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A NOTE ON FORMAT

For the sake of uniformity and readability, Slideshow articles have been formatted using The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, even in cases where the author’s original honors thesis work used AAA, APA, or MLA formatting. However, in recognition of the interdisciplinary character of these pieces, our authors were allowed to choose either Chicago's Author-Date citation system (more characteristic of the social sciences) or its Notes-Bibliography system (more characteristic of the humanities) for their citations.
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Welcome to the thirteenth volume of Slideshow, the annual journal of the Merle Kling Undergraduate Honors Fellowship Program! Slideshow showcases the humanities and humanistic social-science research that the Center for the Humanities’ Kling Fellows have pursued for a two-year fellowship term. In an era when humanities scholarship is often embattled, this issue of Slideshow offers a window into its continued vitality.

Volume Thirteen of Slideshow is its longest ever, with seven full-length senior articles and a bonus short piece from one of our juniors. Yet these articles fit together in unexpected ways. Marie Bissell and Mary-Claire Sarafianos use very different methodologies to address questions about how identities and genders are constructed and differentiated through perceptions about “correct” language. Shivani Desai and Jessica Thea interrogate the motives behind and the long-term effects of international aid in developing countries, especially as it relates to public health. Shaun Ee and Max Hofmeister both write about the unexpected consequences of changing government policies combined with ongoing bureaucratic inertia. Emily Murphy addresses the historical intersection of policy, race, culture, and music, while junior Kling Fellow Allie Liss touches on many of the same themes when she writes briefly about the 2017 commemoration of the East St. Louis race riots.

Despite these common elements, the Class of 2017 Kling Fellows have remarkably wide-ranging interests. Their research has spanned four continents as well as a broad disciplinary spectrum: the 2017 Slideshow articles are built on foundations ranging from literary analysis to archival exploration, from ethnographic interviews to online surveys. Their authors have majored in Anthropology, Economics, English, History, International and Area Studies, Linguistics, and Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology (to say nothing of minors in French, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychological and Brain Sciences, Sociology, Text and Tradition, and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies). It is a testament to the breadth and flexibility of the Kling Fellows’ scholarship that they have so successfully forged intellectual as well as personal connections between such disparate disciplines and fields.

Over the past two years, Kling Fellowship director Jean Allman and I have enjoyed meeting with these talented and ambitious undergraduates in our weekly seminar here in the Center for the Humanities. It has been our pleasure to see their projects develop, change, and mature under the guidance of their faculty mentors and with advice from two other cohorts of Kling Fellows. I hope you will join us in appreciating their articles.

—Wendy Love Anderson, Ph.D
Academic Coordinator, Center for the Humanities
Managing Editor, Slideshow
Editors’ Note

Just two years ago, we were seven sophomores beginning on this academic journey with big ideas and little direction. None of us imagined that by now we would be well-versed in both organic farming and the dynamics of global health aid as it pertains to obstetric fistula; in fact, most of us would barely even recognize our own projects in their final forms. We came to this fellowship from a wide range of disciplines and the diversity of the projects within our cohort has given us the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary inquiry in new and interesting ways. It has forced each of us to branch out from comfortable positions within our disciplines to devote time and energy to truly understanding one another’s approaches and methods. In our time together, we have helped each other build frameworks of inquiry, refine arguments, and interpret unexpected findings. We have critiqued, we have doled out praise, and we have all come to be invested in and proud of every article included in this publication.

However, looking back at our work, trying to carve out connections between subjects like enslaved fiddlers and the attitudes towards regional speech patterns can seem like a stretch. But we are all drawn together here by similar purposes in carrying out these projects—we are all trying, in one way or another, to not just to bring new ideas to the table, but to use this platform to tell stories that others may have overlooked. Marie is trying to expose the nuances and flaws in the narratives surrounding English in the American South. Shivani studies the stories of women living with obstetric fistula versus the stories that public health organizations endorse. Shaun is navigating the complex story of Kenyan identity in the years after independence from the British Empire. Max is exploring the stories of St. Louis organic farmers in the larger context of industrial agriculture in the United States. Emily is working on responsibly interpreting the stories of enslaved fiddlers. Mary-Claire is trying to translate the possibilities of Emily Dickinson’s dash through the figure of the Daisy. Jess is telling the story of NGO exploitation and India’s power in the aftermath of a 1994 plague. We are all working towards questioning existing narratives and exploring new understandings, as participating in this cohort experience has taught us to do.

The Kling Fellowship has given us an invaluable medium for this exploration and taught us the art of thorough investigation: this journal is the space where we present the fruits of our labor. We have been given the freedom and the guidance to pursue our interests and have been taught to be mindful of the difficulties, but with hope for new and fascinating possibilities along the way. We have all been exploring what it means to investigate our world critically and to explore and question the structures we’ve been presented with, though we may be looking through different lenses. It has been difficult work, and it may be lifelong work for some of us. Regardless, we all walk away from this experience having learned immensely about ourselves and our disciplines.

—Mary-Claire Sarafianos and Marie Bisell
Editors of Slideshow 2017
Mapping Prejudice: A Perceptual Dialectology Approach to Evaluating Language Attitudes towards South-Perceived Speech in the United States

Marie Bissell

This study provides evidence that everyday English speakers in the United States think about and assign characteristics to speakers perceived to be from the American South in a way that interacts with both region and gender. Participants were asked to complete a survey consisting of 12 audio samples from different regions, each of which was paired with a Likert matrix of attitudinal labels and a heat map for indicating perceived origin. Statistical analyses reveal that South-perceived speech samples were rated significantly lower than average \((p = .01)\) on measures of intelligence, education, wealth, and formality. A vowel variant analysis demonstrates that the common phonetic feature among these items is the Southern Vowel Shift, specifically Stage 1 and Stage 3. Finally, I examine perceived speaker gender and argue that gender operationalizes differently depending on the perceived geographic origin of the speaker.

As much as we may want language to be an independent domain, capable of objective and exact description in space for all of its features at once, we can only access language systems as they are bound up with the cultural matrix and as part of our perceptions. (Kretzschmar 2011, 190)

Although linguistics acts operate under the guise of strictly communicating verbal content, they are also social phenomena imbued with indexical characteristics. Certain dialects carry with them connotations of prestige, while others are socially intertwined with stereotypes of illiteracy and incorrectness. The regionality of these speech judgments has been analyzed extensively in existing scholarship (Wolfram and Estes 1998, Ash 2003, Eckert 2004, Labov et al. 2006). This particular research study seeks to collect and analyze data pertaining to language attitudes towards English speakers perceived to be from the Southern United States, a region that has been paid considerable attention in the field as well (Preston 1989, Wolfram 2003, Nagle and Sanders 2003, Cramer 2013). The results of the present research study indicate that South-perceived speech is a distinctive linguistic category in the minds of everyday Americans, hypothesized to be set apart from other dialects by its vowel patterns and the attitudinal judgments that become socially attached to them.

**Historical Considerations and Existing Research**

**Setting the Stage**

Perceptual dialectology lies at the intersection of dialectology and sociolinguistics. Until Preston published his seminal work in 1989, the two fields were largely separate from one another in terms of scholarship produced. Dialectology had been largely descriptive in nature, focusing on precisely mapping dialect attributes and boundar-
ies by means of extensive survey fieldwork. On the other hand, sociolinguistics had zeroed in on the social aspects of linguistic variation. From Raven McDavid's (1948) work on postvocalic /r/ in South Carolina to John Gumperz's (1958) analysis of linguistic stratification in a north Indian village, scholars in this field worked towards developing an understanding of how dialects interact with social processes.

Notably, William Labov's 1966 paramount book *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* shifted the methodological paradigm that had long reigned in the academic community. Instead of using semi-structured interviews to elicit linguistic data from participants, he chose to adopt the parlous approach of anonymously observing speakers in social environments in order to acquire authentic speech data absent an explicit observational context. In addition to supporting McDavid and Gumperz's conclusions about the social stratification of language, Labov's work demonstrated that those results could be replicated with a new methodology that did not involve directly interviewing participants.

McDavid, Gumperz, and Labov all studied how language becomes socially stratified within different speech communities. One important concept that is common to all three of their works is that social stratification of language is sensitive to geospatial considerations of class distribution and notions of linguistic prestige. There is a distinctly geographic tint to how language becomes socially stratified, from McDavid's maps of postvocalic /r/ in South Carolina to Gumperz's account of strict geographic class boundaries in Khalapur to Labov's observations about postvocalic /r/ based on proximity to the Lower East Side of New York City. These pivotal studies, in combination with concurrent developments in descriptive dialectology, contributed to the advent of perceptual dialectology, the field that combines considerations of both the social stratification of language and dialect mapping.

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1 Hans Kurath's *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* and *Linguistic Atlas of New England* both exemplify this disciplinary paradigm. They extensively catalogued phonological, lexical, and grammatical variation among different United States geographic areas. Kurath’s books pioneered both theory and methods in the field of descriptive dialectology, particularly the usage of a structured interview technique. Later works, including those by Frederic Cassidy and William Kretzschmar, expanded upon this to strengthen existing methods and offer new insights into surveying.

2 McDavid's 1948 work introduced the notion of linguistic prestige, which is positive regard that individuals can hold for a linguistic feature or variety. Gumperz's study expanded upon this to suggest that stratified speech community members are aware of linguistic prestige to the extent of adjusting speech habits in certain social situations. Both McDavid and Gumperz utilized semi-structured ethnographic interviews in their research.

3 For this study, Labov focused on observing the postvocalic /r/ (much as McDavid had in South Carolina) in everyday speech used in different New York City department stores. He hypothesized that frequency of postvocalic /r/ in employee speech would correspond to the perceived social prestige of each particular department store. Employees at the highest-class department store, Saks Fifth Avenue, were 42 percent more likely to use the postvocalic /r/ than employees at the lowest-class one, Klein's. Labov concluded from his data that the postvocalic /r/ speech feature was indeed socially stratified in a way that suggested linguistic differences could be attributed to socioeconomic stratification.
Perceptual Dialectology

Dennis Preston’s 1989 *Perceptual Dialectology: Nonlinguists’ Views of Areal Linguistics* set the stage for the development of this new discipline. Preston’s study diverged from existing scholarship in dialect mapping because it relied upon folk perceptions of dialect areas rather than wide-ranging descriptive studies of speech features among populations themselves. Unlike the previous contributions to dialect surveying by Kurath, Cassidy, and Kretzschmar, Preston’s book focused on how everyday Americans subjectively perceived dialect differences and how that related to language attitudes towards varying dialect speakers. He wrote, “Nonlinguists know that groups of people form bounded zones of linguistic similarity, and the principal task of a perceptual dialectology is to find out where they believe those boundaries are” (Preston 2010, “Language, Space, and the Folk,” 179). Notably, dialect attitudes have been conceptualized as a way for everyday speakers to classify and make sense of their linguistic surroundings (Niedzielski and Preston 2009, 357). His methodology for this study was innovative because it sought to more accurately capture language attitudes as everyday Americans experienced them by examining their subjective mental maps of dialect areas as they related to different linguistic judgments.⁴

Attitudes towards language consist of a tripartite structure made up of cognitive, behavioral, and affective components. Collectively, these factors contribute to the formation of an attitude that can be defined as “a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects” (Sarnoff 1970, 279). Peter Garrett (2003) further clarifies the importance of language attitudes research: “Whether they are favorable or prejudiced, attitudes to language varieties and their users at least provide a coherent map of the social world….At the intergroup level, stereotypes can serve two major social collective functions: a social-explanatory function and a social-differentiation function” (3). Indeed, connections between speech forms and nonlinguistic social information serve as “anchor points” (Williams 2005, 367) in folk perceptions. “When listeners are asked to assess…an unfamiliar talker based on a short sample of speech, they first activate a dialect representation and then respond based on the connections between that representation and stereotypes about that dialect that are stored as non-linguistic social information” (Preston & Niedzielski 2010, 208-209). Particular speech characteristics come to be “imagined as connected with focal individuals and scenes, or with characteristic activities and ways of being; and in consequence they may be drawn upon…to display attitudes or define situations” (Irvine 2001, 31).

Notably, these ideological conceptualizations of imagined social characteristics can be significantly impactful in the lives of everyday language users in a way that preempts their actual social characteristics. Giles and Powesland note, “[R]esults leave no doubt that dialect differences can impose a priori constraints on an individual’s social acceptability and occupational mobility” (1975). In fact, Preston’s conclusion ultimately echoes these observations in his commentary on how speech style comes

to index languidness among South-perceived speakers:

It is perhaps the least surprising thing imaginable to find that attitudes towards languages and their varieties seem to be tied to attitudes towards groups of people….For the folk mind, such correlations are obvious, reaching down even into the linguistic details of the language or variety itself….US Southerners are laid-back and lazy; just listen to their lazy, drawled vowels. (Preston 2010, “Language with an Attitude,” 112)

Speech style is a complex way in which interlocutors are continuously redefining and reconceptualizing what it means to be their authentic linguistic selves. Irvine notes, “Whatever ‘styles’ are, in language or elsewhere, they are part of a system of distinction, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings” (22). Indeed, self-definition through linguistic acts is a process in which individuals seek to simultaneously identify with one perceived group and disaffiliate themselves with other perceived social categorizations. An individual’s construction of the social meaning of their own speech may be drastically different than an observer’s conceptualization of their speech characteristics. Irvine (2001) comments on this perplexing distribution of linguistic ideas and communities:

[T]he need to investigate ideas about language and speakers independently of empirical distributions, and the need to recognize that ‘attitudes’ include participants’ basic understandings of what the sociolinguistic system consists of, not just emotional dispositions. Moreover, the categories and behaviors toward which one has these attitudes cannot be assumed to have been established independently of anyone’s perception of them. (24)

It would be an immense stretch of the imagination to say that the participants in this research study possess uniform ideas about linguistic forms and characteristics (Mendoza-Denton 2010). The array of internal ideological categories that they use to determine attitude judgments and speech origins are incredibly nuanced, despite the fact that they are not reflective of concrete linguistic facts about dialects and their speakers. However, uncovering and analyzing these ideologies at work can offer insight into how language ideological processes play a pivotal role in affecting speech judgments. The experimental design’s emphasis on drawing attention away from language attitude judgments and directing it towards the relatively minute objective of correctly identifying speaker origins as a test of dialect sensitivity is intentional, and it seeks to record linguistic judgments in a way that is both genuine and revealing in terms of language ideologies that may be lurking below surface-level evaluative tools.

When evaluating language attitudes within the field of perceptual dialectology,
it is important to pinpoint their source as geographic in nature. Simply offering a recorded dialect sample and measuring attitudes towards it is a strategy bereft of this geographic element, because it is not clear where the subject perceives the recorded speaker to be from. In order to capture this salient dimension of language attitudes, the researcher must relate attitudinal speech judgments to mental maps of perceived dialect areas. For his study, Preston accounted for this by asking respondents to physically draw distinct dialect regions they perceived to exist on a map of the United States. He then measured their attributions of speech characteristics to each region they had drawn on the map. After analyzing his data, Preston (1999) noted that, “The salience of southern speech would appear to lie in its distinctiveness along one particular dimension—it is incorrect English” (365). In a related work, Preston (1993) offers the following observation:

In fact, all areas except the South were assigned some such positive label at least once. It was also the case that these Hawaii respondents as well as those in every other area investigated showed a much higher proportion of respondents who identified a ‘Southern’ speech area than any other…. These results suggest that 1) regard for language correctness plays a role in areal distinctiveness and 2) areas perceived as least correct have greater distinctiveness. (345)

The seemingly indelible distinctiveness of the dialect spoken in the American South is the starting point for my current research. This project seeks to investigate the inner workings of folk perceptions about language correctness and how Preston’s original methods can be revised to capture more accurate linguistic data points. Through a careful analysis of how everyday speakers of English in the United States think about and categorize Southern speech, this study aims to examine the following research questions:

1. Which specific language attitude judgments are assigned to South-perceived speakers significantly more than they are to speakers perceived to be from elsewhere in the United States?
2. Which speech cues or mechanisms, if any, underlie the distribution of language attitudes judgments attributed to South-perceived speakers?
3. In which ways, if any, does gender meaningfully interact with regional speech judgments?

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were 77 randomly selected Washington University undergraduate students who are native English speakers from diverse geographical backgrounds.
Experimental Design

This project seeks to analyze dialect mapping and language attitudes both theoretically and empirically. The research survey contained items that were designed to directly elicit attitudinal judgments about speakers in a precise and efficient manner. Previous scholars noted, “Experimental studies of speech perception provide quantitative, empirical insights into the perception and representation of linguistic and sociolinguistic variation without relying on the potentially unreliable impressions of linguistically naïve participants” (Preston and Niedzielski 2010, 203). Considering this comment, I have chosen to revise Preston’s original survey method by switching to direct elicitations of attitudes based on real-time speech samples. Each item on the survey contains three portions: an audio recording of a speech sample, a Likert scale grid to evaluate language attitudes, and a heat map of the United States for indicating the speaker’s perceived origin.

The audio recording of the speech sample is designed to minimize the likelihood that factors other than dialect characteristics are influencing respondents’ speech judgments. Twelve clear, moderately paced speech samples were selected from George Mason University’s Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger 2015); in each case, the sample was recorded from a native English speaker who had spent the majority of their life-span in roughly the same geographic location. This measure was taken to minimize the chance that the speakers recorded were not native speakers of English or recent geographic transplants to their current locations. The speech samples that were ultimately chosen came from both male and female subjects who were geographically dispersed throughout the continental United States. Though my hypothesis directly addresses language attitudes towards speakers perceived to be from the American South, I was also interested in discerning overarching attitude trends towards samples from across the country in order to evaluate them alongside data gathered concerning South-perceived speech items.

The next portion of each survey item is a matrix table question with columns in the form of a Likert scale and rows labeled with social attitude indicators, chosen for its rich history in sociolinguistic research methodologies (Labov et al. 2011). The unique design of the five-item Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree) gives the participant the opportunity to select from a spectrum of response choices as opposed to a strictly binary setup, allowing for nuance and precision when answering. The social attitude indicators that will be used include intelligent, educated, wealthy, likeable, formal, and correct. They explicitly relate to social characteristics that both I and previous scholars hypothesize could influence individual perceptions of different dialect speakers, including those corroborated by Dennis Preston. In fact, Zahn and Hopper (1985) conducted a factor analysis of a large pool of adjectives for describing language varieties and found that there are three primary scales of assessment: superiority (educated, wealthy), attractiveness (friendly, likeable), and dynamism (lazy, enthusiastic) (120).

The final section of each survey item is a heat map image of the United States. The participant is able to click exactly on the image where they perceive the recorded
speaker to be from. This diverges from Preston’s methodology, as his relied on hand-drawn dialect regions on physical maps:

Although we may profit from an investigation of these individual maps..., their usefulness for general language attitude studies depends on the degree to which generalizations may be drawn from large numbers of such maps. This may be done by drawing an (approximate boundary) for each salient region from the first map and then overlaying each subsequent responder’s map and drawing the ‘perceptual isoglosses’ for each region. (Preston 2010, “Language with an Attitude,” 119)

Figure 1: A Michigan resident’s hand-drawn map (Preston, 1989)

However, my digitization of this task improves the accuracy of composite maps and allows the subject to directly pinpoint an exact location for a recorded speaker. When compiling this survey data, Qualtrics survey software creates a composite heat map for each item. This makes it possible to determine approximate regions where respondents perceive speakers to be from based on precise, empirical data. Additionally, digitization allows for more exact statistical analysis and more efficient creation of composite maps.

More broadly, I approached survey design in a way that is intended to elicit genuine and candid judgments from participants. Peter Garrett (2003) notes:

The main methodological challenge of language attitudes research is to assess whether specific manifestations or indices of evaluative stances to language varieties or users are reliable indicators of underlying social tendencies. Reflexivity is what allows us to access attitudes empirically, but it is also a potential source of systematic error in measuring attitudes. (10)

The questionnaire was framed as a reflexive measure of general dialect sensitivity, and the audio recordings included feature a variety of dialects from across the United
States. “Although participants are well-placed in some respects to offer a sociolinguistic analysis (since participation means close acquaintance with the system [of linguistic differentiation]), in other respects they are poorly placed to do so (since participations also means interestedness)” (Irvine 2001, 24). This approach to survey design nullifies the “interestedness” of the participants in the primary subject of research, attitudes towards South-perceived speech; instead, participants’ attention is redirected towards focusing on producing accurate geographic dialect placements for all of the speech samples presented. Despite my particularly strong interest in language attitudes towards speakers perceived to be from the American South, the general dialect sensitivity framing of the survey minimizes participants’ awareness of this research objective and thus increases the likelihood that they will describe their attitudes honestly and accurately.

It is important to note that the participants in this study are situated social actors with their own contextual and circumstantial dispositions. Irvine elaborates:

In short, participants in some community of discourse are not entirely objective observers of each other’s [speech] behaviors. Yet, their own acts are deeply influenced by their perceptions and interpretations of those behaviors. Language ideologies are therefore to be investigated independently of the distribution of observable sociolinguistic facts, not as a substitute for them. (25)

Participants cannot be expected to act as objective speech observers, and their dialect judgments through the measures implemented in this survey design reveal a great deal about their existing cognitive, sociolinguistic ideologies and maps. Irvine continues, “Instead, some of the most important and interesting aspects of ideology lie behind the scenes, in assumptions that are taken for granted—that are never explicitly stated in any format that would permit them also to be explicitly denied” (25). The gaps between formal linguistic facts and language attitude judgments can be accounted for by language ideological processes, which operationalize power dynamics and stereotyping to forge social differences among groups. This study seeks to covertly investigate these underlying ideological processes that operate on everyday speech acts in a way that empirically captures their fundamental natures and distributions in the linguistic conceptualizations of research participants.

Quantitative Methods for Data Analysis

Single-sample t-tests performed in SPSS software were used to evaluate the significance of language attitude scores on the Likert matrix. Each attitudinal descriptor for each speech sample was analyzed independently, totaling 72 single-sample t-tests.

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6 See Labov 1966 on the importance of candidness in attitude judgment measurements.

7 See Williams 2005, who writes extensively about the usage of single-sample t-tests in the context of semantic scales used for sociolinguistic data collection.
Of these analyses, 52 of them were statistically significant (p=.01). Single-sample t-tests are designed to evaluate whether actual outcomes differ significantly from expected outcomes. In the context of the language attitude judgments in this study, this means that the single-sample t-test is determining whether actual mean ratings on each Likert item are significantly different than the expected mean rating of 3, which would indicate a “neither agree nor disagree” response. Any mean rating that is significantly different from the expected mean rating can be considered either a positive or negative, rather than a neutral, language attitude judgment.

**Results**

**Statistical Analysis of Likert Scale Matrices**

The first significant trend that emerges from the data is that Southern-perceived speech samples were consistently rated lower than the expected average in multiple attitudinal categories. Below is the heat map for a speech sample originating in Mt. Holly, North Carolina:

![Figure 2: A cumulative perceptual heat map for a speaker from Mt. Holly, North Carolina](image)

It is worth noting that this speech sample scored significantly below average on four different Likert categories (Intelligent: 2.359, Educated: 2.4103, Wealthy: 2.6667, Formal: 2.4359). On the other hand, this sample also scored significantly above the expected outcome in the Likeable category (3.641). These trends exist across speech
samples from three other locations that were perceived as originating from the South: Blytheville, Arkansas; Mamou, Louisiana; and Orange Beach, Alabama.

The second trend involves an almost completely antithetical effect for North-perceived speech. Below is the heat map for a speech sample originating in Spokane, Washington:

![Heat map for speech sample originating in Spokane, Washington]

Figure 3: A cumulative perceptual heat map for a speaker from Spokane, Washington

As opposed to the North Carolina speech sample, this speech sample was rated significantly above the expected mean on five attitudinal Likert categories (Intelligent: 3.5584, Educated: 3.6364, Wealthy: 3.2338, Likeable: 3.5455, Correct: 3.5974). These trends exist across speech samples from three other locations that were perceived as originating from the North: New York, New York; Riverside, California; and St. Louis, Missouri.

A third trend that becomes apparent when examining the data is that North-perceived speech samples that actually originated from Southern speakers were rated similarly to North-perceived speech samples that actually originated from Northern speakers. Below is the heat map for a speech sample originating in Russellville, Kentucky:
In this case, attitude judgments mimic those attitudinal Likert judgments assigned by participants to North-perceived speech that is actually produced by Northern speakers (Intelligent: 3.4231, Educated: 3.4615, Wealthy: 3.2179, Likeable: 3.3590, Correct: 3.5513). This trend was also present in the speech sample from Duluth, Georgia.

These three overall trends support the notion that perceived speaker origin rather than actual speaker origin determines how language attitudes are conceptualized and decided upon by listeners. North-perceived speech samples are significantly associated with positive attitudinal judgments, even when the speaker’s actual origin is the South. Additionally, the uniformity of these significant language attitude judgments across speech samples suggests that they can be considered overarching trends in how listeners classify dialects of American English.

Another important trend to consider is that participants rarely had exceptionally strong opinions about speech samples perceived to be from the Upper Midwest or California. Below is the heat map for a speech sample originating in Chicago, Illinois:
Figure 5: A cumulative perceptual heat map for a speaker from Chicago, Illinois

It is important to note that there is only one significant attitudinal Likert judgment for this speech sample (Formal: 2.5513). Another crucial feature of this heat map is that perceptions are incredibly widespread and not particularly accurate, even to the point that the most popular estimate was somewhere in central California. In fact, quite a few speech samples that were rated neutrally or positively were incredibly spread out, including those originating in Duluth, Georgia; Riverside, California; and St. Louis, Missouri.

Vowel Variants and Classification Cues

In order to determine which audio cues listeners were relying on to determine dialect judgments and discern geographic origins, each speech sample was analyzed for meaningful phonetic variation. Although consonants were relatively uniform, vowel variation across the speech samples was readily apparent. The process of chain shifting is important for developing an understanding of how and why vowel variants occur in different dialects of English in the United States. The Southern Vowel Shift provides especially salient insights into the patterning of the data in this study because it potentially provides a systematic way for listeners to identify regional dialects and mentally classify them into distinct linguistic categories.

Examining the phonetic qualities of the speech samples from this angle using

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8 See Thomas 2000 and Thomas 2002 on applying phonetic analysis techniques to sociolinguistic variation.
Praat provides numerous insights into how listeners may be utilizing phonetic cues to mentally sort speakers into different dialect categories (Clopper and Pisoni 2004). In order to isolate these phonetic cues, this analysis treats vowels as linguistic variables (Watt 2007). Below is a chart of phonetic vowel transcriptions for a few vowel variants of particular interest, which are bolded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Origin</th>
<th>“Five”</th>
<th>“Kids”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blytheville, Arkansas</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ɐ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, Illinois</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duluth, Georgia</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamou, Louisiana</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Holly, North Carolina</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, New York</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Beach, Alabama</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside, California</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russellville, Kentucky</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokane, Washington</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis, Missouri</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin</td>
<td>ɐ̈</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: A phonetic transcription chart for the vowels in “five” and “kids”

The rows with bolded text indicate the speech samples that reflect the Southern Vowel Shift, while the acoustic qualities of the other samples remain unaffected (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006). For the vowel in “five,” these four South-perceived speech samples reflect the Stage 1 shift in which /aɪ/ moves to the acoustic space of /ɐ/. This iteration of the SVS is complete for the vast majority of Southern dialects in the present day, with the exception of some eastern coastal areas such as Atlanta, Georgia (244). This empirical observation provides a potential explanation for the fact that the speech sample from Duluth, Georgia (a suburb of Atlanta) lacks evidence of this Stage 1 process, and subsequently why it is overwhelmingly not South-perceived by research participants in this study. In consequence, this Duluth, Georgia speech sample also avoids the negative Likert judgments assigned to South-perceived speech samples. A similar argument could be made for the Russellville, Kentucky sample, which also appears to avoid being South-perceived and the Likert judgments associated with that determination. In this case, the Russellville sample may be dodg-

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ing Stage 1 of the SVS due to its location on the geographical periphery of the area empirically affected by the SVS. It could perhaps be classified as a marginally Southern area, but not enough so that it elicits attitudinal judgments to the extent that distinctively South-perceived locations experience.

