the young middle class suburban resident, is indeed a troubled character. When Frank Wheeler appears in the novel, he is trying to make his way towards the dressing room where his wife is cleaning her makeup after a frustrating dramatic performance in an amateur drama company. As he walks, Frank is trying hard to wear a facial expression which he hopes is perceived as "dignity" (8) by the people around him. As the narrator states "his face did have an unusual mobility: it was able to suggest wholly different personalities with each flickering change of expression" (8). Now he chooses to look like "a kindly, witty man who would have exactly the right words of comfort for his wife backstage" (8). Yet the narrator is quick to add that he could use some comforting himself. Therefore, he cannot console his frustrated wife. Luckily for himself, Frank does not take her frustration too seriously; he believes the failure she faces is not worth feeling bad about. In this life, similarly, economic hardships and boring jobs are to be endured. "The important thing, always, . . . [is] to remember who you . . . [are]" (13). Yet, who is Frank Wheeler?

Frank Wheeler, on the eve of his thirtieth birthday, lives with his wife and two children in 1955 in the fictional suburban neighborhood of the Revolutionary Road around Connecticut. Frank and April Wheeler are not content with their lives at all due to their superfluous aspirations for a nonconformist life at a time when conformism is an overt government mandate. Those are the years of McCarthyism; family values are as important as the bunkers against the Bomb and the Russian invasion. Their life seemingly takes a turn when April suggests ending their conformity by going back to a dream Frank once had and had forgotten about: They are to move to France, she is to take a job and support Frank while he seeks his true self and passion in life. Their preparations for the move coincide with Frank's accidental progress and possible promotion in his company and April's third pregnancy. April's self-abortion leads to her death from blood loss, but the French adventure already was always a long-shot dream because of Frank's unresolved conflicts about what it means to be a man in his own understanding. Consequently, the novel displays a man suffering from his fragile masculinity that is maimed by the contradictory types of masculinity provided during the Cold War era. Caught in the dilemma between the idealized hegemonic masculinity represented by conformism and a groundless claim to a nonconformist individuality, which is further problematized by his inferiority complex stemming from his early years in life, he causes not only his own but also the demise of his wife as well. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss Frank Wheeler as embodiment of the American masculinity in crisis during the Cold War. To this end, first, his problematic character due to lack of an authentic identity will be laid bare. Secondly, the underlying causes of his problem will be discussed in detail which will finally lead to his fragile masculinity. As a member of the Cold War American society, Frank responds to certain events in certain ways which are not exempt from the masculinity ideology of his time. Frank and his crisis are historically situated; therefore,

covering the masculinity understanding of the era as derived from masculinity studies is mandatory which is preceded by an analysis of American masculinity as in crisis.

Masculinity studies,[1] which certainly helps us get insight into Frank Wheeler's crisis, is a relatively new field of academic research partly because in the Western male-dominated discourse man is equated with the universal human being. Men were treated as the universal genderless person whereas women were defined in relation to their sex (Armengol 76). According to Haraway, "from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the great historical constructions of gender, race, and class were embedded in the organically marked bodies of woman, the colonized or enslaved, and the worker. Those inhabiting these marked bodies have been symbolically other to the fictive rational self of universal, and so unmarked, species man" (210). The same idea is concisely stated by Michael Kimmel as "American men have no history" (1) and goes on to say if a book " doesn't have the word *women* in its title, it's a good bet that the book is largely about men. Yet such works do not explore how the experience of being a man, of *manhood*, structured the lives of the men who are their subjects, the organizations and institutions they created and staffed, the events in which they participated. American men have no history of themselves *as men*" (1).

Starting with the 1990s "men are no longer the invisible, unmarked gender, the Archimedean point from which all norms, laws, and rights flow; men are themselves the object of gaze of women, of other men, and a new critical scholarship" (Nye 1938). However, writing about masculinity starts before the 1990s. One of the books to cite in this field of research is Joseph Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity*. At a time when the term gender was not so much in circulation, Pleck contents that male sex role identity is defined through "a single bipolar continuum ranging from masculinity at one pole to femininity at the other" (17). Furthermore, he states, traditional male sex role identity, masculinity as we understand today, is cultural and time-bound, i.e., changing as society changes (7).

R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* (1995) is accepted as one of the definitive books on masculinities. She defines gender as "a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body . . . [only]" (71). As noted in the title of her book she emphasizes the plurality of the masculine gender and introduces the notion of power and status in the formation of masculinities. She develops the terms of hegemonic and complicit masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally "exalted" form of masculinity. It is not a "fixed" type approved timelessly everywhere. It is rather "a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (76). Hegemonic masculinity, despite its ever-changing and volatile nature, is presented or accepted as the ideal manhood at a given time and in a given culture. Thus, "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is correspondence between cultural ideal and the institutional power, collective if not individual" (Connell 77). Complicit masculinity, on the other hand, denotes a certain form of masculinity falling short of being hegemonic but still accepting the standards of the hegemonic form as it also benefits from the patriarchy and the social superiority of men over women (Connell 79). Echoing Cornell, Todd W. Reeser states that masculinity studies "is not simply about the lives of men," and highlights that it points up to a complex and inconsistent concept; a concept difficult to sum up due to its "social-constructedness" and multiplicity (27-28).

A common trend among gender scholars is to treat masculinity as in crisis. Long before scholars delved into the issue, Helen Mayer Hacker, a writer of a conservative magazine titled *Marriage and Family Living* noted in 1957 that men may be suffering from conflicts caused by feelings of inadequacy as the norms and role-expectations of men are no more definite. She notes "a man may have no doubts concerning the criteria of masculinity but feel that he does not live up to them, or may be unsure concerning the requirements for validating manhood" (227). She would be validated in her observation

later by scholars such as Kimmel (2006), Nye (2005), Pinar (2001), Traister (2000) and some other authors who point out that American masculinity has been in crisis for a long while. Kimmel observes the beginning of the crisis long before the appearance of the literature of gender: "Beginning in the early parts of the nineteenth century, the idea of testing and proving one's manhood became one of the defining experiences in American men's lives" (1). As for Kimmel, American men have been possessed by "fears that they are not powerful, strong, rich, or successful enough" and an important daily task of the men is to fight these fears (6). Apart from proving themselves, they had to tackle the changing definitions of masculinity caused by industrialization. The Self-Made Man of the early eighteenth century gradually replaced the Genteel Patriarch and the Heroic Artisan of the previous century (13-29), and the previous notions of masculinity turned out to be defunct as the factory system devoured the self-employed American man. Robert A. Nye points out that "gender historians of the early twentieth century industrial America have noted how the rapid transformation of a self-employed proprietors into salaried office workers and professionals weakened the mythic tradition of independent manhood" (1946). Such a rapid transformation manifested itself as masculinity in crisis. In the words of Bryce Traister "not only the nineteenth century, but the twentieth century witnessed repeated crisis . . . of American masculinity and actual men"(288) and, consequently, "the history of American men as men now not only proceeds as a historiography of masculine crisis but collectively writes itself as an actual history of American masculinity as crisis" (287).

The Problem

Revolutionary Road, in broad terms, is a third-person narrative recounted by an impartial narrator who avoids personal commentary except for one instance. The narrator employs Frank as a reflector-character most of the time in addition to two relatively minor characters. In that respect, the audience views matters as Frank does when it comes to his crises as a man or as an individual. Thus, the audience must distinguish between the facts of the fictional realm and Frank's perception of them, which might prove difficult as he is in the habit of constant self-justification. Though he would later blame April for this unfairly, Frank has never truly been himself; he has never been able to develop and live his authentic self. By authentic self is not meant a certain pattern of behavior or model of identity but being true to himself and acting on his free will. In that sense, he is not an independent agent honest to his own self: His actions are always marred by a need to justify himself and rationalize his course of action.

Frank imagines situations, people's reactions in those situations and how people would respond to him before they actually do. Those responses are almost always positive; in other words, he has the tendency to glorify himself, which suggests wish fulfillment and lack of self-confidence. For example, he imagines the evening, and the night of the play April takes part in minute detail including what people would say to each other. He visualizes himself rushing home, lifting his children in the air laughing, gulping down a cocktail, having a quick lunch with the family, driving April to the high school where the play will be performed, at the end of the play applauding his wife proud and enchanted and then finding his wife in tears to give her a kiss. Finally, they are to celebrate the victory of the play with friends. The picture in his mind is a heroic depiction of himself which includes a man in total control of his environment and a man for whom everything goes right. Yet, the narrator states "nowhere in these plans had he foreseen the weight and shock of reality" (Yates 8).

Likewise, he imagines Maureen Grube, a secretary from his office with whom he has an illicit affair, talking about himself with her flat mate saying she has met "the most fascinating man" (101). He

expects April to praise a brochure he prepared at work when actually April expects him to resign. His self-glorification is so profound that he imagines the psychologist, an expert, to agree with him on his diagnosis of April "('I think your own evaluation of the difficulty is essentially correct, Mr. Wheeler. We can't as yet predict how extensive a course of therapy will be indicated, but I can assure you of this: with your continued cooperation and understanding, there is every reason to hope for rapid…')" (280).

He is equally defensive when he finds himself in difficult conditions and most of the time he justifies his actions to April in her absence. While he is doing something April may not approve of, he starts finding excuses and imagines himself persuading her into his course of action. For example, while he is having a lunch meeting with one of the managers in his company, he keeps thinking about how he would relate the meeting to her. He is supposed to tell the man that he would resign soon but he cannot do it and starts finding excuses that he would offer to April. Later that evening he relates the meeting to her in a way to get his imagined response but cannot succeed in it, which once again illustrates the depth of his self-deception. Castronovo and Goldleaf sum up the defect in his personality saying,

> Performing self Frank Wheeler - with his 'terrifically sexy walk', his veneer of literary culture, and his cool manner- actually practices dramatic lines for the ride home with his wife, for an evening in the living room, for a morning at the office. He constantly rehearses speeches, goes over the steps of projecting himself, and even when communing with himself, he sets up a theatrical line, including a physical setting that highlights his positive attributes, and a series of gestures that make him superior to his circumstances. (16)

A poseur in all parts of his life, he aims to project certain images of himself not only when with people, but also when he is alone. For instance, as soon as he gets into the dressing room after the play, he looks into the mirror and tries to give himself a certain look, a facial expression of dominance and control. This is the look he has been working on since his childhood, a look "which no photograph had ever quite achieved" (Yates 16). Once the reality hits him and fails him in all his projections of a dominant, cheerful and attractive man, he immediately reminisces a childhood experience triggered by the school corridors.

Frank's "youthful ambitions" are not recounted in the novel explicitly (Castronovo and Goldleaf 42), but early in life, while a student of fourteen, he plans to travel to the West Coast by freight trains and spends all his free time perfecting the plan. Yet he makes the mistake of revealing his plans to Krebs, a friend, who is not sympathetic at all. Disdaining the plan and Frank's personality, he says "Jeez, you kill me Wheeler . . . Where do you get these weird ideas, anyway? The movies or some place? . . . You want to know why everybody thinks you're a jerk? Because you're a jerk, that's why?" (18-19). His friend's remark would not only make him drop the trip but also haunt him throughout his life whenever he feels overwhelmed by the situation. In cases where he acquires superiority, he would remember Krebs again with a sense of vengeance and self-righteousness, which proves that his habit of self-justification and his lack of self-confidence predates his relationship with April.

His plan to travel to the West by freight trains might be associated with a desire to follow the path of the Frontier that is obsolete by the time of Frank's plan and can only be cherished as a nostalgic idea/ideal. Michael P. Moreno extends this argument to claim that "Frank's real conflict . . . is not just his emasculation by the postwar system; rather the conflict is rooted in his deprivation of the *keys to the frontier*, the promise of roaming the idealized geography of freedom and independence" (93). Castronovo and Goldleaf, too, interpret his illegal and exciting train trip plan as an attempt of non-conformity and relate it to an attempt of being "an authentic self and a memorable character" (42).

Castrated first by the father -as will be discussed later- and then his friend Krebs, he could never develop his authentic self. Krebs being an uncommon name and Kreb meaning cancer in German, the name must have been chosen intentionally to illustrate his cancerous effect on Frank.[2] He could partially acquire self-confidence only when he realizes that people are willing to listen to his conversation after he comes back from the war. His sense of self-assurance or suppression of the inferiority complex is closely associated with his time in the army during the war:

> The solitary tracer of railroad maps had never hopped his freight, but it had begun to seem unlikely that any Krebs would ever call him a jerk again. The army had taken him at eighteen, had thrust him into the final spring offensive of the war in Germany and given him a confused but exhilarating tour of Europe for another year before it set him free, and life since then had carried him from strength to strength. (Yates 21-22)

It must be noted that, though conveyed by the narrator, these are the self-deceptive ideas of Frank of himself. He is also deeply illusioned about the strengths he believes to be developing:

> For the first time in his life he was admired, and the fact that girls could actually want to go to bed with him was only slightly more remarkable than his other concurrent discovery - that men, and intelligent men at that, could actually want to listen to him talk. His marks at school were seldom better than average, but there was nothing average about his performance in the beery, all-night talks that had begun to form around him - talks that would often end in a general murmur of agreement, accompanied by a significant tapping of temples, that old Wheeler really had it. (22)

His self-deception is so strong that he has no doubts of "his own exceptional merit" (22-23) and he compares himself to great men whose biographies have been written. He must have a sense of his actual lack of any tangible and definite merit as he chooses to see this as a strength. Now that he has no special interest in anything, he could choose whatever he wants: "For the time being the world, life itself, could be his chosen field" (23).

This statement, written through his focalization, should be read as another rationalization or an attempt at self-deception and a leitmotif of his life. As for him "all he would ever need, it was said, was the time and the freedom to find himself" (22) and the place to do it is Europe, "which he often described as the only part of the world worth living in" (22). Yet, his young adulthood plan of living in Europe to find himself is aborted when April gets pregnant to her first baby. Frank and April already planned to have two children but "her first pregnancy came seven years too soon" (50). It is difficult to know whether Frank and April were ever serious about living in Europe as the novel does not include any serious attempt of the couple in this direction other than having "French travelling posters" (49) on the walls of their apartment. Considering Frank's daily routine of pretension and self-deception, it is inevitable to conclude that he used her pregnancy as an available excuse for delegating himself into conformism. When a friend asks about his Europe plan, he readily breaks the news of the pregnancy but seemingly sticks to the dream: He is to find a temporary job for the time being before he ventures to achieve bigger tasks in life. The job should be a very boring one that would not change him because he wants "to retain . . . [his] own identity" (78), allegedly a nonconformist identity. With the baby comes a conformist life in the suburbs but both Frank and April maintain the illusion that Frank is meant to achieve greater things than being a regular and average suburban.

Living in Europe and finding himself, then, is another self-delusion and self-glorification for Frank. He justifies everything in a way to preserve his positive self-image and project the image of a man in control for others, and the plan of Europe is a signifier of his lack of an authentic self. As a man who tries to perfect his walk and smile to extract approval and admiration from others, he is troubled to a good stretch.

The Diagnosis

As stated earlier, Frank Wheeler is a character who is constructed as a man living in a certain society at a certain era and masculinity studies enables us to access another layer of his problematic identity. As discussed in the novel, too, conformism and non-conformism is a matter of discussion in the Cold War America. However, even if Pleck's observation that sex roles are contradictory and inconsistent (142) finds a special embodiment in the 1950s and 1960s, the discussion of conformity is much older than the Cold War America. A society that has always cherished individualism and produced great authors such as Emerson and Thoreau, and seminal works of "Self-Reliance" and "Resistance to Civil Government" inevitably reacted to the conformism developing with the rise of technology and industry. Sherwood Anderson, as early as 1919, complained about the growing uniformity in the society due to "the coming of industrialism" (34) in the short story "Godliness" from *Winesburg, Ohio*. American historian and social critic Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. makes a similar remark in 1926:

> The principle of standardization, so vital for industrial efficiency, has become one of the animating principles of modern society. In imitation of the machine, an unthinking public has come to place a premium upon uniformity, homogeneity, conformity, and to abhor, except within narrow limits, diversity, differences, innovation. (134)

Schlesinger believes that institutions such as the industrial world, media, educational system, fashion industry, the church, and the legislation collaborated in creating a conformist America and observed that "in the last decade the forces making for social uniformity and the suppression of dissent have attained an unprecedented momentum" (138). Paul Tillich, a professor of theological philosophy issues a warning against the mounting conformism in America in his book *The Courage to Be* and notes that America is moving in the direction of totalitarian regimes (195).

The warnings of Schlesinger and Tillich about conformism acquire a special meaning for men in the Cold War era: Men are faced with choosing between two types of hegemonic masculinities.

> In the 1950s American men strained against two negative poles- the overconformist, a faceless, self-less nonentity, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist . . . Men had to achieve identities that weren't too conforming to the march of the empty gray flannel suits lest they lose their souls; but they couldn't be too nonconforming lest they leave family and workplace responsibilities behind in a frantic restless search for some elusive moment of ecstasy. (Kimmel 155)

Conformism was intentionally and systemically promoted not only to men but all the Americans. Employing the Red Scare and the possible subversive activities of any un-American dissenters, and the anxieties of the ordinary American, McCarthyism is made the official policy of the state. "Public opinion polls taken at the time illuminate the breadth and depth of anticommunist sentiment in the nation . . . In the late 1940s, nearly three-fourths of those polled believed that members of the Communist Party should not be allowed to teach in colleges and universities. Fully one out of three said that communists

should be killed or imprisoned" (May 12). Today the activities of Senator McCarthy particularly against alleged communists are considered serious violations of human rights, but they were the daily experiences of the average Cold War citizen either as a witness or a victim. The people of the United States were coerced into conformism and as Allen Ginsberg succinctly expressed in his famous "Independence Day Manifesto," "the suppression of contemplative individuality is nearly complete."

Family values and domestic comfort were promoted by the state to alleviate the anxiety of the American people, an anxiety, even if not created but intentionally magnified by the state. As Elaine Tyler May observes in her book *Homeward Bound*, "for . . . white middle-class couples, viable alternatives to domestic containment were out of reach. The cold war consensus and the pervasive atmosphere of anticommunism made personal experimentation, as well as political resistance, risky endeavors with dim prospects for significant positive results" (197). At a time when "the idea of normality was enforced with a desperate passion" (Kimmel 155), even the medical experts were complicit in maintaining the political status quo: "Rather than challenging the circumstances that made life stressful or difficult, the therapeutic model called on individuals to cope with and adapt to existing realities. In that way, experts reinforced the political consensus by pointing to individual weaknesses, rather than to structural or institutional flaws, as the sources of problems" (May 178). Similarly, law collaborated with social engineers by offering "the most generous benefits to married man, bolstering their role as family providers" through the GI Bill after the war (Chiang 113).

Though the conformist ideology is more or less defined through nationalism, xenophobia, suburban life and domestic bliss in the 1950s, the forms of nonconformism cannot, by definition, delineated.[3] Frank and April Wheeler declare themselves nonconformist and intellectual although they lead an utterly conformist life. Their neighbors, the Campbells, help them waddle in their illusion. The Campbells and the Wheelers meet regularly, and, in their conversation accompanied with drinks, they criticize the conformist America represented by the suburban dwellers other than them as they are intellectuals. Their pompous diction derides McCarthy and Freud alongside the petty and the conformist Donaldsons, Cramers, and Wingates of their neighborhood: "with the pouring of second or third drinks they could begin to see themselves as members of an embattled, dwindling intellectual underground . . . Frank might talk wistfully of Europe – 'God, I wish we'd taken off and gone there when we had the chance' - and this might lead to a quick general lust for expatriation: 'Let's *all* go!'" (61-62). When they are bored of politics, they talk about "the elusive but endlessly absorbing subject of Conformity, or The Suburbs . . . or American Society Today" (62). They complain about their neighbors' obsession with their power mowers and barbecue pits, they share anecdotes of "extreme suburban smugness that left them weak with laughter" (62). Soon "Frank would develop the theme. 'The point is it wouldn't be so bad if it weren't so typical. It isn't only the Donaldsons . . . it's . . . a million others. It's all the idiots I ride with on the train every day. It's a disease. Nobody thinks or feels or cares any more; nobody gets excited or believes in anything except their own comfortable little God damn mediocrity'" (62). Catherine Jurca argues that "in *Revolutionary Road*, the suburb is treated as a living space that is in constant danger of contaminating you, of turning you into something you are not- someone who belongs there" (94).[4] In an impartial evaluation, how much the Wheelers and the Campbells do not belong there, and their intellectuality are dubious. Their self-celebration of intellectuality goes only as far as joining an amateur drama club and Europe remains a far-fetched dream until April proposes it seriously.

April's suggestion that they go to Europe includes her working for an international organization like NATO or the ECA with her skills of typing and shorthand and giving Frank the time to find himself.

She believes that Frank gave up his dream of living in Europe, finding himself and doing a remarkable job just because she got pregnant, as if she got pregnant all by herself. Consequently, in her understanding, she is to blame for the conformist life they are sentenced to in the suburbs: "That's how we both got committed to this enormous delusion—because that's what it is, an enormous, obscene delusion—this idea that people have to resign from real life and 'settle down' when they have families. It's the great sentimental lie of the suburbs, and I've been making you subscribe to it all this time. I've been making you *live* by it! (Yates 117). Deep down Frank knows that, despite his antiestablishment self-celebratory intellectualism, he is not as great as he is trying to present himself. On her proposal, his first question is what he is supposed to do while she takes on the responsibility of earning money. On her saying, "you'll be finding yourself. You'll be reading and studying and taking long walks and thinking. You'll have *time*. For the first time in your life you'll have time to find out what it is you want to do, and when you find it you'll have the time and the freedom to start doing it" (114), Frank confesses to himself that this is "what he'd been afraid she would say" (114). He confesses to April that he was just being "a little wise guy with a big mouth . . . showing a lot of erudition" he does not have (119). When April protests him saying "How can you talk that way? Frank, has it gotten so bad that you've lost all your belief in yourself?" (119), he is scared that she might believe him and stops disagreeing with her.

Cross Examination

A legitimate question to ask at this point of the argument, at the expense of breaking the flow of the article, is whether Frank's illusioned claim to nonconformism and intellectuality has any connection with his being a man. In other words, does April not feel the tension between leading a conformist and nonconformist life? Is she not coerced into conformism as much as Frank is? Considering the conservatism of the society, the oppression on women is much greater as May illustrates through the fact that the Cold War women preferred to remain married "even if their particular spouses turned out to be disappointments" (193) according to a survey conducted in the era. Because April does not have as much agency as Frank in the narrative, her ideas on the issue remain to be unknown. However, what she eventually says to persuade Frank about moving to Europe not only disarms him but also reveals how fragile his masculinity is. She says, "Don't you know? You're the most valuable and wonderful thing in the world. You're a man" (121) so as to encourage him. This compliment is followed by a paragraph spared for how Frank feels:

> And of all the capitulations in his life, this was the one that seemed most like a victory. Never before had elation welled more powerfully inside him; never had beauty grown more purely out of truth; never in taking his wife had he triumphed more completely over time and space. The past could dissolve at his will and so could the future; so could the walls of this house and the whole imprisoning wasteland beyond it, towns and trees. He had taken command of the universe because he was a man, and because the marvelous creature who opened and moved for him, tender and strong, was a woman. (121)

The triumphant inner diction of Frank, regardless of its self-celebratory content, is lamentable as it points out his fragile masculinity while manifesting the source of his feverish and groundless claim to nonconformist intellectuality: Simply put, the second source of his inferiority complex.

If Krebs shattered his self-confidence as a boy, his father made him suffer from doubts about his manhood. One of his earliest memories about his father is the father making his hand a fist and asking Frank to open it to no avail while "the laughter [of the father] rang from the kitchen walls" (37). It is not

simply the strength of the hands of the father that impresses and degrades Frank: "it was their sureness and sensitivity – when they held a thing, you could see how it felt- and the aura of mastery they imparted to everything [his father] used: the creaking pigskin handle of his salesman's briefcase, the hafts of all his woodworking tools, the thrillingly dangerous stock and trigger of his shotgun" (37). All these items associated with his father are associated with masculinity. The briefcase symbolizes breadwinning, carpentry tools represent the skill and power of handling the household repairs which traditionally are done by the man of the house and the shotgun, the masculine hobby. The child Frank at times held grasp of the briefcase and saw how heavy it was no matter how lightly it would swing at his father's side while he leaves the house for work. Whenever he handled the carpentry tools, the father would yell "No, boy, no! . . . You're ruining it! Can't you see you're ruining it? That's no way to handle a tool!" (37). As for the rifle, when he was old enough to go hunting, he had no interest in it. Frank acknowledges that he disdained all these items symbolizing masculinity when he gets to be an adolescent: "Who wanted to sit in a puddle and kill a lot of ducks? Who, for that matter, wanted to be good with hobbyist's tools? And who wanted to be a dopey salesman in the first place, acting like a big deal with a briefcase . . . ?" (38). However, he admits that the hands never lost their power on him: Even when the father was in his deathbed, "they still looked stronger and better than his son's" (38).

Frank is aware of the influence his father had or has had on him which condemned him to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Referring to this influence, he would later tell his friends that his relationship with the father will make a whole textbook of psychology and "the headshrinkers could really have a ball with . . . [him]" (38). Yet, he also believes that he had a reasonably good family life that keeps him "stable" (39). However, this is just another justification as he remembers his father's hands when April emasculates her one morning after a night of quarrel by cutting the grass, traditionally a duty of the suburban man. April, "wearing a man's shirt and a pair of loose, flapping slacks" (175) mowes the grass publicly and intentionally to spite Frank.

During another fight in the car April leaves the car and starts to walk in the dark. Once he catches her, the fight gets ferocious. Even then Frank tries to impress the drivers around as a man in control of the situation. However, when April insults her masculinity saying "tell me how by any *stretch*. . . by any *stretch* of the imagination you can call yourself a man?" (29), he loses control and starts banging on the car hood. Frank's care for what others think of him under the present circumstance is a sign of his desire to project an image of hegemonic masculinity since, as Connell states, hegemonic masculinity can be formed if there is cultural acceptance of it (77). Culturally Frank is supposed to be a rational man who can keep not only his emotions but also his wife under control. As Connell argues "a familiar theme in patriarchal ideology is that men are rational while women are emotional. This is a deep-seated assumption in European philosophy. It is one of the leading ideas in sex role theory, in the form of the instrumental/ expressive dichotomy, and it is widespread in popular culture too" (164). Frank's hypocritical show to others who might happen to see them as well as almost everyone in his life is an attempt to acquire validation of his manhood. In brief, Frank feels a need to prove his masculinity repeatedly throughout his life.

Frank's idea of hegemonic masculinity relies on several achievements or trophies. For one thing, as a young single man, he would believe he should have a girl that would give him a sense of "an unalloyed triumph" (Yates 23): Girls whom he sees dancing with the officers in the officer's club or girls getting in or out of a taxis in New York "followed by the grimly hovering presences of men who looked as if they'd never been boys" (23). April was such a girl in his regard probably until the fights start. When she attacks his masculinity verbally and then emasculates him by mowing the grass, Frank tries to fix his broken manly pride by making a masculine achievement: Building a stone pathway in the garden. He wears an old pair of army pants and

starts working to find out that the job is much more difficult than he anticipated, and he is not so skilled in it. The recognition of the difficulty of the task and his own lack of skills still does not prevent him from creating justifications for the situation:

> At least it was a man's work. At least, squatting to rest on the wooded slope, he could look down and see his house the way a house ought to look on a fine spring day, safe on its carpet of green, the frail white sanctuary of a man's love, a man's wife and children. Lowering his eyes with the solemnity of this thought, he could take pleasure in the sight of his own flexed thigh, lean and straining under the old O.D., and of the heavily veined forearm that lay across it and the dirty hand that hung there—not to be compared with his father's hand, maybe, but a serviceable, good-enough hand all the same—so that his temples ached in zeal and triumph as he heaved a rock up from the suck of its white-wormed socket and let it roll end over end down the shuddering leafmold, because he was a man. (47-48)

The mention of the father's hands, references to his house, wife and children, and the repeated idea of masculinity illustrate that he is on the job just to heal his maimed masculinity. However, the job proves to be too difficult for him, and he uses the children who are playing around him and might get hurt as an excuse to postpone the job. Though they do not actually prevent him, "his mind . . . mercifully" (55) distorts the facts and releases Frank of the hard toil.

Frank's double failure in the garden happens at the end of the week of April's frustration on the stage and their fight on the motorway right after. April sleeps on the living room couch since then, which further emasculates Frank. He, then resorts to the affair with Maureen to reclaim his masculinity. While having sex with Maureen, he keeps saying to himself that he needed this and what he means by it is revealed after the sex is over: He has not felt more grateful to any one in his life because she helped him mend his undermined masculinity. For a second, he thinks whether he should say that this relationship cannot continue and apologize to Maureen, but his renewed faith in his masculinity answers for him: "the last thing he wanted to do—the very last thing in God's world he wanted to do was apologize. Did the swan apologize to Leda? Did an eagle apologize? Did a lion apologize? Hell, no" (106). He rushes out of the house without apologizing and almost bumps into -ironically and metonymically- a baby carriage in the street. When the mother protests, he refuses to look back at her: "[H]e refused, no less than an eagle or a lion would have refused, to look back. He felt like a man" (107). Consequently, he uses Maureen to heal his masculinity shattered by April.

Because Frank is a man of justifications, self-glorifications and rationalizations, it is difficult to know whether he was ever serious about choosing a nonconformist life. The reticent narrator and employment of Frank's focalization in the narration make it almost impossible to know his sincere intentions. Ironically, the married couple's imprisonment in the suburbs as a traditional family with children is caused by his need to validate his masculinity. When April gets pregnant for the first time, she plans to abort the pregnancy by herself because abortion was not legal. Having learnt how to do it from a friend, she buys the necessary equipment and is prepared to do it, to which Frank objects. Frank wants her to keep the baby since self-abortion is very dangerous. The matter is settled in Frank's favor after a long quarrel next morning and he feels exhilarated: "[I]t seemed to him now that no single moment of his life had ever contained a better proof of manhood than that, if any proof were needed" (52). It seems some proof was needed for Frank since he objects to the abortion only because April makes the decision and buys the necessary items on her own without consulting him. He confesses to himself that he did not want the baby:

> I didn't even *want* a baby, he thought . . . Isn't that the damnedest thing? I didn't want a baby any more than *she* did. Wasn't it true, then, that everything in his life from that point on had been a succession of things he hadn't really wanted to do? Taking a hopelessly dull job to prove he could be as responsible as any other family man, moving to an overpriced, genteel apartment to prove his mature belief in the fundamentals of orderliness and good health, having another child to prove that the first one hadn't been a mistake, buying a house in the country because that was the next logical step and he had to prove himself capable of taking it. Proving, proving . . . (53)

His contempt for his job at Knox Office Machines is not genuinely felt either. At the beginning of his time in his "hopelessly dull job" (53), he would say "'the great advantage of a place like Knox is that you can sort of turn off your mind every morning at nine and leave it off all day, and nobody knows the difference'" (81); however, he confesses, once again, to himself that he would miss some of the people there if he was to leave the company. Similarly, he does not refrain from calling the fifteenth floor of the building "his floor," the floor "in all honesty he could not have denied a homely affection for" (84). When his resignation is close due to the plan of Europe, he gets more attached to the place emotionally.

Frank never voices it but having a job and a workplace is a form of masculine validation, not only for him but the middle-class American male since breadwinning has always been associated with masculinity. Sociologist Talbott Parson writes in 1959 that "virtually the only way to be a real man in our society is to have an adequate job and earn a living . . . Real men were breadwinning men" (qtd in Kimmell 161). Similarly, Hacker asserts "in the status of a husband, a man must assume the primary responsibility for the support of the home" (229). Consequently, when Shep Campbell learns about the Europe plan according to which April would support the family, he says "what kind of half-assed idea is this about her supporting him? I mean what kind of a man is going to be able to take a thing like that?" (Yates 159).

Despite the façade he presents, Frank is not someone ''to take a thing like that'' because as soon as April says she is to work and support him, his fragile masculinity is awakened. He immediately imagines himself in a Parisian flat waiting for April to come back from work: ''He had a quick disquieting vision of her coming home from a day at the office'' wearing a Parisian tailored suit, briskly pulling off her gloves ''coming home and finding him hunched in an egg-stained bathrobe, on an unmade bed, picking his nose" (114-115) while "her spike-heeled pumps would click decisively on the tile floor and her hair would be pulled back into a neat bun" (119). Her masculine and dominating image and his emasculated vision alert him but April manages to sooth him by saying "You're the most valuable and wonderful thing in the world. You're a man" (121).

As he shies away from the Europe plan and establishes a firm ground on the fronts of his masculinity in the conformist lifestyle, his attitude to work and the suburbs changes gradually. Even before the plan is cancelled completely, he postpones resigning from his job for he is now more sympathetic to his workplace: His "defiance lacked weight" (178) in his present mockery of his company. He starts being proud of a brochure he produced for the company; he thinks the money he will get from the new position can be put to good use in forming a meaningful life even in the suburbs. The suburbs which were defined in the very beginning as

> a landscape in which only a few very old, weathered houses seemed to belong; it made their own homes look as weightless and impermanent, as foolishly misplaced as a great many bright new toys that had been left outdoors overnight and rained on . . . [the] automobiles

> didn't look right either—unnecessarily wide and gleaming in the colors of candy and ice cream, seeming to wince at each splatter of mud. (5)

However, both the neighborhood and his house look good to him. As for the people who enjoy themselves in fancy restaurants, most probably the conformist fringe of society, it is very likely in Frank's opinion that they are "handsome, graceful, unquestionably worthwhile men and women who had somehow managed to transcend their environment—people who had turned dull jobs to their own advantage, who had exploited the system without knuckling under to it" (229-230). Therefore, Frank gradually and easily persuades himself to be content with the conformist suburban life. That is why when April reveals that she is pregnant and it is all her fault that the Europe plan is ruined, he hardly suppresses his laughter. He welcomes the pregnancy as salvation: "The pressure was off; life had come mercifully back to normal" (219). Nevertheless, Frank cannot live the life of the suburban containment long because of April's death due to her attempt of self-abortion.

The last thing the reader learns about Frank is that he moves back to the city, leaves his children's care to an aunt and starts seeing a psychologist. When Shep Campbell sees him months later, he notes his smile has changed into "a soft, simpering giggle" (348). It is probable that he stopped projecting his engineered smile that he rehearsed in front of mirrors and accepted his place among other flawed male characters of American fiction.

Yates declares that he is never interested in successful people, he is interested in failures (Henry and Clark 211) and says, "if my work has a theme, . . . I suspect it is a simple one: that most human beings are inescapably alone, and therein lies their tragedy" (Walker 2009). Frank Wheeler's tragedy, to be precise, lies in his masculinity crisis caused by the changing and contradictory forms of hegemonic masculinity during the Cold War. His desire to be a nonconformist and authentic individual is devastated by an insensitive friend and his masculinity is crippled by an equally indifferent father. While he weavers between conformism and nonconformism, fragile masculinity and superiority complex, he turns out to be a character who cannot resist self-delusions. If not in individual coping mechanisms, he represents the ordinary Cold War period American man in essence: Confused and in a tragic identity crisis.

Notes

1. "Masculinity" refers to hetereomasculinity throughout this article.
2. The name Krebs might be a reference to Hemingway's "Soldier's Home," a short story about a young veteran named Krebs who, as a typical member of the Lost Generation, refuses to or cannot carry out traditional expectations from him. Considering Frank's conformism and Krebs's function in *Revolutionary Road,* it is difficult to propose a direct relationship between the two works.
3. It must be noted that the frontier is viewed as a powerful image of nonconformism and individualism by the Beat Generation, Schlesinger (1972) and Moreno (2023).
4. In a 1972-interview Yates says he meant *The Revolutionary Road* "more as an indictment of American life in the 1950s. Because during the fifties there was a general lust for conformity all over this country, by no means only in the suburbs . . . I meant the title to suggest that the revolutionary road of 1776 had come to something very much like a dead end in the fifties" (Henry and Clark 208-209).

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American Feminist Artists Re-signifying the Female Body in Visual Arts

Abstract
This article investigates the genealogy of the female nude in Western art and its re-signification in American feminist Performance Art of the 1960s and 1970s. From Praxiteles' *Aphrodite of Cnidus* to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, canonical representations have consistently cast the female body as passive, eroticized spectacle shaped by patriarchal norms. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, this study demonstrates how visual culture functions as a signifying system that produces and sustains gendered hierarchies. In contrast, feminist artists in America such as Yoko Ono, Hannah Wilke, and Carolee Schneemann challenged this legacy through Performance Art, transforming the female body from object into medium, agent, and author. By foregrounding vulnerability, the *abject*, and *écriture féminine*, their works created new visual languages that resist patriarchal codes and reclaim female subjectivity. The article argues that these performances radically redefined the female body as a site of critique, resistance, and agency.
Keywords: American artists, feminist art, female nude, male gaze, signifying system

Amerikalı Feminist Sanatçılar: Görsel Sanatlarda Kadın Bedenini Yeniden Anlamlandırma

Öz
Bu makale, Batı sanatındaki kadın nü figürünün soykütüğünü ve 1960 ve 1970'lerdeki Amerikalı feminist Performans Sanatı'nda yeniden anlamlandırılışını incelemektedir. *Knidoslu Afrodit*'ten Tiziano'nun *Urbino Venüsü*'ne ve Ingres'in *La Grande Odalisque*'ine kadar kanonik temsiller kadın bedenini ataerkil normların şekillendirdiği pasif, erotize edilmiş bir gösteri olarak tasvir etmiştir. Bu çalışma, Laura Mulvey'nin "eril bakışı" kuramına dayanarak görsel kültürün cinsiyetlendirilmiş hiyerarşileri üreten ve sürdüren bir gösterge sistemi olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Buna karşılık, Yoko Ono, Hannah Wilke ve Carolee Schneemann gibi Amerikalı feminist sanatçılar Performans Sanatı aracılığıyla bu mirasa meydan okumuş; kadın bedenini nesne olmaktan çıkarıp araç, özne ve yazar konumuna dönüştürmüştür. Kırılganlığı, *abject*'i (iğrenç/öteki olanı) ve *écriture féminine*'i öne çıkararak, eserleri ataerkil kodlara direnen ve kadın özneliklerini geri kazandıran yeni görsel diller yaratmıştır. Makale, bu performansların kadın bedenini kökten biçimde eleştiri, direniş ve öznellik alanı olarak yeniden tanımladığını savunmaktadır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikalı sanatçılar, feminist sanat, nü kadın, erilbakışı, gösterge sistemi

Henrieta Krupa

American Feminist Artists Re-signifying the Female Body in Visual Arts

Introduction

Art communicates through a system of signs that establishes subject positions for the artist (addresser), the image (depicted subject), and the audience (addressee).[1] Signifying systems do not merely reflect reality; they actively construct meaning, reshaping our perception of ourselves and the reality we inhabit. In this sense, art is not neutral; it produces and perpetuates ideology and frames discourse in ways that privilege certain perspectives while silencing others. As Michel Foucault reminds, power circulates relationally by producing subject positions, regulating institutions of dominance and exclusion, and controlling discourse and its signifying systems. He explains that discourse—the network of signs that create meaning—simultaneously empowers some voices while suppressing others (94). Art, too, functions as discourse, transmitting cultural values that are often structured through relations of gendered power. From antiquity to the present, artistic representations have not only reflected gender inequalities but also actively reinforced gender hierarchies. To assume that art is merely a vehicle of personal expression is to overlook the fact that every mode of representation, every compositional choice, and every subject position engendered for the viewing gaze either upholds or challenges existing power dynamics, especially those embedded in the tradition of the female nude.

Art has long been celebrated as an expression of human creativity and imagination, showcasing human capacity for abstract thinking and emotional depth. It is believed to embody aesthetic and cultural values that transcend time and space. It is also believed that art foregrounds distinct emotional and cognitive abilities unique to humankind. In this regard, art emerges as a testament to human intellect and sophistication. Historically, the tradition of the female nude in Western art has been revered as the pinnacle of aesthetic achievement and as a symbol of universal humanist principles. Yet many of the works enshrined in this canon depict women as objects of male desire, devoid of agency or autonomy, and reduced to visual commodities of the male gaze. Feminist critics have long objected to such representations, arguing that these images extend beyond formal aesthetics, shaping social attitudes and contributing to the subjugation of women in everyday life.

Over the past fifty years, feminist theorists and artists have challenged this legacy, urging institutions to reexamine the conventions that govern representation. Pioneering figures such as Yoko Ono, Hannah Wilke, and Carolee Schneemann rejected traditional artistic depictions of the female form, turning instead to Performance Art as a radically alternative—more appropriate and subversive—mode of signification that undermines not only conventional signifying systems but also the very image of the female body within them. By working through their own bodies, they disrupted the mechanism of the male gaze and reimagined the female body as a site of critique, resistance, and reclamation. These innovators contributed to the development of a novel visual language—one that asserts subjectivity, autonomy, and multiplicity in women's portrayal—while exposing the patriarchal frameworks and challenging the established norms of the male gaze that have long governed signifying processes and shaped women's representation.[2]

This article traces the genealogy of the female nude as a cultural signifier across Western art history, aiming to show how recurring motifs—from the Venus figures of classical antiquity to the odalisques of nineteenth-century painting—have codified female bodies as passive objects of male desire. The study first examines how works by canonical artists inscribed the female nude within visual regimes that naturalized hierarchy, objectification, and sexual availability. The article then engages the theoretical

framework of the male gaze, particularly as formulated by Laura Mulvey (1975), to unpack how systems of representation position women as the signified (spectacle) and men as the signifier (controlling viewer). Building on this historical and theoretical groundwork, the study later turns to feminist interventions, focusing on American pioneers who challenged these entrenched traditions through Performance Art. By analyzing Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series*, and Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, the article explores how these feminist artists in America re-signify the female body as a site of resistance, agency, and inscription. Their work not only subverts the male gaze but also generates new visual languages that foreground subjectivity, vulnerability, and multiplicity. In doing so, these performances reclaim the female body from centuries of objectification, transforming it into a living, speaking, and writing medium of feminist critique and creative force.

Historical Background: The Female Nude as a Cultural Signifier

In Greece and Rome, marble sculptures of goddesses and mythical female figures embodied fertility, harmony, and divine beauty. Yet even as they celebrated femininity, these works framed femininity within male-centric values, creating and perpetuating structures of power that persist today. The first life-sized female nude by Praxiteles, *Aphrodite of Cnidus* (375-335 BCE), epitomizes this paradox. This masterpiece depicts the goddess standing in contrapposto, her weight shifted onto one leg, accentuating curves that emphasize her beauty. She is portrayed modestly shielding her groin with one hand while the other supports a draped cloth—a gesture that paradoxically draws attention to her nudity, inviting the viewer's gaze even as it feigns modesty. Such imagery idealized beauty while stigmatizing female sexuality, transforming reverence for fertility into shame. This shift also impacted women's social standing, turning the female form into an object of exclusion. As these early representations also reveal, the idealization of female form additionally excluded the realities of ordinary women's bodies, shaping a cultural narrative that made women feel ashamed of their corporeality.

As Jane Caputi observes in *Goddesses and Monsters* (2004), male sexuality, symbolized by the phallus, retained its sacred status while its female counterpart was systematically degraded, even in divine representations, reducing women's bodies to sites of vulnerability and shame. This symbolic hierarchy is evident in ancient sculptures of goddesses such as *Aphrodite of Cnidus* (4th c. BCE), *Aphrodite of Menophantos* (1st c. BCE), and *Aphrodite* (1st c. BCE), which, although divine and seemingly celebratory of femininity, codified a social order that rendered the female form incomplete—literally stripped of its own agency and power. A recurring motif is the act of modesty. Though divine, the figure is often depicted shielding her nudity with her hands, a gesture that not only emphasizes her vulnerability but also reinforces her subject position as the object of the male gaze. Later figures perpetuate this idealized passivity through similar poses and expressions of shame.

Beneath the refined marble façades lies a profound philosophical foundation that fundamentally shaped Western view on gender. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, whose works became the cornerstone of Western philosophy, played significant roles in generating a conceptual framework that positioned women as inherently inferior to men. In *Timaeus*, Plato introduces the concept of the *chōra*—a passive, maternal principle of disorder—which he contrasts with the rational, soul-infused male form (52a-52b). This association engenders a dichotomy between the rational male as superior and the chaotic female as inferior. Aristotle further entrenches this hierarchy in *Generation of Animals* where he asserts that "the female is, as it were, a mutilated male," biologically and ontologically deficient in soul and generative power (737a.27-28). These philosophies came to reflect broader cultural assumptions of women as subordinate and incomplete, shaping wider social attitudes toward women. Such ontologies

justified women's exclusion from public and intellectual life and codified a visual rhetoric of deficiency and shame that shaped Western art and gender ideology for centuries.[3] This visual rhetoric constructed a framework in which womanhood was defined through lack and submission, shaping Western culture for generations and perpetuating ideals that continue to influence the representation of the female form across various media. This lasting legacy underscores the relationship between representation and cultural power structures, demonstrating that art is never merely a reflection of aesthetic or cultural values but a tool for establishing and sustaining ideologies.

The Renaissance revived classical ideals, but the representation of the female form remained bound to a patriarchal visual economy, a representational signifying system which aestheticizes women's bodies primarily for the pleasure of a presumed male viewer. Although the early Renaissance primarily celebrated the male body, exemplified by depictions of heroic masculinity such as Michelangelo's *David*, the female nude, emerging more prominently in the High Renaissance, did not signify an autonomous subject but rather an object tailored to serve male spectatorship. This reflected the gendered power dynamics of the time, including the power to signify, which was highly influenced by thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, a pivotal figure in medieval scholasticism whose theological and philosophical writings provided a framework that reinforced the subordination of women in both ecclesiastical and societal contexts. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas adopts the Aristotelian notion that positions women as ontologically and morally inferior to men. He describes women as *defective* and *misbegotten* beings by divine order and argues that being born a woman is a result of a deficiency in the male's generative power (q. 92, a. 1). This perspective suggests that women are inherently secondary to men in both form and function. Furthermore, Aquinas discusses the subjection of women to men, distinguishing between two types: One that is servile and a result of sin, and another that is natural and existed before the Fall. His rationale implies that women's subordination is part of the divine order, justified by their perceived lesser rational capacity (q. 92, a. 2). Aquinas also addresses the concept of the *image of God*, arguing that unlike woman, man is the direct image of God: "In a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman" (q. 93, a. 4). These authoritative views reinforce a hierarchical structure where men occupy a superior position by the divine order. Aquinas's work provided a theological and philosophical justification for the continued marginalization of women, influencing societal norms, educational opportunities, and artistic representations. The portrayal of women as intellectually and morally subordinate reinforced their exclusion from positions of authority, perpetuating patriarchal structures in Renaissance societies.