Figure 7: Geographic rendering of the four South-perceived speakers’ actual origins

Additional evidence in favor of this interpretation has to do with vowel variance in the lexical item “kids.” In the South-perceived speech samples, the vowel reflects the Stage 3 shift in which /ɪ/ moves to the acoustic space of /iə/ (248). This iteration of the SVS has been empirically documented most often in the Inland South, an area that may arguably exclude metropolitan areas encompassing locations such as Duluth in addition to marginal upper Regional areas such as Russellville. Neither the Duluth sample nor the Russellville sample reflects Stage 3 of the SVS, suggesting that they are indeed excluded from research participants’ mental representation of the American South as only the perceived geographic area in which Stage 1 of the SVS has occurred. In combination with previous analysis of the vowel variance in “five,” this phonetic evaluation of vowel data suggests that individuals unknowingly think about the American South as a linguistic region using Stage 1 and Stage 3 SVS processes.

Consequently, there is a formal linguistic basis for asserting that the Duluth and Russellville samples are being perceived differently than the South-perceived samples in this study (Guy 2010). Though these two locations may or may not be within a participant’s mental representation of the American South, the acoustic properties of the speech samples themselves provide a basis for determining inclusion in a participant’s linguistic conceptualization of the region. However, it is crucial to note that the four South-perceived speech samples were consistently rated significantly below average on multiple attitudinal measures on the Likert matrix. Below is a summary of the Likert judgments for these four South-perceived speech samples, with statistically significant values bolded (p=.01):
Figure 8: A chart of Likert attitudinal judgments for speech samples that reflect the SVS

It is evident from this data that listeners are likely utilizing vowel variants to classify dialects. Considering that the vowels in Figure 6 constitute the only vowel differences common among the four speech samples perceived to be from the South, it is reasonable to hypothesize that listeners are consistently relying on those variants to identify Southern speech. Therefore, the distinctiveness of South-perceived speakers would appear to lie in their idiosyncratic vowel usages, which then become tied to social stereotypes, as illustrated by attitudinal judgments on the Likert matrix.

**Preliminary Implications for National Trends**

Although these results support the distinctiveness of the American South as a conceptualized dialect region, they also reflect the perceived aregionality of speech samples that are not categorized as South-perceived in the listener’s mind. The heat maps generated for non-South-perceived speech samples show that listeners are incredibly inaccurate at classifying them geographically, with estimates ranging from California to New England (see figures 3-5). I argue that the relative regional ambiguity of dialects perceived as non-Southern supports the notion that the American South is a distinctive dialect region in the linguistic consciousness of English speakers in the United States, and furthermore that this distinctiveness is unique to South-perceived speech, given the findings presented in this research study.

**Exploratory Analysis of Speech, Gender, and Region**

Given the overwhelming salience of gender in linguistic analysis, it is worthwhile to examine the ways in which perceived speaker gender influences attitude judgments. It is important to note that linguistic acts implicitly perform aspects of gender in a process that constructs social gender identities. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (2001) write:
[G]ender doesn't just exist, but is continually produced, reproduced, and indeed changed through people's performance of gendered acts, as they project their own claimed gender identities, ratify or challenge others' identities, and in various ways support or challenge systems of gender relations and privilege. As Erving Goffman (1977) pointed out, even walking into a public toilet—which is always saliently gendered—does gender. (5)

In this sense, language as a performative social act must then indeed project certain notions of gender into the overall social space in which that speech is situated. It is for this reason that the audio speech samples utilized in this research study are irremovably marked by the frameworks through which everyday Americans think about gender as a conceptual category. This situation closely parallels that of how individuals think about the regionality of speech within their own internal linguistic frameworks. There is often a significant discrepancy between an individual's mental mapping of social categories such as regionality and the lived experiences of those who belong to those perceived social categories. This same process occurs when individuals conceptualize what gender means to them. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet continue:

[T]here is considerable distance between the gender stereotypes that are available to us all, and the behavior of real people as they go about their business in the world. But the relation between stereotypes and behavior is itself interesting, for the stereotypes constitute norms...that we do not obey, but that we orient to. They serve as a kind of organizing device in society, an ideological map, setting out the range of possibility within which we place ourselves and assess others. (86-87)

In order to account for the gap that exists between perceived social characteristics and actual human behaviors in an everyday setting, it is necessary to consider how ideological notions about how particular individuals should behave given their perceived social affiliations construct a coherent gender regime within American society. In the current research study, I chose to approach the data through a gendered lens while still accounting for previous results that show the strong distinction between South-perceived and non-South-perceived speech samples. In order to execute this analysis, I bifurcated the dataset into South-perceived (four speakers) and non-South-perceived (eight speakers) groups for statistical analysis. Within each group, I performed a two-sample independent t-test comparing mean Likert ratings for male-perceived and female-perceived speakers for each Likert dimension. The results of this analysis are below, with statistically significant differences at the p=.05 level bolded:
Two notable trends emerge from these statistical investigations. First, the vast majority of Likert items reflect statistically significant differences in attitudinal ratings on the basis of perceived speaker gender. Although this finding was not entirely unexpected, it sets up the salience of the second notable data trend rather well. This second finding strongly suggests that perceived speaker gender is operating in fundamentally opposite ways in South-perceived and non-South-perceived speech samples. For South-perceived speech, woman-perceived speakers were rated significantly higher than man-perceived speakers on every Likert attitudinal category except correctness. For non-South-perceived speech, woman-perceived speakers were rated significantly lower than man-perceived speakers on every Likert attitudinal category except wealth. These starkly opposite results provide evidence that perceived speaker regionality significantly influences the gender frameworks through which they are assessed, causing regard towards woman-perceived speakers to vary depending on their perceived geographic origin as well.

It would appear that non-South-perceived speakers fall victim to historical gender hierarchies that place man-perceived speech over woman-perceived speech, likely a reflection of lingering sexism in American society. However, South-perceived speakers are perplexingly excluded from this deeply ingrained American gender hierarchy. According to the current study, everyday Americans currently think about gender and region as a hierarchical structure that is nuanced in a way that a gender hierarchy alone is not. Though South-perceived speakers are still rated lower on Likert items than North-perceived speakers in absolute terms, the relative ordering of Likert rankings produces an interesting mental gradation of speaker perceptions (from most highly regarded to least highly regarded): non-Southern man, non-Southern woman, Southern woman, and Southern man. The precise reasons for these results are cur-
rently under investigation and will require more extensive research in the future. Existing literature on gender and region is sparse, and perhaps the only salient observation in existing literature is limited in its applicability to the current research study:

Women are regarded in nearly all the sociolinguistic literature as more likely users of standard speech (e.g., Trudgill 1972), but this finding is apparently also a folk stereotype, for our respondents regard a female voice with no distinctive characteristics other than sex identity as “more northern” (a feature characteristically regarded as “more standard” in US folk linguistics, e.g., Preston 1996). Mental maps will have to be cognizant of such sociocultural stereotypes as formative in the construction of linguistic mental spaces. (Preston 2010, “Language, Space, and the Folk,” 194-195)

The reason for this gender asymmetry could possibly be explained by Preston’s observation, because technically, in the current study, South-perceived and non-South-perceived women were closer to the expected Likert judgment of 3 (neither agree nor disagree) than men were. However, the data strongly suggests that some other explanation is both possible and probable. The tendency for women’s speech to be perceived as more standard is an incomplete explanation in this case because it does not provide motivation for the complete reversal of gender hierarchy in the context of regional speech varieties. Gender and region has thus far garnered very little scholarly attention, and this analysis constitutes a significant empirical contribution to a largely neglected subsection of research on the intersectionality of gender and other social factors in language attitude studies.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study are preliminary in nature, and additional investigation is certainly needed to further validate these findings. The parameters of this study limited the types of data that could be analyzed, and it is likely that there are factors influencing regional dialect judgments that have not been addressed here. Notably, this study did not meaningfully account for the factor of race, which has both historically and presently constituted a colossal consideration in language attitude studies. Additionally, this research project was limited by its scale: although it may be advantageous to analyze dialect attitudes on a scale as large as the continental United States in order to discern larger trends, such a large scale may also fail to capture detailed nuances that would become more apparent were a more region-focused study undertaken. Additionally, the current iteration of this study does not take into account the geographic origins or dialects of the participants. Though this information has been collected, it has not yet been analyzed fully. In the future, investigating these data further may provide other significant insights into how different speakers perceive regional dialects by revealing the influence of factors such as proximity and familiarity.
Conclusions

The results in this study clarify the role of perceptual speech judgments in the conceptualization of dialect regions in the United States. Through a measured analysis of both speaker judgments and vowel variance, the results confirm that South-perceived speech exists in the linguistic consciousness of these American participants in a very specific way; namely, it is imagined as regionally cohesive and its speakers are assigned distinct, negative social characteristics. It is important to note that the Southern Vowel Shift is only one possible explanatory mechanism; however, the findings presented here provide compelling support for this interpretation. Additionally, the analyses of gender and region suggest that perceived speaker regionality can significantly influence attitudes towards perceived speaker gender in a way that produces one hierarchy in South-perceived speech and another, reversed hierarchy in non-South-perceived speech. Given current discussions among scholars concerning the nature of language attitudes and to what extent they are influenced by individual conceptualizations of gender and region, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how dialect judgments are mentally constructed and organized.

Bibliography


Centering Women’s Voices: 
Global Narratives and Local Realities of Obstetric 
Fistula, Contested Spaces and Decisions of Care 

Shivani Desai

Within the Western-dominated international health care system, the experiences of women in the 
Global South are often overlooked, ignored, dismissed, and deprioritized. Medical issues such as 
obstetric fistula—ones that can be prevented, yet continue to afflict millions of women worldwide— 
exemplify this cruel reality of structural inequity. In this paper, I explore the disparity in understand 
ings of fistula between levels of proximity when moving from local realities in Iganga, Uganda to 
international perspectives in Geneva, Switzerland. From community care to international policy 
work, I investigate how these differences in perception affect the aid offered to Ugandan women. 
At its core, this project seeks to contribute to scholarship on global health and development work 
by uplifting and giving space to voices that are too often marginalized within international work. 
Through centering women’s voices, policymakers can come to understand authentic needs and how 
best to strengthen humanitarian health aid.

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Introduction: Challenging the "Savior"

“I wouldn’t say that we are very good at trying to engage women experiencing fistula.” I sit on a plush wooden bench at a cafe booth of Médecins Sans Frontières Holland (MSF), interviewing the main reproductive health specialist over rich dark coffee and crumbly cookies. We discuss the efforts MSF takes surrounding maternal health and fistula, as this expert has generously given a random American student half an hour of her time on a Friday. She speaks passionately and enthusiastically about her work, and it is quite clear that reproductive health is meaningful and important to her, yet, she seems caught off guard by my questions. I ask her about sustainability, and how decisions are made regarding policy and programmatic responses to women facing fistula, if the women with fistula are involved, and she wryly admits that she does not think her organization - or really any, for that matter - is particularly good at accounting for the voices of affected women, “I suppose that is something we need to improve upon in our work.”

The international community - often being incredibly well-intentioned - deploys rhetoric of women’s rights and health for all, yet can fail to authentically prioritize and uplift women, rather crusading to save, obsess over, and judge the bodies and choices of black and brown women in disempowering, misaligned ways. Policymakers and removed experts do not often include the voices and experiences of the target or affected population in aid decisions, falling short of prioritizing authentic needs of communities they seek to help. The neocolonial world of aid encompasses a long and loaded history of interventions and efforts that have not only remained ineffective, but also caused harm. It is steeped in histories of Western dominance and oppression, and still exists in a space of great inequity, one that dictates asymmetrical and imbalanced global systems of power, one in which structures of colonialism, poverty, and injustice have left remnants of violence - wide gaps in access and opportunity. This system has privileged western voices, entrenching the Global South in a forced role of silent receiver, placing blame and judgment on entire communities and cultures in the name of health and human rights.

As former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon states, “obstetric fistula is...a stark example of health inequity in the world.” Obstetric fistula is a condition that unacceptably affects thousands of women in the Global South, yet it is entirely preventable and virtually nonexistent in the Global North due to this uneven distribution of wealth and access to care. It is an issue that the Ugandan government has sought to combat, working with local, national, and global organizations to bring care and help to women who need it.
Western intervention has a murky history and can often perpetuate flawed systems and promote disempowering unsustainable cycles. We have a responsibility to combat structural violence and promote women’s health by prioritizing obstetric fistula as an unacceptable reality that must be combatted.

These two existing truths are seemingly at odds and represent the deeply complex and dizzyingly confusing reality and responsibility of global health aid. It is because of uneven systems of power and resources that prioritizing important health issues and working toward equitable allocation of health care and resources is critical; yet it is the manner in which the Western-dominated international community chooses to intervene that requires further critical interrogation. Furthermore, while the prioritization of aid for fistula is one issue, it is essential to acknowledge that even if given enough attention and funding, not all interventions are equal, and not all are necessarily beneficial. Although the call for fistula aid is paramount, so too is the need to critically assess the ethics and efficacy of such interventions. Global health aid necessitates constant reflection and questioning to strive for the best solutions: which solutions are Band-aid fixes, and which will be sustainable and empowering to local communities in the long-run? How can we prevent a repetition of humanitarian intentions hiding colonialist intentions and move forward in an ethical, respectful, and compassionate manner? What assumptions does the West hold when it sets out to “save” black and brown bodies, and how are these assumptions harmful?

In this project, I seek to examine the disparities between understandings and perceptions of fistula between different levels of proximity, analyzing how narratives change from western global policymakers and experts to national policymakers to local politicians to midwives nurses and community health workers to former fistula patients themselves. Through my research, I hope to determine how these disparate constructions of understandings within global aid and policy impact the individual lived experiences of women with fistula. This paper will interrogate this framework through focusing on the choice and dignity of care for women before and after they are affected with fistula, navigating the politics of clinical care and local care, while weaving between Western and local Ugandan perspectives. Ultimately, I argue that international organizations pin traditional birth attendants as a root cause of fistula, and in doing so, pin blame on women by portraying them as forgoing the clinic for reasons such as lack of information or being pulled in by the unwarranted social capital of traditional birth attendants, leaving little room to give reason or rationale behind why women may make this choice. I argue that while some women may have constrained agency due to poverty or transportation factors, some are practicing informed decision-making, considering deeply personal choices and factors surrounding their health, their care, and their bodies.

**Literature Review: The Tenuous Balance of Global & Local**

The literature surrounding obstetric fistula is varied, requiring a profoundly intersectional lens to fully address each component of the issue, making the fields of
Biomedicine, History, Medical Anthropology, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Political Science, and International Development all deeply relevant to the study. The literature includes texts such as World Health Organization technical reports, ethnographic fieldwork on stigma, community perceptions, and access to health care, academic theory regarding global health law, Western medicalization, unsustainable foreign aid, and philanthro-capitalism, and feminist literature regarding Western hegemony, neo-colonialism, and agency.

While understanding the biomedical explanation and statistical prevalence of the issue is critical, even more revealing are accounts of local realities and experiences with fistula in which women’s voices are emphasized. Ugandan public health scholar and advocate Joan Kabayambi focuses her work on fistula in Uganda, producing scholarship and editorial articles on the daily struggles of fistula management, the challenges of treatment-seeking, the role of traditional birth attendants, and community health teams within treatment (2014). In studying the local realities of what it means to live with fistula, scholar Ali Heller explores individual lived experiences in her dissertation, “Interrogating the Superlative Sufferer: Experiencing Obstetric Fistula and Treatment Seeking in Niger.” Heller interviews numerous women, learning about the various techniques they use to deal with fistula, as well as the feelings of shame, isolation, hope, and resilience the women undergo on a daily basis (Heller, 2015). Scholars Weston, Mwangi, & Mutiso examine the issues of mental health and fistula, and in their article “Depression among Women with Obstetric Fistula in Kenya,” they find that often, experiences with fistula are interwoven with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Weston et al, 2011). Finally, in the article “Experiences with Obstetric Fistula in Rural Uganda,” scholar Murk follows the story of a woman on her journey from obtaining the condition to finding referrals and aid from a local organization. The on the ground understandings enhance the data, adding richness and humanity to a medical condition (Murk, 2009).

In moving from local realities to global policy, fistula is receiving increased attention from global authorities and public health experts. Rhetorically, maternal health has received an increasingly growing amount of attention, and fistula falls within the Millennium Development Goal 5 (United Nations Millennium Development Goals, 2013) on Maternal Health, and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015), on Gender Equity. As reported by the United Nations news center just last year, the call for more attention and increased funding has been sounded, as Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called for $750 million to treat fistula worldwide, including efforts such as “intensified investment in cost-effective interventions, including surgery…” ‘Obstetric fistula is one of the most devastating consequences of neglect during childbirth and a stark example of health inequity in the world” (United Nations Population Fund, 2014). This claim also correlates with Federation of International Gynecological Organization documents focusing on utilizing under-researched technologies, and training skilled attendants in affected countries as practical interventions. Yet, even with this fortified attention to fistula, scholars of maternal health policy question whether the rhetoric translates to reality. In “A Generation of Political Priority for Global Health
Initiatives: A Framework and Case Study of Maternal Mortality,” scholars Jeremy Schiffman and Stephanie Smith interrogate the murky politics of maternal health, outlining the politics of earmarked funding, conflation of women’s and children’s health causes, and more. They seek to answer, is maternal health truly empowering for women’s lives? (Schiffman & Smith, 2007).

As the public health policy realm is enwrapped in its own debates, so too is the medical anthropology and feminist literature. In moving forward with transforming discourse into action, some scholars emphasize that action must not just occur for the sake of action - it too can have a negative impact. Critical historical and anthropological scholars Marcos Cueto and Lawrence Gostin point out the dark side of aid interventions through their writing on silver bullet solutions and competition among aid organizations. Much of the literature surrounding the subject of humanitarian aid centers on the historical formation of the notion of global health initiatives and the theoretical challenges to intervention work, both of which are critical to contextualizing current policy aimed at fistula mitigation. In his book *Global Health Law*, historical scholar Gostin analyzes the complex process of the formation of the WHO, detailing the multi-faceted organization of the body, the changes in leadership, the chaotic internal politics inherent to such an internationally-based organization, controversies in financial conditions, and the successes and failures of past initiative, interventions, and policies. While outlining the weak monetary state the WHO is currently in, Gostin asserts that global health law and policy has little legitimacy as the financial power truly rests with the World Bank. Furthermore, Gosten questions what authority a body has when there is little way to enforce policies in other countries and whether a set of norms should be placed on such diverse nations. Finally, Gosten asserts that with so many organizations now competing for a limited set of funding, humanitarian work has become competitive and self-focused, constraining the ultimate mission of international aid (Gosten, 2015). Health policy scholars also assert that in attempting to reconcile vertical tendencies with horizontal efforts, funding competition and desire for reputation pushed organizations in the direction of vertical programs (Béhagu and Storeng 2008).

Marcos Cueto questions the “magic bullet” practices of aid organizations, utilizing malaria as a case study. He claims that funds, short-term interventions, and outside help does little to create sustainable and long-lasting change, instead masking the larger macro-structures that perpetuate the issue. Cueto also pushes back against outside aid knowing what is best for communities rather than those actually living with an affliction (Cueto 2013). Public health scholars Lewis Wall SD Arrowsmith, and KA Danso write about the idea of philanthrocapitalism or humanitarian tourism: the practice in which Western surgeons take short trips to affected countries in order to volunteer. The scholars highlight that many surgeons are not appropriately trained or experienced to actually perform fistula surgeries (as they require very specific procedures). Therefore, centers and organizations should only focus on volunteers making long term commitments, and Western medical institutions should form partnerships with sister organizations in the affected countries for long term and sustainable change. The authors emphasize holistic care for the women, not just surgery repair,
which is impossible if the doctor leaves after a short time period (Wall et al. 2006).
Furthermore, scholar Heller writes about centers which depend on Western doctors,
citing months where women are forced to wait for treatment and health care. She also
pushes back on traditional cultural assumptions held by many policymakers (Heller
2015).

Further complicating the debate surrounding aid, what sort of aid to provide,
and how to administer it—especially in regards to women's health—lies the feminist
analysis of Western hegemony and neo-colonialism, in which feminists attack the
notion that black and brown bodies need to be “saved,” demanding pause to ques-
tion whether current systems of aid operate in a helpful and ethical fashion. Feminist
scholars such as Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak explore the reprehensible
and tenuous history of western “saviors” deploying arguments of human rights and
women's rights as justification for colonialism, rather than as simply humanitarian
intentions. For example, scholar Spivak asserts that the British Raj utilized inflam-
ing rhetoric surrounding sati, a traditional Indian wife-burning practice, not to help
Indian women, but to mobilize support for British Imperialism. Additionally, Spivak
cites the example of when, in attempting to rally support for the war in Iraq, Laura
Bush incited the need to aid oppressed women as one of the large priorities (Spivak,
2010). All too often, it seems that the efforts to help women and provide humanitar-
ian work have been accompanied by ulterior, more selfish, motives. It is impossible
to deny a past of white bodies asserting themselves and imposing their ideals into the
homes of black and brown bodies, often creating more or exacerbating patriarchal
violence and oppression rather than mitigating it (Mohanty 1988). This has created
the system and world we live in today; critics of aid often see the past resonating, fear-
ing for the reminiscent imagery of Western presence dominating the Global South
once more. Feminist discourse asks us to stop and question the actions we are taking,
to critique the global order of power, to push back against Western assumptions, and
to actively and intentionally work to account for the voices of a community.

The existing literature provides a look at the multi-dimensional voices, opinions,
and ideas overtaking the global women's health realm, and exposes some of the inher-
ent controversies and intricacies. The feminist and anthropological theory also offers
a nuanced framework that I utilize as a critical lens and building point throughout
my study. Immensely important studies on fistula including long-term ethnography
and Western development critiques have been conducted, and I hope to build from
this previous work in this study. While critical scholarship has been produced both
from the global policy and the focused local perspective, my study attempts to deftly
weave between both viewpoints in a comparative analysis. Ultimately I hope that
by offering insight into how diverse and varying parties approach and conceptualize
fistula, I can make my small contribution to the existing literature and understanding
of fistula aid.

**Methods & Positionality**

For my research study, I conducted fieldwork in multiple locations, utilized a
qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with experts, policy-makers, and those who work in the field of public health efforts involving maternal, reproductive, and women’s health, mostly from the policy side in Switzerland. In Uganda, I also employed the semi-structured style with national policymakers, local politicians, community health workers, maternal health experts, midwives, nurses, and former fistula patients. The semi-structured interviews were implemented as follows: I began with a set of predetermined questions and then created specific follow up questions following their responses. Interviews ranged in time from twenty-five minutes to one and a half hours (depending on the time constraints of the participant). I also read and analyzed several international organization documents, attended panels, and took field notes of observations as well.

Moreover, in considering the ethics of my work, I felt that I conducted my interviews respectfully and with careful intentionality. In Switzerland, I only interviewed experts in the field, so none of my questions could have been harmful or triggering to the people I was speaking with, as they discuss this sort of material on a daily basis. Furthermore, I asked for consent in regards to referencing names and organizations, as well as recording the interviews. In Uganda, I only interviewed women who were former patients of fistula - women who had already received treatment and overcome the condition, so as to avoid causing trauma, creating expectations of monetary aid, or unintentionally outing the secret of a woman with fistula. I also only contacted women through Uganda Village Project (UVP), and all of the woman I reached out to had previously confirmed their interest in participation with Ruth, the coordinator at UVP. All of my interviews were completed with my Ugandan research collaborators, who helped me navigate the cultural differences and language barriers, and in this way, I was able to conduct my research respectfully. Finally, in order to overcome any bias or preconceived notions I may have held from my readings of literature, academic training, and personal philosophy, I asked questions that gave the participant time and space to vocalize their perspective, ultimately prioritizing the information received from my informants. Throughout the paper, I will attempt to illuminate the voices of my participants rather than my own, ultimately allowing the data to resonate.

The Reality of Obstetric Fistula

Before exploring the causes behind fistula, is it critical to explore what the biomedical issue exactly is. Fistula is an issue caused by obstructed labor that results in incontinence for a woman. At its core, it is an issue of access to quality care as fistula is preventable with the right measures. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “it is estimated that more than 2 million young women live with untreated obstetric fistula in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,” and “each year between 50,000 to 100,000 women worldwide are affected by obstetric fistula” (World Health Organization, 2014). However, this is thought to be an underestimation, as many women afflicted with fistula live in remote settings and do not make it to health clinics, thus remaining unaccounted for; in fact, one WHO study has found that 1 million
women are affected by obstetric fistula in Nigeria alone, and another suggests that 70,000 new cases occur annually in Bangladesh (Ibid).

While understanding the global scope of fistula is critical, even more important for this study was determining the rates within Uganda, specifically Iganga and the Luuka District. Unfortunately, as I found on the ground from speaking with the data-specialist, mayor, fistula-researcher, and health officer in the district, measuring or discerning the prevalence of fistula in Iganga is incredibly difficult, as many cases go unreported. In fact, no official records or data reports about fistula really existed, although each person responded with familiarity and knowledge when I asked about the issue. Medi, a women’s health activist and expert from Safe Motherhood Uganda lamented this lack of measurable data: “There are mothers who are dying and they are not put on record, in places where we cannot put data, so we are losing a lot of data, we are losing information, because mothers are dying in places that we cannot track information” (Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016). He tells me how his organization is trying to understand the extent of the problem: “We went from home to home… asking if there were mothers who had died in the past two years, and we found so many that even when we told the district, they were doubting it because they thought we presented so many of them…so many mothers and babies dying at home, at TBAs, at community clinics” (Ibid). The extent might be vast, but quantitatively measuring has proven difficult for numerous organizations. Given this seemingly uncrossable barrier, there is little quantitative understanding as to the scope of fistula in the Iganga and Luuka District.

According to a World Health Organization report, obstetric fistula is an entirely preventable consequence of prolonged labor (76% to 97% of fistulas are caused by prolonged labor) that almost solely occurs in the Global South. Fistula takes place because:

When the descending fetus is unable to pass through the mother’s pelvis. The fetal head enters the vagina, but the shoulders cannot pass through the bony pelvis. Without access to medical care to relieve the obstruction, the woman may remain in labor for days. The fetal head compresses the vaginal tissue and widespread ischemic damage of the soft tissue occurs … The necrotic tissue sloughs off, leaving a hole between the vagina and bladder (vesicovaginal) or vagina and rectum (rectovaginal) (World Health Organization, 2014).

When asked about the reasons that fistula occurs in some countries and not others, Nelly Staderini, the reproductive health specialist from MSF Geneva, echoes the idea of prolonged labor and access to emergency obstetric care. We sit across from each other in the conference room of her office, books and papers stacked everywhere around us. Ms. Staderini has a scratchy and passionate tone, her voice cracking as she describes visible inequities: “in the North, we do not have any more prolonged labor because people have access to C-sections, and this is the big difference. On top of that, we know that prolonged labor is linked with the dimension of the internal
pelvic of the woman” (Nelly Staderini, Shivani Desai, April 25, 2016).

It is generally known that fistula almost solely transpires in countries within the Global South, but within these countries, some women are much more vulnerable to fistula than others. In Uganda, the issue is definitely present, but it is difficult - impossible even - to ascertain how prevalent fistula may be. Dr. Peter Kivunike Mukasa, a Ugandan Ministry of Health official lamented that there is no national tracking system, and nurses and midwives explained that the silence surrounding fistula impedes the ability to offer support. As Moses, a Ugandan expert and community health maternal health project manager tells me: “They may not tell anyone. But they are there in the villages. They are there” (Kyangwa Moses, Shivani Desai, July 8, 2016). This sentiment will continue to haunt many of my interviews, as fistula is often accompanied by secrecy and a difficulty in truly being able to measure the prevalence.

Both in Uganda and Geneva, many experts believe that young women face the brunt of the issue, and every specialist agreed that women who live in rural areas facing issues of access and socioeconomic means are the most burdened, especially rural areas. Ms. Staderini agrees, stating: “most of the time, it’s true that in those countries, you have better access in capitals rather than in rural areas... [but] you can reduce it in rural areas if you give access to C-sections” (Nelly Staderini, Shivani Desai, April 25, 2016).

The results of fistula are devastating. Firstly, according to the Fistula Foundation, obstructed labor can result in, “excruciating pain for days before [the] baby is finally dislodged.” (Fistula Foundation). [The] baby likely dies and [the woman] is often left with an obstetric fistula, a small hole created by constant pressure from the fetus, which renders her incontinent.” (Fistula Foundation) Moreover, a both short-term and long term impact is incontinence:

[The women] start to have sometimes stool and most of the time urine, so behind that they try not to drink a lot because they are very much afraid to lose urine, so they have very much concentration of the urine so it smells really bad, and they can also have infections ... and dehydration. ... For the long term, there's the possibility to have other pregnancies, and this is one of the reasons why we want to - I mean if you have a good
surgical repair, you can have other children, so this can have a huge impact on the woman. (Nelly Staderini, Shivani Desai, April 25, 2016).

From the global, national, and local constructions of fistula understanding and narrative, it is clear that the short term and long term impacts of fistula can be profound and immensely difficult, and it is significant that fistula is a condition that compounds oppressions, often hurting women already marginalized by structures of poverty and low political and social capital.

**Disputed Choices: Complicating Spheres of Care**

My first interview in Uganda was conducted in Naigobya, a small village thirty-five minutes from Iganga. To reach Naigobya, we folded ourselves into the Uganda Development and Health Associates van, watching lush fields, hills, and ponds whir past the window as we passed along the bumpy red soil road. I reached the maternal health clinic - the only one around for about forty minutes- to find women sitting everywhere around the steps, on the benches, and around the doctor as he spoke to them - it was one of the women’s days at the clinic. The head nurse Rose was available to interview with me, and we sat on a medical beds in the empty birthing room of the clinic, as she clasped her hands and responded to my questions. I asked her if she had treated any women with fistula or if anyone had come to the clinic with the problem. Her eyes closed in sympathy, and her head heavily fell to her chest with weariness as she said: “Yes I know of a woman. But she didn’t come in here. She didn’t come to us. I have heard there is a woman, but she herself has not come to us to say she has fistula…” (Rose, Shivani Desai, July 7, 2016). Rose’s comments raise the question: how can care be received, disseminated, or effective if women are not seeking it at the clinics both during childbirth (before a fistula is formed), and after (when the burden already exists)? What are the barriers to care? Considering the obstacles and causes behind this urgent gap is critical.

**Unpacking Legacies of Western Judgement**

In all of my interviews with experts - both policy specialists from Geneva, and local Ugandan health workers, along with readings of documents - I explored the question of barriers to care, hoping to understand why some women do not utilize clinics. In unpacking the varying responses to this question, many answers thoughtfully consider the multifaceted explanations and reasons women may hold back. However, other responses carry underlying currents of blaming or judgmental rhetoric, either pinning responsibility on cultural practices or women’s choices. This language is either more subtle -enveloped in technical terms and long explanations- or outright criticism; it also hints at complicated tensions surrounding the landscape of formal and informal health systems in Uganda.

For example, upon rewinding to my prior fieldwork in Geneva, I recall some of the explanations I was offered either in interviews, or in primary documents. One
such subtle critique was given to me by the founder of a fistula-focused NGO. Dr. Bartschi is a kind middle-aged man, who carries himself thoughtfully, intentionally, and with humility, pausing to think long and hard before answering any of my questions. He is the sole founder of Women’s Hope International in Bern, Switzerland, a small organization that focuses primarily on fistula. He works from home, running WHI, and we sit across from each other on a rich mahogany table, the sounds of the passerby drifting up in muted waves through the open window. It is difficult to conceptualize tangibilize, the idea of speaking about a reality hundreds of miles away, removed and distant in the suffering. I ask him what causes fistula, and he responds in two parts: highlighting technical barriers to care as well as home births and traditional care: “The two primary causes - at least in the places where we work- are neglected obstructed labor, and that can happen either because the woman labored at home with no help at all or with someone who didn’t recognize the problem or there were barriers to her getting to care in a timely fashion, so she remains with obstructed labor for far too long before getting to a place where she can receive care.” He pauses, “there are also these people called the TBAs or traditional birth attendants, and many woman go to them, and that is not a good thing” (Gerard Bartschi, Shivani Desai, April 20, 2016). His reference to traditional birth attendants reflects a decades long tension, highlighting the negative view many in the west hold regarding local medicine.

Some of the explanations offered in primary documents of World Health Organization reports are more forthright, unequivocally placing blame on traditional practices. The document, “10 Facts About Obstetric Fistula” reads: “Cases of fistula development can be avoided if women can easily access hospitals instead of using traditional birth methods where untrained traditional birth attendants use crude methods that destroy women’s bodies or even lead to their death” (World Health Organization, 2014). Deployment of discourse such as “crude” and “destroy,” and opinions such as “that is not a good thing” can deploy a story of blame, villainizing birth attendants and traditional healers, and in turn, condemning women who choose to seek their assistance.

The reality of Western judgment on women’s decisions in the name of maternal and child health (while ignoring structurally violent explanations) is decades old, rooted in British imperialist and colonialist intentions. So too is the idea of speaking about and making decisions about women - while denying them platform or agency- in a removed and distant space. As historical scholar Jean Allman observes in an international meeting over eighty years ago, the tendency to blame mothers, women, and culture dominates:

For four days in June, 1931, government, church and business representa-
tives from eight European countries and from several colonial territories in Africa met in Geneva to discuss the welfare of African children.’ … Echoing much of the broader discourse surrounding maternal and in-
fant welfare of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the conference participants blamed social diseases, poverty, ‘native midwives and their anti-hygienic
practices’, mothers’ ‘carelessness’ and ‘irrational feeding’ of infants, superstition and, finally, ‘lack of sufficient medical aid’ for infant mortality rates which exceeded seventy percent in some areas. Although the conference repudiated the ‘tendency to blame the mother’, its published conclusions focused almost exclusively on the education of mothers and children and avoided pronouncements on the effects of migrant and forced labour, cash-cropping or taxation. (Allman, 1994: 1-2).

Allman analyzes the hypocritical nature of claiming to avoid the judgment of mothers while narrowly focusing on women's decisions and cultural resources while masking larger sociopolitical factors. Language such as “carelessness,” “irrational,” and “anti-hygienic” as well as a focus on education demonstrates the condescending and colonial development perspective brought into such a meeting (Ibid). Yet such language is not so distant from the kind disseminated today.

While the realm of humanitarian work has moved towards a reality of increased justice since colonial periods, remnants of the past remain embedded - impossible to quickly erase - within global orders of power. Western hegemony and neo-colonial currents pulse through discourses of aid and development today. Of course, some ideas such as the need for education outreaches in rural areas and the lack of resources or emergency care equipment available to traditional healers may hold substantive legitimacy, yet the judgmental approach reflects a harmful legacy. Whether or not intentional, the undercurrent attitude of western forces believing they know what is best for African mothers reverberates through such rhetoric, both in past and present.

The idea of indictment from a distance also carries striking salience, informing how parties relate to an issue. While Western actors may observe the experiences from afar with pity despair, and solidarity, the visceral and intense identification or understanding is impossible to truly capture. The realities of removal are greatly explored in anthropologist Luc Boltanski’s “Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics.” In this pivotal work, Boltanski examines the idea of the spectator and exoticism ever-present in international work. For the average spectator, the idea of suffering is just that - an idea. Many issues in global health such as disease and pain, the lack of preventative care, and inaccessibility to treatment are foreign concepts, as spectators are privileged to never experience such hardships. Similarly, the structures of violence which serve to perpetuate such health issues, such as political instability, extreme poverty, and societal pressures, also strike many as alien and unimaginable notions. There is a limited sense of empathy, authority, or relation to an issue when “the spectacle of suffering, [is] incongruously viewed at a distance by people who do not suffer…” especially if the issue is half a world away or boxed into a TV screen” (Boltanski, 1999: 12).

The anthropology of suffering - how societies relate to external and foreign pain - emerged as a critical question as I interviewed specialists in Geneva. In every case, such as when I interviewed Dr. Bartschi -looking at the polished desks, the stacks of books, and the streets of Switzerland, thousands of miles from Uganda - I found it difficult to truly grasp and feel the reality of fistula, instead more easily connecting to
the issue as an academic and humanitarian study. While grassroots experiences can and must certainly inform opinions, the ability to leave such suffering behind creates a separation, further reinforcing the harm of casting blame. Judgment compounded with removal exacerbates the potential of forming harmful narratives, as the lens of focus holds bias and a lack of experiential authority.

However, judgmental rhetoric not only exists in Geneva, but within Uganda as well, especially in regards to women and their care-seeking decisions in rural areas. While speaking with Dr. Peter Kivunike Mukasa, one of the most prominent national fistula specialists at the Ministry of Health, the question of barriers to biomedical care emerged. As we sat in his buzzing and chaotic office in Kampala - covered in documents, papers, and notes - the MOH official shared his take on barriers to care, emphasizing education. “Those are people who are maybe less educated... maybe have their own cultures, so they will take longer to seek care... and that’s why we have to talk to them” (Peter Mukasa, Shivani Desai, July 22, 2016). At an interview with a young midwife at a village clinic in the Luuka District of Uganda, the idea of lack of education arose again, this time with harsher blame attached. The midwife explains that women fail to come to the clinic because, “They are just ignorant, they don’t come to the clinic because they are ignorants” (Martha, Shivani Desai, July 7, 2016). Such offered explanations of “lack of education” and “ignorance” portray women negatively, pinning responsibility on women and the care they seek, often without accounting for the factors behind such choices.

Offered explanations loaded with shaming language not only cause harm through propagating assumptions, they also fail to capture the deep nuance that underlies the sometimes constrained and sometimes full choice and agency practiced by women in their healthcare decisions. Throughout interviews, women outlined the various reasons they don’t utilize health clinics, and among these reasons, included: fear to admit they’d been with a Traditional Birth Attendant, lack of money/resources, transport fees and unavailability, and scarring personal encounters with health workers. During my fieldwork, the debate and politics of where and why women choose to give birth also became a much more pressing question than I originally realized. When I first reached Uganda, I had only read articles about local healing, but focused more of my time on clinical care. In each exploratory interview, the topic of traditional care emerged. Following my anthropological principles and the idea of building research from the ground-up, I shifted my focus to envelop this debate as a larger theme, speaking with women who are local healers in villages around Iganga. From my interviews with fistula patients, women, midwives, local healers, community health workers, and reproductive health specialists, three key themes that inhibit clinic attendance emerge: access, lack of trust and fear, and a deep trust in local healers. I highlight these explanations to combat the judgmental language deployed by multiple parties, arguing that uncovering the profoundly complex and thoughtful choices of women allows for greater authentic understandings of barriers.
Impossible Paths: Logistical Obstacles to Care

The first themes of facing barriers to care in regards to timing during birth (especially during complication), access to facilities, and training of skilled attendants is highlighted in Loy’s story, in which she waited for countless hours before being granted a referral from her village clinic to the main hospital. By then, it was too late. This idea of delays and waiting was illuminated in an interview with Medi from Safe Motherhood Uganda. He spoke about a delayed referral, explaining it as a function of resource and training gaps: “Recently we had a mother referred, and on the way, she had a third degree tear… health workers sometimes, they are only nursing assistants, so they don’t have that experience to know when to refer and how to refer and where to refer.” (Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016). This story resonates with information asserted by Dr. Bartschi regarding training shortcomings as a primary cause of fistula: “[it’s] a lack of training… I mean it doesn’t depend on the facilities, it’s actually the training and if doctors aren’t doing a proper job basically, that’s what it is.” (Gerard Bartschi, Shivani Desai, April 20, 2016).

Yet, the issue of delays can extend beyond lack of training as well. As Medi and Moses from UDHA both explained to me, sometimes delays are caused not because the attendants do not have the information or training, but because there is no affordable way to transport a woman from the clinic, and they are waiting to see if normal labor is possible before risking her limited funds (Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016). (Moses, Shivani Desai, July 8, 2016).

Dr. Nelly Staderini, from Doctors without Borders Geneva reinforces this point of the remote burden: “I do think that women in rural areas face more barriers to getting to care, first of all just because of distance, urban areas have facilities that are closer and you tend to have higher levels of facilities concentrated in urban areas” (Nelly Staderini, Shivani Desai, April 25, 2016). A women’s health expert from The Netherlands also recounts how sometimes, “the woman labors at home with no help at all or someone who didn’t recognize the problem or there are barriers to her getting to care in a timely fashion, so she remains with obstructed labor for far too long before getting to a place where she can receive care” (Anonymous, Shivani Desai, April 22, 2016).

The arduous journey to care, accompanied by all of the logistical and practical difficulties that women face, is encapsulated by Medi.

Mothers are not prepared to go to health centers….they don’t have money, they don’t feel comfortable to go to health centers to deliver there because there are no services, they don’t have people to stay at home and keep the other siblings if they are not there… and even if they decide to go, they don’t have transport, there’s a long way, and when they reach there, there is no health worker. If the health worker is there, they don’t have supplies…(Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016).

Medi’s point about lack of resources may be one of considerable inhibition; to gather
the funds and resources and time to make it all the way to the clinic only to find a lack of staff or equipment available may strike many as extremely discouraging. The component of time also strikes especially salient when considering the difficulties - both cost and physical distance - of transportation. As my earlier drive from Iganga to Naigobya for interviews reminded me, women in villages are at least forty-five minutes from the main Iganga Hospital, the site of referral for any village clinics in the Luuka District. Determining and exploring these logistical barriers is crucial when questioning why so many women choose home births and local healing: constrained resources are large pieces to account for.

“How Can I Trust Them?”: Considering Clinical Experiences

However, constrained resources are not the only issue. Clinics and well-meaning nurses and midwives often lack the time and funding to properly give each woman the care and attention she so deserves, translating into poor experiences at the clinic, such as when Loy felt alone, with no answers, waiting many hours for someone to refer her. In considering poor experiences at a clinic, another memory also comes to light from my field observations. I am at the Iganga Main Hospital, clutching my faded field notebook, and sitting in the waiting room with Beckie. Women wait on benches and outside, glancing around for the nurse who will see them. Beckie and I are hoping to talk to the head nurse, to understand how Iganga Main Hospital handles referrals that pour in from the village.

Beckie and I have been sitting on the hard wooden bench for about fifteen minutes when the door to the obstetrics ward loudly bursts open, clanging against the wall, and the head nurse marches through, her voice raised in harsh frustration. The head nurse rants, as assistant nurses and midwives nervously flurry over to help. She yells about how no one listens to her instructions and women do not listen and are not good patients. Women nervously shift away, anxiously looking down, at their hands, or in their lap. Beckie leans over, and tells me in an outraged tone “I wouldn’t feel comfortable getting help from this nurse! Now some of the things the women are telling us in these interviews make sense.” Beckie stops to think, “I know this job can be very stressful, and I’ve spoken to this nurse before, she is a nice and good woman. These hospitals are just so crowded and understaffed. But still, women do not want to be yelled at when they come to the hospital” (Beckie, Shivani Desai, July 11, 2016).

As my research collaborator noticed, small interactions can color a woman’s decision of what kind of care to seek.

Another, more profoundly painful experience at a hospital involves the reality that clinics do not always want to record or report mishaps or mistakes, as their funding and evaluation depends on government funding and aid. An interview with another woman who experienced fistula reveals the harmful ramifications of this truth: Afuwa sits with her friend, inviting Beckie and I to share the mat with her. We sit cross-legged under the shade of her home, sunlight scattering through the leaves. Afuwa is a former fistula patient, and now one of the fistula ambassadors for Uganda Village Project; she helps connect women suffering from fistula with resources and help. As
we speak, I ask Afuwa what stopped her from going to the clinic when she experienced leaking and realized something was wrong. Beckie translates, Afuwa’s face clouds over, and she turns her head away, blinking back tears, speaking with a pained and hard fiber in her voice. Beckie leans closer to me and whispers that Afuwa has said: “I think they knew something was wrong at the clinic. I think they did not tell me on purpose. How can I trust them after that?” (Afuwa, Shivani Desai & Beckie Melissa, July 20, 2016).

Finally, another interview illuminates the fact that the tension between local healing and biomedicine can often spill into interactions at the clinic, in some ways further fueling the cycle. Martha and I sit in the Mayuge Clinic - it is her end of the day and she has wrapped up all of her patient work. Martha is young, friendly, giggly, and chipper while explaining to me the work she does and the focus of her clinic - the kind of nurse you might want to be treated by just to see her smile and have her joke around with you. I ask her about the barriers to clinic, why she believes women choose not to come to health centers. She responds: “Sometimes we are harsh with them” (Martha, Shivani Desai, July 7, 2016). “Harsh?” I ask. “Yes, sometimes we are tired, or the patients are not listening, or we just have a lot to do, and we can be harsh. I think that’s why some of the women do not come to the clinics. Also sometimes they are scared we will yell at them if they have been to the traditional birth attendant” (Ibid). Martha’s last point holds deep salience, revealing that nurses shaming reactions to local healing may reinforce the choice to seek traditional care instead. Medi emphasized Martha’s point, explaining that nurses and midwives are often stretched too thin: “She’s doing immunizations, she’s doing birthing, she’s doing a lot of things, so you find that they are fatigued, they are tired, so at times they lose that customer care… [but] at a time of delivery someone needs a lot of care, a lot of pampering, a lot of courage” (Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016). The need for personalized, humanistic, and empathetic care is evident, yet the limit of possibilities and resources conflicts with this need.

Throughout many of my interviews, negative or painful interactions at the clinic were emphasized, serving as a relevant barrier to consider in the question of why women aren’t going to the clinics. These encounters speak to a larger pattern of systemic fault. Public clinics and hospitals are often under-staffed and underfunded, but they are always crowded. This kind of saturation without the ability to uphold the needs of the patients can often translate into frustration and abruptness, even outbursts such as the one witnessed, yet ultimately cannot fall upon or be pinned to individual nurses and midwives struggling to keep up with everyone while providing personalized and quality care. It is an issue that falls upon the systems, revealing faultlines in clinic landscapes. While it is easy to judge this harshness from the outside, in reality, health care workers are working as hard as they can, and their choices are often products of a larger and flawed health care system, with such inequities manifesting in individual lived experiences.
Disrupted Localities: The Politics of Care-Seeking Decisions

Finally, barriers to care and experiences at the clinic inform choice, but so too does the history with, community level, and relationship-building that may occur with local healers. As discussed previously, many hegemonic, Western, and agency specialists point to traditional birth attendants and local healing as causal factors behind fistula, asserting that women die at the hands of the TBAs, and that it is a matter of lack of education and understanding that stops women from going to the clinics. There is also a normative tendency to prioritize biomedicine as legitimate and traditional healing as tertiary. When speaking with women and Ugandan local experts, I found this dismissive perception to miss the nuance of truth; women seeking compassionate care where they can find it.

Feminist scholars Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp argue that hegemonic medicalization can be a double-edged sword in that while it can carry great resources and potential for technological advancement, it can also disrupt local systems and local worlds of meaning. “While the benefits are undeniable, the spread of medical hegemony, through the introduction of hospital-based birth technologies, for instance, often displaces or competes with indigenous practices and may dis-organize or extinguish local forms of knowledge” (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991:318). I found this to be the case in the deeply political debate surrounding traditional birth attendants, who were technically illegalized in Uganda. However, some agencies—especially the Ugandan government—recognize the psychosocial value of local healers, and the global debate surrounding their role has been dynamic and continuously shifting in the past few decades.

Local healers, women with community knowledge, and traditional birth attendants (TBAs) have been an integral piece in the fabric of maternal care throughout history, their role and influence spanning centuries (Sibley 2004:52). Traditional birth attendants have been technically banned in Uganda since 2010, yet the government acknowledges that they still hold prevalence. The official stance is that TBAs are not allowed to carry out deliveries, and instead should refer expectant women to facilities (Kityo, 2017). Yet, an official ban does not necessarily hinder or alter care-seeking behaviors. Traditional healers are informal parties in the referral system, and as I found in my study, many do refer when they feel the birth will be complicated. TBAs seem to be the preference of rural mothers, with as many as 80% of pregnant women seeking the services of TBAs, according to estimates from Ministry of Health officials (Kityo, 2017).

Traditional healers work in Ugandan communities, providing compassionate care for hundreds of women. As maternal health expert Moses from Uganda Development and Health Associates explains, the pull to traditional birth attendants is strong:

We tell women to come to the clinics but yes of course I know why they go to the traditional birth attendants instead. The TBAs make women feel cared for, they tell them everything that is happening; they make them feel cared for. At a clinic, they say okay go to this bed. And then the
women are alone. The clinic are busy and no one gives a woman special attention. But at the local healers home, she will hold your hand, tell you everything that is happening, give you tea. That is important. It matters. (Kyangwa Moses, Shivani Desai, July 8, 2016).

This idea of being alone in the clinics, lying in a bed with no information resonates with Loy’s story, who waited for so many hours with no information on what was happening to her body. Loy’s experience in the clinic directly compares to Moses’s description of interacting with a local healer, exemplifying where exactly the clinics may be lacking.

Furthermore, the choice of care goes beyond bad experiences or time spent waiting. Much of the choice has to do with history, trust, and comfort. As Medi from Safe Motherhood Uganda explains,

TBAs are really respectful, they have a lot of love... they give them courage compared to the midwives... Actually I witnessed a mother, she was part of our community group, so, I expected her to deliver from the health center three, but I found out she has delivered from a TBA. So I went and talked to her, put in safe money and transferred her to the health center, but after three hours when I went away, she went back to TBA to deliver there... her case was she was feeling comfortable there. (Medi, Shivani Desai, July 27, 2016).

I hop on the boda boda, clutching the driver’s back as we veer off the road and jump over bumps, heading into a village just bordering Iganga, the home of Mama Ruth, one of the Ugandan research collaborators advising me on this project. Ruth has asked six of the women in her village to gather and speak with me regarding their reproductive choices. We all sit in a circle in the cool evening air, and the women take turns telling me about their children, their bodies, and their health care choices. The women range from the ages of twenty-seven to sixty, and all of them have utilized both clinics and their own local healer, an elder woman they know and have grown up with. During this focus group, I asked them where they prefer to give birth, and four out of six of the women told me they preferred going to the woman they know because she is close, and they trust her. Many of the women also revealed that for them it is not an either-or choice. Depending on the situation, sometimes they go to the clinic, and sometimes they see a healer (Women’s Focus Group, Shivani Desai & Ruth, July 28, 2016). This combination idea holds importance; a debate with two choices often creates a dichotomy, but combining multiple choices of care is a possible reality for women.

This element of trust goes beyond knowing and being familiar with your care provider. It also rests on the idea that elder women often look out for their patient, acting as an advisor and advocate in the community. The research study in central Uganda found that TBAs often ally with their patients, helping women negotiate domestic power in order “to secure resources to access both formal and traditional healthcare” (Musinguzi et al, 2016: 16) In the case of a woman whose husband was not allowing
his wife to seek antenatal care, a TBA stepped in as intermediary and counsel.

I told the husband [on the phone] that he had to send his wife for antenatal care before I could start giving her local herbs. I asked him to send me 17,000 Uganda Shillings (5 US dollars) for the local herbs. I needed only 7000 for the local concoctions and the remainder was used by the wife for antenatal care. The husband returned after she had already visited the health centre (Ibid).

TBAs also advise husbands for the sake of their patients, using their expansive knowledge of women’s health as authority, telling them to seek HIV testing and blood tests. “Some men I confront end up changing their behaviour. I know what pregnancy means; I understand what the young women go through. I know the young husbands need counselling to” (Ibid). While not all traditional healers go above and beyond to help women (as TBAs also seek to make profit, either through formal economies or informal ones such as chickens, etc.), some are driven by personal and community bonds. “That is the nature of relationships in a small community. Neighbours may be related to one another by marriage or blood. For young women... having older, respected allies is paramount” (Ibid).

The role of the trusted elder woman who fights for her patients was personified to me through Sumaiyah, one of the most celebrated local healers situated right outside of Iganga town. She is a tiny but powerful elderly woman, who has committed her life to serving women for over forty years. Before the interview, Mama Ruth leans over to me and whispers, “she is a good woman. A very good woman who helps so many girls and women in this place.” Sumaiyah grips my hand with tenacious strength, leaning forward and staring unwaveringly into my eyes.

Women trust me. Their mothers and grandmothers and sisters and daughters and friends have all come to me. I sit with the woman. I care for her. I pay attention to her and her family. I am a specialist for women, I have cared for so many women over the ages. Of course, she will trust me, I am close, she knows me and has heard my reputation. She has seen that I will give her the care she wants while going through her labor. I am well trained, I have a certificate from the government and a school I was trained in. I understand women’s health, and I understand when I must refer a woman to a clinic, when the issue needs more technology than my care can give. I am responsible with how I take care of the women who came and see me (Sumaiyah, Shivani Desai, July 26, 2016).

Sumaiyah tells me about the politics of traditional birth attendants, how they have been perceived, blamed, and even villainized. She brings the recorder closer to her mouth, leaning forward. “The hospitals are funded by the government. They cannot
afford to make mistakes or mess up. But yet, they make mistakes. So they blame us, they say oh it was the TBAs” (Ibid). While there exist many sides in the story of blame—one of the clinic, Western world, and government blaming the TBAs, the other of the TBAs blaming the clinics—the reality rests somewhere in the middle. Still, the Western hegemonic narrative proliferates the shameful narrative that has been constructed around local healers. It is underlaid with profoundly political reasons such as ideas of blame, reputation, assessments, and funding, all which serve as urgent factors in this complex landscape of health, care, and aid.

**Conclusion**

The global aid world often paints local healers as villains, clinics as progress, and women who choose to stay away from the clinics as ignorant, yet the truth rests in compassionate care, understanding barriers, listening to experiences, and informed choices to select the care that fulfills individual humanity and acknowledges dignity. Indeed, the highly regarded role played by the TBA is an inescapable reality that global agencies have been unable to deny. Many documents recommend including them in some informal systems of health. Rather than cutting them out of a system, it is beneficial to acknowledge and integrate traditional healers as a resource. Yet, while there is a recognition of the social value of traditional healers, there is a definitive prioritization and superiority of biomedical care. While I do not deny the need for clinical care, nor do I seek to argue that local care is superior to clinical care, I hope to illuminate some of the reasons and factors behind such choice. Moreover, in speaking with women it was evident that the need to emphasize just how ingrained, valued, and crucial such women are seen to be. Encouragingly, a local Ugandan effort is conducting research on how to utilize TBAs in a strictly supportive setting, envisioning a sort of dula role. I argue that listening to women, considering their community resources, and reimagining possibilities that center the need for compassionate and dignified care is essential for building successful and sustaining interventions. In attempting to search for global health solutions, it is critical to account for the feelings and experiences of women within and outside of the clinics, to consider their perspectives and interpretations of who is caring for their bodies.

The right to safe motherhood is one that is paramount within global health. In order to be mothers, women go through so much intensive physical labor, serving as the backbones of human existence: giving rise to generation after generation. The least we can do is ensure that when they are giving birth, it may be done safely. As a thank you to these women, it is our absolute duty and responsibility to fight for their right to safe, compassionate, affordable, and accessible health care. Yet, as women are worth far more than just their roles as mothers, even within the broader health care system of maternal, reproductive, and sexual health, there are still patterns of dismissal and deprioritization. Women face compounded social, political, and economic marginalization through neo-colonial systems, and as such, through health care, we can fight back against these systems of oppression by critiquing aid, advocating for
women's issues to be highly prioritized, and illuminating the voices of fistula patients to better serve their authentic needs within global health work.

**Bibliography**


The Voice of Kenya: Competing Visions of Nationhood in a Postcolonial State

Shaun Ee

When Kenya achieved independence from the British Empire in December 1963, its ultimate future as a nation-state aligned with the West was far from assured: many other possibilities were advanced in the early years of independence, including indirect rule, multiracialism, majimboism, radical nation-statism, and federation. Kenya’s movement toward a development-oriented nation-statism rested on the realization of a broadcast-bureaucratic complex that stands in contrast to Benedict Anderson’s print-capitalist model. Between January 1964 and April 1966, Ramogi Achieng Oneko (Kenya’s first African Minister of Information and Broadcasting) united the two elements of this complex within his Ministry by nationalizing the theretofore-independent Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) in an attempt to align Kenya with the Eastern Bloc. However, the high degree of centralization of the complex incentivized bureaucrats within his Ministry to oppose his agenda in favor of a Western-oriented nation-statism that valued accumulation and personal wealth, ultimately leading Kenya toward its final sociopolitical form.