Within this framework, the female body was aestheticized while simultaneously rendered inferior, valued more as a symbol than as an agent of meaning. Works such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1534) exemplify this representational paradigm, which reinforces and perpetuates gendered objectification, wherein the female nude is codified as an erotic spectacle and an object of male desire, and is notably devoid of personal agency.[4] Titian's painting portrays a reclining female nude, identified as Venus, with one hand coyly resting over her pelvis in a gesture of shielding and modesty while her gaze meeting the viewer's suggests invitation. On one hand, the image entices the audience; on the other, it clearly denies its subject a narrative agency, individuality, or interiority. Subsequent artists readily reiterated this motif. A century later, Peter Lely's *Portrait of a Young Woman and Child, as Venus and Cupid* (1685) drapes its female nude in rich fabrics to accentuate her curves, another representation that reinforces the role of the female body as an objectified, erotic spectacle. Similarly, a hundred years later, Francisco Goya's *La Maja Desnuda* (1797-1800) presents a confidently nude figure reclining on luxurious sheets.

Although her direct stare at the viewer appears to challenge conventional ideals of female modesty, the image remains firmly inscribed within a visual economy of male spectatorship. In the nineteenth century, Félix Trutat's *Nude Girl on a Panther Skin* (1844) continues this tradition, presenting the female nude in a languid posture. Her pale flesh starkly contrasted against the dark, animalistic textures beneath her, intensifying the sensual and exotic/erotic overtones of the composition. Viewed together, these works exemplify a persistent tradition in Western art of displaying, objectifying, and sexualizing the nude female form as a vessel of erotic fascination. The reiteration of the portrayal of the nude female body in similar compositions reveals how it became an ideological tool, producing and reproducing not only the male gaze but also the norm in which the female form signifies as an object intended to serve that gaze, constructed solely to gratify male desire and assert male creative authority while denying subjectivity and autonomy.

Even modernist movements such as Surrealism and Cubism that sought to challenge conventions often re-inscribed them. Although modernists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse abstracted and fragmented the human form, their depictions of the female body remained entrenched in a visual language that portrayed femininity as a site of male fantasy. To illustrate, Picasso's *Lying Naked Woman II* (1955) distorts the female figure, yet the reclining pose and the emphasis on her feminine curves continue to eroticize the object of representation, crafting an objectifying male gaze that denies subjectivity. Similarly, Matisse's *The Blue Nude* (1907) presents a stylized female body with simplified contours, which, despite its abstraction, functions to simply foreground female sensuality and sexuality for male visual pleasure. Amedeo Modigliani's *Reclining Nude with Loose Hair* (1917) follows this tradition by depicting a female nude sprawled across a surface with elongated features, portrayed in a sexually inviting pose that reinforces her availability. In *Pisces* (1938), Man Ray transforms the female body into a surreal composition, yet his female nude figure likewise signifies eroticism rather than agency. Similarly, Salvador Dalí's *Nude in a Landscape* (1923) presents a nude female figure in a dreamlike, distorted space; nonetheless, her languid posture conforms to the conventional ideals of feminine passivity, signifying primarily sexual availability. While seeking to break free from traditional norms of artistic representation, even these avant-garde works perpetuate the entrenched male-centric ideals, constructing and reinforcing the male gaze that signified the female form as an erotic object molded by male artistic authority for male pleasure. The persistence of this framework underscores how deeply the nude functioned as a cultural tool for inscribing gendered power—a testament to male artistic creativity—embedding patriarchal ideology within visual pleasure.

The Enduring Trope: Feminine Passivity

Though male figures are absent from many images of the female nude, their implied dominance persists through the structuring gaze of the viewer, the ultimate signifiers of the visual realm. To illustrate, a recurring motif is the sleeping female nude, an aesthetic decision that both promotes and associates the female form with notions such as vulnerability, passivity, and sexual availability, crafting and offering an undisturbed space for voyeuristic enjoyment. For example, in the sixteenth century, Titian's *Sleeping Venus* (1510) portrays a sleeping nude goddess whose raised arm enhances the impression of unguarded vulnerability while the soft drapery beneath her body erotically amplifies her sensuality. Similarly, two centuries later, Giovanni Battista Cipriani's *Sleeping Female Nude* (1750) reiterates this motif by depicting a sleeping woman in a submissive position. Her exposed nudity that highlights her delicate form evokes fragility and compliance. In the nineteenth century, Théodore Chassériau's *Bather Sleeping Near a Spring*

(1850) depicts a sleeping figure in a pastoral setting, her bare body draped languidly across a surface in a pose designed to amplify her erotic appeal and openness. Likewise, Serge Henry Moreau's *Young Woman Sleeping* (1924) extends this motif into the twentieth century, presenting the nude female form not only in a visibly unnatural sleeping position that serves the voyeuristic male gaze but also as an image of passive femininity that invites visual consumption. Such portrayals equate female nudity with docility, inviting undisturbed voyeurism, and marking the unconscious female form as both powerless and sexually available. The absence of male figures in such compositions does not negate male dominance; rather, it intensifies it through the male gaze, which is embedded in the very structure/composition of the image by constructing a viewing subject position that asserts representational (signifying) power and control. By cultivating a visual culture that privileges male agency while aestheticizing female subordination, these works do not merely reflect but actively produce and sustain patriarchal ideologies. It is precisely this dynamic that drew the scrutiny of feminist critique.

The rise of feminist art in the twentieth century, alongside broader socio-political movements such as feminism, civil rights, and anti-colonial struggles, marked a decisive shift in representational politics. American art critics like Linda Nochlin and Carol Duncan have interrogated the ways in which traditional representations of the female nude by male artists function to sustain gendered power structure and perpetuate male dominance. Nochlin who is renowned for her groundbreaking 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" extends her critique of eroticism in art in "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art" (1972), contending that the *erotic* in art has been constructed exclusively by men and for men, with no consideration for female subjectivity or agency. Asserting that "erotic imagery is created out of male needs and desires," Nochlin emphasizes that erotic art depicting the female body without objectification, whether overt or through fetishistic allusion, is virtually non-existent (137). According to Nochlin, "the imagery of sexual delight or provocation has always been created about women for men's enjoyment, by men" (138). Building on this, Carol Duncan, an American Marxist-feminist and a pioneer of *New Art History*, which emphasizes the socio-political dimensions of art, extends this critique in "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting." Duncan claims that eroticism in art is neither neutral nor a universal aesthetic, but a deeply ideological construct that serves a patriarchal agenda. She maintains that art possesses the power to position, control, and define its subjects. Her work explores how representations of the female nude, as imagined by male artists, signify submissiveness and sexual availability, thereby reinforcing male dominance. Within this visual economy, the female body becomes little more than "passive available flesh," contrasted with the virile energy of the male creator (300). Duncan further claims that such portrayals relegate women in real life to the position of "the other," antithetical to what is deemed civilized or fully human, visually justifying patriarchal control over women (300). The persistent repetition of this iconography, she argues, does not simply mirror social reality but actively constructs and legitimizes masculine hegemony.

With its privileged authority and control over visual representation, the male gaze has long dominated representations of the female body in Western art, normalizing gender hierarchies and reinforcing women's cultural, social, and economic subordination. Nowhere is this gender imbalance more apparent than in the Western tradition of the female nude. However, feminist struggles have sought to subvert this legacy by actively challenging the authority of the male gaze and reclaiming the power to signify the female body. Thus, the aim of feminist art has been to purposefully undermine the subordinated subject positions historically assigned to women—both as the signified and as a signifier—and propose alternative modes that affirm female agency and subjectivity, exploring feminine multiplicity in arts.

The Male Gaze

In her seminal 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," film theorist Laura Mulvey introduces the concept of the *male gaze*, providing a foundational framework for exploring how visual representation constructs and sustains gendered power through the act of looking—spanning from cinematic representations to other aesthetic traditions. Mulvey's theory raises critical questions about perception, spectatorship, and meaning making. She argues that the viewing gaze, which structures meaning within cinematic forms in ways that prioritize male pleasure and foreground male authority, reflects and perpetuates a heterosexual male perspective that fundamentally objectifies and sexualizes women. This perspective not only asserts male dominance by privileging the male point of view but also renders women as objects of male desire. According to Mulvey, this gaze produces a specific viewing subject position—aligned with male desire—which is then imposed on all spectators, regardless of their gender.

When applied to visual art, Mulvey's insights reveal that the privileged male perspective actively projects its desire onto the female form, encoding male dominance within the very mechanisms that govern spectatorship. More importantly, the viewing gaze conditions all viewers to adopt, and often internalize, this male-centered perspective, thereby shaping how gender, sexuality, and identity are perceived and experienced. Within the realm of visual art, the male gaze operates through two interconnected mechanisms. First, the artist constructs the female nude to cater explicitly to male desire, representing it as a spectacle of beauty and eroticism. Second, the audience is invited to adopt a perspective that reinforces a visual system in which the female form exists primarily for male pleasure. Functioning through binary oppositions—subject/object, superior/inferior, active/passive, dominant/subordinate—the male gaze aligns masculinity with attributes such as agency, power, and control, while femininity is associated with submission and passivity. These binaries, often unconsciously internalized, perpetuate gendered hierarchies that extend beyond visual culture into broader social and cultural domains. Mulvey's theory therefore underscores that visual representation, far from neutral, is a potent instrument for reproducing patriarchy at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Art critic John Berger expands on this notion in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), arguing that the male gaze distorts not only how women are represented but also how they come to perceive themselves. According to Berger, women internalize this gaze, learning to see and judge themselves through the lens of a male-dominated society that conditions them to treat themselves "as, first and foremost, a sight" (47). As Berger observes: "*Men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47, emphasis in original). This dynamic creates a form of dual consciousness in which women become both subject and object—observer and observed—perpetually monitoring and assessing their image through external judgment. This inner surveillance profoundly shapes women's self-perception.

Feminist theorists Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo develop this psychological dimension of the gaze further, illustrating how internalized objectification becomes embedded in women's everyday experiences. In *Femininity and Domination*, Bartky notes that women, subjected to a constant regime of visual scrutiny, come to regulate themselves through what she terms "internalized surveillance," producing self-objectification and a fragmented sense of identity (73, 130). Bordo, in *Unbearable Weight*, similarly emphasizes the cultural preoccupation with female bodies, arguing that women are often valued more for how they look than for what they do or think. This emphasis on appearance, she argues, upholds objectifying standards that limit women's autonomy and reduce their worth to surface-level aesthetics (143). These critical insights indicate the enduring dynamics at play in traditional

representations of women. A closer examination of the female nude in Western art reveals that the female form is rarely depicted as a signifier of bodily autonomy or subjective sexual agency. Rather than expressing a woman's natural, self-possessed corporeality, her exposed flesh is rendered as a passive object of erotic contemplation, designed to satisfy the viewer's (implicitly male) desire. In this way, visual art reinforces the ideological system of the male gaze, turning the female body into a site of projection, possession, and control.

The power of the gaze that reduces the female form to a mere sight is particularly evident in illustrations that juxtapose undressed female figures with clothed male counterparts, an aesthetic composition that signifies the gendered division of power within visual culture. This composition also reoccurs across centuries. For instance, the sixteenth century *Pastoral Concert* (1509) by Titian portrays two nude female figures among several clothed men, reiterating the notion that the female form exists primarily for male visual enjoyment. Titian repeats this motif in his *Venus and Cupid with an Organist* (1555), in which a seductively reclining nude female figure appears to serve a fully clothed male musician as his inspiring muse. Tintoretto's *Susanna and the Elders* (1555–56) explicitly dramatizes this power dynamic within the act of surveillance by portraying a nude female figure bathing while two fully clothed elderly men voyeuristically observe her from the shadows. Tintoretto's painting, indeed, foregrounds the theme of male surveillance as intrudingly objectifying the female body. In the nineteenth century, Édouard Manet`s *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863) modernizes the trope by placing a nude woman alongside two clothed men in a contemporary setting. Even as the nude woman returns the gaze in Manet's painting, as many critics have noted, the composition nonetheless conforms to and reinforces the male-centered visual economy. Such works align looking with masculinity and being looked at with femininity, layering objectification on multiple levels.

These compositions thus underscore the historical coding of the gaze; the active act of looking is aligned with masculinity, while the passive state of being looked at is rendered feminine. The female nude is subjected to multiple layers of objectification by the artist, by the depicted male figures, and by the external viewer. This layered structure of the objectifying gaze ultimately positions the audience—regardless of gender—within a visual framework that reproduces patriarchal values through the very act of looking. However, it is also crucial to interrogate whether the gaze is always unidirectional, or whether the female nude can, to some extent, reclaim agency by returning the gaze. Friedrich Nietzsche's observation in *Beyond Good and Evil* that "if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you" hints at this possibility; every act of looking inevitably invites a counter-glance, unsettling the spectator's assumed mastery (146). In this context, the viewer may not be exempt from scrutiny; the power dynamic may, in fact, manifest as reciprocal. In psychoanalytic terms, Jacques Lacan's notion of *le regard* (the gaze) describes precisely this destabilizing encounter. When the subject who ostensibly controls the act of looking suddenly discovers an unsettling void at the center of their vision—as though the *seen* were simultaneously *seeing back*—the illusion of visual control and mastery traditionally associated with the gaze is fractured (Lacan 96). Similarly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception insists that vision is always embedded in a reciprocal relationship: Embodied perception always folds back on itself, generating a mutual encounter between seer and seen; in other words, to see is also to be seen (369-370). These insights complicate the traditional tripartite model of the male gaze—artist, male figures, and external viewer—by suggesting that certain visual encounters where the female subject looks back at the viewer, such as in Manet's nude in *Luncheon on the Grass*, may interrupt the male-centered visual order. These moments can be interpreted as subtle forms of resistance that attempt to subvert the passivity

conventionally associated with being looked at and instead, introduce the possibility of self-awareness as a form of agency and defiance.

Reclaiming the Female Body

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist artists sought new modes of expression that broke decisively from tradition, giving rise to Performance Art as a powerful means of reclaiming the female body. Unlike static art that separates artist and audience, Performance Art foregrounds the live, embodied presence. When enacted by women, the body itself becomes both medium/instrument and message. In this context, the body becomes a dynamic site for interrogating complex issues related to gender, politics, sexuality, class, and race. Engaging audiences directly, Performance Art disrupts conventional boundaries and invites new forms of interaction. As art historian Roselee Goldberg observes, "Performance Art has always been a practice that violates borders—between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art, following no rules" (30). By centering the presence of the body, Performance Art challenges artistic conventions and destabilizes the underlying patriarchal signifying systems that have historically shaped visual culture. In doing so, it reclaims the female body from its long-standing role and repositions it as a locus of agency, resistance, and creative force.

Feminist pioneers, Yoko Ono, Hannah Wilke, and Carolee Schneemann, have embraced the radical potential of Performance Art with the precise aim to subvert the objectifying male gaze. In their performances, the female nudity directly confronts and challenges the tradition of representing the female body as a passive object of male desire. By turning exposure into agency, they reconfigure nudity as resistance, transforming the act of being seen into an assertion of subjectivity. In this way, these artists reclaim femininity within its nakedness as a source of not only critique but also power. Their performances destabilize conventions of the female nude, demanding conscious engagement with themes such as bodily autonomy, female experience, and cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. Rather than presenting themselves for consumption, each artist deliberately re-imagined and re-signified female nudity as a political act of empowerment. Yoko Ono stages audience complicity into a visceral meditation on consent, violation, and reclamation; Hannah Wilke scripted her nude body as both a record of consumption and a monument to resilience; and Carolee Schneemann literally drew language from within her body with, asserting that women's stories emerge from flesh itself. These radical enactments show the female body not only gazing back but writing, scarring, and re-signifying itself, reclaiming femininity as both subject and author of its own narrative. Through provocative and often unsettling imagery, these feminist trailblazers redefine the female body into agency and authorship—as an *author*: a locus of creation. These performances forge new visual languages that engender embodied autonomy and transformation.

Yoko Ono's *CUT PIECE* stands as one of the earliest landmarks in feminist Performance Art, directly confronting the patriarchal tradition that treats the female body as a passive spectacle serving the male gaze. In this performance, Ono sits motionless onstage and silently invites audience members to approach and cut away pieces of her clothing, one piece at a time. By literally handing over the scissors, Ono transforms what appears to be a benign act of looking into an embodied experience of disrobement, exposing the violence that underpins objectification by the gaze and implicating every participant in its enactment.

From the outset, *CUT PIECE* subverts the assumed neutrality of spectatorship and dismantles the male gaze from within. Ono's stillness transforms passivity into strategic defiance. Her refusal to resist

each cut reveals how readily the viewing gaze can slip into aggression and violation. Each fragment of removed fabric marks a shift in power, symbolically transferring agency from the artist to her audience while exposing inequalities of consent and exploitation. Ono's performance thus turns vulnerability into protest, making her own body a canvas that reflects society's tendencies to impose meaning and power onto the female form. By involving the audience directly in artistic process, *CUT PIECE* dismantles the illusion of art as non-ideological and foregrounds viewer complicity. In this way, *CUT PIECE* becomes both a commentary on the objectifying dynamics inherent to art and a critique of the potential violence embedded within the viewer's gaze.

CUT PIECE emerges as a striking exploration of power dynamics, vulnerability, and the porous boundaries surrounding women's consent—issues that still resonate deeply in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Although Ono consents to her undressing, the gradual increase in her visible vulnerability emphasizes how women's consent can be compromised within patriarchal contexts where power is unevenly distributed, urging a reconsideration of the dynamics that govern interactions with women and their bodies. Moreover, Ono's performance transforms the audience into active participants in this uneven power exchange while she silently—yet directly—meets each assailant's gaze, forcing every participant (and every witness) to confront their own complicity in this dynamic of objectification and boundary violation. This aligns with Judith Butler's concept of *performativity*, which suggests that repeated actions engender and reinforce societal norms, which might easily perpetuate systems of dominance (527). In a similar vein, *CUT PIECE* illustrates how seemingly mundane gestures mirror and reiterate deeper structures of power and control. Furthermore, Ono's performance dissolves conventional boundaries, such as between art and life, artist and audience, private and public, personal and political. Her body becomes the public artwork itself, insisting that viewers recognize her as a fellow human rather than a signified body alienated as an object or an abstract signifier. This shift compels the audience to reconsider how they engage with the body of the *other* (and the story it must tell), both inside and outside institutions such as gallery, demanding recognition beyond objecthood.

Lastly, the act of undressing in *CUT PIECE* reverses sexualization of the female body from within. Instead of arousing desire by eroticizing nudity, each removed garment increases discomfort, visually laying bare the latent aggression of and within the gaze. By exposing the mechanisms through which art has historically coded women's nudity as available for male pleasure, Ono desexualizes the female body: Her nakedness becomes a tool for resistance, demanding alternative signifying practices that refuse to equate female nudity with sexual submission. What is more, by staging the uncovering of the female body in a public arena, Ono reclaims the female body from the enclosed, private space, insisting on its visibility in all its complexity. The performance thus not only critiques existing gendered power structures but also signifies an alternative mode of representation, communication, and engagement—one rooted in awareness and accountability, qualities that signal shared humanity. As a seminal moment in feminist Performance Art, *CUT PIECE* reveals how strategically deployed passivity, audience participation, and embodied presence can dismantle the male gaze and the male-centric signifying system from within, opening pathways toward female agency and liberation.

Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series* is a powerful interrogation of beauty standards, sexual objectification, and commodification of the female body while the artist utilizes her own body as origin, medium, and message. Merging live performance with *performalist self-portraiture*, Wilke transforms a mundane material—chewing gum—into sculptures that evoke both scars and vulvas. These small, labia-like forms are then affixed to her skin as she poses provocatively, deliberately challenging

and subverting ideals of desirability and confronting the pervasive male gaze. In the live performance component of *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series*, Wilke distributes pieces of colored gum to audience members, inviting them to chew the gum and return it to her. She then sculpts these discarded wads into tiny labia-shaped forms, which she provocatively termed *cunts*, and presses them onto her bare torso. These immediate, tactile actions implicate the audience directly. By participating, the viewers become complicit in the very processes of objectification and scarification of the female body, the everyday mundane practice that Wilke's work seeks to expose. What begins as a gesture of playful intimacy quickly reveals its darker undertones. The gum, once a symbol of disposable pleasure, becomes a potent metaphor for women's expendability, consumed, discarded, and replaced at will, sticking to Wilke's body like wounds that refuse to heal.

Wilke extends her critique into a series of staged self-portraits. Collaborating with photographer Les Wollam, she parodies visual clichés from fashion magazines and Hollywood: Cowboy hats, toy guns, sunglasses, exaggerated poses drawn from commercial femininity—pouting her lips, thrusting her hips, and tousling her hair, mimicking the seductive postures typical of glamour photography. These gestures appear both familiar and farcical, exposing performativity of desirability as depicted in popular media. Initially conforming to conventions of eroticizing the female form, the act of eroticizing within these photographs is disrupted by the gum sculptures adorning Wilke's skin—disfiguring the idealized female form and unsettling the viewer's gaze. The result is an uncomfortable fusion of eroticism and mutilation. The initial allure is undercut by grotesque reminders of violence, compelling the viewer to confront the psychological toll and violence beneath beauty culture. This tension is encapsulated in Wilke's coined term *starification*—a neologism that plays on the dual meanings of *star* (idolization) and *scar* (wounding). Her body becomes the literal site where fame and harm intersect. The gum sculptures, like symbolic scars, comment on the everyday violence that objectification inflicts on women's bodies. By invoking the language of stardom, Wilke highlights the complex dual role women play in patriarchal systems—simultaneously celebrated and consumed, exalted and discarded.

By foregrounding her body as both the sculptor and canvas, Wilke collapses art and lived experience. Her work does more than parody the male gaze; it confronts and disrupts the voyeuristic pleasure derived from objectifying women. The gum-scarred body challenges the viewer's comfort, replacing voyeuristic pleasure, or even passive consumption, with ethical engagement. Hence, Wilke exposes another binary placed upon women—to conform to beauty standards or risk erasure. Her art resists this dichotomy by presenting a body that is at once desirable and defiant, aesthetically seductive yet visibly marked. Wilke's playful yet pointed use of glamorous imagery against itself reveals the absurdity of the societal pressures that govern femininity. Her decision to use her own body affirms the feminist imperative of reclaiming bodily autonomy and narrative control. Wilke's body is not merely displayed; it is actively inscribed, transformed into a site of critical discourse. Through this embodied act, she reclaims authorship and writes her own body, rendering it a living text of critique, desire, and resistance.

Her work aligns with feminist theories of *écriture féminine*—a mode of writing that emerges from the body and is associated with the reclamation of female subjectivity.[5] In *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series*, the female body becomes the surface upon which meaning is created, dismantled, and re-imagined. Rather than simply reversing the male gaze or reproducing it with female agency, Wilke's art invents a new visual grammar, one in which the female body speaks on its own terms in a language of resistance that transcends conventional representation. Wilke's self-inscription turned her body into a living text, reclaiming female authorship and subjectivity by inscribing a feminine script that writes

through the body rather than merely depicting it. Ultimately, *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series* stands as a landmark in feminist Performance Art, one that confronts the viewer with the cost of visual pleasure and exposes the violence inherent in systems of idealization. Wilke's performance renders visible the scars that often remain hidden beneath desirability, transforming the female body into both archive and agent of feminist resistance.

Finally, Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* offers one of the most visceral challenges to patriarchal signification and male-centric artistic conventions to this day, transforming the female body from object of representation into agent of expression. In this performance, Schneemann dramatically extracts a paper scroll from her vagina and reads its text aloud, literally giving voice to her body. In doing so, she reclaims the vulva—long associated with shame since antiquity—as a site of creativity, knowledge, and meaning-making.

The act of reading a text provided by the female body foregrounds the notion of women having their stories—ones that originate from within their bodies rather than being imposed by external forces. By using the scroll—traditionally a vessel of authority—Schneemann inverts its associations, challenging the audience to rethink established sources of knowledge and the legitimacy of dominant narratives. Instead of distant artifact of patriarchal scholarship, the scroll emerges directly from her flesh, insisting that women's narratives arise from lived embodiment. This act positions the female body as an active participant in meaning-making, collapsing the boundary between creator and creation. The artist's body becomes both origin and medium, enacting the feminist maxim that *the personal is political*.