Barely half a year after Kenya had achieved formal independence from the British, on June 25, 1964, Ramogi Achieng Oneko stood on the floor of the Kenya National Assembly to propose that the Kenyan government nationalize a major corporation for the first time in its brief history. Oneko was Kenya’s first African Minister of Information and Broadcasting (and, at that point, also tourism), and the institution that he sought to bring under state control was the independent Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). His proposal would shape Kenya for decades to come, bringing as it did the whole country’s broadcasting media under state control. By 1968, the Ministry would have the power to reach an audience of up to 3.5 million—as much as half of the country’s population. The Ministry and hence the Kenyan state gained dominance in the battle to define the young country: what it stood for, where it was headed, and to whom it belonged.

But alongside the historical significance of the KBC’s nationalization, there were ironies at work here too. Oneko, who leaned socialist, likely did not know that though this would be the government’s first act of nationalization, it would also be its last; he certainly did not know that though he had been the one to gain control of the KBC, that control would soon enough be stolen by opponents who would turn it against him. The tantalizing power that the Ministry offered was the source of extensive conflict around independence, and despite Oneko’s leading part in the drama surrounding the KBC, ultimately, his role would end with him vanquished, not triumphant. Yet these ironies would wait to reveal themselves to Oneko, who opened his motion with a rebaptism, saying:

“Mr. Speaker, Sir...I hope hon. Members will take a decision to change the name [of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation] to a reasonable one; one which the Members will probably have already read about, that is, the Voice of Kenya.”

Oneko’s rechristening of the KBC underscored a key question surrounding the fact of Kenya’s independence: how was it that the struggle around Kenya’s information services had come to be a struggle of who was to be the Voice—that is, a singular voice—of Kenya? This singularity was the central tenet behind the doctrine of nation-statism: a unitary state, represented by Oneko and the Ministry, would govern a homogeneous nation, rejecting the subdivisions of race, region, and tribe. But Kenya was a political invention of British colonial rule, devised in the early 20th century as the first military expeditions made their way inland from the East African coast. How, then, had this idea—the core of nation-statism—retained sufficient currency after independence that Oneko could claim to speak for the whole country, divided by issues of class and ethnicity as it was?

The answer was that nation-statism was, in large part, a state-imposed ideology, crafted by politicians such as Oneko and turned into a reality during the postindependence years. These politicians sought control of the state—the apparatus of governance across the territory of Kenya—and their articulation of nation-statism was one way of legitimating that control. In the years around independence, other possible sociopolitical formations sprang into being, but Oneko and his fellow nation-statists foreclosed those possibilities and worked actively toward their dissolution. In order to do so, they needed control over two entities: the centralized civil service, which was responsible for administering Kenya, and broadcast media, which was the only media capable of penetrating Kenya’s diverse linguistic communities. These two elements formed a broadcast-bureaucratic complex (in contrast with Benedict Anderson’s print-capitalism) through which nation-statists sought to implement their ideology of choice. Unlike print-capitalism, this complex was highly centralized, and this created an incentive for politicians to exercise total control over it, hence intensifying competition between the proponents of nation-statism. Though political actors such as Oneko helped to decide the outcome of this competition, they ultimately relied on the bureaucrats who manned the Ministry itself. These bureaucrats separated themselves into two factions along Cold War lines. On one side, there was the “old Ministry,” a conservative group of African civil servants who had served for years under colonial rule and prioritized Western values of economic development and self-attainment. On the other, there was the “new Ministry,” a recently appointed group of radical outsiders in Oneko’s orbit who embraced the Eastern Bloc rhetoric of revolution and redistribution. Though the members of the “new Ministry” initially held more power, it was a shallow form of power stemming from political appointments, and ultimately the weight of inertia enabled the “old Ministry” to reassert control.

The Engines of Imagination (January–June 1964)

The discussion of nationhood—and particularly, the manufacturing of nationhood—naturally evokes Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and its conception of the nation as being an “imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Anderson centers the process of imagination in creating nationhood because of the impossibility that a member of a nation could meet all its members face to face or travel its entire geographic expanse. His approach is particularly effective because it understands “nation” as a fluid and often hard-to-pin-down concept; other scholars, such as political philosophers Margalit and Raz, have struggled with securing a fixed definition for the “common character” or “common culture” that members of the same nation are supposed to have. The versatility of imagination has no doubt been one of the key reasons for Anderson’s enduring popularity, but his methodology and specific argument also illustrate how it is possible and necessary, but also insufficient, to place constraints on that fluidity.

Anderson focuses not merely on nations as imagined communities, but also on the mechanisms of imagination by which these communities are produced. In his argument, nations are produced by a particular conjunction of forces, “a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.” Each of these three on its own is insufficient to produce nations, but it is the interplay between them that does so. The amalgam of print technology and capitalism (print-capitalism) leads to the mass production of published material in a standardized form of the spoken vernacular (print-language). Within the boundaries of this print-language, the mass consumption of print media by a reading public then enables people to imagine themselves collectively within the same societal framework: in other words, to imagine themselves as a nation. In other words, the imagining of nations is limited by material constraints, rather than being completely independent of them. Although nations are socially constructed, the process through which they are imagined is bounded by finite and material factors.

Despite the utility of Anderson’s framework, his actual argument is limited because he confines it largely to print-capitalism and print-language, whereas the introduction of broadcast media in the 20th century fundamentally reshaped the development of postcolonial nationhood. To his credit, Anderson recognizes the postcolonial nationalisms as being part of a new wave of nationalism that had fundamentally different characteristics than previous waves. During this new wave, schools and the civil service created a young and highly educated intelligentsia who learned the territorial

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5 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 43.

bounds of their community through contact with fellow pupils and administrators from across their colony. They were then able to create nationalisms based off these territorial understandings because “multilingual broadcasting can conjure up the imagined community to illiterates and populations with different mother-tongues,” permitting nations to “be imagined without linguistic communality.” However, this acknowledgement is cursory: instructively, Anderson refers to radio and television as being allies to print media. This relegates broadcast media to a mere supporting role, when in reality it was central to the creation of postcolonial nationalism. Although Anderson’s new wave model is a step toward accurately modeling nationalism in the postcolonial context, it still falls short of recognizing just how fundamentally different postcolonial nationalism was from the print-capitalist model that lies at the heart of his thesis.

The model of nationalism that key political actors in Kenya embraced following independence was not a print-capitalist model, but instead a broadcast-bureaucratic model. Colonial officials at the end of empire had first espoused this model, relying on the potential of broadcast media to unify the colony across tribal lines. Broadcast media, as Anderson himself has noted, bypassed the need for literacy in a print-language in favor of comprehension in a spoken language. This was extremely important, because all else being equal, the learning curve for spoken language was much gentler than that for print-language. In other words, broadcast media was able to escape the fatality of “irremediable linguistic diversity,” one of the core pillars of Anderson’s trinity. Broadcast media was truly a form of mass media, capable of reaching a wide range of audiences regardless of their prior linguistic aptitudes. This was the central reason that these new officials favored broadcast media: they were committed to the idea of modernity and development, and so supported the colony-wide vision behind multiracialism (and later, nation-statism) because they feared the potential divisiveness of tribal animosities. In order to do this, they needed to eliminate the powerful intermediaries who had heretofore been the responsible leaders of their tribal communities and skip straight to speaking to the masses.

But in order to engage in this act of speech, they needed to rely on the civil service. This was the primary vehicle that political actors relied on to implement policy, even though its backstage operations were far less visible than the onstage drama of politics. The reason for this emphasis on the civil service was Kenya’s colonial history. The first post-independence leader of the civil service was Duncan Ndegwa, and shortly after assuming control, he made the astute observation that it had been “the instrument by which the metropolitan power imposed its wishes on the country it had occupied.” Since Kenya was a “conquest state,” built around the subjugation of

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7 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 113–140.
8 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 135.
9 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 43.
a much larger population by a small elite, colonial politicians and bureaucrats had correspondingly built up the civil service as a route for controlling this large population. Their choice to build up the civil service came at the expense of other formal institutions that might have encouraged or permitted political participation. Over 60 years of colonial rule, intent to conquer rather than intent to govern enshrined a narrow rather than broad institutional structure in the civil service by making it highly centralized and hierarchical. Independent Kenya hence inherited a set of formal institutions that had strongly antidemocratic tendencies, which correspondingly shaped the antidemocratic practices of its post-independence leaders. The centralization of this broadcast-bureaucratic method was what drove the nation-statists controlling it toward the destruction of all alternative nationalisms—in particular, toward the destruction of majimboism, one of the last alternatives to nation-statism at independence.

Resisting Majimboism

In the time after independence, the main competitor to nation-statism was majimboism, or decentralization (jimbo meaning “region” in Swahili). Majimboism rested on the idea that Kenya was composed of multiple and distinct communities that were each endowed with different sociopolitical needs, and hence had to be protected via official constitutional and administrative safeguards. It interpreted these communities as being drawn along regional lines—essentially, along ethnic lines, since the colonial restrictions on movement embodied in the “native reserve” system had segregated Kenya into ethno-regionalist blocs. The ethno-regionalism of majimboism was rooted in an appeal to autochthony and the fears of smaller ethnic groups that their diminution would make their land easy pickings for larger ethnic groups. Both the smaller African ethnic groups (forming the Kenya African Democratic Union party, or KADU) and the more “liberal” European settler populations supported majimboism. (“Liberal” in this case meant only that they were amenable to compromise with Africans in order to protect their own land, as opposed to the “conservative” settlers who refused to compromise at all.) However, larger ethnic groups (forming the Kenya African National Union, or KANU) derided majimboism as being tribalist in nature and the product of imperial thought. This conflict—the demographic majority of KANU against the minorities of KADU and the European settlers—was the central conflict around independence.

Leaving the pejoratives of KANU aside, what majimboism really represented was a two-tiered understanding of nationhood. On a regional level, it gave ethnic groups the ability to assert primacy over their ancestral land, and on a national level, it united these ethnic groups under the banner of federal government. This idea had been formally enshrined in the majimboist constitution by the metropolitan government during extensive negotiations at the Second Lancaster House Conference in early 1962. But because of its regional flexibility, majimboism experienced substantially more difficulty in defining the character of this united nation. This was because it included both African and European constituents, who were not particularly inclined to agree
with each other on most things other than majimboism. In the pre-independence elections of May 1963, these difficulties at the national level became clearly apparent when KANU trumped KADU at every level of government. At the Third Lancaster House Conference in October 1963, members of KANU then used this mandate to persuade the metropolitan government to ease the path toward repealing the formal protections of the constitution, dealing *majimboism* a mortal blow. By the time Oneko and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation came onto the scene in mid-1964, *majimboism* was already on the way out. But in order to guarantee its total destruction, Oneko needed to lay claim to the KBC.

At the time of its nationalization in 1964, the creation of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation was still fresh in Kenyans’ memories. The KBC had been created as an independent service out of the government-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Services in 1961, with the primary intent behind this separation being to protect broadcast media from abuse by a future government party. Settler politicians and members of KADU—in other words, the proponents of *majimboism*—had been the primary proponents of the KBC’s creation. Maintaining the independence of the KBC was a stance that fit well with the idea inherent to *majimboism* that there should be safeguards to protect Kenya’s multiple communities. It prevented centralized control by a small group, and thereby warded against the possibility that one of Kenya’s multiple communities could be targeted for marginalization and erasure. The creation of the KBC had been of paramount importance to the *majimboists*, who had referred repeatedly to broadcasting as a weapon and clearly feared the chance that the nation-statists would triumph and use it against them (as they ultimately did). But the rapidity of independence had prevented them from taking adequate precautions to guard against this possibility, and the dominance of KANU in the 1963 elections made clear just how shallow these protections were.

The decision of KANU members to reclaim the KBC was a direct repudiation of the *majimboism* of years before. Oneko himself was well aware of this context, suggesting that “the independent corporation of that nature fitted well with the colonial day,” but that the character of the KBC was now out of step with the “nationalist spirit of Kenya,” because “there [was] only one community in Kenya and that [was] Kenyans.”\footnote{Kenya National Assembly Official Record (Hansard), 528–532. June 24, 1964.} This refrain was not a new one: it directly echoed the parliamentary debate of 1961 to create the independent KBC, during which KANU member Derek Erskine had expressed his “extreme repugnance at seeing those words ‘minority communities’ in [the] Bill,” because “in Kenya we are all one community.”\footnote{Kenya National Assembly Official Record (Hansard), 576. October 31, 1961.} The idea that Kenya was a single community, with citizens who held strictly national identities (as opposed to racial, tribal or regional identities), was the most fundamental tenet of nation-statism. It followed the either-or logic of nation-statism, in which citizens could either be nationalists (and hence allies of the nation) or tribalists (and hence enemies). Any assertion that some group of members within the nation-state shared an identity distinct from the national identity—i.e., that they formed a separate com-
munity—was tantamount to rejecting national identity itself. Accordingly, there was to be no singling out of any subgroup within the nation for special treatment by the KBC, which instead inculcated a uniform understanding of Kenyan nationhood as dictated by the central government.

What was surprising about this debate was that in a break from the past, a number of KADU members sided with this nation-statist conception of the KBC. Three members of KADU spoke during the debate (out of a total of seven speakers): Daniel arap Moi, Masinde Muliro, and Robert Matano. Of the three, Moi (Rift Valley, of Kalenjin ethnicity) was the most oppositional by far, attacking the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism (MIBT) for being tribalist, inefficient, and a purveyor of propaganda. But on the other hand, Muliro (Western Region, of Luhya ethnicity) and Matano (Coast Region) were remarkably acquiescent, and both openly declared their support for the bill. It is unclear why they did so, but the cause may have been a combination of the dire financial straits of KBC and weakening party discipline within KADU. Particularly interesting (and telling), however, was their stance on KBC’s language policy.

In a sharp break from majimboism, Muliro stated that the KBC should only use English and Swahili, and that “even the vernacular languages...should be brushed aside in the interests of integrating the nation.” This firmly nation-statist stance was a stretch even in comparison to the official stance of Oneko, who insisted later in the debate that he planned to retain the other vernacular languages. By advocating for the widespread use of English, Muliro invoked a particular understanding of language and boundaries that echoed Benedict Anderson, who wrote of nations as imagined communities that are bounded in their expanse. Through the mid-20th century in Kenya, language had been one key way via which members of these communities had determined how they were bounded. For print media, these boundaries were relatively rigid and unyielding: knowledge of the written word needed to comprehend (and produce) print media was only accessible through education, which was the preserve of only an elite few. Broadcast media offered state agents an alternative to print media: namely, the tantalizing possibility of penetrating these heretofore-resilient subnational communities and directly crafting a national identity by bypassing these intermediaries.

Because it relied on the spoken word rather than the written word, broadcast media made linguistic boundaries both flexible and permeable. This diminished the importance of educated intermediaries by offering the alternative of mass education, in which state subjects could be engaged en masse with a common range of content that provided the basis for a shared national identity. However, although broadcast

media was more capable of overcoming linguistic boundaries than print media was, it was not all-powerful. The fact that KBC continued to broadcast in the vernacular, despite the nation-statist claim of Kenya being “one community,” betrayed its inability to realize a truly universal translatability. Despite its reliance on the spoken rather than the written word, ultimately broadcast media still required the learning of a new spoken-language form—just one that was more accessible than a written-language form. If the continued use of vernaculars were permitted, it would reduce the spread of this new spoken-language form, and thereby reduce the ability of broadcast media to spread this content. This was the justification behind Muliro’s claim that the vernacular languages should be brushed aside—if KBC were to take on the task of unbinding, then it would have to do so unrepentantly, working not just toward the creation of a national community (bounded by English and Swahili), but also toward the erasure of the regional communities (bounded by their vernaculars).

This was the most astounding thing about Muliro and Matano’s about-face in the debate: not only were they relinquishing their allegiance to majimboism, they were in some sense actively turning against it, suggesting that the KBC should be used to disperse regional identities. It is difficult to speculate why they chose to take such a stance, but more likely than not, their shift symbolized a recognition on their part of the changing terrain of power. They had picked KADU, the party of majimboism, because they had sought to preserve their own regional power bases. In other words, they had favored majimboism precisely because they had been the educated intermediaries that nation-statism and a centralized broadcasting system would seek to bypass and make redundant. In giving up majimboism, they acknowledged that the prospect of preserving their role as intermediaries to the state was dead, at least on a national level. Instead, they assumed a more direct involvement with the state by taking on the mantle of nation-statism—though outside of the state and in their local communities, whether they likewise renounced regional identities was another question.

Muliro’s vision for the KBC would never fully be realized, but the gist of it would be put into practice well enough. Though Oneko formally supported the use of vernaculars, it seems probable, given his general nation-statist attitude, that he would have been sympathetic to Muliro’s views. In all likelihood, he simply recognized that failing to broadcast in the vernacular was politically unfeasible and technically impractical. The KBC never managed to fully phase out the use of vernaculars; by the mid-1980s, the two national radio services (Swahili for the National Service and English for the General Service) coexisted with three regional radio services (Eastern, Central, and Western) that used a total of 16 languages. But these services were inadequate, broadcasting for only a limited amount of time per day, often at unusual hours. This neglect reflected the enduring priorities of central government, which mandated that the nation be remembered and the regions be forgotten. But even though majimboism was on its way out, it was still not yet clear which vision of

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nation-statism would supplant it. The contest between two visions of nation-statism, one moderate and one radical, would eclipse the contest between *majimboism* and nation-statism as Kenya left behind the year of 1964.

**Building A “New Ministry” (July–December 1964)**

The arrival of independence on December 12, 1963, had brought with it a whole new host of challenges, among the greatest of which was that of navigating the international order. Kenya had become independent at the height of the Cold War, barely more than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and this indelibly shaped its post-independence politics. As Branch writes, “Between 1963 and 1969, Kenyan politics were played out on the global stage.”

However, though politicians may have favored one Cold War patron or another, it was not these politicians’ explicit dedication to a Cold War ideology that mattered as much as the domestic political orientation their choices of patron evoked. Questions of access to patronage and the factional politics of the Cold War became intertwined with deeper-rooted struggles from the pre-independence era about egalitarianism and the distribution of land and wealth. If Kenya was a nation, what kind of nation was it to be? If it were to engage in development, what developmental path would it take? The politicians of KANU connected these historical debates to a larger global context, but in the process of doing so split themselves into two groups: the moderates, who aligned themselves with Western ideas of development, and the radicals, who called for the redistributive practices symbolized by the East. Helming the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and Tourism was Achieng Oneko, who belonged to the “radical” leftist faction of KANU and was a close ally of fellow Luo leader Oginga Odinga. Oneko’s politics dominated the Ministry through 1964.

Oneko had been a key figure in the independence movement and was prominent both as a committed nationalist and a leader in the Luo community. He had gotten his start as the first editor of *Ramogi*, a Luo vernacular newspaper opened in the late 1940s and named after the mythical ancestor of all Luo. In starting *Ramogi*, he had aimed to cultivate social and political consciousness within the Luo community, behind a façade of encouraging education and development; in his words, the goal was “to propagate [the Luo] to rally behind [Luo leaders]...to fight for independence.”

This activity had, in the 1950s, driven him into contact with Jomo Kenyatta, a Kikuyu nationalist and the prime minister at independence, who agreed with Odinga to an exchange program between prominent Luo and Kikuyu leaders.

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of the Kapenguria Six due to their alleged support for the Mau Mau Uprising. Their detention together made Oneko particularly close to Kenyatta after their release, as the latter showed “disdain and intolerance” in private for every member of the Six except Oneko. Oneko’s appointment to MIBT likely reflected both Kenyatta’s trust in him and his experience with mass media. As a close friend of Kenyatta’s and a steadfast KANU supporter, Oneko would be invaluable to Kenyatta in the short term in combating KADU; however, his radicalism and his ties to Odinga would ultimately send him and Kenyatta down very different paths. But the divergence of these paths was not so immediately apparent to Oneko in 1964, and he hence operated under the assumption that the radical and moderate factions would not engage in open conflict within the foreseeable future. In order to assert control over the Ministry, the members of which had allegiances that were at best uncertain, he embarked on a quest to replace its senior figures with members of a “new Ministry” whom he could rely on and trust.

To do so, Oneko created the Kenya News Agency (KNA) in late 1963, which was intended primarily to provide him with direct and highly regulated control over Kenyan citizens’ access to both domestic and international news. The KNA was able to do so because it sat “squarely astride the news flow,” acting as an intermediary between original news events and the reporters who wrote about them. In theory, the domineering control that the KNA was meant to hold over domestic news collection would have allowed its staff to regulate how independent journalists wrote about Kenya even before their fingers touched their typewriters. This was not fully realized in 1964, as by early 1965, domestic news was still being routed through another department within MIBT (the Press Office) pending the installation of relevant equipment within the KNA, much to its Chief Editor’s frustration. The KNA did, however, succeed in achieving this control much more quickly with international news. In early 1964, MIBT made an agreement that ensured that all international stories collected by Reuters would be retransmitted via the KNA. The KNA was meant to “preserve the identity and integrity” of the news stories transmitted by Reuters, but in practice, it engaged in fairly heavy editorializing. For the Standard, one of Kenya’s two major newspaper groups, this was infuriating. Eric Marsden, in charge of syndication, remembered, “We had a real rebellion in the office...We felt we had been sold

21 Kyle, Independence of Kenya, 140.
down the river by Reuters. I never had any regard for them after that.”

The KNA also was the sole source of news for the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation following its nationalization later in 1964, which in turn had a monopoly over all broadcast media in Kenya. This made the KNA an incredibly powerful institution for control of access to news in Kenya: in effect, it had total control of the content propagated by all broadcast media and partial control over a large swath of print media.

Oneko did not squander this control, using it to cultivate a national consciousness that was specifically informed by the values of the Eastern Bloc. To do so, he drew on old ties and sources of patronage, funding and staffing the KNA with resources and manpower drawn almost exclusively from the Eastern Bloc. The USSR provided radio-receiving equipment, a technical expert for maintenance of machines, and the (East-aligned) international news service TASS, all free of charge. Czechoslovakia gifted the KNA with teleprinters (telex machines, for sending and receiving news) and typewriters, sent a Czech journalist to work as an advisor (Zdenek Kubes of the Czechoslovak News Agency), and trained the students who ended up staffing the KNA. The entire setup of the KNA was a not-at-all subtle nod to the agenda of the radical faction, and as a result, the KNA drew flak from multiple parties. Fellow MPs were concerned that tribalism was at work in the hiring of KNA personnel, and the U.S. embassy feared that the media had been suborned by interference from communist countries. But there was more to the setup of the KNA than simple tribal favoritism or expediency. Like the rest of the radical faction’s ties to the Eastern Bloc, these initiatives had deep historical roots.

**Asserting Control**

Oneko’s appointment of KNA personnel was not simply an attempt to expand state power, but also an attempt to assert control over the Kenyan bureaucracy. Czechoslovakia’s training of Kenyan newsagents had been in progress for years before independence, with candidates being sent by KANU to train with Ceteka, the Czech news agency, in a castle near Prague. They were “all of one tribe”—i.e., Luo—and were almost certainly some of the many Kenyans who had been shuttled through Cairo on the way to the Eastern Bloc for training, courtesy of Odinga’s counter-

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The key benefit to Oneko of having this cadre of midlevel supporters was the ability to neutralize, or at least minimize, the capacity of other parties to act against members of the radical faction. This ability was extremely important, because many of the bureaucrats within MIBT were unknowns to Oneko, but the time they had spent working for colonial officials made it likely that they were sympathetic to the moderate rather than radical faction, since the British made anticommunism a key policy point on their part. Oneko hence made it a point to hire known factors upon his introduction to the Ministry, and the appointment of these Czech-trained Luos to the KNA was clearly the radical faction attempting to reap the benefits of their earlier investment into establishing a reliable cadre of midlevel supporters. A key member of this cadre was Wera Ambitho, then the Chief Editor of the KNA but originally of Radio Cairo fame. Radio Cairo had been a significant anticolonial force in the years leading up to independence, broadcasting anticolonial propaganda toward Kenya with the aid of the Nasserite government. Ambitho had run it out of the Kenya Office in Cairo, a hub of anticolonial activity of which he was the effective leader, even though he was not the official chairman. If not by his voice (Keith Kyle has called Ambitho the most hated man by the British in this era), the other new members of the KNA would surely have known him by his face: as leader of the Kenya Office, Ambitho had also been responsible for shuttling Kenyans toward their studies in the Eastern Bloc. Ambitho was fairly dedicated to the anticolonial rhetoric of the Eastern Bloc, and some sources have alleged that he was in fact the person responsible for pushing Odinga himself, the leader of the radical faction, toward his greater contact with the communist world in 1960. He was one of the few individuals whom Oneko could trust to enact the agenda of the radical faction.

Under Ambitho’s direction, the KNA portrayed Kenya as a bourgeoning nation that belonged to a greater transnational community, sharing with it a unifying set of anticolonial and redistributive sentiments. The first part of this was the domestic element, aiming to ensure that the KNA gave “maximum publicity to Government work.” Direct criticism of Kenya was seen as being non-constructive, and an internal directive stipulated that any such criticism in Reuters’s copy “had to be referred to the chief editor [Ambitho], who normally killed it.” However, it was not merely sufficient for the KNA to ensure that regional or national news had the stamp of central government on it. That news also had to have the influence of the radical faction written into it. Although the KNA taking news from both Reuters and TASS was nominally meant to ensure that it had “a balance between East and West,” in...
practice, Matheson (working in the newsroom of the KBC following nationalization) remembered Oneko “breathing down [their] necks to use as much TASS as possible.” Moreover, Oneko and Ambitho made it a point to adopt a strictly anticolonial policy that clearly identified the allies and enemies of Kenya. South Africa and Rhodesia, both still under white rule, were regularly designated as “racist-minority” governments, and conflict reporting that showed anticolonial (and particularly Eastern Bloc-backed) forces in a poor light was trimmed or even outright suppressed.

Ambitho’s imprint was clear here; having been part of a transnational anticolonial network in Cairo himself, he understood the contextualization of national ideals within a transnational framework to be a powerful tool for building collective identities. Rather than letting the nation stand alone as an abstract idea, he chose instead to embed it within a greater framework of allies and enemies. By situating the nation-building struggle within a greater international struggle, Ambitho gave the nation moral authority and transformed it from an imposition of the state into an organization necessary for survival. This was a philosophy that was explicitly revolutionary in nature, framed in Manichaean terms of good and evil, and it stood in stark contrast to the gradualism that the moderate faction promoted. It was still very much a nation-statist philosophy—in a 1961 pamphlet, Ambitho had quoted Kenyatta saying that the independence of individual countries had to precede pan-Africanism—but it was a type of nation-statism that was compatible only with the Eastern Bloc and definitively rejected the West.

The End of Majimboism

Already weakened by the outcome of the Third Lancaster House Conference, the majimboist constitution came under attack once more through mid-and late 1964. Some KADU politicians resisted, but, left out in the cold, many of them—such as Muliro and Matano—were now being tempted into KANU, and as time went on, an increasing number of them defected. Rather than hold out, the remaining members of KADU—Muliro among them—submitted, and on November 10, 1964, led their party across the floor. Kenya was now a de facto one-party state, and regionalism was dead and buried. Receiving notice of this, the editor of the independent Mombasa Times, previously vehemently pro-KADU, chose to leave the country and was summarily replaced by an apolitical editor. He clearly felt that there was nothing more

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33 A.J. Hughes, Senior Press Officer (Overseas & Features), “Draft Speech to Be Delivered by the Minister of Information, Broadcasting & Tourism, Mr. R. Achieng Oneko, at 7 P.M. on Tuesday, 20th April, 1965 to Students and Staff at the Kenya Institute of Administration.” April 1, 1965, Kenya National Archives (KNA), AHC/1/53, 119–125. Loughran, Birth of a Nation, 78.
34 Loughran, Birth of a Nation, 78.
36 Hornsby, Kenya, 95–96.
37 S.L. Muhanji, Senior Information Officer, Coast Region. October 26, 1964, Kenya National Archives (KNA), AHC/1/45, 50. S.L. Muhanji, Senior Information Officer, Coast Region. November 26,
to be said on his part: all talk of majimboism was done.

Kenya became a republic on December 12, 1964. Among other constitutional changes, the position of prime minister was abolished, making Kenyatta the president. He took the occasion to reshuffle the Cabinet, introducing Daniel arap Moi, the one time enemy of nation-statism. Like many of his ex-KADU colleagues, Moi leaned heavily conservative, much of his support for majimboism having been rooted in a desire to maintain old structures and old power bases. Their previous quarrels put aside, Kenyatta was not shy about using his one time foes against the radical faction, as once they put their claims to majimboism aside, many of them were in truth closer in political ideology to him than the radicals were. In this way, the absorption of KADU into KANU proved to be a bane, not a boon, for individuals like Odinga and Oneko.38

In all likelihood, Oneko—and perhaps other members of the radical faction—had not anticipated just how soon this split would come or how sharp it would be. If he had known that he would eventually come into conflict with Kenyatta, he might have been more judicious in the way that he consolidated his own power over his Ministry. Rather than turn MIBT into a highly centralized state organ with access to the Kenya News Agency, the Voice of Kenya, and more besides, he might have chosen to disperse its power in a more decentralized structure. As it happened, Oneko went the same way as the British had in the prelude to the First Lancaster House Conference: he built up a powerful system of control, only for his successor to wrest it from him and use it as a method of knocking him down. The coming year and a half would prove that Oneko's cursory attempts to appoint the “new Ministry” would not be enough.

“Old Ministry” Redux (January 1965–April 1966)

The end of the battle between KANU and KADU signaled a pivot within MIBT from the struggle against majimboism to a struggle around the nature of nation-statism. But like the contest around majimboism, this was a lopsided battle in which the existing structure of the state created incentives for the individuals operating it (i.e., civil servants) to work against those who wished to command it (i.e., politicians). The bureaucratic coup against Oneko rested on the introduction of a new individual into the Ministry: Peter Gachathi, who replaced Justus Oluoch as the permanent secretary of MIBT. Gachathi was “part of a Kikuyu clique that was closest to Kenyatta” and a powerful official, having been educated at the elite Alliance High School like many of the other intelligentsia in Kenyatta’s inner circle. His appointment as permanent secretary in Oneko’s Ministry was likely no accident; given Gachathi’s prominence and connections, Kenyatta almost certainly saw him as someone who could check Oneko’s potential excesses. With KADU essentially neutralized, the reshuffling of the Cabinet presented a perfect opportunity for Kenyatta to mobilize against his

1964, Kenya National Archives (KNA), AHC/1/45, 40.
other great opponents, i.e., the radical nation-statists. Kenyatta’s control of appointments within the civil service was an excellent and subtle way to cut the power base of his opponents out from under them. Although individuals such as Oneko would remain in nominal political control of their ministries, in practice, the positioning of loyal civil servants in key positions undercut any effective authority that Oneko may have had and enabled Kenyatta to expedite or delay the implementation of his policies. It was a strategy that members of KANU had employed before when countering the regionalization of the civil service in early 1963; now, Kenyatta would have a chance to try his hand at this old strategy once more.

Gachathi acted quickly to cement his power, even while remaining deferential to his minister. Barely into the new year, he was already instructing senior officers that the practice of consulting Oneko on Ministry matters must “cease directly” and that all correspondence to Oneko should be directed through Gachathi instead. Ostensibly, this was Oneko “[wishing Gachathi] to make it clear” that his responsibility was that of formulating policy and advising the Cabinet, but it is improbable that Oneko was the true originator of this directive: it cut him off from direct contact with key officials such as Ambitho, and moreover, it followed too coincidentally closely in the aftermath of Oluoch’s transfer. Instead, it was likely an attempt by Gachathi to assert control over the Ministry. Although he claimed in this memo that his concern was “the day-to-day administration and staffing” of the Ministry, this was not the case; just one month later, he was enthusiastically proposing the creation of a new chief information officer position that would let him focus on policy as well. In all probability, however, this was not a purely cynical power grab and was also driven by Gachathi’s own personality and working style. Gachathi was a disciplinarian who demanded strict adherence to protocol from his underlings and was particularly uptight about the need to obey the chain of command. He had little tolerance for subordinates failing to perform their duties or engaging in politics above their station, which frustrated him on more than one occasion given the inadequate training and organization of the rapidly transforming Ministry. But whatever the mix of Gachathi’s motivations, his gradual commandeering of the Ministry—and consequently, his stripping Oneko of authority—would be a key feature of the coming year and a half in MIBT.

But the appointment of Gachathi did not obviate the moderate nation-statists’ need for other loyal civil servants of lower rank. Although Gachathi helped to coordinate and recalibrate the policy direction of MIBT, steering it decidedly toward the political right, this would not have been possible without the assistance of subordinates. Gachathi’s most dedicated lieutenant by far was Phillip Wangalwa, formerly the information officer in charge of Coast Province, and not so long before, a fierce

40 P.J. Gachathi, Permanent Secretary, MIB. February 17, 1965, Kenya National Archives (KNA), AHIC/1/13, Pt. 2, 2–3.
defender of KANU amid the chaos of late-1963, pre-independence Kenya. Then, Wangalwa had expressed his fealty to the state, at least partly in the hopes of ascending to its center on his national pilgrimage; by mid-1964, this hope had been realized.

Wangalwa had been appointed the Senior Press Officer (News) at headquarters in Nairobi because of Oluoch and Oneko’s inability to find a more suitable candidate, despite Oluoch “not [thinking] that he [was] at present competent to cope with the responsibilities involved.” It is unclear what his duties had been during Oluoch’s tenure as permanent secretary, but the introduction of Gachathi provided Wangalwa with a new opportunity for recognition and advancement. By January 18, 1965, Wangalwa was issuing a directive from Gachathi that all senior staff in regional offices should “take special precaution in all matters regarding Trade Union [sic]” and “until further notice, stop covering Political Meetings.” This latter decision to bar coverage of political meetings was almost certainly targeted at members of the radical faction, who relied heavily on populist rallies for exposure, and would have hampered the moderate faction to a much lesser degree, since ministers (most of whom were moderates) were specifically exempt. Oneko would almost certainly not have instituted this measure, so its application was clear evidence of Wangalwa falling into Gachathi’s orbit.

By April 6, 1965, Gachathi had named Wangalwa Public Relations Officer for the President’s Office in an emergency meeting. The purview of this post was unclear but seemed to entail the right to override existing programming when requisitioning television coverage for Kenyatta. The lack of certainty around the ambit of this post was exactly what made it so important: it blurred the lines between personal and bureaucratic power, giving Wangalwa an ambiguous jurisdiction that he could rely on people such as Gachathi and Kenyatta to enforce. As an official stuck in Coast Province, Wangalwa had once written dreamily to Oluoch:

“I love [Kenyatta] and I love all my ministers so much that they will be the last in this ugly world to be ignored or slighted by me...Why can’t our new Government copy some examples of British Government system where the Prime Minister or Governor is always accompanied by a highly educated attache. [sic]...If I have erred, I beg your pardon but I will continue to press for the appointment of...an educated Attache [sic]...who will always speak with authority and understanding to any one, including the Press, who wish to see the Premier.”

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42 J.N. Oluoch, Permanent Secretary, “We spoke briefly this morning regarding the successor to Mr. Chatterton...” March 23, 1964, Kenya National Archives (KNA), AHC/1/31, 245.
To all appearances, Oluoch ignored this letter. But a year and a half later, Gachathi had, startlingly enough, helped Wangalwa to realize a version of this reverie. Wangalwa’s success illustrates the incredible social mobility that existed at independence for those with the means and inclination to seize onto it. Before independence had arrived, Wangalwa and Oluoch had both been provincial information officers—Wangalwa at Coast, Oluoch at Nyanya—but they had risen rapidly to positions of national significance that gave them direct contact with Kenyatta. But more than mere ambition, Wangalwa’s rise also spoke to how Kenya’s bureaucracy shaped its politics at independence.

The Aftermath of Africanization

The existence of middle-ranking civil servants such as Wangalwa was one key reason that moderate nation-statism was so successful in Kenya. Although they were often not as vocal as the radical nation-statists (and for that matter, rarely as vocal about their own ambitions as Wangalwa himself), many of the newly promoted African civil servants were far more comfortable with moderate nation-statism than radical nation-statism. Their reasons for endorsing moderate nation-statism were often varied and dissimilar, as were the degrees to which they did so. Anticommunist colonial policy before 1960 and during Africanization from 1960–1963 was one major reason for this, but more subtle and important were the understandings, values, and personal ambitions that individuals such as Wangalwa brought to their jobs in the civil service. Ultimately, these views of what the civil service should be were shaped by its own structure, such that the civil service created the conditions for its own perpetuation. Both personal agency and the institutional structure of the civil service hence played significant roles in the realization of moderate nation-statism, with the latter being particularly important. In the study of early 1960s Kenya, these roles have been partially obscured by actors who had greater visibility on the national stage, such as Kenyatta, Mboya, and Odinga, but they were no less significant for that fact.

To begin, a good deal of established bureaucratic support for moderate nation-statism was due to the fact that the newly senior civil servants had worked their way gradually up through the bureaucracy while it was still under British control. The British had been discriminating about whom they permitted to be educated, trained, and promoted, being aware that these were all methods through which Africans could gain power and wanting to limit the advancement of more radical (and potentially communist) candidates. Ambitho’s case was instructive: he had originally won a scholarship to study in Britain, but then had been refused a passport due to concerns about his political alignment. This refusal was what had driven him to Cairo; in its absence, it is entirely possible that he would have ended up in Britain otherwise. Even before the First Lancaster House Conference in 1960 and their awareness that independence was on the horizon, British bureaucrats had been picking Africans whom they saw as reliable and trustworthy and sending them on to training programs that were often based overseas in the West (and particularly Britain). Many of the pioneer
African broadcasters in the KBC/VoK, such as John Ithau and Stephen Kikumu, received training during attachments to the BBC in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Such training was, of course, intended to equip these individuals with the skills necessary to carry out their duties better, but it also had two auxiliary goals: it acted as an endorsement that ensured their preferential treatment over other less qualified candidates, and it familiarized them with the British conception of broadcasting institutions as being part of a greater landscape of liberal and independent media.

At independence, this selection process had intensified because of the policy of Africanization. This policy demanded that a competent corps of African civil servants be trained to replace their departing British counterparts and led to the hasty elevation of individuals such as Wangalwa and Oluoch. This accelerated the selection process of years prior, thrusting personally ambitious but sometimes underqualified individuals into major leadership positions. However, the rapidity of the process also made it important that they take up the mantle of gradualism and development, because this was a posture that they needed to adopt in order to gain access to new opportunities. This philosophy was vindicated upon the victory of KANU in the pre-independence elections of 1963 and informed their continued decision to maintain this posture, as was visible in Wangalwa’s appeal to political development following those elections. The net product of these selection pressures was to cultivate a particular type of senior civil servant who was sympathetic to the British worldview and hence more predisposed to support moderate than radical nation-statism.

However, this was not to say that middle-ranking civil servants such as Wangalwa were purely the product of colonial (or neocolonial) rule; they supported moderate nation-statism also because of their understanding of their vocations as civil servants, independently of the wishes of their superiors (be they African or European). This was a mixture of their personal understanding of how the state should properly function and the personality traits and ambitions that had led them to become a part of the state in the first place. Many civil servants saw the state as being an arena for opportunity and promotion, and it was this desire for recognition and security that had driven many of them to join the civil service. Although Wangalwa was particularly egregious in making his preference for these things known, he was hardly alone in his values. Richard arap Koske, soon to be the Director of Broadcasting, had been employed in the civil service (originally as a teacher) since at least 1952. In commending him for a promotion in 1956, the principal of Tambach Government African School wrote that Koske “[came] from that part of Kipsigis that [had] gone ahead... due to the hard work of the local people,” and that he had “the self-confidence that [came] from achievement,” but also “[realized] the value of sound moral discipline within tribal life.” The only fault that the principal could see was that Koske “will not tolerate inefficiency” and was “a relentless driver of those under him”—all values, in truth, that made him perfectly suited to the acquisitive spirit of the civil service.

47 Principal, Government African School, Tamach, “Mr. Richard arap Koskei. Re: your AF/K.6/6I of
appeal of moderate nation-statism to personal accumulation hence led these experienced civil servants to endorse it, but they did so because of their own volition, not simply because it was an ideology imposed hegemonically from above.

The intervention of middle-ranking civil servants such as Wangalwa in deciding the nature of nation-statism underscored the importance of personal agency within the state. Just as McCulloch had forestalled the implementation of majimbosim, thereby guaranteeing that it was ultimately overturned, Wangalwa was able to combat the implementation of radical nation-statism and lay the groundwork for its disruption. These otherwise invisible civil servants were able to accelerate or delay the implementation of political agendas by more prominent actors. As a result, even if it was necessary that individuals such as major political figures such as Kenyatta and Oneko support a certain kind of nation-statism for it to be implemented successfully, it was not sufficient that they did so. The responsibility for implementing policies supporting radical nation-statism fell to middle-ranking civil servants such as Wangalwa, and it was their hesitations around radical nation-statism that permitted Kenyatta to buck Oneko's agenda. By pushing back on policies, civil servants were able to act as an inertial brake that slowed the implementation of political agendas. Beyond individual intentions—be they imposed from above or exercised from within—the role of personal agency in these middle-ranking civil servants underscored the importance not just of individual agents within the state, but also of the structure of the state itself.

Cold War in Miniature

The strengthening hold of the moderate faction within the Ministry in early 1965 paralleled an escalation of conflict between the two factions on the national level. This escalation began in February 1965 and reached its climax in April, but took months to fully play itself out. By the time it ended in late 1965, the radical faction was decimated, though it took till early 1966 for the moderate faction to conclusively force them from government. At its root was Kenyatta's February 1965 decision, long in the making, that members of the radical faction were genuinely plotting a coup to oust him from power. Whether there was truth to this still has yet to be conclusively resolved. The activities of the radical faction were cause for some suspicion, but at the same time, Kenyatta's Western advisors were indubitably keen to move him to action against Odinga. With Kenyatta’s discreet approval, Mboya led the charge against the radicals, being so fervent in his crusade that they did not notice Kenyatta’s hand in the matter until their final ousting in early 1966, when it was too late for them to do anything about it. But within Kenyatta’s inner circle, there was to be no doubt about where his convictions lay. Duncan Ndegwa, the head of the civil service and

10th November 1956.” December 17, 1956, Kenya National Archives (KNA), OP/1/1836, 8–9.
48 Goldsworthy, Tom Mboya, 233.
49 Hornsby, Kenya, 147.
50 Goldsworthy, Tom Mboya, 233.
a close associate of Kenyatta’s, recalled that when he visited Oneko at his house in Kileleshwa, Kenyatta “warned [Ndegwa] to keep away from such company.”

The message was clear: within government, one had to be either with Kenyatta or against him. What middle ground there had been between the moderates and the radicals was rapidly vanishing.

Within MIB, the first signs of open conflict burst out in late February, two months after Gachathi’s appointment. Though the start of their conflict was contemporaneous with Pinto’s assassination, it appears to have been an independent matter: the cause of the conflict was a meeting convened on February 23, the day before the assassination. Nevertheless, it seems improbable that the strong emotions surrounding the assassination of Pinto, who harbored politics markedly reminiscent of Ambitho’s, would not have played into the matter in some way. The two contestants were, naturally, Ambitho and Wangalwa, who in the charged political climate of the time represented views that were about as diametrically opposed as one could get. Ambitho was one of Odinga’s men, a political appointee and an outsider to the civil service. He was ideologically committed to the realization of policies in support of radical nation-statism, and having enjoyed an enormous amount of influence in Cairo, clearly relished the autonomy that his appointment into a key MIBT position had offered him. Conversely, Wangalwa was all but one of Kenyatta’s, having worked his way up through the civil service and fully embraced the developmental ideals of moderate nation-statism in the process. His central interest was his own personal attainment and the ability to make good on his serendipitously proximal placement to a position of power, but in all likelihood, he also took poorly to Ambitho’s vocal championing of anti-British redistributive politics. Most importantly, both officers were in positions of significant power, and their bureaucratic turf overlapped in ways that remained ambiguous because of the continuing reorganization of the post-independence Kenyan state.

The ultimate prize that both officers wanted was the power to control the outward flow of news from the Ministry, but since both their offices had some influence over this, their incompatible political views and personalities drove them to clash. Technically, they were of the same rank, if assigned different duties: Ambitho was the Chief Editor of the Kenya News Agency, while Wangalwa was the Senior Press Officer (News), or SPO (N), in charge of the Press Office. It is unclear how exactly the duties between the two were delineated when the clash began, but in the February 1965 meeting that sparked their conflict, the KNA was designated as “the clearing house for news transmitted to local and overseas subscribers,” while the Press Office took on the primary function of “publicizing Government policies and achievements both locally and overseas.”

This appears to have been roughly in line with what was supposed to be the case: the KNA was responsible for news editing and distribution,

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while the Press Office was responsible for government publicity. Nonetheless, with the intensifying conflict around the battle for nation-statism, this division of duties would not stand. Wangalwa and Ambitho first battled over a proposed restructuring of MIB called for by Gachathiin February 1965. Ambitho refused to sign on to the document, with the key provision that he rejected being its call for “a Senior Officer appointed to effect overall coordination of news policy for the Government.” He accused this of being “an exercise in trying to create a sinecure,” since all the existing senior officers were supposed to be specialists at their respective duties. Most likely, what he truly resented was the reduction of his autonomy, as any direct oversight would reduce the latitude he had to decide the KNA’s policy regarding nonalignment. Barely a month later, in April 1965, this potential reduction of autonomy was exactly what drove him into conflict with Wangalwa, whom he accused of interfering in his affairs. The contention was that Wangalwa had attempted to transmit speeches made at a KANU rally in Nakuru without permitting Ambitho to examine what the domestic and foreign policy implications of the speeches were. Over the course of these clashes, Ambitho and Wangalwa’s attitudes toward each other degenerated from mild dislike to active hostility. In one of the last letters of their exchange, Ambitho wrote:

“The SPO(N) [Wangalwa] has called me an ‘agitator.’ I take a very serious view of that epithet. I may be or may not be an agitator, but I will certainly not be a monger in ingratiating—which is the hallmark [of] incompetency and public service prostitution.”

Yet though these insults were surely based at least in part on their incompatible personalities, they were also rooted deeply in the incompatibilities of their politics and their worldviews, and reflected the clash between the two ministries—one Oneko’s and one Gachathi’s. The two insults that they chose for each other—Ambitho the “agitator” and Wangalwa the “monger in ingratiating”—were rooted in mutual contempt for each other’s worldview. To Wangalwa, who prized order and stability and had gained his rank and power by dint of hard work (and quite a little luck), Ambitho threatened the bedrock of the social structure upon which his achievements rested. This was the same critique that politicians of the moderate faction articulated at large against their radical counterparts: that these radicals were noise-makers whose

political activity would upend the whole hard-won rewards of independence. But to Ambitho, who prized reform and possibility and was returning from abroad to try to transform Kenya, Wangalwa represented all that he had reviled of the colonial state: incompetent sycophants who were only rewarded because they made a deal of how they refused to rock the boat. As officers of the same rank, though, they were evenly matched, and neither agitator nor sycophant would be directly able to get ahead of each other.

Gachathi undertook the tie-breaking action, but even so, his ability to act revealed the shallowness inherent to the support that the radical faction enjoyed within the Ministry. In May 1965, Oneko was forced to make his Ministry available to a Committee of Inquiry, chaired by Minister of Finance (and close Kenyatta ally) James Gichuru. This committee took testimonies not from Oneko, but instead from his most senior staff: Assistant Ministers Ithau and Njeru, and Permanent Secretary Gachathi. Gachathi submitted two separate testimonies: a more general set of notes on the organization and function of the Ministry and a separate Secret-level report that he passed to the committee one month later. Although the first testimony was nothing special, the second testimony amounted to a direct attack on Oneko and the way in which he had conducted the Ministry. In particular, he took aim directly at members of the Ministry even though he did not supply names, putting the KNA under fire with the suggestion that “most of the KNA staff were trained in Eastern Countries and [appeared] to have marked political tendencies.” Gachathi’s recommendation: fire them. It is unclear what happened to most of the other KNA staff, but since many were on short-term contracts, it seems probable that they were summarily dismissed. Ambitho fared a bit better, but not by much: a few months later, in late 1965, he was shipping out to New York as one of Kenya’s press attachés. Although there could be no doubt that this was a cushy position, it held little of the power that the KNA Chief Editor would have had. This underscored the difficulty that members of the radical faction faced: Oneko was unable to counter Gachathi simply because he had no one else to draw on. By contrast, it was trivial for Gachathi to promote another member of the “old Ministry,” who would be more than happy to take a “new Ministry” member’s place.

**Aftermath**

As the months wore on, members of the moderate faction continued to wear down Oneko’s grip on his own Ministry. Gachathi set up a “Senior Officers’ Liaison Meeting” to centralize control around himself, directly intervened in June 1965 to stop coverage of political rallies supporting members of the radical faction, and staffed a new Presidential Mobile Press Unit against the protests of Deputy Director Odula. By late 1965, Gachathi had succeeded in undermining Oneko to the extent

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that he and his former allies no longer had a home base, and, as Oneko would complain later on, his Ministry even actively worked against his own interests. In April 1966, other events forced Oneko’s hand. At the Limuru Conference, Kenyatta split the KANU vice presidency into eight regional VPs, and thereby destroyed Odinga’s power. The left-wingers’ clique had been routed, and Odinga, Oneko, and others would step down and form their own party, only to suffer further humiliations.

Ironically, the state machine that Oneko had built up, already deployed against him in this period, would only be used against him further. The conflicts of this short period cemented the political and social forms in Kenya for the coming few decades. Majimboism was exiled from the political lexicon until after 1978, when Kenyatta died and the new president, Daniel arap Moi, resurrected it to justify his continued hold on power. In the meantime, Kenyatta and his compatriots brutally cracked down on members of the radical faction, jailing Oneko in 1969 and firing Ambitho in 1971. The Ministry retained total control over Kenya’s broadcast media well into the 20th century, and hence monopolized the ability to decide Kenya’s sociopolitical form. Despite the tumult surrounding independence, the broadcast-bureaucratic model retained its primacy and cemented the role of development-oriented nation-statism within Kenya for years to come.

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Alternative Agriculture: Breaking the Industrial Mold and Establishing “Organic”

Max Hofmeister

This article explores how industrial agriculture became the dominant mode of production in the United States and how, in recent decades, alternative agriculture, particularly organic agriculture, developed as a rebuke of industrial production. Alternative agriculture is defined by its contrast with mainstream industrial agriculture, a system characterized by and criticized for its reliance on machinery, chemicals, monoculture, and modified seeds. Alternatives to industrial agriculture have struggled to compete with its high efficiency, and they are criticized for their high cost and low production. Small-scale farmers in and around St. Louis provide commentary on how their own production decisions regarding industrial or alternative practices are motivated by cost, market, environmental, and health concerns. On a larger scale, U.S. agriculture faces the choice to continue the trajectory of the past century—ever-increasing production and specialization—or to incorporate more diverse perspectives and approaches to producing our food that limit its impact.

Introduction

Farmers have been called the “the backbone of the nation” and “the salt of the earth.” One rabbit and goat herder called owning her farm “achieving the American dream,” hearkening back to the dreams of millions of immigrants who came to the United States to farm. Today only 2 million farmers remain in the United States. In 2012, almost 90 percent of these farmers were classified by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as small family farms, defined as those with annual gross sales less than $350,000 (2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture).1 These farmers account for approximately 20 percent of agricultural production by sales, but only 5 percent of net farm income. Although their share of goods produced is low, small farmers are the stewards of half of U.S. agricultural land. Their management of the land will be crucial to the nation’s environmental and economic sustainability.

Many of these farmers adopt alternative methods of growing to improve the quality of their product, or use alternative rationales to pursue goals of self-sufficiency, altruism, or environmental sustainability. Small urban and nearby rural farms supply the niche, high-quality products for a range of farmers markets, restaurants, community supported agriculture operations (CSAs), and grocery stores. These farmers must balance their commitment to a healthier land and people with their need to make a living wage, if not a profit. The USDA has certified nearly 25,000 American farmers as organic, but many small farmers skip certification or employ other forms of alternative agriculture besides organic.

This paper delves into how the industrial system developed over the course of the 20th century due to scientific advances, a revolution in economic organization, and support from the government. In the later part of the century, sustainable farms

1 also see Figure 1 and “2012 Census Highlights: Small Farms.”
returned to the landscape due to a confluence of environmental, health, and quality concerns. These alternative farms have struggled to compete economically, but at the same time, more Americans than ever are demanding organic, local, more sustainable food options. In choosing agricultural practices, farmers are influenced by government policy, public opinion, environmental reality, and personal conviction. Alternative farmers were surveyed in St. Louis due to convenience and its general approximation of a mid-to-large size average American city. Both industrial and alternative farmers are making rational decisions about what they believe will make them most successful, but alternative farmers face considerable bias based on the organization of the food system in the United States.

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Figure 1. Eighty-eight percent of all farms are small family farms, but they take home 5 percent of net farm income (Graph courtesy of the USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture).

Throughout the paper, I refer to several interviews with St. Louis farmers. The following key describes each of the farms:
Industrial vs. Alternative Agriculture

Industrial agriculture combines mechanization with chemical inputs to solve the main challenges of agriculture: back-breaking labor, annual decrease of fertility, weed pressure, insect or animal damage, and plant diseases. The system has become conventional in the U.S. because it allows high yields and has low labor requirements. Since the early 1900s, the labor requirements per acre per year have shrunk from tens of hours to in some cases a few minutes. Industrialization accelerated greatly during World War II due to technological innovation, increased manufacturing capacity, and the widespread introduction of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The agricultural system continued to evolve in the late twentieth century with the development of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), computer technology, and recently, geographic information systems (GIS).

Industrialization's influence on American agriculture is evident from the decline
in farms and farmers. The number of farms fell 63 percent between 1900 and 2000 (Dmitri et al. 2005). In 1900, an estimated 41 percent of Americans were farmers; by 1950, 12.5 percent were farmers; in 2005, the number fell to 2 percent; and by 2012, only 0.65 percent of the population worked on farms; 22 million farm animals have been replaced by 5 million tractors (Dmitri et al. 2005, 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture). Farmers left rural areas to find better work in cities, both because the number of urban jobs increased and because the relative value of agricultural products fell. Prices fell, and with them, profits. The costs of scaling up to stay in business during the mechanization and fertilizer boom of the 1940s sent another wave of farmers off their land. Costs have since continued to rise as farming becomes more technologically sophisticated, requiring more land but fewer people.

A remarkable concentration of farming into large grain-producing operations has boosted agricultural production despite the declining number of farms. Out of roughly 2 million remaining farms, the 320,000 largest (farmed by 0.1 percent of the U.S. population) account for 89 percent of U.S. agricultural production, meaning the statistics on the number of “farms” are misleading; only these 320,000 farms should be considered as the U.S.’s agricultural producers (2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Conkin 2008, 3.). In 2012, 88 percent of all farms were “small,” with annual gross sales less than $350,000 (2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture). These small farms took home 5 percent of net farm income, a shockingly small percentage, which demonstrates that these small farms have little ability to make a profit. Production across all farms is highly concentrated into a few crops: in 2012, corn made up 31.4 percent of all cropland acreage and soy beans another 25.4 percent—see Figure 2 for the full distribution (2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture). These crops have also benefited most from the industrial system: corn yields have risen from 30 to 60 bushels per acre in the 1930s to 150 to 200 bushels per acre since 2000 (Conkin 2008). Since 1960, global production of cereal grains has risen 170 percent, despite using only 8 percent more cropland (Lobell and Burke 2010, 18). Industrialization of agriculture caused huge gains in production per acre and per hour of labor, a revolution that can be interpreted alternately as having deprived millions of people of their jobs, or as having liberated them to work more productive jobs in other parts of the economy.