Interior Scroll also foregrounds the *abject*, which as theorized by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982) refers to that which destabilizes order by exposing what cultures repress. Kristeva defines *abjection* as rejection and expulsion of the *other*—chaos, disorder, and all that threatens the illusion of order—which she ties to the historical exclusion of women. Neither subject nor object, the *abject* is therefore associated with that which subverts borders separating, for instance, the inside from the outside and the contained from the released. As Kristeva explains, *abjection* is a state of flux where *meaning collapses* and the body is revealed to be open and irregular, sprouting or protruding internal and external forms (207). Schneemann's revelation of interiority, in this light, confronts viewers with *abject*—the visceral, inside-out of the body compelling to recognize one's own discomfort around female corporeality and bodily fluids. In doing so, Schneemann disrupts sanitized patriarchal signifiers and the signified within the signifying system that casts the female form as inferior and instead, she reasserts the female body as life-giving genesis—to cycles of creation, matter, and meaning. Schneemann's performance also aligns with Hélène Cixous's call for *écriture féminine*—to write from and through the body (875)—by literally materializing text and meaning from within female body. The scroll's emergence from within becomes a powerful metaphor for reclaiming women's voices long suppressed by patriarchal discourse. *Interior Scroll* critiques the historical silencing of women while engendering an alternative performative language, rooted in embodiment and soaked in the *abject*. Schneemann redefines the female body as author, reshaping possibilities for feminist art and feminine agency.[6]

Conclusion

From antiquity onward, the female nude in Western arts has rarely functioned as a celebration of the human form. More often, it has served as an ideological instrument—idealizing, codifying, objectifying, *otherizing*, and sexualizing the female body in accordance with patriarchal agendas. By denying female autonomy, these traditions have shaped cultural attitudes that continue to marginalize

women. Acknowledging this legacy is a crucial step toward understanding how visual culture participates in constructing reality and for recognizing the urgency of re-imagining representations that affirm female agency.

This study has shown how, beginning in the 1960s, American feminist artists turned to Performance Art as a radical medium for disrupting entrenched male-centered norms. Through Yoko Ono's *CUT PIECE*, Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series*, and Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, the female body—starting with the bodies of the artists—was reframed as a site of critique, resistance, and reclamation. These performances unsettled traditional aesthetic paradigms not simply by reversing gender roles but by implicating audiences in the dynamics of objectification and exposing the violence embedded in acts of looking. By foregrounding discomfort, vulnerability, and the *abject*, they compelled viewers to confront their complicity in systems of oppression and domination and see the female body not as a passive spectacle but as an active agent.

In embodying *écriture féminine*—inscribing meaning through female flesh—these artists succeeded in forging new visual languages, embodied in female experience. Ono transformed audience participation into a text of consent and violation; Wilke mapped the scars of objectification onto her skin; Schneemann coaxed narrative from her body's interior. These interventions demonstrate that true transformation requires more than gender reversal: It demands alternative frameworks that transcend binaries and embrace feminine multiplicity.

Ultimately, the revolutionary power of feminist Performance Art lies not only in its potential to dismantle patriarchal conventions but also in its capacity to envision alternative possibilities for bodily representation—modes of signification that exceed established male-centric systems. The pioneering work of Ono, Wilke, and Schneemann laid a foundation for subsequent generations of feminist artists, who continue to explore and expand the boundaries of artistic practice in order to re-signify the female body as a dynamic source of agency, resistance, and creative transformation. While the struggle for equitable representation remains ongoing, the legacy of Ono, Wilke, and Schneemann reminds us that feminist art can be both an arena of political contestation and a space of visionary reinvention.

Notes

1 Roman Jakobson's model of verbal communication identifies six fundamental elements in any communicative act: addresser, addressee, message, code, contact, and context. In visual and artistic communication, these roles can be translated into the positions of the artist as the sender (addresser), the audience as the receiver (addressee), and the artwork or image as the message. This model highlights the relational and constructed nature of communication, emphasizing that meaning is shaped through these interrelated positions. See Roman Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics."

2 The concept of a *signifying system* derives from structuralism, particularly Ferdinand de Saussure's theory that meaning is generated through the differential relationships between signs—composed of the *signifier* (sound/image) and the *signified* (concept). Roland Barthes later expanded this idea to cultural texts, arguing that meaning in visual and verbal media is produced within a system of culturally coded signs. In the present context of art, the signifying system determines how the female body is represented and perceived. See Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Roland Barthes's *Elements of Semiology*.

3 For a comprehensive exploration of women's subordination in ancient Greece and Rome, see Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* which examines how women's roles were circumscribed by law, custom, and philosophy, arguing that women in both societies were systematically excluded from public and intellectual life.

[4] The concept of objectification has been extensively examined within feminist philosophy. Martha C. Nussbaum delineates seven features characterizing the treatment of individuals as objects: Instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity (257). Rae Langton expands on this by adding three more features: Reduction to body, reduction to appearance, and silencing, emphasizing how objectification can suppress individuals' voices and reduce them to mere physical attributes (228-229). These theoretical frameworks illuminate how the discussed artworks contribute to the objectification of women. By depicting the female form as passive, decorative, and available for visual consumption, these images reflect and reinforce societal norms that reduce women to objects of male desire, thereby perpetuating gendered power dynamics.

[5] First articulated by Hélène Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) names a mode of inscription that resists the phallocentric order of language. Rooted in the rhythms, multiplicities, and corporeality of the female body, it disrupts binary logic and hierarchical structures that sustain patriarchal discourse. Rather than a fixed system, it operates through excess, fluidity, and contradiction, privileging embodied expression, affect, and silence. As such, *écriture féminine* is less a prescriptive style than a political-ethical practice of opening language and signifying practices to alterity—an insistence that women write and signify their bodies into discourse, thereby reclaiming subjectivity and unsettling dominant modes of meaning-making.

[6] The phrase *the personal is political* became a foundational slogan of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s. It encapsulates the idea that personal experiences—especially those of women—are shaped by and reflective of larger social and political structures. The slogan is widely attributed to feminist activist Carol Hanisch, whose 1969 essay of the same name argues that issues such as domestic labor, sexuality, and gender roles were not merely private matters but central to feminist political struggle.

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A Reading of Maps in Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*

Abstract
Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* explores the interdependence between maps and map makers/map users from a child narrator's perspective. In the novel, maps serve as the central subject and theme, functioning as structural tools for survival, metaphorical images, and interpretive texts. There are four maps in the novel: al-Idrisi's accurate world map, Nour's Mama's colored map, the fictional map within the covers of the book, and the visual poems addressed to the travelled countries. These maps are essential for analyzing the relationship between visual representation and verbal description of maps, as well as reading them as layered texts to encode power dynamics, emotional experiences, and memories of displacement. Therefore, this article shows how maps and narratives are closely interwoven through the lens of cartographic ekphrasis. It examines the textuality of maps within the framework of critical cartography, affective/memory mapping, and geocriticism in Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*. This article eventually demonstrates how literary narratives map human experience through geographical, emotional, political, and mnemonic dimensions, particularly in the context of displacement and the search for home across real and imagined geographies.
Keywords: Zeyn Joukhadar, *The Map of Salt and Stars*, cartographic ekphrasis, critical cartography, geocriticism

Zeyn Joukhadar'ın *The Map of Salt and Stars* Eserinde Haritalar Üzerine Bir Okuma

Öz
Zeyn Joukhadar'ın *The Map of Salt and Stars* adlı eseri, haritalar ile harita yapımcıları/kullanıcıları arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimi bir çocuk anlatıcının bakış açısından sunar. Bu romanda, haritalar hem ana konu hem de tema olarak işlev görür ve anlatıyı düzenleyen yapısal araçlar olarak kullanılırken aynı zamanda hayatta kalma araçları, metaforik imgeler ve yorumlanabilen metinler olarak karşımıza çıkar. Anlatıda dört farklı harita bulunmaktadır: Al-Idrisi'nin gerçeği temsil eden dünya haritası, Nour'un annesinin renkli haritası, kitabın kapakları içinde bulunan kurgusal harita ve gidilen ülkelerin harita konturları içinde yazılı görsel şiirler. Bu haritalar, haritaların görsel temsil ile sözlü tanımlaması arasındaki besleyici ilişkiyi analiz etmek ve bunları güç dinamikleri, duygusal deneyimler ve yerinden edilmenin anılarını anlatan katmanlı metinler olarak okumada son derece önemlidir. Dolayısıyla, bu makale, Zeyn Joukhadar'ın *The Map of Salt and Stars* adlı romanında haritalar ile anlatılar arasındaki birbirini besleyen ilişkiyi kartografik ekphrasis kavramı aracılığıyla incelemeyi ve eleştirel kartografya, duygusal/bellek haritalama ve coğrafi eleştiri kuramları çerçevesinde haritaların metinsel doğasını irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale, coğrafi eleştiriyi diğer kartografik yaklaşımlarla bütünleştirerek edebi anlatıların insan deneyimini—özellikle yerinden edilme ve gerçek ve hayali coğrafyalarda ev arayışı bağlamında—coğrafi, duygusal, politik ve bellek boyutlar aracılığıyla nasıl haritalandırdığını göstermektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Zeyn Joukhadar, *Tuz ve Yıldızların Haritası*, kartografik ekfrasis, eleştirel kartografya, coğrafi eleştiri

Özge Üstündağ Güvenç

A Reading of Maps in Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*

Introduction

The history of humanities and social sciences has been characterized by successive paradigmatic shifts, the most influential of which was the linguistic turn, which foregrounded the centrality of "linguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, and various models of 'textuality' . . . [as] the lingua franca for critical reflections on the arts, the media, and cultural forms" (Mitchell 11). In response to changing social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental conditions, this linguistic paradigm has encountered contestation from emergent cultural turns that propose alternative perspectives for cultural and literary analysis. Of particular significance among these turns is W. J. T. Mitchell's conceptualization of the pictorial turn, which he defines as "a postlinguistic, postsemiotic, rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institution, discourse, bodies, and figurality" (16). Unlike the hegemonic impact of language in the linguistic turn, this theoretical approach acknowledges "the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.)" (Mitchell 16). The pictorial turn thus challenges the primacy of textual analysis based on language by addressing the multifaceted nature of images and the power of visual representation.

Within this context, the map emerges as a particularly compelling object of study in the humanities, embodying the convergence of image and text that characterizes the pictorial turn's exploration of contemporary visual culture. In any literary text, the inclusion of maps—whether through textual descriptions, symbolic representations, or simply as images—complements the narrative with their visual and verbal features, which recalls Mitchell's "complex interplay" between visual and discursive systems. Depending on the context of the fictional world, they sometimes play an active role in shaping the physical, intellectual, and emotional experiences of the protagonists and contribute to the political discourse and geopolitical power of communities. Zeyn Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018), as the title suggests, illustrates the use of maps as a fundamental fictional element, showing the mutually nourishing relationship between the visual representation and verbal description of maps as well as the significance of map-making and the reading of maps as texts.

Zeyn Joukhadar is a Syrian American author whose fiction and non-fiction—be it novel, short story, poetry, or essay—revolve around themes ranging from human rights and gender issues to displacement, exile, and identity. Born in New York City to a Muslim father and a Christian mother, the author travelled to Europe and the Middle East, underwent gender-affirming surgery, and changed his name from Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar to Zeyn Joukhadar. The author occupies an intersectional position due to his versatility and transnational identity within American literature. Currently living in the United States, Joukhadar sees himself as an American citizen, yet he also embraces his Syrian history and heritage. His belonging to both countries and interaction with different people from a variety of backgrounds enable him to explore various writing styles to communicate with his readers and provide a vision of life that values human experience beyond the constraints of socially constructed categories. That is why, he particularly focuses on the plight of the Syrian refugees and portrays a Syrian family's trauma of constant displacement from America to Syria and across the Middle East in search of a home in *The Map of Salt and Stars*. His work contributes to American literary studies by expanding the geographic and cultural imagination of American fiction, as there is not a single America but Americas shaped by diverse cultures and transnational identities. It further enriches the map-literature and image-text relationship

by foregrounding not only the complementary link between visual depictions and verbal accounts of maps but also the inherent quality of maps as constructs shaped by power, social relations, and layers of emotions, memories, and lived experiences.

The novel is composed of two narratives: The one taking place in the contemporary world tells the story of Nour, a 12-year-old Syrian American girl whose mother relocates her family to the Syrian city of Homs following the death of her father in Manhattan. Their arrival in Syria, however, coincides with the onset of civil war, and they are left with no choice but to escape. As they traverse the Middle East and North Africa as refugees, they search desperately for a safe place which they can call home. Throughout their arduous journey, Nour takes comfort in the old legend of Rawiya, a story her father told her. It takes place in the medieval period when Rawiya travels with a renowned mapmaker, al-Idrisi, to explore and map the world. What unites the two narratives is their tracing of the same geographical path through maps, albeit for different reasons and eight hundred years apart.

Among the four different maps integrated into the novel, the first one is drawn and painted by Nour's mother, a mapmaker, who names it "a special map" (Joukhadar 34) since it merely constitutes lines and colors rather than coordinates and place names. The second map, created by al-Idrisi in 1154 under the commission of King Roger of Sicily, is known as the *Tabula Rogeriana*, the most accurate world map of its time. The third map is a fictional representation of the geographical route taken by Nour and al-Idrisi's expedition and is incorporated into the covers of the novel in its PDF form. The last map differs from the previous ones as the author composes visual poems addressed to the countries traveled by Nour and her family, ranging from Syria to Ceuta, in the shape of each specific country. In doing so, the author integrates the poetic expressions into geographical imagery to show a cartographic representation of the refugee experience. Due to its cartographic nature, the novel asks for a transreferential act of reading. In other words, understanding the maps necessitates the reader to read the map descriptions and visualize what they represent as images, as well as to view the maps and decode what they represent through words. During this process, some questions may arise to discuss how Joukhadar constructs his novel on the visuality and textuality of maps: What is the purpose of the map as a fictional element in the novel? How do the visual representations and verbal descriptions of maps feed on each other? What kind of debates does the map provoke, especially power relations in al-Idrisi's map? How do the characters react to the map? How does the map evolve, how is it reconstructed, and in what ways does it acquire new meanings as it interacts with the characters? Focusing on these questions and their possible answers, this study examines how maps and narratives are closely interwoven by analyzing the interplay between visual representations and verbal descriptions of maps in dialogue with each other through the lens of cartographic ekphrasis. It also explores the textuality of the maps by examining power relations, emotional experiences and memories of displacement within the framework of critical cartography, affective/memory mapping and geocriticism in Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars*.

Theoretical Framework

The term ekphrasis originates from the Greek language, meaning "'speaking out' or 'telling in full'" (Heffernan 6). Put another way, it refers to how a visual object is given voice or described through the expressive and narrative power of words. The relationship between visual and verbal arts, particularly painting and literature or poetry, has been a complex debate since antiquity. Despite being referred to as the sister arts, the two art forms were characterized by rivalry and comparison until the twentieth century, in which the former is more privileged than the latter due to the differing transference between visuality and textuality. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, for instance, highlights the capacity of painting in

capturing the most remarkable moment of representation as opposed to poetry, which requires more time to reflect on the same representation of reality through words. In his work *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Lessing also draws attention to the inherent limitations of painting by arguing that the painter's representation of reality is restricted to a single, fixed moment on the canvas. The poet, however, "can take up every action, if he will, from its origin, and carry it through all possible changes to its issue" (21); thus, the poet remains unrestricted by the temporal constraints that define visual art. Lessing argues that the juxtaposition between the sister arts—whether framed as poetry and painting, image and word, or visual and verbal—is grounded in their basic characteristics: Visual art is associated with spatiality, stillness, and silence, whereas verbal art is defined by temporality, action, and eloquence (78). In short, his approach to that discussion is not based on the rivalry between the two arts but their use of different mediums in reflecting reality. Later in the twentieth century, Murray Krieger states that ekphrasis "is the poet's marriage of the two within the verbal art" (22) and emphasizes not only the mutual relationship between the sister arts but also the significance of ekphrasis as a method that enables the poet to give voice to silent images in painting. In a similar vein, Mitchell enhances the discussion of ekphrasis by emphasizing the different capacities of the art forms saying, a verbal representation "may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can 'cite,' but never 'sight' their objects" (152). Through ekphrastic description of an image/a painting, the poet transfers the meaning of images through words and leaves their interpretation to the imagination of the reader. Thus, the image(s) in the painting turn into distinct verbal representations, which show not only the potential of the word and the image working together but also the involvement of the poet and the reader in this process.

The dynamic and interactive nature of ekphrasis has recently begun to encompass the use of maps as visual representations and their verbal descriptions in literary works. Drawing on the traditional definition of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan 3), Jeff Thoss introduces cartographic ekphrasis as a reading method because maps can be utilized as images to be perceived and read. He states that "maps are like images, similar to figurative paintings and photographs" as they are composed of word and image and have "iconic and indexical dimensions" (66). His approach does not privilege the dynamic verbal description of maps over their static visual image or vice versa. Instead, he emphasizes the visual and verbal features of maps as an integrated whole, viewing them "as opaque rather than transparent sign systems, as media which, despite their mimetic trappings, are really performative insofar as they create rather than simply reproduce a pre-existing territory" (68). Thus, maps are meant to be viewed and read; they reveal as much as they communicate and portray as much as they narrate. In his discussion of cartographic ekphrasis, Thoss draws an analogy between his approach and critical cartography:

> [S]cholars have favoured the (verbal) metaphor of the map as text over the (visual) metaphor of the map as mirror or window to emphasize that maps are not neutral reflections of the world but social and cultural constructs, human-made artefacts that possess an inherent rhetoricity as well as performativity and that establish, store, and transmit knowledge/power. (67)

In a sense, cartographic ekphrasis and critical cartography are aligned in their efforts to represent the reciprocal relationship between image and word, as both engage in practices that question how visual representations are constructed, narrated, and interpreted through language.

Emerging as a critical framework in *The History of Cartography* by John Brian Harley, critical cartography has been significantly expanded and refined by geographers and cartographers such as Franco Moretti, Mark Monmonier, David Woodward, Denis Wood, John Fels, John Pickles, and James Corner, among others. In contrast to the traditional understanding of maps as reflecting scientific and technical representation of the physical environment, their approach places more emphasis on the cartographer, the context in which the map is used, and the map reader who interprets it. For example, instead of accepting the information in the map as systematic patterns, Harley questions how the cartographer and the map reader construct this information or meaning. He argues that spatial representations of objects, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the maps (Preface XVI) do not aim to reflect reality exactly, "not as a mirror of nature" (*New* 35), but as social constructs that present issues concerning society and human beings within their historical context. Monmonier draws attention to another aspect of maps by explaining that "maps are compilations of information and can be subject to manipulation out of ignorance, greed, ideological blindness, or malice" (2). Pickles, on the other hand, argues that a map is a text that can "go far beyond the boundaries of mere information transmission" (44) and that mapping is "an interpretative act" (43). As can be seen, the fundamental approach in critical cartography reveals that maps are not neutral representations of reality, but rather socially constructed texts open to interpretation.

Contemporary scholars have expanded critical cartography through new forms of mapping, such as Jonathan Flatley's "affective mapping" (77) and Kaitlin M. Murphy's "memory mapping" (10). Both scholars emphasize the complexity of human experience that includes emotional, recollective, and sensorial responses to spatial and temporal circumstances, and argue that maps should contain these multiple layers of human experience. Flatley highlights "the affective aspects of the maps that guide us, in conjunction with our cognitive maps, through our spatial environment" (77) and notes that people perceive their surroundings through an interaction with the environment that reflects their intentions, beliefs, and emotional attachments. Consequently, the spaces they inhabit are shaped by the feelings they associate with their surroundings, their experiences along the way, and the people they communicate with (77). These emotional dimensions are essential in planning and setting out on journeys. Murphy's "memory mapping" complements this approach by defining mapping as "the aesthetic process of representing the affective, sensorial, polyvocal, and temporally layered relationship between past and present, anchored within the specificities of place" (10). For her, map-making can express emotions, memories, and experiences of displacement that transcend geographical representation. As she puts it, memory mapping "works to develop affective, visual maps of the relations between bodies, memories, [and] lived experience" (10). So, maps have a dynamic nature evolving in relation to multifaceted aspects of human experience. Similarly, Flatley notes, "affective maps are likely to be especially in need of revision, repair, or invention at moments of rapid social change or upheaval" (79). In that sense, both affective and memory mapping become useful tools to examine displacement narratives where traditional cartographic representations fail to represent the embodied experiences of constant mobility and the search for a home.

Building on the intersections of cartographic ekphrasis, critical cartography, and affective/memory mapping, geocriticism combines these approaches and provides a comprehensive reading of literary spaces imbued with meaning. Developed by Bertrand Westphal in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, geocriticism examines the relationship between real and imagined spaces, that is, between geographical/physical spaces and their literary/fictional representations. As Robert T. Tally Jr. indicates

in his introduction to *Literary Cartographies*, "narratives are, in a sense, mapping machines" as they are "devices or methods used to map the real-and-imagined spaces of human experience" (3). This approach extends cartographic ekphrasis by examining how narratives both describe and function as maps, as well as integrating critical cartography's reading of spatial representations as power relations, which necessitates the readers' involvement in interpreting this relationship. Tally further develops this approach by arguing that narratives, like maps, "must be understood as themselves objects to be mapped" (3), requiring their own meaning-making through mapping. His concept of "narrative mapping" encompasses mapping geographical and literary spaces for a geocritical reading of a narrative.

Similarly, in *Orientalism*, Edward Said examines the spatial and geographical representations in literature and asserts that the "practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be quite arbitrary" (54). Such imaginative divisions are sufficient to categorize others as outsiders, not belonging to our own, which makes them move from one place to another as "refugees and displaced persons" in Said's words ("Reflections" 177). These imaginative geographies show how geocriticism blends the emotional and memory-based aspects of human experience in space and time. Drawing on Said's emphasis on the connection between space and history, Tally suggests that spatial representations in narratives are intertwined with the history of ideology, power, and knowledge – conditions that lead to wars, displacement, suffering, and loss. From this perspective, narratives map human experience through movement, belonging, and exclusion across both real and imagined geographies (*Geocritical* 1-16). In this sense, geocriticism aligns with other approaches by revealing how Zeyn Joukahadar's novel, *The Map of Salt and Stars*, exemplifies literary cartography. The novel foregrounds map-making through the characters of al-Idrisi and Nour's Mama, while other characters use maps for various reasons. This layered engagement with maps invites readers to read the narrative like a map and to interpret the maps like a narrative.

Maps as Stories, Stories as Maps

The novel begins with Nour and her family's migration journey, which is a distressing, frustrating, and fearful experience for Nour as she is just a child who has not yet explored and identified her sense of self and home. Her synesthesia allows Nour to perceive the world through a palette of colors, associating specific hues with "smells, sounds, and letters" (Joukhadar 17). It is a kind of "Photographic memory . . . [w]here you can go back and see things in your mind's eye" (17). This sensory experience enables Nour to transcend the physical world and retreat into an imaginary one "where the world is all colors at once, where nobody dies" (7). Also, her upbringing, shaped by listening to her Baba's stories, learning geography from her Mama's map-making, and observing her paint maps and compass roses, further empowers Nour by enriching her inner world. Throughout their migration journey, Nour struggles with hardship and overcomes this plight by recounting Rawiya's story and reinterpreting her Mama's map. In doing so, she realizes that "all maps are stories" and "all stories are maps" (352). Her realization exemplifies Tally's concept of narratives as "mapping machines" that represent human experience through both real and imagined spaces.