Historian Deborah Fitzgerald defines industrial agriculture as a system consisting of five parts: “large-scale production, specialized machines, standardization of processes and products, reliance on managerial (rather than artisanal) expertise, and a continual evocation of ‘efficiency’ as a production mandate” (Fitzgerald 2003, 23). Economic-scientific-rational logic has replaced traditional experience as the guide for how to farm. Conventional industrial agriculture uses a combination of pesticides, fertilizers, hybrid or genetically modified seeds, and a wide range of specialized machinery to expand yields and increase labor productivity, resulting in vast farms. Today, most production occurs on farms averaging 1,100 acres, with some farms 5 or 10 times larger (Macdonald et al. 2013). These farms are radically different from the agriculture that had previously focused on self-sufficiency and diversification.

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2 see also Figure 1 and “2012 Census Highlights: Small Farms.”
Fitzgerald considers industrialization to be a revolution that has transformed every farm into a factory floor. The hallmark of the system is a conception of growing plants or livestock as being the same as producing an inanimate physical object, or as a chemical reaction that takes in specific inputs and outputs neat, identical products and wastes. Few farmers think in these terms, but plant scientists and economists study how to maximize the output of such a production process, subject to a given amount of land, labor, and time. Part of the alternative agriculture movement is a reconsideration of what contributes to that logic—for example, health and the environment—and a reconsideration of how natural processes can make production cheaper and more efficient.

Agriculture's transformation in the twentieth century led to a trade-off, a Faustian bargain that compromised the quality of rural life and land in return for higher crop yields and less work. Historian Douglas Hurt, in explaining how post–World War II industrialization changed agriculture, stated, “Although farmers had always been commercially minded and profit oriented, new scientific and technological developments together with high wartime demands and government price supports ended any lingering illusions that farming was a way of life” (Hurt 1994, 321). Over the past four decades, farmers’ incomes have increased faster than the incomes for any other occupation in America, though they remain below average (Pew Research Center 2015). But this increase comes from widening income inequality—large, wealthy farmers are getting wealthier, while farmworkers’ and small farmers’ incomes stagnate or fall. Rural areas have been and are being hollowed out while agribusinesses post record profits. Patricia Whisnant, of Rain Crow Ranch, lamented rural decline in her area, stating:

We live in a very rural county where there is no industry and jobs are not plentiful. Over the years we have witnessed the continual disappearance of our community’s most precious resource. I am referring to the loss of
our children who are forced to leave the farm in search of opportunity in education and jobs. Most of these kids never return to live in our community… in the era of industrialized consolidated mega-farms it is difficult on a small farm to support one family. Much less extended families.

Industrializing farms cuts out the need for so many farmers because machines and chemicals take over their work. Farms are likely to need even fewer people as robotic machinery develops. The progressive decline of rural life reduces the viability of small farms because they often cooperate with neighbors, sharing equipment, knowledge, or labor. This trend will not be reversed, barring another revolution (or catastrophe) in agriculture, but also it’s unclear whether it should be opposed or applauded as an economic-scientific triumph.

Agriculture has more complicated dimensions than simply water + seeds + sunlight = crops. A farm completely replaces the environment that existed before it, disrupting natural cycles that provide clean air and water, allow biodiversity, and regulate nutrients. To what degree do we consider agricultural pollution, the toll production takes on the land, the interaction of agriculture with other natural systems, or the effects of certain types of production on the food we eat? Uncertainty complicates these decisions. As scientific understanding of ecological interactions improves, industrial farms can ameliorate their effect on the land, but the least destructive path is still eliminating as many chemicals and machines as possible and mimicking nature’s way of growing. As we learn more about how the planet stabilizes itself, the consequences of so much space devoted to agriculture—40 percent of all ice-free land by some estimates (Taneztap 2015)—are revealing themselves. In the next century, we will have to decide if and how our laws and behavior should reflect our knowledge of agriculture’s effect on the planet.

Alternative agriculture is one way to lessen this effect on the planet. It refers to a variety of sustainable agricultural practices that offer an alternative to conventional industrial agriculture. Organic farming—which uses no synthetic chemicals—is the most popular alternative form, but other forms include low-input agriculture, regen-
Alternative Agriculture

Iterative farming, biodynamic agriculture, agroecology, polyculture, and conservation agriculture. These systems widely overlap but have subtle differences. Farmers can employ a few sustainable practices—such as natural nutrient management, crop and pasture rotation, manure and crop residue recycling, integrated pest management, water conservation, minimal tillage, and the use of natural fertilizer or pesticide—rather than a whole alternative system. These methods attempt to diminish the harm to land and people that agriculture causes.

Environmental & Health Effects of Industrial Agriculture

Industrial agriculture damages the environment and contributes to climate change on a global scale. Estimates vary, but studies suggest agriculture directly contributes approximately 25 percent of the world’s annual greenhouse gas emissions, and supplying farms with their industrial inputs and processing their output contributes another 10 percent to 15 percent of emissions (Vermeulen et al. 2012; Foley et al. 2011; Tilman et al. 2011). Agriculture harms biodiversity by taking up ever more land and destroying habitats; interrupting the nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorous biogeochemical cycles; and polluting land, oceans, and the atmosphere with chemical toxins (Pereira et al. 2012; Hooper et al. 2012; Foley et al. 2005). With the global demand for food expected to increase by 70 percent to 110 percent by 2050 due to rising population and affluence (Alexandratos and Bruinsma 2012; Tilman et al. 2012), the world will need to add an estimated “2.7–4.6 million hectares of cropland, annually, the size of a small European nation” (Tanetzap 2015, 1–2). Agriculture uses 70 percent of freshwater worldwide, and as much as 92 percent of the global water footprint—the amount of water that is consumed by its use rather than returned for downstream usage (Hoekstra et al. 2012). In addition to using so much water, since the 1990s, the EPA has continually cited agricultural runoff as the greatest impairment to U.S. waterways, as pesticides poison plants and animals, and fertilizers over-saturate waterways with nutrients (Hall et al. 2012). Agriculture links into many of the world’s interconnected problems of energy, land and water usage, climate change, and biodiversity.

In addition to harming the environment, industrial agriculture harms the bodies of its consumers. Obesity has doubled since 1980, partially due to an increase in the consumption of processed foods, meat, sugar, and fat (Freck 2015). These unhealthy foods come from an industrial system that privileges high-volume grain and soy production to be fed to livestock or made into food chemicals. Specifically, corn has been synthesized into hundreds of new chemicals—including high fructose corn syrup—which are frequently blamed for obesity and other health problems (Pollan 2006). Conventional production leaves pesticide residue on food, which varies greatly based on the produce and the chemicals used, but can cause chronic and acute health problems (American Academy of Pediatrics 2012). Nutrient contents may be higher in organic foods, and are unquestionably higher in foods picked closer to peak ripeness—as is usually the case with local foods (American Academy of Pediatrics
The health effects of industrial agriculture in the U.S. are not as severe as its environmental effects, given strict food safety laws, but nonetheless offer further encouragement to farmers considering alternative agriculture.

**United States Agricultural Policy**

Why, despite its risks, does industrial agriculture dominate? As previously mentioned, it has tremendous efficiency advantages in terms of crop yield per labor hour and acre of land, and land and labor are typically the largest costs for any industry. However, investing in industrialization is expensive; in fact, evidence suggests that organic agriculture can have a lower cost per yield, although it is riskier. To institute industrial agriculture required considerable help from government policy and research.

Agricultural policy operates under a twofold rationale in the U.S. It aims to ensure a consistent, cheap, abundant food supply, and to protect the livelihoods of farmers. The first rationale stems from the idea that because of increasing population, our food supply must continuously grow. The second motive for policy came from the Great Depression, when failing farmers and low prices prompted the creation of direct agricultural subsidies. Explicitly, U.S. agricultural policy seeks to “support farm income by raising prices for agricultural commodities through supply management to control surpluses” (Winders 2009, 9). Subsidy programs have disbursed billions of dollars throughout the 20th century and into the present (see Figure 3). These policies have largely succeeded, however cheap products come at the cost of degraded land, and while most remaining large farmers have relatively stable incomes, millions of people left agriculture after they could no longer make enough money to support themselves.

![Agricultural Subsidy Programs by Payout 1995-2014](image)

*Figure 3. Government subsidies have totaled $322.8 billion from 1995 to 2014, over half of which came from commodity programs that give direct payments for specific crops (Graph by Author, Data from the Environmental Working Group’s Farm Subsidy Database).*
The state’s involvement in promoting agricultural industrialization was initially intended to help small and midsize farmers adopt modern, efficient methods and become economically sustainable (Giesen and Hersey 2010). Early reformers in the 1920s hoped that modern technology, in the form of hybrid seeds, tractors, fertilizer, and pesticide, would help small farmers struggling with soil fertility and conservation (Giesen and Hersey 2010). However, paradoxically, larger farms could more easily capitalize on government supports because many of the expensive solutions had high returns to scale, leading to greater income stratification and further decline of small farmers. The larger the farm, the more it benefited from industrialization and government-supported research. By the 1970s, Earl Butz, President Nixon’s secretary of agriculture, famously urged farmers to “get bigger, get better, or get out” and to plant “fencerow to fencerow” (Quoted in Dudley 2000, 23), but his exhortation merely reflected the agricultural policy that had been in effect for 50 years.

The state established a mutually beneficial relationship with agribusiness and large farmers in the early twentieth century. The state sought to increase yields to make food cheap and abundant, agribusinesses sought to create new technology to sell to farmers, and farmers sought to make more money—the simplest method being to grow more crops. And while the state played a crucial role, all of its efforts relied on the cooperation of farmers; in the words of J. L. Anderson, a farmer and historian, “It was farmers, people with grease under their fingernails and Atrazine and crop oil on their overalls, who industrialized the rural landscape” (Anderson 2009, 193). U.S. policymakers have long focused on supporting industrial agriculture and the mass production of food, becoming increasingly out of touch with the realities of farmers’ welfare, food demand, and environmental impact.

Agricultural policy tended to reinforce the status quo after industrialization took hold of farming. Policies created a self-sustaining “iron triangle of agency personnel, agricultural commodity interest groups and agribusiness, and members of congressional subcommittees” able to manipulate and set spending to serve their interests (Meyer et al. 2005, 123). Jim Hightower, a critic of agricultural policy, documented in 1978 what he viewed as a “land-grant college complex” consisting of government policy, agricultural science, agribusiness, and land-grant colleges designed to serve the interests and profits of large corporations, often to the detriment of small or alternative farmers (Hightower 1978). Illustrating the difficulty of attracting funding for alternative agriculture and the influence of agribusiness, Robert Rodale, editor of Organic Gardening, explained in 1954 that: “[i]ndustrial grants lead the colleges and experiment stations into lines of commercial research at the expense of other fields of study which may not promise as much financial success. Why, for example, should a college look for ways to fight insects naturally when the chemical companies are willing to pay for research on insecticides?” (Quoted in Hightower 1978, 96–97). Thus the “iron triangle” or “agricultural complex” (akin to the military-industrial complex) created a near-insurmountable obstacle to government support of organic and alternative agriculture. A desire for higher production led to a reliance on chemicals and machines that helped chemical and equipment manufacturers, who then lobbied the government to continue support for industrialization. Organic agriculture,
by its nature, discourages the use of inputs sold by agribusiness and produces lower yields, making opponents of both corporations and government agencies. The bias does not exist only against organic or alternative operations—small farms also face discrimination.

The USDA has publicly acknowledged its systemic bias toward large, industrial farms. In 1998, the USDA created the National Commission on Small Farms to investigate discrimination against small farms in U.S. agricultural policy, a follow-up to a 1979 USDA report that discovered decades of racial discrimination in agricultural policy. The 1979 report warned that “unless present policies and programs are changed so that they counter, instead of reinforce or accelerate the trends towards ever-larger farming operations, the result will be a few large farms controlling food production in only a few years” (USDA 1979, 142). Yet the 1998 small farms report, A Time to Act, found the warning was completely unheeded. Systemic discrimination against small producers continued unchecked (USDA National Commission on Small Farms 1998, 8). This discrimination consisted of, but was not limited to: tax policies that gave larger farms greater ability to purchase capital and expand, exemptions from federal labor laws for the agricultural sector that allow large farms to exploit low-wage workers, prohibition of loan or credit assistance to farmers who previously needed “debt forgiveness” (bankruptcy), livestock inspection prices discriminating by volume, subsidy payments based on historical production—and the list continues (USDA National Commission on Small Farms 1998, 10-12). In cases where federal funds are supposed to be restricted to small operations, or regulations are eased on small operations because of their scale, the report found that the USDA was liberal in granting exemptions to large operations.

Small livestock operations experience the bias against them more than other types of farms because of the strict regulations for meat and dairy. Larry Hammer, of Hammer’s Farm, a cattle ranch, corroborates this point on how the USDA regulations are biased against grass-fed cattle ranchers. Regulations stipulate that if a cow is over 30 months old, the tenderloin must be stripped out and discarded because of fears of mad cow disease. At concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), however, fast growth avoids this regulation. Cows are given growth hormones and specialized fatty grain diets to accelerate their fattening, which means they can be butchered after 12–16 months, thereby allowing producers to avoid the 30-month restriction. Growing cows on grass requires more time, but if Mr. Hammer wants to keep some of the most valuable meat, he cannot let his cows age more than 30 months. Rain Crow Ranch, a much larger operation than Hammer’s Farm, finishes its grass-fed beef in 24 months, and didn’t mention a similar problem with the 30-month restriction. Mr. Hammer stated that one reason regulation continues to ignore the needs of small farmers is because of lobbying by the major beef operations, and the weak political influence of small grass-fed ranchers. These small operations may lack political power but are not necessarily less productive than large operations.

Much to its surprise, the Commission on Small Farms found that small operations can be as or more economically efficient as their larger counterparts. The report emphasized the value that small farms contribute in terms of economic and biological
diversity, rural and family life, and environmental quality. Since the 1998 report, the playing field has leveled slightly, but USDA programs intended to help small farms are now at best neutral and at worst continue to support conventional (wealthy) agricultural interests.

Conventional agricultural interests in the latter half of the twentieth century ridiculed all things organic as outdated and unscientific, impractical in terms of mass production. The infamous Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz commented, “We can go back to organic agriculture in this country if we must; we know how to do it. However, before we move in that direction, someone must decide which 50 million of our people will starve!” (Quoted in Guthman 2004a, 110). Similarly, Norman Borlaug, oft-quoted as the “father of the green revolution,” argued, “We can either use pesticides and fertilizers at our disposal or starve” (Quoted in Wright 2005, 8). Agrichemical company lobbyists claimed as Congress debated alternative agriculture programs that “low-input” (let alone organic—no input) programs were “a guarantee of low yield, low income, mass starvation, and destruction of the agrichemical industries” (Madden 1998). Agrichemical lobbyists had a distinct interest in promoting the use of chemicals, and their voices held the attention of many lawmakers.

Despite public and private discrimination against the movement, alternative agriculture has flourished on the surface of agriculture and in the supermarket. Criticism of organic farming never completely eroded its support. As one environmentalist put it, “It’s easy to understand why key individuals and organizations in agriculture have flocked to this term. After all, who would advocate a ‘non-sustainable agriculture?’” (Francis 1990). The problem with alternative, sustainable, or organic agriculture is that it threatens the status quo—it paints conventional farmers as “non-sustainable,” which of course they would be unlikely to believe of themselves.

The Invention of Organic

Organic agriculture has become the standard bearer for the alternative agricultural movement. The issues within the organic movement play out in every form of alternative agriculture, and they exemplify the tensions between large and small, national and local producers. The USDA publishes a list of methods whose use disqualifies farmers from organic certification, as well as a list of chemicals and substances that are permitted for use on organic farms. These criteria can be taken as the U.S. government’s definition of “organic” (USDA 2012). Meeting these criteria allows farmers to be certified by the USDA as organic and permits the use of the USDA organic label. Some farmers appreciate the definition and the ability to have a government-backed label that customers can trust and for which they are willing to pay extra, but other farmers believe the organic label has been diluted in meaning and does not entirely prevent large farms from degrading natural resources, polluting the land, and diminishing biodiversity.

The battle for a legal organic standard drew upon a history of fiery opposition to conventional agriculture, but ultimately compromised its radicalism in favor of a highly marketable label used by large-scale producers to rake in profits. In 1997,
the USDA first passed rules for growing organic produce. These rules outraged the nearly 275,000 Americans who felt compelled to comment on them (a record number of comments for USDA regulations) and who had different expectations about what “organic” meant (DeLind 2000). These 275,000 people, however, had various interests at heart. The label “organic” originates partly from an alternative agriculture movement reacting against the government, agribusiness, and the implementation of industrial agriculture. “Organic” also comes from an alternative food movement of critical consumers trying to select better, healthier food.

“Organic” can be simply defined as the absence of artificial chemicals. But for the founders of the organic movement in the 1960s, the concept implied a complex system of land management tied to ethical and moral responsibilities to steward the earth (Guthman 2004, 6). The USDA standards lie somewhere between these definitions—not challenging the hegemony of the food system, but not wholly divergent from its radical definition. Much academic discussion has gone into evaluating whether the creation of organic standards led to the “conventionalization” of organic agriculture (Constance et al. 2014). Geographer Julie Guthman writes about a diverse coalition of small-scale ideological farmers, environmentalists, agrarian populists, and health food activists who came together to support organic agriculture as a “radical critique of industrial agriculture” (Guthman 2004, 9). This coalition’s progressive vision of what organic agriculture should be, while not uniform, contrasts with the organic certification standards implemented by the USDA in 2002. Some of the members of the coalition—especially the health food advocates—were satisfied with the resultant organic standards but many believed that their battle for organic standards was lost with the USDA’s proclamation.

The organic definition, which makes a $39 billion a year industry possible, requires government regulation (Organic Trade Association 2015). But regulation is also an anathema to the far-left idealists who created the concept of organic and helped large-scale organic producers outcompete small farmers. Most certified organic food in supermarkets and grocery stores comes from massive agricultural operations located far from their consumers. These farms may not differ substantially in their practices from conventional agriculture. The USDA standards allow for some conventional farms to make only minor adjustments—for instance, substituting synthetically produced, “naturally occurring” chemicals for artificial chemicals—and still obtain organic certifications, without significantly altering water usage, crop rotations, tilling methods, pest management, etc. In this manner, some farms are certified organic mainly because the certification allows products to be sold for higher prices. While they cut out synthetic chemicals, these farms retain many other energy-intensive methods that cause environmental problems; such farms make up the so-called “industrialization” of organic agriculture (Constance et al. 2014). Guthman argues that organic food is “designed to cost more, to incentivize organic production,” and thus is cut off from the goals of food justice and spreading healthy food (Guthman 2011, 149). Moreover, the way alternative food is regulated allows it to “be as nutritionally debilitated, toxic, or ‘fattening’ as agribusiness can get away with” (Guthman 2011, 152). The organic industry wrested away control of the label from its coun-
terculture, hippie origins due partly to the challenge of working within the existing institutional agricultural framework, which had for a century supported the process of industrialization.

Until the 1980s, the USDA paid virtually no attention to organic or alternative agriculture. But in 1980, amidst geopolitical turmoil regarding energy and the environment, and domestic concerns about tainted food, the first USDA report to examine organic farming came out. It documented and interpreted the scientific evidence on the methods and results of farming organically (Madden 1998). Then in 1988, Congress funded the small Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (originally called Low-Input Sustainable Agriculture, or LISA) program with $3.9 million (Madden 1998). These small moves by the USDA were part of a gradual process of acknowledging the viability of organic, a process many attribute to the energy crisis of the 1970s and the farm crisis of the 1980s, which showed that the country had limited energy and plenty of food (Madden 1998; Guthman 2004a). Growing fears over the contamination of food by pesticides complemented critiques of conventional agriculture on the basis of its waste of energy and food. In the 1980s, the Alar and Aldicarb “food scares”—reports of people made sick by pesticide residues—caused a rash of consumers to convert to organic food (Guthman 2004a, 20). These events, along with calls from the various existing nongovernmental organization (NGO) certification programs to formalize standards, helped inspire regulators to action.

The 1990 Organic Foods Protection Act, the first government law formally addressing organic production, set out to create a system of regulations for the term “organic” through the establishment of the National Organic Standards Board (DeLind 2000). Recognition of the need for standards was counted as a major success for all supporters of alternative agriculture. However, the USDA’s first attempt to create an organic certification process in 1997 (it took seven years simply to come up with a process) sparked massive controversy, generating the previously mentioned 275,000 public comments (DeLind 2000). The hundreds of thousands of people involved show that the stakes were high for organic farmers and people eager to have regulations that safeguard their food. While many of the comments focused their criticism on the USDA’s failure to exclude the use of genetically modified organisms, irradiation, and sewage sludge, the so-called “big three,” (Meyer et al. 2005, 121) the regulations also split organic advocates over their failure to fully encompass organic ideals.

The legal definition of “organic” represents a compromise between conventional and alternative agriculture. The latest USDA organic certification standards promulgate that organic products must be “produced without using excluded methods (e.g., genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, or sewage sludge)” and “produced using allowed substances” from a list of chemicals—including some synthetic chemicals—specified by the USDA (USDA 2012). These standards are susceptible to influence by the “industrial organic” producers, which may desire the option of including agricultural practices diehard alternative agriculture advocates consider to have questionable ecological value (Guthman 2004). “Certified organic” products are grown with limited artificial chemical usage and must refrain from using a few prohibited methods—but these standards are a far cry from the radical, systematic overhaul of
agriculture envisioned by some organic advocates. Partly, this limited organic regulation is a consequence of the difficulty of writing organic sentiments about land treatment into law. But the standards emerged from a lengthy battle over the regulatory language with plenty of opportunity for comments, and the organic “industry” won, while parts of the diverse coalition of small-scale ideological farmers, environmentalists, agrarian populists, and health food activists lost Guthman 2004a; Goodman 2000). This battle is considered a loss due primarily to the fact that the regulations “increase the challenges faced by smaller farmers and ease entry [into the organic market] for large agribusinesses and others who do not embrace the core values of the movement” (Meyer et al. 2005, 124).

The organic food industry is “highly oligopsonistic” in the sense that access to the “mass market” is controlled by a few major buyers (Guthman 2004b). Originally, organic foods were sold mainly in specialty health food stores such as Whole Foods or Wild Oats; however, recent years have seen the growth of organic options in mainstream food chains, notably Walmart (Batte et al. 2007; Harris and Strom 2014). The significant revenues generated by high-volume sales have fostered the development of larger-scale organic producers who expand due to the struggle to meet the supply needs. The profile of Gene Kahn, founder of Cascadian Farm, in Micheal Pollan’s Omnivore’s Dilemma details the growth of one such “hippie farm” as it supplied General Mills and shifted its production methods from mainly manual labor and manure to large-scale machinery and cutting edge non-synthetic chemicals (Pollan 2006, 144–45). Guthman has a similar profile of Earthbound/Natural Selection Foods farms that shows another ideologically concerned farmer who outgrew his radicalism to move high quantities of produce (Guthman 2004, 29). The result of increasing consumer demand for products, and the extensive supply chain requirements that accompany it, have been a primary force in transforming organic agriculture into an “industry.”

In general, the needs of a major food chain are hostile to small farmers, and the agrarian movement identified by Guthman has had its view largely dismissed from the national debate about food supply. California’s agricultural history reveals that the small farmer was long gone from the national food supply before organic agriculture, despite the niche products grown there:

Specialized commercial agriculture had little place for the small-scale family farmer who had little capital, few acres, and no irrigation or access to a marketing cooperative. As California’s agriculture became more industrialized, more farmers could not compete, [because] California’s growers based their specialty-crop agriculture not only on the ownership of extensive fertile lands and access to cheap water but also on immigrant labor (Hurt 1994, 237).

These last qualities, extensive ownership and the employment of immigrant labor, very obviously demonstrate that California’s agriculture has never been a part of the so-called “agrarian tradition” of small family farms.
As for the government’s continued interaction with organic agriculture, the farm bills since 2002 (the year USDA organic certification was implemented) have steadily increased their support for organic agriculture, although it has yet to be wholly embraced. The 2008 Farm Bill appropriated $78 million in research, education, and extension for organics,” five times the amount from the 2002 Farm Bill (Constance and Choi 2010). In addition, the USDA has aggressively pursued the expansion of export markets for organic products and defended the organic certification standards for imports. It trained 30,000 of its employees in an organic literacy class (one of the primary complaints for early organic farmers was the derision and lack of support on the part of extension agents). The 2014 Farm Bill made significant changes to crop insurance, eliminated the surcharges on organic insurance, changed price policies to reflect the premiums on organic products, and enhanced the protections of crop insurance to 50 to 85 percent of their “whole farm revenue” (USDA 2015). To overcome the barriers to certification, the USDA now offers a cost-sharing program to reimburse the losses associated with the three-year transition period of certification (USDA 2015). However, the USDA does not explicitly encourage organic production, it does not subsidize organic production directly the way it for many years subsidized grains, and the early government rejection of organic agriculture continues to stigmatize organic producers, especially in areas with few neighboring organic operations (Constance and Choi 2010).

The USDA conducted surveys of its certified organic farms in 2008 and 2014; approximately 14,500 farms were certified or exempt in both years (exempt farms are organic but have annual sales less than $5,000). Sales during this period increased from $3.2 billion to $5.5 billion (2014 Organic Survey). Organic food is a $39 billion industry, but the oligopsonistic buyers—buyers large enough to dictate prices—capture the difference between farmers’ sales and the final sales. Small farmers (with gross sales of less than $150,000) sold 8 percent of all organic products. These statistics are skewed by the fact that many small organic farmers are not certified—only one of the surveyed farms is certified by the USDA as organic, despite the other eight using organic methods.

The economic dominance of industrial agriculture and the century of agricultural policies that have supported this system have created a difficult situation for today’s small alternative farmers. Despite some evidence that small farms can be run more cheaply and as productively as large farms, these small farms face cutthroat competition in the marketplace. Each new small farmer faces a complex decision about what to grow, where to sell their products, and how to best manage their farm, which has led to many short-lived and struggling small operations.

**Alternative Agriculture in St. Louis**

Alternative agriculture has allowed a modest revival in small farming, as it provides a system that does not require large capital investments and can operate at small scales. In recent decades, after the Organic Foods Production Act, growing USDA support, and an increased public interest in how food is grown and how it contributes
to a healthy diet, small farms have been able to insert themselves into the local food economy. Near St. Louis, this trend appears in the proliferation of farmers markets, as well as their increase in size, variety, and quality. Missouri has 216 organic farms operating on 49,000 acres, and Illinois has 249 organic farms operating 41,000 acres, these totals are close to the averages per state: 282 organic farms and 73,000 acres, bearing in mind these numbers are skewed by major organic states such as California and Wisconsin (2014 Organic Survey). Given these states are roughly average, St. Louis can be approximated as an average U.S. city in terms of its access to alternative agriculture.

The findings presented in this paper are based on interviews with nine farmers in the St. Louis area who practice some form of alternative agriculture. Interviews sought to gain their insight into how they consider their place in the local food economy, how they operate and measure success, and the role of alternative agriculture now and in the future. These farmers are passionately committed to bringing delicious, healthy food to the public, and not destroying their local environment in the process. Of the farmers, five run very small urban farms within St. Louis city limits, and four operate slightly larger farms in the neighboring area (no more than an hour's drive from downtown).

These farms consist of a small cooperative farm designed to feed its members and nine CSA shareholders; a rooftop farm working on a very small scale that splits most of its produce between a subsidized mobile grocery store seeking to alleviate food deserts and a café operated almost entirely by homeless workers; a fig farm that produces its exotic, niche fruit far outside its expected season by using elaborate sustainable greenhouses, a farm school offering a part-time apprenticeship for future organic farmers; a 2.5-acre farm in the heart of St. Louis operating as a therapeutic and retraining program for ex-convicts and the homeless; a grass-fed cattle ranch that has been in operation for 70 years in residential Florissant; and a “certified naturally grown” farm producing entirely for CSA shareholders.