Nour's perception of sensorial details in her surroundings and her conception of stories displays the geocritical understanding that interpretation of spatial representations and narratives mutually construct one another. In that sense, Nour's realization of the connection between maps and stories illustrates the textuality of maps rather than their objective representation of reality. Mama's map, for instance, tells

a narrative of the refugee experience shaped by human experience and resilience. When Nour and her sister Zahra look at Mama's map to figure out their way to Uncle's home in Ceuta, Zahra recalls her Mama's words about mapmaking: "[W]hen you make a map, you don't just paint the world the way it is. You paint your own" and Zahra realizes that "It's a map of all the awful things that happened" (Joukhadar 315), exemplifying a visual-verbal account of their plight. Similarly, Baba's story functions as a metaphorical map that guides Nour through personal challenges as it shows the complexities of life in Rawiya and al-Idrisi's fictional world, including their encounters with enemies. When Rawiya shares her concerns about the potential dangers in their pursuit of mapping new territories, al-Idrisi never stays back, saying, "there are no reliable maps of this region and its routes . . . For now, we follow the accounts of other travelers. Only when we see for ourselves will we know the distance for certain" (Joukhadar 74). His insistence on accomplishing his task despite all challenges inspires Nour in the journey of displacement. From a geocritical perspective, Baba's story performs as an "imaginative geography" enabling Nour to deal with displacement emotionally and mentally. The parallel journeys of Rawiya and Nour across the same geographical lands, separated by centuries, show how narratives map not only physical space but also the temporal and emotional dimensions of human experience. By showing how maps (images) and stories (texts) go hand in hand, informing and complementing each other, Joukhadar underlines the fact that embodied experience is embedded in both forms of expression.

Al-Idrisi's Map

While Rawiya's narrative serves as a metaphorical mapping of the ways for struggle and survival in a world of adventure, it also illustrates the coexistence between visual and verbal aspects of al-Idrisi's mapmaking, which shows the geography and knowledge of the world. Al-Idrisi is the only historical character in the novel, "regarded as one of the foremost geographers and cartographers of medieval Europe" (Ahmad 156). His aim is "not only to map the whole Mediterranean but to create a map of the entire world" (Joukhadar 40) for King Roger. As Maqbul Ahmad notes, al-Idrisi creates his map by "collect[ing] the data from the written and oral sources . . . collat[ing] the material on the drawing board and . . . engrav[ing] faithfully on a silver disk the image on the drawing board" (159). So, through studying the texts that describe the lands, reflecting the knowledge of lands onto the drawing board, and finally engraving the image on a silver disk, al-Idrisi creates his map. Considered from the perspective of cartographic ekphrasis, the stages in constructing the world map illustrate "a genuine integration of map and text" (Ahmad 163) and show the transreferential act of reading verbal descriptions and visual representations of geographical areas, building on each other.

Upon the completion of the map and the silver disk, King Roger commissions the creation of a book, which is called *Nuzhat al-mushtaq* in Arabic, namely *The Book of Journeys into Faraway Lands or The Book of Roger* (Joukhadar 304) that follows the format of the map. Because maps are simplified abstractions of physical space or geographical areas, they are inherently limited in their ability to display the complexity of a region's historical, cultural, and economic characteristics. So, al-Idrisi's book is essential as it reveals an account of the inhabitants' conditions, possessions, agricultural practices, climates, geographical features, and other relevant details, which the map cannot cover. In this sense, the map and the silver disk, as visual representations, require an accompanying narrative to enhance their comprehensibility for both viewers and readers. The interplay between visual and verbal representations is also evident in the reader's engagement with the novel's textual description and its visual image on the Internet. As a result, the reader goes between shifting perspectives of maps from verbal to visual and from visual to verbal. In

cartographic ekphrastic terms, this dynamic interaction underscores the reciprocal relationship between visual and verbal features of maps, each enhancing the other's meaning.

From a historical perspective, the perception of maps as scientifically objective productions stems from their integration of precise mathematical calculations with empirical observation and geographical exploration, a view exemplified by al-Idrisi's map. As Philip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke put it in their seminal work "Maps in Literature," "A map maker must strive for accuracy, not originality. Thus, a map, even more than the printed word, impresses people as being authoritative and tends to be accepted without qualification" (326). By following "the trade routes south and then east" (Joukhadar 50), drawing sketches in his book, "copying every detail of the twists and curves" (61) of territories in his pursuit of exploring distant lands and achieving broader historical and cultural knowledge, al-Idrisi establishes a reputation as a map-maker committed to representing geographical reality; consequently, his map gains authority and power to influence and shape geographical exploration and territorial expansion. His map illustrates what Said names "imaginative geography" through which dominant powers construct spatial representations to provide an adequate ground for regional control. In Said's terms, al-Idrisi's map constructs these regions as a "geographical inquiry into historical experience" (*Culture* 7) that serves Sicilian imperial interests. The map's claim to represent geographical reality conceals its ideological function and turns these lands into conquerable regions.

As al-Idrisi and his expedition travel across various regions to achieve their objectives, they observe a changing world characterized by a pervasive "thirst for gold and water" and marked by political rivalries, where "[r]uler plots against ruler" (128) such as "the bloody snarls of disputes between the Seljuqs, the Fatimids, and the Crusaders" (115). Although al-Idrisi and his expedition consider themselves "humble pilgrims, seeking the wonders of God in wadi and mountain" (149), the troops they encounter, like the Fatimids and the Almohads, see them as a threat to their empire due to the strategic knowledge contained in al-Idrisi's map and book. The Fatimids aim to "regain control of the shores of the Gulf of Sidra and the city of Barneek from the Almohad forces," while the Almohads have long planned "an attack to push back the Fatimids" (191), utilizing al-Idrisi's map and book to consolidate their power and strengthen their position in the Middle East. After capturing al-Idrisi and his expedition, and discovering his book notes and sketch maps, the Almohad's general Mennad attempts to burn them. This shows the significance of maps imbued with knowledge and power dynamics. Their power struggle over al-Idrisi's map reveals a geocritical condition: The representation of spaces on maps is closely related to political conflicts and power dynamics. The map becomes, in Tally's terms, a narrative that needs to be interpreted and reinterpreted to figure out ideological intentions. Addressing the power relations involved in both the creation and use of maps, Graham Huggan argues that "the 'reality' represented mimetically by the map not only conforms to a particular version of the world but to a version which is specifically designed to empower its makers" (118). Expanding on the power dynamics of maps and map-making, Harley asserts that "[m]aps are never value-free images" (*New* 53) and emphasizes that "[t]hrough both their content and their modes of representation, the making and using of maps has been pervaded by ideology" (*New* 79). In this context, the relationship between knowledge and power as well as the role of politics and ideology in the process of map-making, is an aspect of al-Idrisi's map. His map, known as the most accurate map of the world, serves a dual function. On the one hand, it acts as a tool of empowerment for King Roger in the pursuit of imperial ambitions; on the other, it is perceived as a potential threat by opposing troops, who seek its destruction to prevent further territorial expansion and maintain their order and power in the Middle East.

Mama's Special Map

Apart from the map of al-Idrisi, standing out with its accuracy and geopolitical power, Nour's Mama's "special map," which she paints throughout their migration journey, "one layer after another" (Joukhadar 34), also supplements the narrative as an aesthetic work and illustrates the kinship between image and words. As Nour describes, her "Mama's map is thick with acrylic paint, like it's an actual thing, a sculpture, a mold. It's as heavy as two or three canvases, full of colors instead of names, little blocks of paint" (241). As her Mama paints, she engages Nour in a color game, asking, "what color is this letter or that number, like she is testing [Nour] that [symbolic meaning of letters] stay the same" (33). While Nour responds to these questions, her Mama "glances at the map" (33) and paints. However, Nour struggles to understand why her mother continuously paints over the same surface. In response, her Mama explains, "You have to weave two stories together to tell them both right" (34). Here, the dialogue between Nour and her Mama reveals that the map functions as an evolving, layered narrative reflecting their lived experiences across different countries and cities, ranging from Homs, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, to Ceuta. As Thoss puts it, the ekphrasis of a map "might be likened to that of a painting insofar as [the viewer is] trained simply not to look through a painting to see what is represented but to take its manner of representation into account as well" (67-68). In that sense, only if Nour looks deeper to make sense of her Mama's special map constituted by the layers of colors, can she read the map as a text and understand what it conveys. Nour's need for a closer engagement with the map highlights the interplay between its visual elements and textual nature, and reinforces the idea that maps are inherently subjective rather than objective representations depending on the mapmaker's perspective. Mama's statement about weaving two stories further highlights the interwoven nature of painting and mapping, both of which function as multilayered forms of visual expression akin to a palimpsest, where meaning is continuously rewritten and reinterpreted through narration.

Mama's special map exemplifies Flatley's "affective mapping" and Murphy's "memory mapping" because the map serves both functions: Its layered paint structure, combined with its color-coded system linked to Nour's synesthesia, encodes emotional experiences and sensorial memories that extend far beyond geographical representation. The map shows how literary spaces, real and imagined, are constructed through the interplay between emotional experience of spaces and their spatial representations, which foregrounds the embodied and affective dimensions of space. Through the color game, Mama transforms conventional cartographic practice into an affective and sensorial mapping process that preserves the emotional geography of Nour and her family's refugee journey while preparing Nour for dealing with potential emergencies during times of crisis. Having experienced the loss of her Baba, the bombing of their house in Homs, Huda's injury by shrapnel, and all the suffering during the migration journey, Nour and her family never lose hope for a better future by keeping the map as a survival tool and an artefact to recollect their memories, which embodies affective and memory mapping features. When Mama decides to stay with Huda to provide medical assistance while instructing Nour and Zahra to continue their journey to Ceuta, where their uncle resides, she discreetly places the special map inside Nour's bag along with their passports, food, and money. She warns Nour against losing the map: "Don't you dare forget, habibti. Use the map. Remember what is important" (Joukhadar 239) and "we'll end up in the same place" (Joukhadar 205). This exchange shows how the map is used as a practical guide to arrive at their destination and a mnemonic device connecting Nour and Zahra to their family, their past, and their present journey. By bridging temporal layers—past, present, and future—the map illustrates Murphy's memory mapping.

Upon their Mama's placing the map among passports, food, and money, as well as her warning of its significance, Nour and Zahra realize the role of the map guiding them on their way home, both physically and emotionally. As it is layered with their Mama's skill in mapmaking, also embedded with love, their experiences and memories, the map becomes a medium of affective mapping, including emotions and memories. Like Flatley's affective map, Mama's map is shaped by emotional attachments and lived experiences. What needs to be done immediately is to decode the map, a task that only Nour is capable of undertaking. She stares at the map until the colors blur, turns it from side to side, then upside down and discovers the color game: "It's a code. Mama coded the map with my colors . . . Each square of color reads like a letter" (Joukhadar 242) and all the other cities they passed through are colored on the map. The combination of colors and letters demonstrates the map's interplay between visual and verbal features, creating a synesthetic language for Nour to read emotions and memories. For instance, there is no label pointing out the name of HOMS but rather "a brown square for H, then white one for O, black for M, and red for S" (Joukhadar 41). Nour's synesthesia enlivens the map by uncovering Mama's drawing and painting and turns it into a map of their migration story revealed through sensory details—a sort of sensorial narrative of displacement. She interprets Mama's colored map in an aesthetic framework. Just as paint on a canvas represents HOMS while the city, in turn, is symbolized through the paint, Mama's map functions as both an artistic and cartographic expression. The colors and layers of paint are not merely visual elements but serve as representations of places, experiences, and memories shaped by their resilience. Unlike al-Idrisi's map, which has coordinates and names serving imperial interests, Mama's map appropriates conventions of cartography by creating a refuge map as an aesthetic tool. This cartographic refusal resonates with geocritical approach because Mama's map challenges the so-called accurate geographical representation that places "refugees and displaced persons" through arbitrary spatial divisions, as Said indicates. By encoding displacement and migration through affect and memory, Mama's map recreates geography from the perspective of the refugees. Through Nour's deciphering of the colors, the map transcends its conventional role as a visual image representing geographical areas and becomes a narrative medium where the physical and emotional experiences of Nour and her family are intertwined. The creation of such a map containing colors and letters transforms into a narrative embedded with emotions, memories, and displacement in the end.

Apart from colors and letters, the map's most significant cartographic feature lies in its strategic omission: "Ceuta is the only city that isn't labeled" (Joukhadar 243) by Nour's Mama as she wants Nour to grasp the meaning of home by interpreting the emptiness on the map. This cartographic absence reveals a geocritical reality about the refugee condition: Home is not a fixed geographical location on a map but is constantly constructed through narrative, memory, experience and sense of belonging. Nour's recreation of the map through interpretation also evokes Flatley's understanding that maps require "revision, repair, or invention" (79). On the one hand, the visual absence of the city is a metaphorical image complementing the narrative's critique of forced migrations through the depiction of Nour and her family's move from one city to another. On the other hand, it suggests the reconstruction of home, which Nour accomplishes by telling her own story. Through verbal articulation, Nour reconstructs her sense of home and belonging, which shows the political as well as the affective capacity of cartographic gap: "If a language or a story or a map can be used to give people a voice or to take it away, only our own words can guide us home" (Joukhadar 299). Her words reveal the geocritical understanding that narratives are mapping practices as she maps her way home by creating her own emotional, imaginative, and spatial geography. In this sense, Ceuta is transformed from an unmarked place into a home through reading

the absence on the map. In addition, Nour's interpretation exemplifies the concept of cartographic ekphrasis, wherein the map and its verbal description interact in a mutually constitutive relationship to convey refugee experiences. The ekphrastic relationship demonstrates how affective and memory mapping work through the interplay of visual and verbal elements. Nour's claiming of Ceuta as their new home through her verbal expressions and visual interpretation of the special map shows the interplay of visual absence and verbal telling of personal stories. By drawing a circle in the air that holds everyone, she extends the map beyond its physical borders, then points at her heart and her own tongue and says, "Home is this" (Joukhadar 299). In that sense, visual absence and verbal storytelling converge to redefine home as an affective and recollective representation rather than a geographical one. As Thoss argues, "the medium of the map possesses a potential for intermedial friction with spoken or written language" (67), which emphasizes that maps are not only visual representations of geography but also affective and memory narratives that embody emotions, memories, and experiences.

Fictional Map

Like al-Idrisi's world map and Nour's Mama's colored map, the fictional one requires interpretation because when Nour and al-Idrisi refer to the map in the narrative, the reader can imagine the events by looking at its visual representation placed within the covers of the novel. In this way, the fictional map begins to exist not only as a visual appendage but as an integral part that contributes to the meaning of the narrative. Through a geocritical lens, the fictional map engages the reader in narrative mapping by moving between the verbal descriptions and the visual representations of spaces and maps, and participating in the construction of the narrative's geography and its cartography. In *Reading and Mapping Fiction*, Sally Bushell sees the fictional map as a dynamic model that can be studied in relation to the narrative. For her, the fictional map is "not a direct translation of the verbal form into the visual form, but an element that demands a new act of interpretation – to be read – and that requires the reader not just to look at it, but to actively interact with the two forms of representation [map and text]" (251). For example, when Nour and her family give a break on their way to Jordan/Egypt, her Mama "stays by the van, unrolling her map on the backseat," takes her paints out of her burlap bag and "brushes new colors onto the map, yellow and turquoise and salmon pink" (Joukhadar 154). After engaging with the narrative, the reader can look at the fictional map to visualize and interpret the relationship between colors and their corresponding cities. Bushell argues that the fictional map acts on the reader's imagination in a manner similar to verbal association, leaving space for the reader to actively interpret the text (252-53). This feature allows the fictional map to serve as a visual representation reconstructed by the reader through a process of cognitive mapping. This, in turn, contributes to the reader's interpretation of the narrative through a dialogue between the verbal and visual features of maps.

Visual Poetry

The last instance of this dialogue is exemplified in the poems that are composed in the shape of countries on maps opening each part of the novel. In an interview, Joukhadar explains that he writes poems from the perspective of a character addressing Syria, though she welcomes alternative interpretations. The first poem in the shape of Syria, for instance, illustrates the intersection between visual poetry and cartography through verbal and visual features, reinforcing Nour and her family's experience of displacement and search for a home. These visual poems serve as geocritical representations that spatialize language and transform the countries into geographical and affective representations of lands.

Brian J. McAllister defines visual poetry as a genre "that blurs formal boundaries between the poetic and the visual, provides a unique testing ground for identifying narrativity's visual and poetic potential" (234). In a similar vein, Thoss underlines how the verbal component of the visual poem differs from the verbal description of a visual image in painting: "[F]irst, words on a map are positioned according to the dictates of topography rather than grammar, and second, that the typography of letters (and numbers) varies in a multitude of ways. Language is thus conspicuously visualized and spatialized in cartography, becoming more like an image" (66-67). He argues that map descriptions should be considered as a form of ekphrasis. Within this context, the shape of the Syrian map supplements the poetic diction of the poem as it begins by addressing Syria: "O beloved, you are dying of a broken heart" (Joukhadar 1). The country is personified as a fractured and wounded one experiencing emotional suffering due to civil war reflected in imageries such as the wadi running with tears, two pale stones in the river and the cracked arms mingling with the speaker's tears. As McAllister puts it, in visual poetry, "the layout of text on surface typically contributes to the intended effect of the work" (234).

Likewise, the shape of Syria on the page transcends its function as a map, a visual representation, or a metaphorical image and becomes a verbal expression of suffering. In geocritical terms, these visual poems represent the countries marked by human suffering and resilience, and they demonstrate Tally's assertion that narrative spaces are intertwined with the history of wars, displacement and loss. The presence of the visual poem addressed to Syria enhances the thematic impact of the novel—loss of home and forced migration—through an interplay between the map of Syria and its poetic description. Thus, the poem, like the other poems addressed to Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Ceuta, serves as an example of cartographic ekphrasis in its amalgamation of the visuality and textuality of maps with the narrative of Nour and her family's migration journey. This cartographic reading demonstrates how Joukhadar's use of various maps—from al-Idrisi's transreferential integration of verbal and visual representation to Mama's affective color-coding system, from the reader's cognitive engagement with fictional cartography to the spatialized language of visual poetry—illustrates that narratives function as "mapping machines."

Conclusion

In *The Map of Salt and Stars*, Zeyn Joukhadar constructs his dual narrative of Nour and Rawiya taking place across centuries yet in shared geographies by utilizing different maps from al-Idrisi's world map encompassing image and text to Nour's Mama's affective color-coding map, from the fictional map within the covers of the book to the visual poetry in the shape of countries. His use of diverse maps enables the narrative to offer a more comprehensive context for analyzing the relationship between verbal and visual representations of maps within the framework of cartographic ekphrasis, as well as reading the multifaceted aspects of maps as textual constructs embedded with politics, displacement experiences, memories, and emotions through a critical cartographic approach. A geocritical reading of these diverse cartographic representations reveals the ways literary narratives map human experience through geographical, emotional, political, and mnemonic dimensions. Whether in al-Idrisi's historically authoritative yet politically charged world map, the reader's engagement with the fictional map, the spatialized language of visual poems, or Nour's Mama's aesthetic map coded with sensorial details, these maps transcend their conventional status as objective representations of reality and turn into dynamic and interactive products of meaning-making. In addition to depicting geographical features, guiding characters on their journeys, or revealing the cartographic representation of refugee experience, they function as palimpsests layered with political strategies, power relations, memories and emotions. Joukhadar's

novel, exemplary of literary cartography (narrative mapping), demonstrates how cartographic ekphrasis, critical cartography, affective/memory mapping and geocriticism provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how narratives construct meaning through the spatial dimensions of human experience, particularly displacement and search for a home across real and imagined geographies.

Notes

[1] For further information, see *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture* (2016) by Doris Bachmann-Medick and translated by Adam Blauhut.

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(Non)Hegemonic Masculinities in Carson McCullers's *Reflections in A Golden Eye*

Abstract
The concept of hegemonic masculinity has held a peculiar career in social sciences, receiving both positive and negative feedback, and reappearing in various formulations. Although its examination has come a long way thanks to the growing interest in critical masculinity studies through the 1970s and 1980s, there is still a research gap in terms of analyses of fictional masculinities, particularly in the works of mid-twentieth century American writers. Carson McCullers's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), set in a normative setting where traditional masculinity is a prerequisite, is a fitting novel for making a re-assessment of fictional representations of masculinity. While McCullers uncovers the constructed yet bogus nature of hegemonic masculinity practices in a rigidly masculinized backdrop, she simultaneously offers possibilities for alternative masculinities that challenge the norms impinging on men, women, and racial and sexual minorities. This article argues that McCullers creates different visions of masculinity, far ahead of her time, especially non-toxic, non-hegemonic masculinities that do not legitimate men's power in oppressive ways but thrive in healthy relationships, bearing the novel's sociological potential to interrogate America's relationship to masculinity.
Keywords: Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, masculinity, masculinity studies, non-hegemonic masculinities

Carson McCullers'ın *Reflections in a Golden Eye* Adlı Eserinde (Gayri)Hegemonik Erkeklikler

Öz
Hegemonik erkeklik kavramı sosyal bilimlerde karmaşık bir geçmişe sahip olmuş, hem olumlu hem de olumsuz eleştiriler almış ve çeşitli formülasyonlarla yeniden ortaya çıkmıştır. Hegemonik erkekliğin incelenmesi, 1970 ve 1980'lerde eleştirel erkeklik çalışmalarına olan artan ilgi sayesinde uzun bir yol kat etse de, özellikle yirminci yüzyıl ortası Amerikan yazarlarının eserleri bağlamında kurgusal erkekliklerin incelenmesi açısından hala eksiklik vardır. Carson McCullers'ın *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941) adlı romanı, geleneksel erkekliğin ön koşul olduğu normatif bir bağlamda geçen, kurgusal erkeklik temsillerinin yeniden ele alınması için uygun bir eserdir. McCullers, katı bir şekilde erkekleştirilmiş bir zeminde hegemonik erkeklik uygulamalarının inşa edilmiş ama sahte doğasını açığa çıkarırken, aynı zamanda erkekler, kadınlar, etnik ve cinsel azınlıkları etkileyen hegemonik normların dışında var olan alternatif erkeklik olasılıkları sunar. Bu makale, McCullers'ın, zamanının çok ötesinde bir bakışla, özellikle de baskıcı yollarla erkeklerin gücünü meşrulaştırmayan, sağlıklı ilişkilerde gelişen, toksik olmayan, hegemonik olmayan erkeklikleri ele alarak, romanın Amerika'nın erkeklikle ilişkisini sorgulama yönündeki sosyolojik potansiyelini ortaya koyduğunu savunur.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, erkeklik, erkeklik çalışmaları, hegemonik olmayan erkeklikler

Onur Yiğit

(Non)Hegemonic Masculinities in Carson McCullers's *Reflections in A Golden Eye*

Introduction

Carson McCullers's second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), was inspired by an actual location McCullers inhabited with her husband, Reeves McCullers: Fort Benning, a military facility located in Georgia. During her residence at Fort Benning (1930-34), she closely witnessed the militarization of the American South. Stecoupolus states that "the federal government spent close to ten million dollars on the base, expanding facilities and erecting new buildings" (104). For example, approximately sixteen million American soldiers who fought during World War II "were first brought together in the South, which beginning with World War II became the principal site of America's military training bases" (Sosna xvi). The largest army training camps were initiated in the American South (xvi), one of them being Fort Benning, Georgia.

Despite the heavy militarization of the American South, World War II did not yield the same effect on Southern literature as the Civil War (1861-1865), which sparked a literary proliferation in Southern writing. Noel Polk claims that "it is a matter astonishingly to be noted how little so profound an event as World War II figures in the fiction and poetry of the major Southern writers of the middle of the century" (132). With the exception of William Faulkner, he further adds that "the most convulsive, the most revolutionary, event of the twentieth century was so collectively repressed from the Southern literary consciousness" (133). McCullers was one of the few Southern writers who took the opportunity to express her perspective on World War II and the state of the world in her writing. For example, she wrote essays containing antimilitarist essence, which are included in her posthumous collection of writings, *The Mortgaged Heart* (1972) under the subtitle "War Years."