Of the farms, the five urban farmers interviewed started post-2000, as did three of the rural farms. All the farms used alternative agricultural practices, but only the farm school was certified organic. The USDA organic standards focus mainly on the purity of the end product—at the point of sale, the product is free of artificially produced substances—whereas other standards, such as that of the International Federation for Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) fall into the “process-based” rather than “product-based” category of standards. IFOAM offers this definition of organic:

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved (Quoted in Clark 2015, 15).

This definition speaks to the holistic ideals of the original organic movement, rather
than its appeal to consumers. However, this definition is rarely used in the United States. It fits closely with the ideas of Molly Rockamann of Earthdance Farms, whose farm was dedicated to a “vision of human sustainability,” and sought to create a “localized food system” that “empowered the community.” Most farmers I interviewed decided not to undergo certification because of its expense and inconvenience, although their practices are organic or highly sustainable.

All of the farmers maintain a commitment to sustainable environmental practices. None of the farmers use synthetic chemicals. In this sense they are all “organic.” Despite not having the organic label, they welcome the public recognition of organic agriculture. When asked about the influence of large companies on organic production, most farmers thought that corporations had diluted the concept of organic, but that any move toward sustainability on the part of mainstream production was positive. Farmers brought up their disapproval of the fact that these companies could market their products as organic without implementing the careful environmental standards that they themselves maintain, but nonetheless thought that the more organic production in the world, the better. Rockamann believes we need a “shift in the economic paradigm” to empower more individuals and communities to be involved in the production process before organic production can be truly sustainable.

Rockamann, of Earthdance Farms (not to be confused with the massive national organic operation, Earthbound Farms), runs the only USDA certified organic farm in St. Louis County. Earthdance Farms pursued the USDA certification so that it could market its products with the USDA label, and to give an example of the certification process to its students. The farm operated for several years without the certification, due to the expense and difficulty of obtaining it. Rockamann lamented the difficulty of the certification process but believed it to be improving—the USDA has been easing the burden of certification through subsidies and grants, especially for small farms.

Mike and Carol Brabo run Vesterbrook Farm, which was established in 1902 and revived into a Certified Naturally Grown farm by the couple in 2008. The Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) label is regulated by a coalition of farmers in a peer-review process. The CNG label uses the exact same criteria as the national USDA organic standards—no synthetic chemicals or GMOs are permitted, there is a three-year transition period, the works—but fellow farmers perform the inspection at lower expense and greater convenience. The CNG label allows farmers to work outside the government bureaucracy, a bureaucracy for which the Brabos had little appreciation.

Mark and Patricia Whisnant run Rain Crow Ranch with their entire family and their three adult sons. They raise grass-fed beef, Heritage pork, American pasture pork, and American pasture chicken. Their venture started 30 years ago, and while all the livestock are finished on their ranch in Doniphan, Missouri, they have extend grazing lands in Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, Kansas, Illinois, and Iowa. The ranching operation is profitable enough to employ their three oldest sons (one of whom is now president of the ranch) as well as many hired laborers. Their livestock is certified as Animal Welfare Approved, American Grass-fed Association 100% grass-fed; the Global Animal Partnership gives the farm a 4 rating, and all its pastures are
USDA certified organic. They plant some wheat, rye, and oats each year, which the livestock graze on directly in the fields. The certifications allow the family to market their products to a wide audience with third-party verification of its quality.

The Whisnants got into raising grass-fed beef just for their family, knowing that beef raised in a natural fashion on grass and with no antibiotics or growth hormones was much healthier than that raised on industrial farms. They believe their grass-fed process not only produces healthy livestock, but trickles into every other aspect of the farm and family. In their words, “Grass-fed beef as a product is the tip of an underlying mountain of strength and integrity rooted in family farms that put their hearts and hands into what they produce.” Their creed speaks to exactly why many small farms switch to more natural methods of production—it just feels better to be farmer who raises happy, healthy cows—and of their product they claim, “It tastes like beef is supposed to taste.” Unlike the other operations surveyed, Rain Crow Ranch handles large-scale production, supplying 50–60 restaurants and stores in St. Louis, but it does so without comprising its adherence to alternative agricultural values.

Other small farmers saw little need to certify as organic, given its complications and their diverse operations and markets. Farmers catering to specific consumers, who they have established relationships with, for instance the cattle rancher, Larry Hammer, did not have a need for certification. Eighty percent of Hammer’s Farm’s customers return year after year, and the rest come from word of mouth. Ivan Stoilov, a PhD biochemist who moved from Bulgaria for a post-doctorate program at Stanford, started a sophisticated fig farm in his retirement. His figs, however, need no government assurance of their quality—their incredible taste does all the talking. It helps that these are the only local figs in St. Louis, available at select farmers markets and restaurants. However, these farms did benefit from other government programs.

All the farmers interviewed, besides the Brabos at Vesterbrook Farms, had participated in or benefited from government programs and grants. These grants came from the USDA, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, the Environmental Protection Agency, other federal agencies, the Missouri Department of Agriculture, other Missouri state programs, local municipalities, St. Louis City, and elsewhere. Most farms received grants to make capital improvements—such as the purchase of machinery, equipment, or buildings—to adopt experimental or sustainable practices, or to implement conservation measures. New Roots Urban Farm received a local foods matching grant to build its hoop house—a large greenhouse—and shed; Food Roof Farm’s major grant came from a storm water reduction program focused reducing urban water pollution. The Food Roof grant financed the bulk of construction, because the new green roof leaves a much smaller water footprint on the surrounding area. A grant for monarch butterfly conservation financed native plant gardens at both New Roots and Food Roof farms. Farms face fierce competition for each grant, and stringent reviews of their grant proposals, but the multitude of possible grants and the ingenuity of their proposals allows enough applications to be funded that the farms continue.

Ivan’s Fig Farm started 20 years ago after a chef got ahold of some of the figs Ivan Stoilov was growing in his front yard and asked for more for his restaurant, then other
chefs began asking for the figs, and Ivan realized a high demand existed throughout the city. In addition to his famous figs, Ivan grows many heirloom varieties of tomatoes, eggplants, kale, bok choy, peppers, and other vegetables. Ivan brought his biochemist background and inventive nature to the farm, designing a system of four large mechanized greenhouses coupled with 5,000 feet of underground pipes that store geothermal heat to keep the figs producing from the late summer all the way until Christmas. He grows organically with top-quality organic compost and minerals from Montpelier, Vermont. Building his farm would have been impossible without support from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, the University of Missouri extension service, and other government and corporate programs. He cautions that these grants are highly competitive—for some, he reapplied year after year; many he never received—but they allowed him to experiment with the hoop houses and the heating system by matching Ivan’s funds 50/50. Ivan’s successes with government grants show that the cynicism about government support is not always warranted.

Ivan Stoilov and Larry Hammer used to work other jobs, and started their farms upon retirement—a very different start from young entrepreneurial farmers. “Retirement farms” make up 29 percent of all U.S. farms, about 609,000 farms, with an average age of 69.3 years (2012 Census of Agriculture). While their income now comes solely from farming, these farmers can take more risk and operate at lower profit because of their savings, and they often enter into farming using previously owned family land.

None of the farmers spoke of much economic success; I suspect this outcome to be the case for many small farms selling locally. One concept explaining this phenomenon is that farmers engage in “preemptive self-exploitation,” which traps them in a cycle of low profitability. A survey of 54 CSA operations in California found that many farmers frequently made economically inefficient decisions that benefited their customers but left them with lower profits (Galt 2015). Farmers using the CSA model provide their members with weekly baskets of food, paid for at the beginning of the season. The system provides upfront income for farmers, but puts pressure on them to deliver consistent quantity and quality each week. The California study revealed that the average CSA farmer operates at a loss, and nearly every farmer surveyed had currently or in past years recorded losses (Galt 2015). The study attributed this loss to a tendency toward undervaluing produce, delivering higher quantities than paid for out of a loyalty and generosity toward customers, and a persistent disregard for the farmer’s personal labor costs. Mike Brabo, running his CSA farm, reacted with puzzled amusement when I asked about his profitability and how to run an economically successful CSA. He told me, “You’re assuming we make a profit. We don’t.” Other farmers grappled with their conflicting ideology and economic need to make livelihood.

All the small farms surveyed, especially urban farms, struggle to make profits, and make little dent in the market share of conventional agricultural producers in the St. Louis food economy. The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported that 41 percent of small farmers received positive income from farming; the other 59 percent lost
money (2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture). All the farmers surveyed stressed the need for multiple income streams and markets when possible. Earthdance Farms, the farm school, estimates its gross sales at $70,000 annually. It sells at a farmers market, runs a CSA, and sells to restaurants, but to supplement sales it holds a yearly community fundraiser, pursues corporate and government grants, and charges a small tuition fee for its apprentices. The farm supplements sales because $70,000 is not enough after expenses and providing for a staff of 13 (some of whom are interns, admittedly). Other farmers need to take other jobs in order to earn enough income.

Difficulty in making ends meet is not unusual for farmers engaged in any small-scale agriculture. Off-farm income is the norm across the U.S.; the USDA estimates that only about 550,000 of the 2,100,000 farms receive 50 percent or more of their household income from farming, including only 16 percent of small family farms.

The problem with profit in local alternative agriculture is that farmers markets and CSAs already face sharp criticism for their high prices. Farmers receive intense pressure to keep prices low, and larger farms can often deliver lower prices. Some farms, such as Ivan’s, can thrive under these conditions. Others face more opposition in satisfying their vision. New Roots Farm, the small agricultural cooperative, jointly run by its members, one of whom loosely directs the operation and depends on the farm for her livelihood, brands itself as “anti-profit,” but in practice the farm needs societal change to live up to this standard. The cooperative, in addition to feeding its members, sells seasonal CSA shares and attends a farmers market, but its director has met with two economists to discuss how the farm could begin to break even, or how to expand her small micro-green operation to make the farm more economically sustainable. The other strategy for urban farms, beyond expanding markets and sales, is to diversify their revenue streams.

Three of the urban farms sought nonprofit status in order to be funded mainly by donations and supported heavily by volunteer labor (they have community workdays every weekend, for which volunteers receive no compensation). These farms—the farm school, the rooftop farm, and therapeutic farm—dedicate themselves to community participation, and so nonprofit status seems particularly appropriate. My sample of urban farmers may be distorted by the fact that the farmers I spoke with are the most public (as they seek donations) and willing to be interviewed, but it appears these farmers betray the reality of most small farms, that they cannot run with economic sustainability without nonprofit status or outside income.

These interviews suggest that unless urban farming scales up (taking on larger plots) or specializes intensely—for example, by growing high-value flowers on a dense, single acre, as one St. Louis farm does—these farms are likely to remain a niche sector of the agricultural economy and not one of its main contributors.

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3 A reminder, these small farms make up 88 percent of all U.S. farms and are defined by the fact that they make less than $350,000 in sales per year.
Figure 4. The steepest decline in number of farms since 1982 has come from the category of farms with sales of $2,500 to $99,999; it fell by nearly half. Farms with sales of $500,000 or more have shown the only consistent growth. Adjustments to years before 1997 are due to a change in the method of counting farmers (Graph by Author, Data from 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture).

Conclusions

The demand for local, organic food is likely to rise, as it has almost every year since the creation of the organic label. However, the place for small farmers in this market remains uncertain. The farmers surveyed fell generally into two categories: urban nonprofit farming organizations and rural retirees with niche products. Both categories reveal more in what they omit than in what they contain. Enterprising individuals struggle to thrive at the small scale of alternative agriculture, and they may never do so, given the capitalist system.

Production on a small farm cannot compete with that on larger farms because of economies of scale and structural advantages of larger operations. Small farms can achieve similar or even greater yields, but often reaching high yields incurs extraordinary cost because of the inefficiency and expense of machinery on small plots. Virtually all costs on farms—machines, irrigation, pesticides, fertilizers, etc.—are cheaper when bought in bulk, because they have diminishing marginal costs. Large farms enjoy the advantage of well-established markets, greater bargaining power because of higher quantities, and more efficient transportation to markets.

Small farmers are caught in the middle of an uncertain world, with their products in demand, but rarely at a price that makes them profitable, and their competition remains fierce. The life of a small farmer is often romanticized—farmers appear to live off the fat of the land, working only a few months of the year during the growing season, and spending all of their days outside. This idealized image of farmers does draw new people into the profession, but these people are quickly disabused of these notions. Small farming can be a romantic, easy life, but this guarantees low yields,
weeds, bugs, diseases, flooded crops, and a host of other problems that come from neglect and lack of experience. Small farmers will likely always survive on the edges of the agricultural systems, but never come to dominate the center.

U.S. agriculture now confronts a world in which our country overproduces grain and livestock while parts of the world still lack enough food. The U.S. system generates significant water and air pollution that damages the environment. The solution for these twin problems may simply be a decrease in agricultural production—rather than a new rise in small farmers. Large, wealthy farms are attempting to mitigate their negative environmental presence, and large farms will be the main agents in any agricultural change, given their share of production, profit, and land area.

Small, local agriculture is almost by definition alternative. It was dying out until the 1980s, and now that it is slowly returning, its resurgence is fraught with economic instability and the possibility of corporate appropriation. These types of farms will continue to be on the fringe of production unless we have radical change in our social goals or our economic priorities. Successful models for small, local agriculture exist, but they do not involve production for a basic consumer, supplying all his or her daily needs; they exist for specialized production, or for creative repurposing of agriculture by organizations to integrate into communities.

Sustainability means that a farm can continue production year after year in perpetuity; the land and environment must be supported and cyclically restored, farmers must be able to live from the amount they produce, and society must be supplied with its needs in a way that maintains its health and satisfies its goals. Our best examples of sustainable farms are small farms, but these small farms are impractical for previously mentioned reasons. Large farms will need to learn lessons from small farms on how to produce sustainably over the long-term scale—hundreds of years—otherwise the planet will devolve into irreparable decline.

Bibliography


The Violin in a World of Violence: Enslaved Fiddlers and the Racialized Social Roles of Music in the Antebellum South

Emily Murphy

My project examines the complicated social roles thrust upon enslaved fiddlers in the Antebellum South and the diverse strategies they deployed to negotiate this contradictory position of status and oppression. In wielding the fiddle, they found pride, pleasure, community solidarity, and avenues for resistance despite the reductive gaze of white audiences. Contextualizing their struggles and triumphs within West African music cultures as well as their lasting impact on American music, I build off existing literature and theoretical frameworks from History, Sociology, and African-American Culture Studies. I analyze firsthand WPA accounts, runaway slave advertisements, travelogues, newspapers, and diaries in ways that amplify the life stories of enslaved violinists. This project illuminates how enslaved violinists, in straddling racial expectations, variously asserted their personal dignity, supported enslaved communities, and protested White control. Through their talent and strength, they maintained direct cultural connections to West Africa, crafted a unique synthesis culture of music, and ultimately gave birth to American music.

Introduction

The legacy of the enslaved fiddler has been circumscribed in the American cultural consciousness. Despite recent on-screen representations in the film Twelve Years a Slave (2013) and in the miniseries adaptation Roots (2016), their influence seems otherwise forgotten: the classical world of violin is predominantly upper-class and white, while popular fiddle culture is dominated by white southerners and those with Celtic roots. Though scholarship on slave culture touches on enslaved fiddlers, these discussions often lump them in with other enslaved musicians or reduce them to theoretical tools. This project seeks to focus on enslaved fiddlers through their multifaceted social role, in which the fiddle served as a powerful material site and a mechanism for racial performance.

In examining ex-slave narratives and runaway slave advertisement databases, a complex portrait emerges of fiddlers who found pride, pleasure, privilege, community solidarity, and avenues for resistance in wielding the violin, despite the reductive gaze of white audiences. Building on both African fiddling history and the advantageous qualities of the instrument, enslaved fiddlers garnered widespread popularity and admiration. Yet this musical talent placed them paradoxically in both a privileged and an oppressed position in the antebellum racial hierarchy. Their assigned social role of mirth-maker, which assumed black fiddlers to be noble savages and bearers of lighthearted amusement, burdened them with contradictory obligations to white and black audiences. White society exploited them for entertainment at balls, for which they received special but ultimately limited personal privileges in return. Within enslaved communities, fiddlers helped fellow enslaved people persevere through the healing distraction of music, but the scrutiny of white slave owners set limits on this leadership. In resistance, they subverted what was expected of fiddlers to buck racial
hierarchies and pursue freedom. Navigating their strained social position across a spectrum of resistance, the varied survival strategies of fiddlers illuminate the ways in which enslaved people moved through a violent world and mark the origins of a uniquely American music.

**Methodology**

This project builds primarily off of the WPA ex-slave narratives, a collection of interviews of former slaves collected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. Though an invaluable source amplifying the perspectives of people who were enslaved, the collection has its limits. By the 1930s, a lot of time had passed since the end of slavery. Most WPA interviewees were in their 70s at the time of the interviews, dating them as children at the time of emancipation. This adds the bias of childhood and nostalgia to their accounts. In calling upon firsthand recollections from this database, I favor older respondents who were in their 80s, 90s, and sometimes their 100s. Though age can distort memory, older respondents who were at least young adults when emancipated had prewar experiences of slavery beyond childhood. I prioritize their firsthand experiences, though they are often problematically rendered by white interviewers, and supplement the information they provide with a variety of other primary sources, such as magazines, newspapers, travelogues, and diaries. The other major pool of sources comes from runaway slave advertisement databases. Though these databases are still in development and thus are limited to North Carolina and Virginia, they offer robust responses to support a content analysis that reveals the multifaceted significance of enslaved fiddlers.

**Explaining the Fiddle's Popularity Among the Enslaved**

The fiddle enjoys a long history in the African-American experience. The first known record of an enslaved fiddler in America dates back to the 1690s in Virginia, the fiddler’s early historical presence confirming his critical role in racial hierarchies. Indeed, the fiddle endured as a favorite among enslaved black populations. In the WPA ex-slave narrative archives, it is the musical instrument most often discussed by former slaves. With 205 mentions, it occurs nearly twice as often as its closest rival, the banjo. The history of the indigenous African fiddle buttressed the fiddle’s appeal among enslaved communities. West Africa, where most New World enslaved people hailed from, cultivated a particularly diverse and vibrant fiddle culture that continues to this day.

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The most widely dispersed fiddle at the time of slavery was the goge-type fiddle, with a body consisting of a hemispherical section of a gourd covered in animal skin and a circular sound hole cut into the skin. This stringed bow instrument was widely distributed in the West, through the region from Lake Chad to Senegal, and in the East throughout the Ethiopia/Somalia region. The fiddle’s uses varied depending on the context of community and location: it served as an accompaniment to singers in Niger, Northern Nigeria, and Mali; a musical newspaper in Ethiopia, where fiddlers moved through villages reporting local events; a talking fiddle among the Nago and Yoruba, for whom it simulates language tones and patterns; and a tool for spiritual invocations in the Niger among the Tamaske, a nomadic people. Local fiddlers typically played at religious ceremonies, weddings, and festivals; at market-places; at people’s homes as entertainment; or at regular evening gatherings for simple pleasure and relaxation. Professional musicians, known throughout West Africa as griots, occupied a near-legendary social standing. Beyond just performing the instrument, most typically the fiddle, the griot maintained duties as a historian, storyteller, composer, diplomat, and advisor to political elites. Song topics included everyday life, social relations, historical events, and praise songs for powerful individuals. The fiddle, and to a lesser extent the banjo, which both had strong indigenous roots in West Africa, became popular instruments on American plantations, demonstrating a continual thread of music connecting enslaved musicians in the antebellum South to Africa.

On plantations, the instruments were so popular that many enslaved people built their own fiddles out of available resources, such as sardine cans, handsaws, and cigar
boxes. Simp Campbell, a former slave from Georgia, exclaimed of his plantation’s fiddlers: “All the music gadgets was home-made.”

Harkening back to ancestral African fiddle roots, slaves built their own fiddles using traditional African methods. One former slave, Mack Chaney, remembered of his father, who had been deported directly from Africa at the age of 18, “He made himself a fiddle outa pine bark and usta play fer us to dance.” Another former slave, Henry Wright, recalled, “I made a fiddle out of a large-sized gourd—a long wooden handle was used as a neck, and the hair from a horse’s tail was used for the bow. The strings were made of cat-gut.”

These crafty methods of building fiddles exemplified the synthesis music culture being brought into existence by enslaved fiddlers—tied to the past but looking forward through innovation. Exemplifying this unique cultural fusion, some surviving slave fiddles from the antebellum period show gourds with classic European-style wooden necks simply attached.

Some scholars have argued that Europeans introduced the fiddle to enslaved African Americans in American colonies. However, the widespread culture of indigenous African fiddles and the experience of enslaved people making their own fiddles disproves an external introduction or a purely colonial claim to the instrument. Despite the disruptive trauma of the Middle Passage and enslavement in America, the cultural meanings that various African societies attached to fiddlers were not lost. These deep-rooted notions of fiddler as elite entertainer, cultural leader, and community advisor reacted with the racialized demands of white society to forge a synthesized culture, bound to African roots but mixed with European influences in a uniquely American musical ethos in antebellum America.

The fiddle’s widespread prominence among enslaved African Americans can also

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10 Thompson, 112.

11 Thompson, 111.

12 Gourd, wood (maple?), metal, early 20th century, L. 24 inches. Collection: Roderick and Betsy Moore, Ferrum, VA.

be in part explained by the natural advantages of the instrument. The fiddle, with its
crying vibrato and sliding notes, produces a dramatic and soulful sound from a small
frame. Its petite size renders it both portable and delicate; it can be easily transported
as well as easily broken. Its practical aesthetics create a sense of closeness between the
player and the instrument. To perform, one nestles the body of the violin between the
chin and the neck. While manipulating the strings with the extended left hand, the
right hand yields the bow and swoops it across the strings. As the strings vibrate, the
sound holes reverberate the motion of air molecules and project a jagged sonic wave
outward. This physical framework gives the player the sensation of creating vibration
in a solid wooden object and thus bringing it to life. These material qualities of the
fiddle encourage nimble, quick playing and innovation. The fiddler, with his or her
ear incredibly close to these holes, can hear much more clearly than with different
strings instruments. When the fiddler makes even the slightest shift in the left
and/or right hand, he or she immediately hears and feel the results. Through flexible
phrasing and shifting tones, the fiddle can also paraphrase the human voice and echo
nuances of accompanying singers. Spontaneity also encourages collaboration with
other fiddlers, as well as listener participation. These features of intimacy and impro-
visation must have been attractive to enslaved fiddlers, as individuals whose personal
freedom was continually restricted by an oppressive system.

The Origins of the Enslaved Fiddler as Mirth-Maker

Though the cultural richness of enslaved cultures and their music is now widely
recognized by pop culture musicians and academics alike, early historians of slav-
ery like Kenneth Stampp did not acknowledge enslaved fiddlers. Emphasizing the
dehumanization of slavery, they supposed that brutality left no room for amuse-
ment, self-expression, or intellect. When the music of the enslaved was discussed and
chronicled, slave owners and white audiences wrote enslaved fiddlers into the role of
the mirth-maker, an insouciant supplier of amusement. Beyond just entertainment,
these “merry” performances served a larger ideological purpose of putting a happy
face on slavery and justifying an illogical racial hierarchy. The fluidity of music, teth-
ered to the material site of the fiddle but dependent on performer and context, lent
itself well to this colonial “script” of mirth.

In the 1970s, Marxist historian Eugene Genovese ushered in a reinterpretation
of enslaved people’s musical innovation through his theory of paternalist exchange.
Building on Antonio Gramsci’s framework of cultural hegemony, Genovese theorized
that white masters psychologically needed to see themselves as benevolent paternalists
to preserve their self-esteem. In turn, enslaved people accommodated this fantasy to
gain some security, to ameliorate harshness, and to cultivate an autonomous African

Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1959).
American culture within the hegemonic plantation system. Viewed through this perspective of paternalism, enslaved fiddlers as mirth-makers served to perpetuate slave owners’ myth of benevolence, and as a reward for their acquiescence, they received special privileges and recognition. Though this theory is lacking in its ability to explain the range of brutality and rebellion experienced on plantations, its framework of racial exchange sheds light on the complicated relationship of perpetuation and self-preservation that enslaved fiddlers faced in their assigned role of mirth-maker.\textsuperscript{16}

The myth of the mirth-maker first appeared on the Middle Passage, with its early development demonstrating the essentialness of fiddlers’ role in the racial hierarchy of slavery. On transatlantic slave ships, slavers mobilized musical performance as a tool of suppression and located enslaved musicians onboard to serve as entertainment. Some supplied European-style fiddles for captives and compelled them to improvise, imposing a white cultural hegemony that would continue upon their arrival in America.\textsuperscript{17} Other times, they collected local fiddles and other instruments like drums from the coast and brought them onto the ship. Captives sometimes brought their own instruments with them that captains permitted them to use. This continued use of local instruments refutes the paternalistic notion that the Europeans solely introduced instruments to enslaved people and thus created enslaved fiddler culture. Nevertheless, the imposition of a colonial script twisted African performance arts into an American racial hierarchy that would come to dominate the lives of fiddlers.

The creation of this colonial script led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. As enslaved folk were continually forced to be mirth-makers, American culture posited that enslaved people’s racial disposition was inclined to musical joviality. One European traveler who visited a plantation observed, “A black boy will make an excellent fiddle out of a gourd and some string,” and reductively concluded, “every negro is a musician from his birth.”\textsuperscript{18} Enslaved fiddlers thus faced constant coercion ranging from overtly brutal to insidiously covert pressure to be a “true” negro. Whether forced to adapt to a European instrument, presented with a local fiddle, or allowed to keep one’s own, enslaved fiddlers found themselves entangled in a contradictory exchange of power in which fiddles could represent both cultural resistance and the perpetuation of oppression.\textsuperscript{19}

Slavers not only manipulated the material site of the fiddle as a means of control—they also twisted the social influence fiddlers held over their African audiences. In a ritual that became standard on board slave ships, they forced the enslaved up from the lower cargo storage to dance on the upper deck. These coerced performances


\textsuperscript{19} Maria Deidrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pederson, eds. \textit{Black Imagination and the Middle Passage} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36.
required music, thus demanding the presence of the enslaved fiddler.\textsuperscript{20} Though slavers ostensibly used ship dances to keep their human cargo active and healthy, they ultimately sought to prevent rebellions and suicides by exhausting the enslaved and lifting their moods. In despite of these ulterior machinations, many captains insisted on the lightheartedness of the dancers as well as the Africans’ natural inclination for music. One 17th-century ship owner, James Barbot of the Albion, described the dances as gatherings of “full of jollity and good humor” that kept his human cargo in “good condition.”\textsuperscript{21} Despite this narrative of mirth, accounts of the dances emphasize the brutality of enslaved people being “compelled to dance by the cat,” or the cat-o’-nine-tails whip, under the constant gaze of slavers. In extracting the music needed for these macabre dances from enslaved fiddlers, slavers forcibly conscripted them into burnishing brutality.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition, enslaved fiddlers’ burden of performance ranged from audiences of bondmen to audiences of those doing the enslaving. After on-deck slave dances, enslaved fiddlers had to entertain captains, their crews, and their guests behind the scenes. At these slightly more formal dances, they put enslaved performers in competition and rewarded the winners with goods like liquor, both acknowledging personal skill and establishing a hierarchy of talent that disarmed resistance. The emerging role of mirth-maker forced enslaved fiddlers to enable enslaved subjugation, then pivot and make white audiences merry. Though enslaved fiddlers were granted special privileges in return, these rewards did not necessarily lessen the burden of enslavement. This psychological abuse heightened the manipulative coercion weighing on them and compelling them to perform.\textsuperscript{23} Intertwining oppression and entertainment, these unequal dynamics established on board transatlantic slave ships set a pattern for how the fiddler would fit into racial hierarchies in America. The privileging of enslaved fiddlers, which created division among the enslaved community and used one of their own to maintain an oppressive façade of merriness, strived to divide and control bondmen. And yet, the use of local fiddles and fiddlers on the Middle Passage unwittingly created a direct cultural link between the music of Africa and America through. This connection continued in America, as the fiddle became an essential tool for enslaved survival though being simultaneously used to aid imposed racial hierarchies. The enslaved fiddler as mirth-maker, both connecting the enslaved community to their roots and propping up the myth of happy slaves, was forced into existence through the crucible of the Middle Passage.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite the condescending association with musicality and noble inferiority, some slaves expressed racial pride at this instrumental talent. Former slave Solomon Lambert mused, “We made our music, music is natural wid our color.”\textsuperscript{25} In addition to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 37.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 35.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 36.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 36.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Thompson, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{25} “Interview, Solomon Lambert,” WPA Slave Narrative Project, Arkansas Narratives, vol. 2, part 4,
homemade enslaved fiddle-crafting, some fiddlers independently saved up enough money to purchase a formal violin, displaying initiative and individual passion. The slave Isaac Williams showed determination and thrift when he collected and sold over 100 muskrat skins to purchase a fine violin. These efforts often delved into rebellion against masters, as many ignored rules and risked punishment to procure the instrument for themselves. Celestia Avery, a former slave in Georgia, remembers that slaves on her plantation stole away to sell chickens belonging to their master to buy their own fiddles. In his interview, Jerry Boykins of Texas proudly recounted his story of sneaking out in the night to steal his master’s corn and mules. He traded them for a fiddle and would play it in secret, but nevertheless, his master found out and whipped him until the sun set.