Most importantly, McCullers wrote *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), whose setting is a southern army base. The novel received adverse feedback and was considered scandalous "due to the morbidity of perverse sexuality and love affairs" (Zhou 79). Her acquaintances even called her "queer duck" (Carr 91). Moreover, she was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan which dialed her and said "We are the Klan and we don't like nigger lovers or fairies. Tonight will be your night" (McCullers and Dews *Illumination* 31).[1] Despite such viscous condemnation, *Reflections* was her "fairy tale" (Carr 91), which ironically features characters that harbor psychoses, obsessions, and perversions, diverging from the static army life, present in a military setting, where order, normativity, and sanity are fundamentals. In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, McCullers recreates the army base in a new fashion, revealing the contradictions in such normative settings, and conflicted versions of masculinity through the exposure of repressed sexuality, homophobia, and misogyny.

Narrated by a third-person omniscient point of view, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is a bleak murder story that revolves around "two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse" (2). Set in the dull atmosphere of an army base, the narrative comes alive with the complexities of relationships, the tensions between the characters, and love triangles. Secrecy, discontent, and discomfort permeate the relationships of the novel's two army couples. While Leonora and Captain Penderton are far from being a happy couple, Alison and Major Langdon's marriage is devastated after the loss of their baby. In the meantime, an enlisted young man, Private Williams surreptitiously wanders around the base and starts stalking Leonora. The story concludes with the murder of Private Williams by Captain Penderton.

By using insights from masculinity studies, this article scrutinizes *Reflections in A Golden Eye* and how McCullers depicts the complex multifaceted nature of masculinity. Military settings are locations of

regularity, conventionality, and normativity in terms of gender, masculinity and sexuality. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is aligned with military masculinity, both of which affirm and follow strict patterns of masculine gender expression and excessive performances of manhood. However, McCullers's male characters in this normative setting are atypical, crossing the usual constraints of sexuality, identity, and the expectations set for military men. While Captain Penderton, Private Williams, and Major Langdon make efforts to adhere to military normativity and hegemonic masculinity, Anacleto and Lieutenant Weincheck have no such purpose; they deviate from heteronormativity and military masculinity. Therefore, McCullers offers multiple versions of masculinity that may not legitimate male power over others. For Penderton, military manhood is a constant struggle, and unattainable despite his repeated efforts to repress his homosexuality. For Private Williams, his learned hostility and misogyny toward women shaped by a hetero-patriarchal household leads to perversion, voyeurism, and self-destruction– his hamartia. For Langdon, his hegemonic masculinity needs legitimization through the presence of "others" such as women, non-white and non-heterosexual men. In opposition to these three, for Anacleto and Weincheck, masculinity is a way of expressing oneself without any restrictions on the self. For this reason, their masculinities are positive and non-hegemonic as they do not perpetuate or dwell on any form of oppression or violence towards others, and they emerge as critics of hegemonic masculinity.

Army Base and Military Masculinity

Any place defined by borders and ruled by a form of authority (a boarding school, a prison, or a military base), is open to interpretations regarding institutional and societal norms, and the extent to which these norms are upheld. Military settings are (hetero)normative and (homo)social places that require their residents to comply with rules and norms that do not tolerate weakness, vulnerability, and dishonor, mainly associated with femininity or queerness. As Connell has elucidated, "the practice of sexual politics bears mostly on institutions" (*Gender* 158). Military settings are places of invisible yet socially acknowledged masculine hierarchies that put men above men, men above women, and men above marginalized identities. Thus, such a hierarchical organism, with its unequally distributed power, is a gendered arena "in which manhood is tested and proved . . . which tensions between women and men and tensions among different groups of men are weighted with meaning" (Kimmel, "Masculinity" 184). It is argued that "in many societies, the military institution is discursively constructed as a key 'masculinity maker'; compulsory military service is considered a disciplinary rite de passage that turns boys into men" (Christensen and Kyed 1). Parallel to this view, Goldstein posits that "unlike women, men must take actions, undergo ordeals, or pass tests in order to become men" (264). An army base exacts such prerequisites and thus becomes a designation to make masculinity, exemplified in *Reflections* particularly through the masculinities of Langdon and Penderton.

The novel begins with revelatory descriptions of the setting: "An army post in peacetime is a dull place," "the general plan of a fort in itself adds to the monotony," and "all is designed according to a certain rigid pattern" (1). Being bland and monotonous, the continuity of conformity and normativity is sustained through lack of change. The narrator adds, "For once a man enters the army, he is expected only to follow the heels ahead of him" (1-2). It is a premonition by the narrator that adherence to unwritten rules is a must, and any deviation from collectivity and normativity will be punished. This formalism is best exemplified and showcased by Penderton and Langdon, who, as examples of hegemonic and toxic masculinity, use their power to spread hatred and disgust towards others, especially queer men and disobedient women. These men define their masculinity "in opposition to a set of 'others'—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women" (Kimmel, "Masculinity" 182).

Langdon is the highest-ranking officer who symbolizes greatness, physical strength and prowess, as he "was called The Buffalo" (25), and "the only ornaments in [his room] were the cups he had won at horse shows" (48). He is popular among the officers and "was a fine horseman . . . [and] he had made a rare name for himself on the polo field" (25). Not only he is respected by the other men, and he has many accomplishments as a seasoned officer, but also he outrivals his companions at outdoor activities, parading his utmost physicality. Moreover, he is a very patriotic man who aims "to be a good animal and to serve [his] country . . . [and to have a] healthy body and patriotism" (129). For such reasons, he has every characteristic needed to be a "fitting" military man, thus aligned with the model of military masculinity.

On the other hand, Penderton, as an officer, is an elitist snob, effete in his demeanor (which reinforces his queerness), and less masculine than Langdon, who is a man of experience, success, and respect. Langdon's ideals are aligned with the ideals of military masculinity, whereas Penderton disappoints this model due to his homosexuality, which is a type of sexuality "subordinated to the hegemonic model" (Demetriou 341-342). Furthermore, Langdon is a lover and the substitute husband for Leonora, who is unable to find romantic and sexual needs in her marriage because of Penderton's impotency. Although Penderton describes this secret affair as a "torment to him" (33), he has "a sad penchant for becoming enamored of his wife's lovers" (11), which buttresses his homosexual desires.

Penderton also fails as a Southern man as he cannot protect his wife and therefore his honor. Wood states that "[W]ithin southern conceptions of honor, a man's masculine reputation was signified by his wife's (or daughter's, or sister's) virtue – to protect her purity was to assert his own masculinity" (202-203). Penderton has no such ambition to cease his wife's affairs with other men, as he is disturbed by his wife's secret affairs not because he has a deep affection for her, but because he dreads being labeled a sissy, wimp, or chump who cannot control his wife. Penderton cannot confront Langdon, as he "represents his ideal male image" (Zhou 79). Rather than lose the favor of a man he admires, Penderton turns a blind eye to their secret affair because the acquisition of the respect, appreciation, and approval of a man at the top of the masculine hierarchy is far more significant. As a result, "he [carries] his cuckoldry with a cynical good grace" (33).

Moreover, Penderton cannot conform to the physical vigor and strength traditionally attached to the norms of military masculinity. In the army, soldiers are expected to excel at physical activities. Despite the many years he spent at the army base, he has no riding skills, which signifies his failure as a Southern man as well. He "always had been afraid of horses: he only rode because it was the thing to do, and because this was another one of his ways of tormenting himself" (73-74). Langdon, Leonora, and Private Williams each demonstrate exceptional horseback riding skills. Firebird, Leonora's stallion, has a special position in the novel as he stands for Penderton's homosexual desire. He fails to liberate this desire with another man, yet he finds joy, energy, and satisfaction in riding Firebird: "[T]he Captain suddenly began to live. A great mad joy surged through him. This emotion, coming as unexpectedly as the plunge of the horse when he had broken away, was one that the Captain had never experienced" (76). This particular moment has sexual overtones as it conjures "the effect of orgasm, of sexual excitement and satisfaction, providing [Penderton] with a powerful expression of vicarious desire as well as confirmation and enjoyment of the penis/phallus" (Gleeson-White 52). In Freudian terms, it is a moment of cathexis in which Penderton directs his libido, though not knowingly, to another object. However, Penderton is only interested in the feeling Firebird evokes in him, not Firebird himself, as there are moments where he uses violence on the stallion, whipping the horse as if punishing himself.

His punishment of Firebird and his jealousy stem from two main reasons. First of all, he wishes to be loved, admired, and desired as the stallion is by Leonora and Williams, who adore him as if he is their son. At times, Firebird also gestures and motions as if he is Leonora's lover (25), reinforcing the love-hate relationship between Penderton and Leonora. Firebird is the object of Williams's care, Leonora's affection, and her husband's disdain (Graver 21). Yet, Penderton is nowhere close to being loved. Secondly, when Penderton beats Firebird, it becomes a punishment for himself and Leonora, and a "heated effort to dispel his sexual desire for the Private" (Free 433), which manifests his masochist tendencies to rebuke his homosexual desires and compulsive obsessions. Penderton also senses an equivalent masochistic satisfaction when he savagely gives the stallion free rein and then drags him back in (Gleeson-White 58). Thus, Penderton's beating of Firebird can also be read as an effort to eliminate queer desires (Free 434).

Moreover, when he uses violence on Firebird, Penderton metaphorically punishes the Private since he associates the stallion with the Private which, for him, is "an unpleasant association" (10). He thinks of a situation "in which he caught the soldier transgressing in some way and was instrumental in having him court-martialed" (10), illustrating Penderton's proclivity towards sadism and his instinctual desire to hurt others around him because it brings him perverse pleasure. In another incident, he finds a kitten in a doorway, and he "opens in the freezing letter slot and squeezed the kitten inside" (12). He physically punishes the horse and the kitten, but at the same time, he metaphorically disciplines his desire for the Private and Leonora. In this respect, Penderton cannot incorporate physicality, aggressiveness, and heterosexuality into his life and therefore fails as a military officer, a horseman, and a husband.

Both Penderton and Langdon opt for forms of oppression, particularly homophobia, to affirm their hegemonic toxic masculinity. Since manhood is associated with strength, success, competence, reliability, and control (Kimmel, "Masculinity" 184), these adjectives have not been used for women and effeminate men. Masculinity has historically meant both "the flight from women [and] the repudiation of femininity" (185). To renounce femininity means to become misogynist and homophobic. In the novel, cis-gender heterosexual women, Leonora and Alison, and queer and racial others, Anacleto, Weincheck, are the victims of misogyny and homophobia respectively. As white supremacist misogynists, Penderton and Langdon both belittle their wives. For example, Penderton dislikes Leonora, whom he calls a "slattern" (14). Moreover, he also disgusts Alison, whom he describes as a "big-nosed female" (53). His hatred derives both from "her total indifference to himself" (34) and from that Alison "knew of a certain woeful shortcoming in his nature" (53)—his kleptomania.

Penderton and Langdon's homophobia stem from "the fear of being seen as a sissy [which] dominates the cultural definitions of manhood" (Kimmel "Masculinity" 189). Since Anacleto is closer to the feminine side of the gender spectrum due to his inclination towards traditionally feminine hobbies, he negates the essential definitions of masculinity as he possesses all "the qualities that contradict [traditional] manhood, that is, being effeminate, intellectual (not animalistic), and unhealthy" (Matsui 122). In this respect, Langdon showcases his homophobia and animosity against Anacleto, whom he considers not a real man, but a domesticated houseboy who participates in "nonsense" female activities (125).

Penderton's homophobia, on the other hand, reflects "the expression of a secret desire, driven out of consciousness and converted into hatred" (Connell, *Masculinities* 40). Penderton hates, but is secretly jealous of, Anacleto due to Anacleto's embrace of his true self without fear and the need to apologize or repress emotions. Penderton defines Anacleto as a "loathsome Filipino . . . he abhorred" (53), which also underscores his racism. Penderton recalls his childhood memory when he was bullied by his crush because he gifted him "an old-fashioned hair-receiver as a love offering" (53). At an early age,

he confronted hate, disgust, and bullying that tarnished his same-sex love and desire. Hence, Anacleto becomes a personification of Penderton's tumultuous childhood and a non-normative identity he never achieves, which leads to self-frustration, self-pity, and self-loathing for Penderton. Thus, he becomes ruthless enough to desire Anacleto's death: "It was a pity the nasty little Filipino hadn't been carried off by a heart attack also" (123-124).

Anacleto and Alison are targets of animosity, but their departure from the army base also signifies cracks in the armor of hegemonic military masculinity. Alison dies in a sanatorium (of a heart attack, but more likely suicide) and Anacleto runs away after her death, but they become the heroes of this bleak story, leaving Langdon defeated, emasculated and guilty because of the way he treated his wife and houseboy. No longer interested in Leonora, he wishes "If only Anacleto would come back" and "miss[es] Anacleto in many ways and [feels] concerning him the most uncomfortable remorse" (123). Ironically, his object of his disgust and hatred becomes his object of longing, because the childlike Anacleto is his only living connection to Alison, sprouting the contradictions within his masculinity.

Towards the end of the novel, Langdon and Penderton converse heatedly regarding whether to sacrifice one's happiness to conform. Langdon, a firm devotee of the army as a masculinity maker, believes that attendance to the army may change Anacleto, who indulges in so-called 'unmanly' activities, as "it might have made a man of him" (124). He thinks of the army as a way for boys to switch from nonsense to sense and from weakness to vigor, matching with the army as "a place where non-normative men can be made normative/masculine" (Matsui 121). This suggests that Langdon is prejudiced against any fulfillment opposed to masculine ideals. As Kimmel argues, masculinity is almost always historically about having the courage to flee femininity ("Masculinity" 185). However, as an ideal of military masculinity, it is not enough to avoid femininity; one must also be anti-feminine to survive in military settings (Lindsey 346), which explains Langdon's inimicality to Anacleto and Weincheck, who possess feminine behaviors. After all, the army encourages men to embrace hegemonic masculinity and to reject femininity, non-normativity, and nonconformity.

Surfacing Repressed Desires

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, queer characters remain deeply closeted as a means of survival in such a homophobic setting. Therefore, sexual repression was a performative strategy aiming at maintaining a cohesive military identity. The military's purpose is to create well-behaved men who act in accordance with the military's normative system. This is akin to Freud's idea that sexual "instincts must be suppressed, restrained, transmuted, directed towards loftier goals, for civilized psychical achievements to take place" (*Collected* 109). For non-heterosexual men, adopting to the abiding military masculinity required repression, since deviation from heterosexuality was the most threatening perversion because of the disorder it represented, and was associated with weakness, softness, femininity, and therefore un-Americanness. For Penderton and Williams, the repression of their sexual desires, whether heterosexual or homosexual, ultimately leads to psychosis, culminating in the murder that concludes the novel.

Superficially a man of discipline and rigidity who is responsible for a large group of enlisted soldiers, Penderton is the most complex character in the novel in terms of masculinity and sexual identity, who is described as a "savant" because he is an avid reader, "wrote [in] three languages gracefully," and "knew something of astronomy and had read much poetry" (11). However, his life is consumed with concealing his sexuality, his hatred of women, and his jealousy of others, and McCullers repeatedly suggests that these are among the reasons why he is still a captain and has not been promoted to a higher rank.

Multiple scholars have defined him as homosexual (Carr 39; Harker 101; Matsui 121). Since homosexuality "was seen as subversive of discipline and hierarchy in the armed forces" (Kinsman 172), Penderton feels obliged to uphold his military manhood and masquerade his homosexuality. Otherwise, "to be a nonconformist means risking his rank and career" (Graham-Bertolini 175). Nevertheless, he is never a man of virility, vigor, and strength. His struggle to conform is noticeable to the other soldiers since "he was known to the soldiers as Captain Flap-Fanny" (26), a derogatory expression that refers to female genitalia and a soft floppy behind. By mocking of Penderton's physical appearance and calling him "Captain Flap-Fanny," the soldiers inhospitably comment on his sexuality. Hence, the use of pejorative slang related to the female body to denigrate less-masculine men reinforces the homophobia, prejudice, and misogyny of the military, and how it is deployed to consolidate the male hierarchy.

While Penderton is a captain, Private Williams is a private, an enlisted man, which reveals their positions in the military hierarchy. Williams is defined as animal-like in the novel: He has a "mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals" (2) and "moved with the silence and agility of a wild creature" (3). While the older and flabby Penderton has "fattish hands" (5), the young and vigorous Williams has strong hands which he uses to ride a horse in a skilled way. They are the exact opposites because Williams's masculinity is defined by his physical qualities and strength, whereas Penderton's masculinity is only based on his military rank. The physical masculinity that Penderton lacks is embodied in Private Williams, who becomes "a mirror figure for Captain Penderton to transform and identify with a masculine image" (Zhou 79).

Williams is a threat because he not only has the potential to destabilize Penderton's life and marriage but also can reveal his repressed sexuality and masculine charade. Although Penderton "imagined a fantastic situation in which he caught the soldier transgressing in some way and was instrumental in having him court-martialed" (10), he knows that the real power in this relationship lies not with the officer but with the enlisted man. Penderton develops feelings for Williams, mostly because he admires his rugged masculinity and his life among men in the barracks. The first confrontation between Penderton and Williams is significant in that it reveals how Penderton's masculinity, and sexuality, are at stake. He invites Williams to clean up the mess in his garden. Williams prunes the erect (and phallic) oak tree, foreshadowing the Private's interference with Penderton's heteronormative façade. Williams physically occupies Penderton's garden at his request. However, this simple activity also has a metaphorical meaning, suggesting Penderton's heterosexual impotence as an act of castration, the cutting of the male organ. Bereft of male power, Penderton is impotent and has been emasculated in his own territory, in front of his wife, who finds the entire situation amusing. He reacts by chastising Williams for overpruning the tree, thereby trying to reclaim some of his lost authority.

Penderton's impotence is also implied by his indifference to sex, fear of sex, misogyny, and repressed homosexual desire. For this reason, the Penderton marriage lacks marital fidelity. While Leonora flirts and has sex with other men at the army post, Penderton seeks emotional meaning in his homosocial interactions. Penderton and Leonora do not have sexual intercourse and sleep in different bedrooms: "The Captain used the large room and his wife slept across the hall from him" (58). The reader is also told that "when Leonora married the Captain she had been a virgin. Four nights after her wedding she was still a virgin, and on the fifth night her status was changed only enough to leave her somehow puzzled" (17). They never seem to have a sexual relationship, which results in Leonora's interest in other men and a marriage that emasculates Penderton (Matsui 122). He vehemently tells Leonora, "I'll be damned if I'll undress you" (55). Moreover, Penderton "[s]exually . . . obtained within himself a delicate balance

between the male and female elements, with the susceptibilities of both the sexes and the active powers of neither" (10). He is a cog built to fit in the army base, but he is unable to meet the standards set for men due to his repressed desires and his disinterest in (heterosexual) sex.

Penderton essentially uses his marriage to mask his same-sex desire. He has no opposition, resistance, or protest against Leonora's secret affair because it is in his interest for their marriage to continue. Although he is discontent with his relationship with his wife, their marriage obscures Penderton's masculinity crisis and homosexuality in an army environment where non-normative identities are forbidden. To maintain credibility in the army, he clings tightly to this lavender marriage, which is a convenience between a homosexual and a heterosexual partner, as the marriage settlement protects the homosexual partner from societal stigmatization and persecution. His mask becomes a performance, which "is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo" (Butler 95). Penderton's authenticity as a "real man" in the army remains legitimate only through a stable heterosexual institution—a marriage with Leonora.

Penderton's connection to other queer characters, such as Anacleto and Weincheck, also suggests his repressed homosexuality. Billig argues that "the idea of self-deceit, or willed forgetting, forms the basis for the Freudian concept of repression" (13). One must forget desires and feelings that arouse the desire to repress. Anacleto, who embraces his sophisticated boyishness and effeminate masculinity, reminds Penderton of his failure to accept his sexual identity, which results in hatred, jealousy, and internalized homophobia. His shame grows as he witnesses Anacleto enjoying his feminine hobbies. Anacleto also reminds Penderton of his wistful nostalgia for his childhood, where once he gifted his crush and received a violent reaction.

The title of the novel provides multiple connotations concerning masculinity, and repressed homosexuality. Seeing, looking, watching, and stalking are human gestures that require the use of the eye. As men who repress their desires, Penderton and Williams engage in stalking their objects of desire. Throughout the novel, while Penderton uncontrollably watches Williams, Williams keeps his eyes on Leonora, "the object of his infatuation" (Free 433). Both men utilize their eyes to exert their desires despite "desire denied, whether homosexual or heterosexual" (433). A form of endless stalking, voyeurism becomes a consequence of the repression of unwanted desires. Yet, there is no fulfillment, materialization, and execution of desires with voyeurism. Freud argues that pleasure emanating from looking, known as scopophilia, becomes a form of perversion when it replaces conventional sexual goals (*Three* 157). Therefore, the act of stalking becomes a reflection of their perversion—*reflections* in their golden eyes. Furthermore, Penderton sees reflections of his soul in multiple scenes: he sees his reflection in the eyes of Firebird and imagines himself as a distorted doll, all of which signify Penderton's authentic self and that there is more beyond the externally perceptible.

In addition, "the golden eye" also represents the grotesque as it reflects homosexuality. In different scenes, both Penderton and Anacleto, as queer men, interact with bird figures who have golden eyes. Bird was slang for "homosexuals as early as the 1930s" (qtd. in Free 432). Penderton imagines "a great dark bird alighted on his chest, looked at him once with fierce, *golden* eyes" (57 emphasis added), whereas Anacleto sees, in one of his paintings, "a peacock of a sort of ghastly green. With one immense golden eye" (95). While Penderton is the object that is being looked at by the dark bird, Anacleto is the subject who looks at the peacock. As an observer, Anacleto owns the moment of seeing because he does not conceal his effeminacy. However, Penderton, as the observed, fails to embrace his queer identity due

to his repression and incomprehension of his same-sex desire. The golden eye is especially reflective of Anacleto. He throws his incomplete drawing into the fireplace; as the fire slowly engulfs the drawing, Anacleto sees the peacock with "one immense golden eye" (95), which reminds him of himself as an unfinished drawing burning in the fire, an exceptionally colorful peacock with a golden eye. Anacleto knows very well that Alison will die soon, which will leave him all alone without family in the cruel, punitive world. Therefore, the golden eye highlights the duality of queerness and the grotesque as both men have their unique versions of queerness and the grotesque in a world of regularity.

Obsessive/compulsive behavior is also an indicator of sexual repression in the novel. The narrator provides signs of Penderton's compulsive behavior, such as kleptomania and homicide. Penderton has had kleptomaniac tendencies since childhood. As the narrator says, "Penderton was inclined to be a thief" (53). For example, when he was seven, he stole his aunt's hair receiver. More recently, he stole a "beautiful little dessert spoon" from a dinner party (53). His kleptomania, which is considered a compulsive disease, is his flaw and a source of shame because "Penderton's kleptomania involves not only theft but also object-obsession and is associated metonymically with his sexual longings" (Free 434). It is "a matter which if gossiped about could cause him the most distressing embarrassment" (34). As he represses his sexuality, he cannot control his impulses, and his subconscious leads him to take part in unwanted acts like theft. His impulses also result in his murder of Williams in the end. As a witness of the scene in which his sole object of desire, Williams, and his object of disgust, Leonora, are present in the same room, Penderton no longer escapes his compulsions. Disappointed and crushed, Penderton must punish his crush, who does not reciprocate his love. It is this remorseful ending that satisfies Penderton's masochism as well; he is responsible for the loss of his beloved, which becomes his agony and torture. Yet, as an officer, he will most likely not be punished for killing an enlisted man, for the act will probably be seen within the code of Southern chivalry, as a gentleman protecting white womanhood from a sexually deviant threat.

Private Williams also grapples with his repressed desires, which stem from his childhood due to the male-dominated household. He is "a silent young soldier" with "a certain watchful innocence" (2). Gleeson-White describes him as a "primitive private" (41). This is because he is always in a trance; he does not speak or think about anything at all, and he is animal-like, showing no signs of intelligence. Born in "a household exclusively male" (20), Williams fears and hates women; he avoids interactions with them and only watches them from afar. For him, they are dirty objects to be avoided: "he had learned that women carried in them a deadly and catching disease which made men blind, crippled, and doomed to hell" (20). In his view, women not only carried sexually transmitted diseases (syphilis), but these illnesses were also contagious and deadly, prompting him to escape physical contact with women at all costs (Gleeson-White 42).

His earlier familial influences re-emerge in the army as "he also heard much talk of this bad sickness" from other soldiers (20). His misogyny resurfaces when he is "examined once a month by the doctor to see if he had touched a woman" (20). He is afraid of nurses who "came near him, and he had lain for hours in misery rather than ask of them some service" (136). When he sees Leonora naked, his repressed desires are awakened because he has never seen a naked woman in his life (20). Yet, he is so appalled by Leonora's nudity that he freezes in place: "[H]e had not found it in him to go away. He stood motionless in the silent night" (20). Leonora becomes his object-desire, and he manifests a symptom, an abnormality originating from what Freud calls, the return of the repressed. He succumbs to his desires, which leads to voyeurism, obsession, and perversion: "The soldier returned each evening, approaching by way of the forest, and looked at all that went on within the Captain's house" (27).

Although Penderton murders Williams due to his repressed sexuality, by the end of the novel, Penderton makes progress with respect to accepting non-conformity. When Langdon advocates the idea of the army as a masculinity-maker, Penderton, for the first time, presents disapproval and questions his role model, Langdon, which can be read as a deviation from the mindset of hegemonic masculinity and military hierarchy. In reaction to Langdon, Penderton says, "You mean that any fulfillment obtained at the expense of normalcy is wrong and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better, because it is morally honorable, for the square peg to keep scraping about the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit it?" (125). Langdon replies that he agrees with this statement. In the meantime, Penderton envisions himself as "a distorted doll-like image, mean of countenance and grotesque in form" (125). Then, he says, "No . . . I don't agree" (125). When he expresses his disapproval, a queer feeling consumes him, and he unprecedentedly thinks of himself as a grotesque figure resembling Anacleto. Showing nonconformity and interrogation of societal and institutional norms, he opposes the idea that one should sacrifice one's normalcy and happiness to conform to the ideals of a larger group. Hsu claims that "instead of acquiescing to Langdon's hegemonic model of gender conformity, [Penderton] will look for an alternative fulfillment in a sexuality that is conventionally perceived as tainted by humiliation and abjection" (433). Therefore, Penderton's interrogation of normativity indicates a step toward a transition from hegemonic masculinity to non-hegemonic masculinities.

Non-hegemonic Masculinities

James. W. Messerschmidt argues that "hegemonic masculinity has no meaning outside its *relationship* to emphasized femininity—and nonhegemonic masculinities—or those forms of femininity that are practiced in a complementary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity" (28). That is, what informs the essence of hegemonic masculinity is its relationship to multiple models of masculinity, which are listed by Connell as non-hegemonic masculinities: *complicit*, *subordinate*, *marginalized,* and *protest* (Messerschmidt 29).[2] While complicit masculinities benefit from unequal gender relations despite not simply adopting hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinities are considered "lesser than or aberrant and deviant to hegemonic masculinity, such as effeminate men" (29). On the other hand, marginalized masculinity is often imperiled to discrimination due to the inequalities rooted in dynamics such as racial identity, socioeconomic class, and age. Furthermore, protest masculinities emerge as exaggerated expressions of masculinity stemming from a hypermasculine characterization of behaviors, aligned with "a working-class masculine ethic of solidarity" (Connell, *Masculinities* 117). These non-hegemonic masculinities, most of the time defined by sets of healthy behaviors, emerge naturally in opposition to the archetype of hegemonic masculinity. In *Reflections*, Anacleto and Weincheck are located at the bottom of the masculine hierarchy in terms of rank and class in the male hierarchy, and on top of that, they embody effeminacy as part of their identities, which emerge as nonhegemonic masculinities.

Demetriou states that hegemonic masculinity is "a closed and unified totality that incorporates no otherness" (347). To achieve this goal, men generate hierarchies that subjugate others and instantaneously place their own perceived characteristics in positions of symbolic dominance. This is rooted in the notion that heterosexual men find themselves "as more morally oriented, self-disciplined, physically able, emotionally controlled, martially skilled, or intelligent" (Hinojosa 179). Replete with prejudice and humiliation, military settings, largely consisting of men who claim to be cis-gendered and heterosexual, provide a toxic yet suitable forum for the manifestation of homophobia.

In opposition to Langdon and Penderton, Anacleto is an archetype of both subordinate and marginalized masculinity, who is threatened by the toxic, misogynist, and homophobic masculinities of the army base. To make meaning of Anacleto's masculinity, it is equally significant to trace the historical moment of Filipino men who were recruited as stewards to "perform domestic duties" for the US Army and Navy during the twentieth century (Espiritu 18). They "performed the work of domestics, preparing and serving the officers' meals . . . [as well as] menial chores such as walking the officers' dogs and acting as personal servants for the officers' wives" (18). They were assigned domestic duties as women were, which was a way for white American men to acknowledge their hegemonic power over Asian minorities. Furthermore, Filipinos were stigmatized with a "virulent campaign" targeting Filipino men with "twin gender images; the Filipino was both too much and too little of a real man" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 167). As a racialized, subservient, and emasculated minority, male privilege was not accessible to Filipino men. A literary example of this is Anacleto, who confronts prejudice and humiliation on three levels as a homosexual, working class, and racial minority.

Anacleto is "the young Filipino servant who had been with [Alison] since he was seventeen years old" (36). He is described as follows: "The little Filipino walked with grace and composure. He was dressed in sandals, soft gray trousers, and a blouse of aquamarine linen" (41). He is intelligent and cultured; he has enthusiasm for learning and speaking French. In addition, Anacleto enjoys going on trips and to concerts with Alison and Weincheck, which are "the joy of Anacleto's life" (65), and his only access to the (cultural) world outside the army base and the house of Langdon. Since hegemonic masculinity is principally "heterosexual" (Connell, *Gender* 186), the defamation of homosexuality becomes an exertion of legitimate male domination through hegemonic masculinity. Anacleto faces this tyrannical exertion as he is an affectionate, gentle, and childlike racial other who likes activities that are traditionally considered feminine and hence taboo for hegemonic men, such as painting, dancing, and learning languages. Therefore, he does not fit the description of the "unblushing male in America," that is "a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports" (Goffman 128). In fact, very few of the men at the army base would fit this definition at all.

Despite being "less of a man," Anacleto is the most reliable and caring person in the narrative as he offers comradeship to Alison and even "[i]n her labor Alison had clung to Anacleto (for he, the Major, could not stand it)" (40-41). The seemingly invincible masculine Langdon is unable to comfort his wife during and after childbirth, while Alison and Anacleto are so married to each other that "[t]heir voices and enunciation were so precisely alike that they seemed to be softly echoing each other" (45). After the loss of her baby, Alison becomes a mother figure who protects Anacleto, at all costs, from outward danger. Anacleto, in turn, becomes "the substitute for Alison's dead daughter" and transforms into a beloved child to whom she can give all her attention (Zhou 83). She is constantly worried about "what would become of Anacleto when she was dead" (63). Furthermore, Anacleto also becomes a parent for Alison, who suffers from postpartum depression. Their bonding is unlike any relationship in the narrative, and they can only trust each other. Anacleto utters in honest revelation: "he thought the Lord had blundered grossly in the making of everyone except himself and Madame Alison" and "the sole exceptions to this were people behind footlights, midgets, great artists, and such-like fabulous folk" (43), both of which express Anacleto's admiration for the grotesque as he navigates between eccentricity and normalcy, unusual and habitual, masculine and feminine.

Anacleto debunks the army base's dominant masculinity, which favors the aggressive and heteronormative, by practicing positive masculinity, not defined by exploitation of aggression, oppression, or violence but by gender equality, freedom in bodily expression, and healthy, affectionate relationships. Through his progressive approach, he contributes to "legitimating egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities" (Messerschmidt and Messner 42). Moreover, he creates a partnership with Langdon's long-suffering wife Alison and keeps the secrets of another closeted gay man, Weincheck, who also comes into prominence with his non-hegemonic masculinity.

As an unmarried, closeted homosexual, Weincheck also suffers from prejudice and homophobia. He is described as follows: "In the service he cut a sorry figure, as he was nearing fifty and had never yet earned his Captain's bars" (38). That is, he, as a lieutenant, which is "the lowest of the noncommissioned officer ranks" ("Lieutenant"), lacks prestige, success, and accomplishments, even though he is almost fifty. Therefore, his career, "as indicated by his rank, has been a failure" (Evans 61). As a lower-ranking officer, he does not receive as much respect as Langdon does: "he was of no consequence to anyone on the post" (38). This is derived from his indulgence in traditionally feminine hobbies, like Anacleto. Having "two small rooms [crowded with] an accumulation of a lifetime, including a grand piano, a shelf of phonograph albums, many hundreds of books, a big Angora cat, and about a dozen potted plants" (39), he is interested in books, theatre, cultural trips, plants that historically denotes femininity. He also suffers from financial difficulties, suggesting that he is an outlier not only in terms of sexuality but also class: "he was very poor" and "his one dress uniform was so seedy that he only attended the most obligatory social affairs" (39).

As his hobbies and interests differ from the rest of the officers, Weincheck is socially excluded; the officers mock him by "scratch[ing] their heads and wink[ing] at each other" (39). He is also physically ostracized by his peers, such as Langdon and Penderton, who reside in self-contained houses because they are married and live in family units. For example, while Penderton's house is "an eight-room two-story building of stucco," Weincheck "live[s] in one of the apartment houses set aside for bachelor lieutenants" (39). According to Hsu, "Weincheck's perpetual bachelorhood arouses suspicion and suggests something of his deviation from normative masculinity" (420-421).

Unsurprisingly, Weincheck is befriended by two other outcasts, Alison and Anacleto, who are driven out of the base's social life due to their non-conformity. As the isolated and the unwanted misfits of the army base, they form a comradeship against the regulatory system of the army base, transgressing the normativity and rigidity of the institution, and they build "their friendship on the sharing of their marginalized status in the Army" (Hsu 422). Alison is mentally unstable due to her postpartum depression, and a suicide attempt that involved cutting her nipples off with garden shears, yet she loves to gossip about everyone else's misfortune. Anacleto, her sidekick, arrogantly frames his effeminacy as power, despite knowing otherwise. Weincheck pursues his love for arts, culture, and "highbrow things," even though it will force him into early retirement (38). They also share another common feature: All three lack a traditional family structure, so they become each other's family by choice, which is a common occurrence in the LGBTQ community due to rejection by biological family members. Weincheck is single and has no immediate family; Alison is in a dead marriage with no extended family members; and Anacleto is deprived of a family due to being an immigrant. Consequently, they develop their own kinship network as a way of resisting the unbearable and stifling restrictions of the army base.

Anacleto and Weincheck emerge as models of nonhegemonic masculinities and goes in hand with Messerschmidt's idea that "a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man might become prevalent, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies" (29). Both characters

disrupt the monotony of the bigoted homophobic misogynistic male-dominated society, build healthy relationships with one another, form strong social, even familial bonds, and display that there is another version of manhood that is available to men in society.

Conclusion

In *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, which functions as a melting pot of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, McCullers shifts the center of attention from the shared culture of southern manhood and heroism to the intricate and multi-layered relationships between men, and between women and men. In *Reflections*, no male character is exemplary, flawless, mentally and emotionally resilient, and heroic. Quite the reverse, the male characters have flaws, feelings, and fears of which they are ashamed. On the one hand, Major Langdon overcompensates for his dysfunctional household, over which he has minimal control, by playing the role of the womanizer and having an affair with Penderton's wife Leonora. He is the culmination of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity; he has all the characteristics needed to define one as a true military man. However, he is also an example of the failure of this hegemonic model, despite his efforts to be an admirable role model to other men, as his version legitimizes male power to oppress others, including Alison, and he denounces Anacleto as less of a man.

On the other hand, Penderton is a specimen of how the army base and military masculinity compel him to act with a certain rigidity, prevent him from naming his sexuality, and repress his homosexual desires, which cause an array of undesirable incidents where he struggles with compulsive behavior, such as voyeurism and kleptomania, which become blockages to his military life as a "real" man. Nevertheless, he symbolizes a transition from hegemonic masculinity to non-hegemonic masculinity, as he uses his marriage to mask his homosexuality. Moreover, his ultimate disapproval of the army as a masculinity maker becomes a defining moment during his transition. Similar to Penderton, Private Williams, whose disgust for women derives from his early male-dominant household, falls into the trap of perversion and voyeurism as a result of his repressed sexuality. Thus, both men are alike in their violation of the army's normativity. In opposition with these three characters, Anacleto and Weincheck offer a non-hegemonic, alternative masculinity that is defined by gender equality, freedom in bodily expression, the pursuit of happiness, and healthy relationships with likeminded individuals.

As evinced in all these male characters, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* engages with masculinity trouble: while some are in trouble with masculinity, perpetuating male hegemony, others react against hegemonic masculinity and ultimately finds their own way. Ultimately, the novel defies gender roles, undermines orthodox and military masculinity, and promotes the pursuit of nonconformism and the possibility of alternative non-hegemonic masculinities, even suggesting that the repression of such goals is the true source of terror in southern society.

Notes

[1] This quote contains a derogatory ethnic slur used in historical and literary contexts for accurate representation of the primary text. The author of this article condemns the use of such terms outside historical or scholarly contexts.

[2] See R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* (2005) for a detailed analysis on the four types of masculinity mentioned in this article.

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Indigeneity, Belonging, and the Afterlife of Colonialism: Morgan Talty's *Fire Exit* (2024)

Abstract
Following his first success with the story collection *Night of the Living Rez* (2022), the Native American writer Morgan Talty published his debut novel *Fire Exit* in 2024, establishing himself as a compelling new Indigenous voice that commands attention. This paper illustrates how, unlike other creative works by contemporary Native American writers, *Fire Exit* presents a captivating story not only about life on and off the reservation but also about the various personal, legal, and cultural complications of present-day Indigenous belonging within a tribe, particularly the Penobscot of Maine. It offers a narrative of false Indigenous parentage claims, intentionally made to grant the offspring full benefits of tribal belonging based on blood quantum level. It represents a search for a deeper truth beyond the lived realities of Native descent, while exploring in detail the intricate, multilayered meanings of Indigenous belonging and inclusion, postcolonial survival, and tribal blood quantum.
Keywords: Indigenous belonging, Native American legal status, post/colonial Indigenous history, tribal blood quantum

Yerlilik, Aidiyet Ve Sömürgecilik Sonrası Yaşam: Morgan Talty'nin *Fire Exit* (2024) Romanı

Öz
Yerli Amerikalı yazar Morgan Talty, ilk hikâye kitabı *Night of the Living Rez* (2022) ile elde ettiği başarının ardından, 2024 yılında yayımladığı ilk romanı *Fire Exit* ile dikkatleri üzerine çeken yeni bir Yerli ses olarak öne çıkmıştır. Bu makale, diğer çağdaş Yerli Amerikalı yazarların yaratıcı eserlerinden farklı olarak *Fire Exit*'in yalnızca rezervasyon içi ve dışı yaşamı değil, aynı zamanda günümüz Yerli aidiyetinin kişisel, hukuki ve kültürel karmaşıklıklarını, özellikle Maine'in Penobscot kabilesi bağlamında, etkileyici bir biçimde anlattığını ortaya koymaktadır. Roman, kabile üyeliğinin kan oranına (blood quantum) dayalı avantajlarından tam anlamıyla yararlanabilmesi için kasıtlı olarak yapılan sahte Yerli ebeveynlik iddialarının hikâyesini sunar. Bununla birlikte, Yerli soyundan gelmenin yaşanmış gerçekliğinin ötesinde daha derin bir hakikati arayışın yanı sıra, Yerli aidiyeti ve dahil oluşun, sömürgecilik sonrası hayatta kalmanın ve kabile kan oranının karmaşık, çok katmanlı anlamlarını ayrıntılı biçimde keşfeder.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerli aidiyeti, Yerli Amerikalıların yasal statüsü, sömürgecilik sonrası/sömürge dönemi Yerli tarihi, kabile kan oranı

Regine Rosenthal

Indigeneity, Belonging, and the Afterlife of Colonialism: Morgan Talty's *Fire Exit* (2024)

Introduction

Parallel to the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s and '70s, led so prominently by the African American community, various other minority groups, such as Asian, Latino, and Native Americans, joined in the fight, starting to forcefully speak up for their civil and political rights.[1] Yet for Native Americans, the fight went far beyond political claims to include urgent quests for cultural survival that focused on Indigenous heritage, language, and art. In fact, starting in the 1960s, the few creative Native voices that had outlived cultural erasure imposed by the federally mandated boarding school system were joined by a growing number of prominent Indigenous writers and visual artists. They initiated the Native American Renaissance, as the critic Kenneth Lincoln called it in his eponymous 1983 study. The term marked the significant increase in Indigenous literary production that started in the late 1960s with Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and brought Native American fiction into the mainstream. In the twenty first century, the early voices of Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan, and Gerald Vizenor, among others, have been joined by generations of younger writers such as Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Sherman Alexie, David Treuer, Tommy Orange, and Layli Long Silver, all of whom contribute in remarkable ways to contemporary literature and visual arts.[2]

Among the growing number of even younger contemporary Native American writers, the voice of Morgan Talty clearly stands out. Talty is a 2016 graduate of the Department of Native American and Indigenous Studies at Dartmouth College, like Louise Erdrich before him.[3] He had launched his literary career with his celebrated 2022 short story collection *Night of the Living Rez*, which had established him as a promising young writer whose voice is to be taken seriously. In 2024, Talty published his first novel, *Fire Exit*, once again to great acclaim. He is a member of the Penobscot Nation, a federally acknowledged Indian tribe. At present, he is an assistant professor of English in Creative Writing and Native American and Contemporary Literature at the University of Maine in Orono, and he also teaches in the Stonecoast MFA Creative Writing program at the University of Southern Maine.

In early 2025, Talty gave an illuminating interview conducted by his former Dartmouth Native American Studies professor, Bruce Duthu, about *Fire Exit*. In this wide-ranging, thoughtful conversation held on January 10, 2025, Duthu and Talty highlight the intricate interplay of fact and fiction in the novel, as well as the postcolonial scholarly and legal ramifications of the blood quantum debate. As the interview makes amply clear, the novel raises a variety of complex issues and painful questions about Indigenous belonging, descent, inclusion, exclusion, citizenship, and identity in the United States. These issues, together with those addressed in Talty's provocative 2024 *Esquire* essay, "I'll Show You My Indian if You Show Me Yours," are central to the writer's contemporary approach.[4]

In *Fire Exit*, Talty portrays diverse, thought-provoking perspectives on life on a contemporary, federally recognized tribal reservation in Maine, a place still suffering from the indelible and painful historical consequences of United States colonialism. As a further challenge, the novel's very subject matter places it squarely within the current, fiercely contested political debates about officially excluded cultural terms such as diversity, race, belonging, inclusion, exclusion, discrimination, indigenous community, and Native American (Yourish et. al.).[5] As such, the novel also points toward deeper, probing questions about the meaning of America, who is represented in present-day voices of American art and fiction, and, on a larger scale, the concept of American identity. Critics have called *Fire Exit* a "spellbinding . . . mystery of identity, family, and a river" (Hampton), while reader-based platforms such as Goodreads

and literary publishers like *Tin House* have praised its "masterful and unforgettable story" and listed it among notable First Novel Awards. In turn, the Canadian writer Esi Edugyan, in her detailed and candid review, praised the "lovely clarity" of *Fire Exit,* noting that it "does not shy away from blistering questions of belonging and identity, but rather leans into them, in taut, often precise prose," despite the "occasional overreaches" of any first novel.

To adequately address the specific challenges facing the Penobscot tribe that lie at the heart of Talty's novel, this article will first explore the special status Indigenous people have held in the history of the United States since the country's beginning. It will then examine the 1790 Trade and Intercourse Act, which, as Bethany Berger notes, established Indigenous tribes in the newly founded United States as both sovereign and subjugated, and clearly defined the constitutionally determined relationship among the federal government, the individual states, and the Indigenous Nations and tribes (1122). This discussion will also address the Act's contentious and subsequent historical impact on today's tribes, specifically on Talty's Penobscot Nation. Building on these historical and legal colonial foundations, the article will probe the diversely discussed definition of current, postcolonial tribal membership, its preconditions, who has the power to define it, and how these complex, much debated questions are reflected on a deeper level in the novel's portrayal of its main characters.

Historical Background

The historical and political facts and core issues on which *Fire Exit* is based carry wide-ranging implications for the development of the novel's plot and principal characters. Its historical framework reaches back to colonial America, the early relationship between the federal government and Native American tribes, and the respective statutes in the American Constitution. According to the 1980 Indian Tribal-State Commission of Maine in its historical retrospective, "Indian tribes were subject to the legislative power of the U.S. Congress," that is, to the laws of the newly founded United States, not to the authority of the individual states. Under these tenets, "Tribes retained their pre-existing internal sovereignty, including powers of local self-government . . . [while] the federal government has a trust responsibility to protect tribal resources and act in the best interest of Indian tribes and their members" ("Summary"). Thus, the foundational elements of Federal Indian Law consisted of inherent tribal sovereignty, the US Constitution, and the 1790 Trade and Intercourse Act, also called Non-Intercourse Act, which regulated both tribal commerce and land ownership.[6] Yet, as is widely known, throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the "Federal government failed to meet its trust responsibility" to the tribal nations, including the Wabanaki Tribes of Maine. At the same time, as indicated in the novel, the State of Maine unlawfully usurped power over Indian tribes and lands ("Summary").

This conflict came to a head in 1975 in a legal challenge brought by the tribes against the State of Maine and has continued to fester since the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement of 1980—an Act that becomes the starting point for the novel's troubling questions on a personal level. Although the tribes had long fought for their federal recognition, the 1980 Indian Land Claims Settlement in Maine, signed by President Carter, contained two important statutes—one enacted by Congress and the other by the Maine legislature—both of which required approval by Congress. This settlement, fundamental in its on-the-ground implications to the story line of *Fire Exit*, provided that certain Maine tribes, including the Penobscot Nation featured in the novel, were granted full sovereignty over their "internal tribal matters, including membership in the respective tribe or nation" ("Summary"). It also clearly stated that "the right to reside within the respective Indian territories, tribal organization, tribal government, tribal elections and the use . . . of settlement fund income shall not be subject to regulation by the state" ("Summary").

Furthermore, the settlement extinguished all federal land claims in Maine, provided some compensation to the tribes, and made Maine state laws applicable to all other matters. Overall, the jurisdictional provisions of the 1980 Maine Indian Settlement Act moved the relationship between tribes and the State of Maine in a direction fundamentally different from elsewhere in the country, as it limited tribal self-determination by granting the state extensive jurisdiction. The Act also resulted in disagreements between tribes and the state about the meaning of the term "internal tribal matters," disputes that remain unresolved to this day. One exception for the different Wabanaki Indian Tribes and Nations of Maine is that the Penobscot tribe, part of the Wabanaki, received differential treatment from most other tribes of Maine ("Summary"). In fact, it is this contested definition of "internal tribal matters" that carries such pervasive, long-held trauma and pain for the characters and is the driving force of Talty's *Fire Exit*.[7]

Internal Tribal Matters, Blood Quantum, And Indigenous Belonging

The narrative exposition begins with a mystifying first chapter that masterfully lays out all the questions and issues further developed later in the novel, but which the readers cannot yet decipher. As the story unfolds, however, the reader must slowly uncover the facts on the ground to fully comprehend their untold consequences and human costs. These evolving facts are channeled through the perspective and emotions of the first-person narrator, Charles, who serves as the novel's center of consciousness and delivers its first, still enigmatic, introductory statement: "I wanted the girl to know the truth. I wanted her to know who I was—who I really was—instead of a white man who has lived across from her all her life and watched her grow up from this side of the river" (Talty, *Fire* 1).

As becomes clear, the narrator refers to the river that "divided the Penobscot Nation from the rest of the state of Maine" and that separates Charles on "this side of the river" from the reservation on the other (Talty, *Fire* 1). It also separates him from his alluded-to daughter, Elizabeth, whose mother, Mary, had persuaded him go along with the lie "that the girl was another man's, an enrolled Native man's, so that she, our daughter, could be on the census . . . But . . . I wanted our daughter to know the truth. I was tired of holding that secret" (Talty, *Fire* 2). Thus, the main conundrum for Charles to deal with is the secret birth of his daughter and whether he should reveal to her the lie around her parentage, including its connection to Native enrollment, its significance for her, and why it should matter. Here is where the above-mentioned Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act comes in, for, as Charles also explains in the opening chapter, this Act

> had restored to the tribe its inherent sovereignty, so they could make and pass laws. While the white folks who had owned land prior to the act could remain, as well as those who had married in, one of the first laws the tribe passed concerned non-Natives: anyone who wasn't Native at all had no right to live on the reservation. (Talty, *Fire* 4)

As a result, Charles, an outsider due to his whiteness, is barred from living on the reservation, while Elizabeth, an insider by virtue of her enrollment in the Penobscot tribe, is allowed to live on the reservation. Yet for Charles, the issue of enrollment is more complex. As we learn from the beginning, his mother, Louise, had been married to a Native man, Frederick, which allowed her to live with Frederick and her son Charles on the reservation. When Frederick died, however, Charles was required to move out. He had loved his stepfather like a father, and as a boy, had been educated by him in Native customs and ways of life. By tribal decree, though, Charles had to leave the reservation when turning eighteen despite his accumulated traditional tribal knowledge (Talty, *Fire* 15).

In addition, as it turns out, Frederick had been "strongly against the [Settlement] act and spent a great deal of time with the tribal council trying to persuade them to go after a better deal" (Talty, *Fire* 3). He often vented his frustration at home, explaining his reasons at length to Louise and Charles. In fact, his act of spearheading tribal opposition indicated ongoing internal tribal fights over policy issues, Indigenous cultural preservation, and matters of inclusion and exclusion. In the Penobscot case, it indicated a shift in power over the sovereign Indigenous tribe, from the federal government, through the state of Maine, to the Penobscot tribal council itself, to establish the rules of belonging: Who is allowed to reside on the reservation and who is not. On a larger scale, it also raises questions about the rationale for imposing this age limit, given that some of those affected, such as Charles, may have acquired much substantial traditional knowledge than young tribal members on the reservation. This foregrounds the debate surrounding the criteria for inclusion or exclusion.

Requirements for Indigenous membership in the United States vary greatly from tribe to tribe, but in general, they involve proving lineal descent from an ancestor listed on the tribe's historical enrollment rolls or demonstrating a certain blood quantum—that is, a specific percentage of Indian blood. It is the latter that predominantly counts for the Penobscot Indians of Maine, as we learn through the novel's reference to the lie regarding Elizabeth's birth. As Charles explains, the intention of Mary's plan had been "to lie and say that the girl was another man's, an enrolled Native man's, so that she, our daughter, could be on the census—*Mary's Penobscot blood plus Roger's*—giving Elizabeth exactly what she needed to be enrolled" (Talty, *Fire* 2; emphasis added). The Federal census, conducted every ten years, determines the amount of money allotted through the State of Maine to its Indigenous tribes. Therefore, it is important for the Penobscot to first determine who and how many are enrolled based on their blood quantum and, for maximum benefit, to keep the definitions strictly circumscribed. It also affects the amount of income allotted to the tribe under the Maine Indian Settlement Act of 1980. This, in turn, is what motivated Mary to marry a Native Penobscot man entitled to all the benefits of tribal membership and to construct the lie about the daughter's parentage.

Yet the definition of membership by blood quantum is not a traditional Native one. Rather, it was introduced through colonialism and was based on Western standards that, at the time of the colonies, ran counter to Indigenous understandings of belonging, understandings in which adoption and the assimilation of outsiders, based on their degree of traditional tribal knowledge, were decisive. The blood quantum requirement was introduced by the Federal government in the early years of the United States and applied throughout the nineteenth century as part of the nation's effort to "civilize" the Natives—whether considered "noble" or "savage"—and subject them to the cultural and legal rules of the American nation (Bayor 5-7). Talty's novel engages with the possible consequences of this conundrum by positing the protagonist, Charles, as the white father of Elizabeth; acknowledging him would exclude her from receiving any membership benefits due to her watered-down Native blood quantum. In "I'll Show You My Indian If You Show Me Yours," Talty goes even further, explaining with biting irony how the restrictions of tribal blood quantum are also imposed to prevent the tribe from being brought "to the brink of 'extinction'" by marrying out and thus diluting its Native blood.[8]

Frederick's Vexed Belonging

Narrated in short, episodically structured chapters, the novel is filtered through Charles's first-person voice. He slowly reveals to the reader his memories of the past and his reassessment of them in the present through his long-term relationships—with his Native stepfather, Frederick; his ex-lover, Mary;

his own mother, Louise; his daughter, Elizabeth; and the Penobscot tribe, whose handling of internal matters and policy have deeply impacted his life and sense of belonging. In his probing reminiscences, Charles comes across as an insecure man with low self-esteem who constantly second-guesses himself. Together with Frederick, he had built the house in which he now lives off the reservation, "three years after the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act was passed" (Talty, *Fire* 3). Working for a woodyard, he often spent months in the woods, while also developing a drinking problem that led Mary to prevent him from seeing his daughter. Yet through regular attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), he managed to get it under control and has now been sober for twenty-two years. When he first made the effort to go to these meetings, he reconnected with his mother, Louise, and, through her, with his past. Realizing during these visits that he had never really known her, he now remembers his early childhood abandonment by his biological father, Louise's repeated long bouts of depression, and Frederick's unwavering support of her. In fact, as Charles comments, he did not really know his mother at all, while Frederick "had understood her in a way nobody else could" (Talty, *Fire*15). By the same token, Frederick, a Penobscot man, had accepted parental responsibility for Charles, despite the fierce objections of Louise's mother, who despised and hated Frederick for his "Indianness."[9] During Louise's recurring phases of depression and emotional withdrawal from the family, Frederick became Charles's dependable, *de facto* father. As Talty writes:

> So I felt I belonged to Frederick, and to his family . . . It didn't take time to grow into that feeling of being welcome. I was so young when we joined their family. My mother and I were not Penobscot, but I spent all my early years on the reservation and was taught at the school . . . I was around the tribe day and night, and I felt it was where I belonged, who I was. (*Fire* 20-21)

The quote shows that he not only instructed Charles in traditional Indian ways but also gave him love and a sense of home.

Yet this sense of inclusion changes for Charles in his teenage years due to the implementation of the Maine Settlement Act. He observes firsthand the fraught impact it has on tribal relations and the indelible pain it inflicts on him and on his place within the community. This comes to a head one day when Charles witnesses a fierce confrontation between Fredrick and Lenno, the tribal chief, over Lenno's son, the son's suspected homosexuality, and the severe beating he receives from his father. In a fury, Fredrick challenges Lenno to an armed fight that, at its center, is linked to the tribe's internal relations at the time and the acrimonious implementation of the Maine Settlement Act. Talty says, "If . . . [Lenno] hadn't been the chief, if he hadn't been pushing the tribe so hard to accept what little the Settlement Act would give them—which was less than what Frederick felt the tribe was owed and was a constant point of contention between the two—I wonder whether Frederick would have done what he did" (*Fire* 38).

The fight between Frederick and Lenno ends with Lenno turning truth and lie on their head, claiming, loudly enough for his supporters and tribal bystanders to hear, that it is Charles who is the actual "faggot" and aggressor. He claims that Charles committed the violence to his son because the boy fiercely resisted Charles's alleged sexual advances. In this moment of betrayal and utter loneliness, Charles realizes that he is now without support from the community he grew up in. Despite all his protestations of innocence, he knows he will no longer be trusted: "[M]y situation on the reservation was already precarious, and this—this story—could snap what little thin line had held me in this place" (Talty, *Fire* 42). Though Frederick believes Charles's version of the story, he tells Charles: "[I]t doesn't matter what I believe . . . It's what they will believe. And they will believe . . . [Lenno's] story" (Talty, *Fire*

43). As a result, according to Penobscot policies, Charles, an insider by virtue of his cultural upbringing and knowledge, becomes the outsider by race and is excluded from the reservation. Frederick, in turn, as a tribal insider, suffers the consequences in a different way. Remaining as fiercely loyal to Charles as before, he watches the effectiveness of his work on the tribal council evaporate. Noone listens to him anymore. In resignation and frustration, he withdraws from involvement in tribal matters.

Mary's Consequential Lie

The significance of Charles's exclusion from the Penobscot reservation as a non-Native outsider, the tribe's refusal to grant him an identity that still connects him to his Indigenous upbringing, and the tribal meaning of belonging is embodied in the figure of Mary, whose ruthless adherence to the Indigenous blood quantum rule underscores these tensions. In fact, the relationship between Mary and Charles conceals a long, untold story that both unites and separates them to the present day. In their early teenage years, they shared an inseparable, trusting friendship in which Mary brought joy to Charles's life, a life otherwise overshadowed by his mother's chronic illness. They roamed the reservation, always together, driven by Mary's adventurous, rebellious spirit. At one point, Mary even challenged the deeply traditional, gender-conforming Penobscot customs by attempting to take part in a ceremonial drum circle performance, which at the time was strictly reserved for adult male tribal members. Even though she had secretly practiced mastering the drumming, she was ousted by Chief Lenno and ridiculed by the male drummers. Yet this only strengthened her resolve to resist and push for a more forward-looking tribal agenda. Indeed, due to her and other women's activism, as Charles tells us, tribal women are now able to participate in ceremonial drumming by making "room for themselves at their own drums" (Talty, *Fire* 64).

But this teenage friendship, which had subsequently bloomed into love and intimacy, abruptly ended the day Mary discovered she was pregnant. At that moment, her primary focus shifted from Charles to the issue of tribal belonging, which turned Charles into an unwanted outsider. Mary severed her loving bond with Charles and transferred all her love to her future daughter. She married Roger, a Penobscot Native, for Elizabeth's sake, and, through the lie about her daughter's paternity, which increased Elizabeth's tribal blood quantum rights, secured her daughter's enrollment in the Penobscot tribe with all the privileges that came along with it. That very day, she left Charles with only the bare words, "This is for the baby, you have to understand that" and not even said goodbye to him. Charles, in turn, had to accept "that was the last time [he]'d see the Mary [he] had loved, the one [he] had grown up with and thought [he]'d spend the rest of [his] life with." Yet despite conceding that "no matter how big the lie was, Mary loves Elizabeth. It was for her she did this" (Talty *Fire* 139), he was devastated, left with no hope that Mary would ever come back to him. As he states, "I was a mess after, and all these years later I still was" (Talty, *Fire* 140). Trying to drown his sorrows, he became an alcoholic until, years later, he found the strength to fight back and join AA, also for the sake of Elizabeth.

Playing over in his mind the newly established family triangulation around Elizabeth, he silently abdicated his own paternal role, transferring it to his daughter's loving relationship to Roger, her substitute father. In fact, Charles conceded that from now on

> Elizabeth was Mary and Roger's daughter. Nothing could change that. And so I expected nothing to come from telling her except that she would know there was more to her story than she had thought. I didn't hope she'd love me . . . All I wanted was that she know the history that was hers . . . and that she know she was as much a part of me as she was not. That's the truth, the absolute truth. (Talty, *Fire* 148)

Yet when he increasingly pressured Mary to tell their daughter this truth, Mary resisted, by laying out the potential complications of doing so, especially given Elizabeth's current state of unstable mental health. She countered Charles's position with the argument that "By giving her this story, you're creating a situation where she's learning more about herself, yes, but she's also questioning who she is—or at least I would, if I were her. And her learning all this on top of managing her well-being? It could break her, Charles. This could break her. Your daughter. Let her keep living knowing what she knows" (Talty, *Fire* 169).

Louise's Life of Untold Stories, Secrets, And Tenuous Trust

Charles's increasing determination to disclose to Elizabeth her factual paternal family lineage is ultimately driven by the troubled history of depression in his mother, Louise. This comes increasingly evident in Louise's advanced years, when Charles is middle-aged. His more frequent, caregiving visits with her remind him of his childhood on the reservation and of Louise's recurring cycles of depression that periodically sent her to the tribal wellness center for a few days. Her declining health also leads Charles to confirm that Louise would be permitted to be buried next to Frederick on the reservation, a gesture that grants her a degree of tribal belonging denied to him. This fact not only raises again the issue of non-Indigenous exclusion determined by the tribal elders but also reignites his fears about his daughter Elizabeth and her recent mental health struggles. Thus, the lie surrounding Elizabeth's secret parentage continues to fester while Charles is preoccupied with the wellbeing of his mother, who is now displaying not only symptoms of depression but also increasing forgetfulness. Long reticent to divulge any personal information about her life before Charles's birth or his early childhood, Louise has begun to speak mysteriously to people who are not in the room and whom Charles does not know or remember. She forgets his name, mistakes him for somebody else, or fails to recognize him at all. He sadly reflects,

> I wasn't sure Louise knew who I was anymore . . . I was thinking . . . about how, in just the past year, I had just started to know her, but then I began to unknow her, getting farther and farther away like watching a boat drift from the shore and head out . . . to an open water that never, ever ends. And she did not even know this, that she was on the boat. (Talty, *Fire* 188)

Louise's increasing memory loss also illustrates the ambiguous relationship between mother and son that had characterized almost all of Charles's life. It was a relationship shaped by untold stories and withheld secrets that made them wary of one another and unsure whether they could trust each other, especially after Frederick's tragic death.[10]

The details of this devastating event once again underline the paramount issue of truth and lies that runs like a red thread through the novel. Fully aware of Louise's love for him and her dependence on him during her recurrent periods of anxiety and depression, Frederick had assured his wife that he would not go hunting alone the next day but would take Charles along for company in case anything happened. Charles, for his part, was reluctant and preferred to stay home; most importantly, he stayed because he was secretly and anxiously waiting for his newborn daughter to be brought home from the hospital that very day. Then, tragedy strikes. Frederick does not return from his hunting trip, neither that day nor the next. When he is still missing on the third day, a search party is sent out, and Charles confesses to Louise the lie that had been concocted by Frederick and upheld by both men for what was assumed to be Louise's benefit. Frederick is finally found frozen to death in a fierce snowstorm. Louise, however, never completely forgives her son for lying to her, while Charles is haunted by a sense of guilt that intensifies his

growing determination to tell the truth now, especially to his daughter. Only much later, when facing the dead body of Louise, is Charles finally able to let go of the past and talk back, setting the record straight: "I just started talking, told her body the truth of every story I had ever been part of" (Talty, *Fire* 231).

During Louise's progressive slide into confusion and misrecognition, her story line and Elizabeth's finally converge. While Louise is receiving help at the local clinic for her long-standing depression and recent memory loss through electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), the two women meet at last. One day, when Charles wheels Louise into the waiting room for her ECT treatment, he encounters Mary, who is waiting for Elizabeth to come out of hers. This sudden recognition confirms his long-held sense of dread and anticipation, at this moment becomes "the longest wait" of his life. It confirms, for him, that the "blood . . . that ran through her body was tainted, flawed." It also underlines "why it was so important she know all of this, who I was and who her grandmother was. This was why her body's secret history was so important to know" (Talty, *Fire* 143). Ultimately, this moment substantiates the critical difference, yet also the convergence, between family bonds created through bloodlines and those defined by blood quantum levels, a distinction that shapes the Penobscot understanding of Indigeneity.

Elizabeth's Complex, Hard-Found Truth

Charles's insistence on full disclosure of Elizabeth's troubled family legacy nearly ends in tragedy. Under pressure to tell Elizabeth Charles's side of the truth, Mary and Roger decide to disclose it to Elizabeth themselves. In a dramatic downward spiral of her despairing state of mind, one that Mary had fearfully anticipated, Elizabeth attempts to work out the consequences of these suddenly upended family and tribal relations on her own terms. Challenging her family, and especially her newly discovered biological father, she runs away from home at night in a freezing snowstorm testing the depth of their bond in circumstances that parallel the tragic death of Frederick. Yet when a tribal search party, including the Charles, Mary, and Roger, frantically search for Elizabeth, it is Charles who, different from Frederick's ending, ultimately saves Elizabeth's life. Finding Elizabeth amid a raging fire she has set herself, Charles rescues her in a desperate act of courage, so that both daughter and father survive, if only barely.

Reflecting the novel's main concerns, this cataclysm invites a deeper critical reading of the narrative and of the meaning of Charles's insistence on telling the truth, its impact on the various characters' relationships with one another, and, most importantly, the implications of imposed and inherited bloodlines within the novel's Indigenous context. When Charles and Elizabeth meet again after the dramatic events, Elizabeth is back in hospital for treatment, but the only person she wants to see now is Charles, her biological father. She desperately wants to know why her mother suddenly revealed the lie. Charles comments,

> I told her why. And she listened to me . . . I told her that my plan was to tell her the truth, that I felt she should know it, that she deserved to know the history that was hers. We are made of stories and if we don't know them—the ones that make us . . . How can we ever be who we really are? . . . I wanted her to know, wanted her to understand what it meant that she was being stretched beyond the walls of her parents' house, that she was of that house, certainly, but also of others—the one across the river. (Talty, *Fire* 226-227)

In the final scene on the reservation, Charles, Mary, Roger, and Elizabeth come together as a family at Louise's funeral. When Charles tells Elizabeth about Louise, whom Elizabeth had hardly known but who, as Charles notes, resembled her granddaughter in so many significant ways, Elizabeth joins him, in a telling gesture, to say a final goodbye to her grandmother: "And she got on her hands and knees [at the

open grave] and with her arm she pushed the rest of the earth, our sweet, sweet earth, over our shared blood that was now turned to ash" (Talty, *Fire* 235).

Indigeneity, Tribal Belonging, and Blood Quantum: A Continuing Debate

Thus ultimately, blood means much more than the Penobscot notion of tribal belonging via percentages and blood quantum. In the broader framework, blood means family, history, health and disease, and a heritage carried through stories, cultural traditions, customs, and values. Elizabeth has now become part of Louise's history, the history of her depressive condition, which Elizabeth knows may send her back to the hospital at any time. It will send her to the wing that says *Fire Exit* at its entrance, a place of dread and heightened alarm where she will be behind locked doors for her own safety. On the other hand, symbolically, this door also serves as a reminder of transcending the lie of her birth to reach at a truth larger than herself. Together with Charles, Elizabeth will move beyond a simple truth to make room for complexity—one that encompasses suffering but also tolerance, acceptance of difference, and possibly, the joy toward which her final gesture points.

Charles, in turn, the conflicted insider and excluded outsider, has finally bridged the divide. By revealing the truth of his and Elizabeth's multifaceted parentage and through Elizabeth's acceptance of the complexity of her diverse cultural and blood heritage, Charles can now embrace the space in-between, the cultural and legal borderland that had once torn him and his family apart. Leading back to the fraught definition of "internal tribal matters," this outcome constitutes an appeal to the tribal community to rethink their narrow interpretation of the Maine Indian Settlement Act and to reinvent themselves in a world of intricate postcolonial premises and possibilities. It calls for a renewed sense of responsibility toward accepting difference, acknowledging hybridity, and including those who inhabit the space in-between. Ultimately, despite all the pain and sorrow that have weighed on Charles, his diverse family, and the community throughout their lives, the ending holds a promise of hope. It suggests a muted but a genuine sense of joy when father and daughter find commonality in caring for the departed ancestor and, in this act, arrive at an acceptance of each other.

Notes

1 For detailed information, see Bayor's *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History*, which examines how the dominant white power structure in the United States has treated racial and ethnic minorities from the early colonial period through the civil rights era. The collection repeatedly returns to questions of belonging and national identity, asking who is considered American, who is included in the nation, and who is relegated to a position of subordination, and it offers multiple, sometimes historically overlapping, perspectives from its contributors.

2 See "Native American Heritage Month - A Reading List for Adults" by Flyleaf Books.

3 Louise Erdrich graduated with the first class of Dartmouth College's Native American Studies Department. The department was founded in 1972 by Michael Dorris, who also served as its first chair, and later, as a remarkable milestone for the visibility of Native American Studies, cowrote with Louise Erdrich the 1991 novel *The Crown of Columbus*. In a 2025 interview with Bruce Duthu (referenced below), Morgan Talty expressly mentions Louise Erdrich's 2012 novel *The Round House* and the complex legal issues around the conflicting branches of law enforcement authorities when solving a crime on the reservation as an inspiration for the core conundrum in his own novel.

4 The essay was published shortly before the novel came out in 2024, and it addresses the tribal blood quantum issue from a perspective that both parallels and meaningfully contrasts with the one

presented in the novel. Divulging Talty's deep personal involvement in the topic as a lived experience, it renders the matter even more urgent.

[5] Yourish et al. assembled a list of specific words in the *New York Times* under the title "These Words Are Disappearing in the New Trump Administration," noting, "As President Trump seeks to purge the federal government of 'woke' initiatives, agencies have flagged hundreds of words to limit or avoid, according to a compilation of government documents."

[6] In fact, as Berger states, the concept of sovereignty posed a fundamental challenge to the idea of US citizenship and thus adds to the "often heartbreaking but sometimes inspiring complexity of the American experiment" (1121).

[7] The issues of "internal tribal matters," Penobscot citizenship, and blood quantum level have preoccupied Talty for many years. As early as 2020, he published a short essay titled "The Citizenship Question: We the People" in *The Georgia Review*.

[8] Talty explains that "federally recognized tribes have retained their inherent sovereignty to determine 'membership' eligibility" through blood quantum or lineal descent. "But when citizens marry outside of the tribe . . . there is danger for the tribes using blood quantum, that racist and skilled assassin silently committing genocide." He continues his critique: "The blood, the very measurement that determines 'how Native we are' . . . gets 'diluted' the more we marry out . . . until the tribe is on the brink of 'extinction' based on the measurement of blood" ("I'll Show").

[9] Gerald Vizenor comments critically on the term *indian* as an expression of Western misrepresentation, sense of supremacy, and cultural contempt for Native Americans. As he argues, *indian*, a word intentionally italicized by Vizenor, "insinuates the obvious simulation and ruse of colonial dominance." It is "an occidental misnomer . . . that has no referent to real native cultures or communities. Manifest manners [in turn] are the course of dominance, the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of *indian* cultures." Thus, Vizenor strives to capture what he calls "postindian survivance" as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories . . . [that] are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victory" (vii).

[10] This mutual mistrust and reluctance in families to discuss the past also plays a prominent role in the recent documentary *Sugarcane* (2024). In a groundbreaking investigation into the abuse of Indigenous children in the residential school system run by the Catholic Church in Canada, the film shows in moving detail the intergenerational trauma among the members of the Sugarcane reservation in Sugarcane, BC—a trauma that leads to a refusal and inability to speak openly across generations of parents and children, who are burdened by a sense of guilt and hurt.

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