Indeed, fiddles were not always easy to come by. In a show of conspicuous paternalist care, wealthy slave owners often supplied European-style fiddles to aspiring musicians. Though gourd fiddles fall into a distinctly African tradition, there was oftentimes no recognizable difference between a “fiddle” and a “violin”—the difference was socially determined by the musical style being played and the formality of the performer’s training. An old fiddler adage goes, “You take a violin to a concert in a case, and a fiddle to a dance in a flour sack.” In general, store-bought fiddles from masters aesthetically aligned with European culture. By purchasing these instruments, masters transferred their musical hegemony onto their slaves and relished in the self-conscious display of generosity. In one 1851 issue of DeBow’s Review, a popular monthly Southern newsletter that offered advice on managing slaves, a Mississippi planter bragged that he bought “a good fiddler” to whom he gave a quality instrument and whom he kept “well supplied with catgut.” Because of the money needed to acquire instruments, these masters tended to possess larger Southern plantations. However, slave owners from small farms also invested in purchasing instruments for their slaves, which speaks to the perceived benefits of owning an enslaved fiddler as well as how slave owners of all classes envisioned themselves. By accepting the instruments, enslaved fiddlers were pressured into an unequal power exchange that entertained the benevolent illusions of slave owners. However, they in turn gained an outlet for personal expression, an opportunity to climb the social ladder, and a means of self-preservation.

Regarding fiddle training, more experienced enslaved fiddlers often passed down...
their knowledge to the younger generation. One former slave named William Gant remembered that he “learned to fiddle after the fiddler on the place, Uncle Tim.” Former slave Simp Campbell proudly recalled, “One of the oldest fiddlers of slavery time teached my brought Flint to play the fiddle.” This generational tradition, which forged collaborative musical bonds between enslaved musicians, probably began with the first African fiddlers who arrived in America and passed down their ancestral roots. Learning by ear and imitating, enslaved fiddlers mentored each other and took full advantage of the instrument’s capacity for individual improvisation. If there were not established fiddlers available, slave owners cemented the paternalist exchange and provided their own guidance. Though more typically audience members than teachers, white slave owners participated in fiddling as well and passed down European-style minuets and cotillons. Per Guy Stewart, a former slave born in Louisiana, he recollected that his master was a good fiddler and “larns some ob de niggers hows to play de fiddle.” This show of benevolence, though ego-boosting for slave owners, was more common on smaller and geographically isolated plantations, probably because of the lack of sufficient funds to purchase a fiddler and the absence of self-sustaining fiddler tradition passed down generationally on large plantations. It could also be tied to yeomen’s need to work alongside slaves, which may have encouraged an interracial cultural blending that in part explains the current popularity of white southern fiddlers.

**Elite Mirth-Makers, Balls, and the White Gaze**

By the 18th century, the most esteemed method of training was to send enslaved violinists to exclusive music schools in New Orleans or other Southern cities to learn how to play. This professionalized style of training signaled more of a violin tradition, but the difference between the two styles is more of a matter of self-identification and external appraisal than objective categorization. The more formal path offered a chance for slave owners to publicly demonstrate their wealth and their benevolence, but it also helped enslaved fiddlers gain more professional respect and opportunities to advance. William H. Harrison, born a slave in 1832 in Richmond, Virginia, was one such favored slave musician who later reminisced, “This is how good my owner was to me. He sent me to Hendersonville, North Carolina, to learn to fiddle. I was so afraid of the old colored teacher I learned in a month about all he could play.” Harrison’s depiction of the interplay between the intimidating black teacher, himself as the enslaved student, and his “generous” slave-owning patron gives a glimpse into the

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tangled attachments that paternalist benevolence intentionally cultivated to produce skilled fiddlers as status symbols. Trainee selection—fostering division among slaves by elevating some rather than others—also reinforced antebellum Southern attitudes about race and gender. While many enslaved women were dancers and singers, when a slave was chosen by a slave owner to serve in the occupation of fiddler, that person was inevitably a man. Though still inferior because of their blackness, male musicians were still regarded by white society as more capable than black women and thus were worthier of investment.\(^\text{35}\)

The money slave owners invested in enslaved fiddlers to purchase instruments and provide training paid itself off not just through perceived paternalist care. Patronizing enslaved fiddlers was an economic as well as an artistic endeavor. Enslaved fiddlers fetched a higher price on the auction block because the fiddler, who could perform solo or lead an ensemble, ranked at the top of the musical hierarchy. Enslaved vocalists and dancers, though more common, were not regarded with the same esteem.\(^\text{36}\)

Sometimes wealthy slave owners simply purchased enslaved fiddlers rather than go through the difficulty of training them: Adeline Jackson of South Carolina recalled that her master “bought a slave in Tennessee just 'cause he could play de fiddle. Named him Tennessee Ike.”\(^\text{37}\)

The famous case of Solomon Northup, a free-born professional violinist who was kidnapped in 1841 and forced into slavery for twelve years, highlights the well-known economic potential of enslaved fiddlers. Northup’s skills on the violin caught the attention of kidnappers, who assumed his musical talent rendered him valuable. Throughout his enslavement, the slave owners who traded him seemed to base their purchase on his violin talent. When his master Tibeats sold him to Edwin Epps, he had “at the time of my sale informed him I could play on the violin.”\(^\text{38}\) Prior, Tibeats had “received his information” from Northup’s master before him, Ford. Epps ultimately purchased Northup because of the importunities of Mistress Epps, who loved music. Whenever he was traded and sold, Northup’s value was defined by his violin skills more than any other characteristic. Despite white slave owners’ endeavors to paint themselves as the caring patrons of elite fiddlers, these economic machinations expose the project as one of enslaved exploitation.

To white slave owners, fiddlers fetched more on the market because of their entertainment value. As the most popular musicians, enslaved fiddlers earned money and prestige for their masters by being rented out for performances. Former slave Isiah Green of Georgia remembered, “If a white family was entertaining, and needed a mu-

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sician but didn’t own one, they would hire a slave from another plantation to play for them.” 39 One 1853 “For Hire” advertisement in the Richmond Enquirer announced George Walker, “the celebrated musician and fiddler,” as “the best leader of a band in all eastern and middle Virginia.” 40 Slave-owners capitalized on their talent to make a profit, translating slaves’ personal talents into their own wealth and esteem. Enslaved fiddlers became the standard entertainment at elite soirées and events in the South, establishing an economic network of entertainment exchanges. As one traveler remarked of Mississippi, “Invitations for exchange of visits are circulated among the negroes of different plantations; fiddlers are in demand; and dancing and merriment characterize the hours of night and day.” 41 Between the profit and the public acclaim, rich slave owners eagerly exploited their enslaved fiddlers. Prominent socialite Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote of one popular enslaved fiddler, in 1861: “Night after night; we used to meet him as fiddler-in-chief of all our parties…we gave him five dollars a night that was his price. His mistress never refused to let him play for any party.” 42 This process of renting was one of collaboration between planters, content to profit, show off, and be entertained by enslaved fiddlers.

Because the job of musician was a menial one by the standards of white Southern society, enslaved fiddlers instead of white musicians typically filled the need for entertainment. Professional white violinists played in orchestras, not for local gigs. 43 Part of their individual power lay in the private nature of their careers—they could not be simply bought by members of the public. In contrast, enslaved fiddlers’ fame was individually bestowed but ultimately accumulated by their masters. For example, one esteemed Revolutionary War veteran, Colonel Baker, had a slave named Cato who “ranked high as a fiddler in the community” and provided music “for balls on the nights preceding the annual thanksgiving and other occasions when dancing was expected.” But Cato was still defined as “Colonel Baker’s negro.” 44 These upper-class power dynamics, in which music solidified the supremacy of rich white men, gave the chance for talented fiddlers to rise to positions of responsibility and privileged acclaim yet gain no concrete liberty in the larger racial hierarchy.

Particularly in urban hubs like Charlestown, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Annapolis, elite gatherings could not succeed without enslaved fiddlers. They oftentimes played solo for hours until they were too exhausted to continue—as one English traveler noted on a trip to Virginia, the expectation was that “these dances always last as long as the Fiddler can play.” 45 If not solo, they would be accompanied by other

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39 “Interview, Isiah Green,” WPA Slave Narrative Project, Georgia Narratives, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
40 Daily Enquirer, June 27, 1853.
41 C. Tuttle, Our Whole Country, Volume 2, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1863), 842.
42 Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator from South Carolina, 1859–1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 15.
43 Cimbala, 16.
44 History of Wallingford, Conn. (1870), 341.
enslaved musicians in an orchestra of as many as half a dozen other violins, violoncel-
los, double basses, flutes, oboes, clarinets, and French horns. Elite enslaved fiddlers
were obliged to perform European minuets and cotillions, yet white audiences also
couraged them to play African-style jigs and reels that were considered more lively
than serious. Wealthy attendees became enamored of this dance, with some nick-
naming it the “Negro Jig” or “Negro scamper dance.” As planter Henry W. Ravenel
of South Carolina retrospectively noted in 1874, “The jig was an African dance and
a famous one in old times…it was always called for…and never failed to raise the
shouts of laughter, with applause of the performers.”

The enslaved fiddler’s medley performances of European and African-style dances at these elite gatherings became
the stuff of legend among white society. Their uniquely African American music
satisfied white audiences’ desire for both the exotic and the familiar. As observed by
J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur in his Sketches of Eighteenth Century America, “If
we have not the gorgeous balls, the harmonious concerts, the shrill horn of Europe,
yet we dilate our hearts as well with the simple Negro fiddle.”

The public image of the mirth-maker, powerfully designed to make racial hierar-
chies seem benevolent, furnished the white imagination with notions of merry, musi-
cal slaves. Both the exploitative economics, which white musicians would not deign
to accept, and the internalized racism behind the image of the mirth-maker rendered
the presence of an enslaved fiddler semi-obligatory for elite slave owners. When remi-
niscing on her plantation childhood, socialite Caroline Howard Gilman character-

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768–69.
48 Hector St. John de Crévecoeur, Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America, Or More Letters from An
American Farmer, ed. Henri Bourdin, et al. (New Haven, CT, 1925) 148.
ized it as “the usual plantation luxury of a fiddler.”

One traveler who traveled the well-worn path from Washington, D.C., to Charlestown claimed he had not seen one white orchestra south of the Potomac. This popularity, though in some part based on admiration for talent and desire for fun, developed principally through the appeal of low-cost available fiddlers and their musical performance of racist delusions.

William Sydney Mount, “Rustic Dance after a Sleigh Ride,” 1830

The Privileges of Enslaved Fiddlers

In return for serving white society, enslaved fiddlers typically received softer treatment from white society. As Uncle Ben Horry of South Carolina summed it up: “I and Uncle Summer uster been fiddlers gone all round when the white people gone to Prospect to ball and sich as that. Dem white didn’t treat you so brutish!” Between two worlds, he could uniquely move between racial divisions, affording him a certain social elevation and fluidity that other slaves were denied. Even enslaved vocalists and dancers were not considered musicians in this same privileged sense: the possession of a valued material instrument elevated the enslaved fiddler to a position of respectable skilled labor. As one Virginian, Dr. C. A. Bryce, recounted of fiddlers during

49 Caroline Howard Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (South Carolina: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 76.
50 Miller, 509.
52 “Interview, Uncle Ben Horry,” WPA Slave Narrative Project, South Carolina Narratives, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
his antebellum boyhood:

The ability to play a "good fiddle"…was worth a good deal to its possessor if he was a slave, for he was given all manner of privileges and favors, the lightest work and good clothes, and the young men for whom he played always passed the hat around before he left and gladdened his heart with liberal returns. In addition, he got the best supper of all of the guests and his measure of "peach and honey" or apple toddy was only regulated by his ability to contain and carry.54

Bryce probably exaggerated out of nostalgia and to downplay slavery's brutality, but his statement hints at why white society elevated fiddlers: selectively giving out certain privileges helped white onlookers rationalize a brutal system. In return for acting out racist fantasies, the compensatory privileges of elite fiddlers broke the dull plantation routine and earned an enslaved person access to the sensual world of balls. Fine food and clothes as earthly pleasures sustained slaves in a cruel system, allowing them brief evenings of comfort. The illicit allure of alcohol and its numbing effects allowed enslaved musicians to temporarily escape from their realities. According to former slave Isiah Green, slaves who were typically never allowed to drink whiskey at their own plantations “managed to take a little” when performing at balls “without the master knowing it.”55 These fleeting physical pleasures, in contrast to the typical monotony of grueling field work, no doubt lifted the spirits of those privileged enough to receive them.

In addition to perks like food and drinks, tips for a fiddler provided a relatively independent source of income. Though the slave owner typically collected the payments and ultimately reaped performance fees, they nonetheless encouraged slaves to collect tips, and many earned an attractive haul. Colonel Willis of Georgia, as remembered by Green, who was one of his former slaves, “always allowed his slaves to keep whatever money they earned.”56 In the case of Solomon Northup, his indebted owner Edwin Epps rented him out for his violin talents to reap the profits. However, Northup received tips for his performances, returning “with many picayune jingling in my pockets.”57 On one occasion, he collected $17 in tips—“I was looked upon by my fellows as a millionaire.” Former slave William Little of Arkansas who “used to play to fiddle for dances all around the neighborhood” recalled that “one white man gave me $10 once for playin’ at a dance.”58 Though still confined by enslavement, this economic advantage gave fiddlers a rare source of independence and security.

54 Dr. C. A. Bryce, Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19
55 “Interview, Isiah Green,” WPA Slave Narrative Project, Georgia Narratives, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
56 Ibid.
57 Northup, 196.
Being rented out to other plantations also provided enslaved fiddlers with mobility and a socially acceptable chance to venture off the plantation. Because slave owners were more than willing to earn money from renting out their enslaved fiddlers, they would give them permission to travel to faraway gigs. Though enslaved, Solomon Northup traveled as far as 10 miles away from his Louisiana plantation to perform. In his later memoir, he remembered with pride, “Throughout the surrounding villages my fiddle was notorious.”

One enslaved Texan fiddler, Pete Robinson, as remembered by his proud wife, Mariah, “played de fiddle all over de country.” Former slave William H. Harrison, who was previously sent away for elite training, boasted, “I played for parties in eight states in slavery.” Remarkably, he even traveled as far as the White House: “I eat at the same table with the president. I slept in the White House. I played for the President and his Cabinet. I played for big balls.” Though perhaps a touch of exaggeration on the part of Harrison, it is true that enslaved fiddlers served as a common fixture among governor’s houses and other elite political institutions. Thomas Jefferson specifically cultivated enslaved fiddlers at Monticello for his amusement, and Andrew Jackson was known for attending dances with well-respected trained fiddlers. At these upper-class gatherings, enslaved fiddlers both blended into the background and occupied a central role in the dances. This ambiguity allowed them access to exclusive white places, usually being the only black people in the ballroom.

Their collaboration with other enslaved musicians, performing with as few as two musicians and as many as six, created other connections among enslaved people. The classic plantation duet of fiddle-banjo, filled with improvisation, especially cultivated close ties. In addition to white society, enslaved fiddlers performed on other plantations for fellow slaves. Former slave Andrew Goodman, late in his life, still remembered Mance McQueen, a slave from another plantation “what could play a fiddle, and his master give him a pass to come play for us.” Enslaved fiddlers’ mobility expanded social networks of bondmen and invigorated a sense of interconnected enslaved communities. Though they were not completely free to go where they pleased, traveling fiddlers expanded their circle of social contacts and experienced a world beyond the plantation.

In addition to money and mobility, the mirth-makers garnered a special admiration from white society for their masterful command of the instrument, their

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59 Northup, 24.
60 Miller, 510.
63 Phil Jamison, Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 46.
64 Conway, 3.
ability to blend styles, and their talent for reading the desires of audiences. Though they were also famous among their fellow slaves, these elite mirth-makers received social privilege from white audiences in ways that black audiences could never provide. So intense was upper-class white society's obsession with elite mirth-makers that one Philadelphia satirist mocked them for it in 1819:

You observe the leader of the band. He is a descendant of Africa, and possesses a most respectable share of musical talents. Among other follies of our young ladies, it is quite a fashionable one, to be “enchanted” with this fiddler…. The fiddler is the presiding deity on such occasions, and although a tawny one, is not the less fervently invoked on that account. In fine, he is the leader of the band at all balls, public and private; sole director of all serenades, acceptable and not acceptable; inventor-general of cotillions; to which add, a remarkable taste in distorting a sentimental, simple, and beautiful song, into a reel, jib, or country-dance.\(^66\)

Many even became, veritable celebrities, such as Sy Gilliat, who belonged to Baron Botetourt of Williamsburg and worked at the governor's palace.\(^67\) The region's most popular fiddler for over two generations, he was remembered for known his nimble balancing of European and African styles of music by starting dances with a minuet then jumping into a “fast and furious” reel. At one noted performance, local historian Samuel Mordecai detailed his “erect and dignified appearance”: Gilliat appeared in an “embroidered silk coat…silk stockings (which rather betrayed the African prominence of the shin-bone), terminating in shoes fastened or decorated with large buckles….Sy wore a brown wig with side curls. His manners were as courtly as his dress, and he elbowed himself and his fiddle-stick through the world with great propriety and harmony.”\(^68\) This outfit was one of “fifty suits which constituted his wardrobe.” Though sure to notice his race and condescend, onlookers admired Gilliat's talent and ability to entertain high society. His obituary upon his death in 1820 described a “man beloved by polished society, who will deplore the loss.” This admiration does not entail true respect, but some level of approval from a wider society intent on denigrating black people surely carried some importance to enslaved fiddlers.

In return for performing as mirth-makers, fiddlers such as Gilliat received the luxe clothes of the upper classes, along with their admiration. The elite fiddler's external markers of success, such as clothing, seemed to serve as an important aspect of his identity, marking him as different than other slaves and sometimes even as more tasteful than his white audience. At one Louisville gathering, a traveling Northerner remarked, “The music was a fiddle, and the performer a darky dressed like a lord…

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67 Epstein, 115.
A couple of very ill-dressed Englishmen; a very well-dressed nigger.\textsuperscript{69} Despite the outward signs of pomp, even elite enslaved fiddlers could not break out of the bottom of the racial hierarchy because of their skin color. On the part of white society, dressing their elite fiddlers in fine garb helped externalize the imaginative myth of the mirth-maker by making fiddlers dress the part of a noble savage treated well by his benevolent masters. Mary Chesnut described her previously mentioned “fiddler-in-chief” as being “dressed sumptuously in blue broadcloth and brass buttons; a stout, respectable, fine-looking, middle-aged mulatto.” When she saw him a couple years later, he had been sold off to a crueler owner for attempting to run away, and his social position was downgraded to menial servant. Seeing his now “shabby” appearance, she could not fathom why he had run away from “home and comfort.”\textsuperscript{70} This incident hints at how the exterior pomp of elite mirth-makers was but a marginal privilege bestowed on fiddlers by white society to paint a happy face on slavery and could thus be easily revoked.

Nevertheless, these indicators of dignity often carried personal symbolic weight for enslaved fiddlers that extended beyond just white approval. One slave, Uncle Dick, as remembered by the ex-slave Mamie Hanberry from Kentucky, understood that “his presence was essential.”\textsuperscript{71} As Hanberry glorified him to the point of folk legend, “Uncle Dick was fully aware of his own importance, and in consequence assumed a great deal of dignity in his bearing. Before setting out he always dressed himself with the greatest nicety. At the appointed time, he was at the place with all the weight of his dignity upon him.” The emotional significance of Dick’s clothes goes beyond a show of superiority over other slaves or a manifestation of white admiration—they also externalize his self-respect and pride in front of audiences of fellow bondmen. When he left to perform for a festival about 6 miles away from his residence, “He donned his long-tailed blue coat, having carefully polished the glittering gilt buttons; then raised his immense shirt collar, which he considered essential to his dignity, and, fiddle in hand, sallied forth alone.” For black audiences, this ritualistic pomp likely provided the chance to live vicariously through the flamboyant fiddler, who, though constrained by racial hierarchies, appeared closer to freedom.

The extravagant clothes visually designated an elite enslaved fiddler’s paradoxical social importance. Though enslaved, fiddlers garnered privileges and attention like beloved celebrities. This fame was not limited to the racialized praise of white society—they became icons among fellow enslaved people as shining beacons of talent and pride. Mobile and widely admired, the elite fiddler and his professional traveling calls to mind the elite griots of West Africa.\textsuperscript{72} This sense of pride, harkening back to the traditional roles of fiddlers, was probably instrumental in developing an enslaved

\textsuperscript{69} John Campbell, “A Short American Tramp: On the Fall of 1864,” Travel in America (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1865), 352.
\textsuperscript{70} Chesnut, 15.
\textsuperscript{71} “Interview, Mamie Hanberry,” WPA Slave Narrative Project, Kentucky Narratives, vol. 7, Federal Writers’ Project, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 94.
\textsuperscript{72} Thompson, 112.
Solomon Northup, in his memoir, exclaimed, “Alas! Had it not been for my beloved violin I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses—relieved me of many days’ labor in the field—supplied me with conveniences for my cabin—with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes….It heralded my name around the country—made me friends, who, otherwise would not have noticed.”

However, not all fiddlers worked under such elite conditions. The myth of benevolent paternalism, as an imaginative exchange, did not consistently translate into unbreakable privileges for enslaved fiddlers. Though elite mirth-makers may have seemed less explicitly menaced, the relationship between slave-owners and enslaved fiddlers was always predicated on coercion and exploitation. The menace of the lash simmered behind these supposedly mirthful interactions, the veneer of benevolence often slipping to reveal backstage brutality. Resembling the dynamic on board slave ships, Solomon Northup’s cruel master Edwin Epps forced him to play music to make the other slaves dance, “no matter how worn out and tired we were.” His whip in hand, he would shout “Dance, you damned niggers, dance” and spur a tune out of Northup with the “occasional sharp touch of the lash.”

Even as a mobile, well-paid, and respected fiddler; Northup’s privileges had limits. While his elevation in the racial hierarchy allowed him to eschew certain elements of slavery, the duality of the enslaved fiddler made it impossible for him to achieve true freedom.

Slave coffles, in which slaves were marched to auction blocks, involved a similarly paradoxical blend of music and torture that forced enslaved fiddlers to be complicit in their own subjugation. To manipulate onlookers and maintain a semblance of morality, slave drivers and speculators recruited enslaved fiddlers to perform during these marches and put a “happy face” on a spectacle known for its brutality. In 1822, Reverend James H. Dicken was drawn to a nearby road by “the sound of music,” be-

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73 Northup, 196.
74 Northup, 182.
75 The Anti-Slavery Record, February 1835, 13. Courtesy of the Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.
believing it was a military parade. He soon discovered that “about forty black men and thirty black women” were being marched in “solemn sadness” to the “sounds of two violins,” played by two chained musicians.76 Another traveler in 1849 observed how slave-owners used cruelty to manipulate fiddlers as well as other bondmen: “when the driver found [the slaves] melancholy and disposed to pray, he had a fiddle brought, and made them dance in their chains, whipping them till they complied.”77 Onboard boats transporting slaves between the states, enslaved fiddlers served a similar function. A traveler exploring the seaboard slave states shared his observation of fiddlers onboard a ship with a “large majority [of] slaves, going on to New Orleans to be sold, or moving with their masters to Texas.”

“There was a fiddle or two among them,” he remarked in his travel diary, “and they were very merry, dancing and singing. A few, however, refused to join in the amusement, and looked very disconsolate.”78 Though fiddling could provide escapist distractions, the coercive dynamic of these performances pressured enslaved fiddlers not only to accept the merry façade of music but to furnish this illusion as well. Though Genovese’s theory of paternalist exchange can explain the privileges received by many enslaved fiddlers in return for their performances, the denigrating racial hierarchy of the antebellum South required a bottom line of cruelty that not even elite fiddlers could escape. More commonplace fiddlers, without fancy clothes or adoring fans from far and wide, were especially vulnerable to this explicit viciousness.

Enslaved Fiddlers as Community Leaders

In spite of white audiences’ reductive gaze, blending pedestalization and dehumanization, enslaved fiddlers also entertained their own communities. A typical enslaved fiddler would perform for white audiences as well as for other bondmen, giving him an unparalleled fluidity to cross between worlds. As former slave Uncle Cinte Lewis explain, “I’d play de fiddle for white folks and cullud folks both.”79 Ordained by his paternalist exchange with white slave owners, the enslaved fiddler secured space for a vibrant, semiautonomous slave culture. In return for this juggling act, he received the admiration of white audiences and became a folk elite among enslaved communities. However, the scrutiny of white society enforced limits on his ability to bring enslaved people together.

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77 Ebenezer Davies, American Scenes and Christian Slavery: Letter XII, 1849.
The apex of the fiddlers’ community power was at Christmas, which, as the major holiday of up to eight days without work for slaves, represented a momentous outpour of mirth. Solomon Northup remembered that his role as fiddler “gave me an honored seat at the yearly feasts, and secured the loudest and heartiest welcome of them all at the Christmas dances.”\[81\] It seems that the fiddler tended to lead festivities through the organizing force of music, controlling the tone and pace. As one European traveler observed in Mississippi, “The festivities of Christmas commence at the brink of day…[slaves] form into a procession, and preceded by a fiddle and a variety of rude instruments, above all of which is to be heard boisterous singing and laughing, they march ‘round the house, crying at intervals, ‘Wake up! wake up! Christmas has come!’”\[82\] Frederick Douglass in his 1845 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave recalled that Christmas merriments included “fiddling, dancing, and drinking whisky.”\[83\] Intoxicated merriment and dancing to the fiddler defined the Christmas experience. Former slave Shade Richards looked back on Christmas as “such a good time…the boys would fiddle and they’d have a drink of liquor.”\[84\] The music of the fiddler marked a euphoric break from work and cultivated an atmosphere of happy distraction. Though not truly fulfilled in the same sense as joy, the frenzied mirth supplied by fiddlers created enough distraction and escapism for the community to survive another year. While not as forced as their performances

81 Northup, 217.
82 C. Tuttle, Our Whole Country, Volume 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1863), 842.
83 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849), 68.
for white audiences, enslaved fiddlers in their own communities were still pressured by the oppression of enslavement to provide mirth. Yet in a communal context, providing fiddling fun was for black survival, not white imagination.

Fiddlers and their lighthearted music also transformed plantation events like corn-husking, which would otherwise be laborious, into holidays. Plied with music and alcohol, slaves shucked mountains of corn until the harvest was completed. The mirth-making fiddlers of corn-shucking were regarded as veritable folk legends and led the crowds of dancing slaves. As one White observer noted at a Georgia corn-shucking, “The fiddler is the man of most importance on the ground. He always comes late, must have an extra share of whiskey, is the best-dressed man in the crowd, and unless every honor is shown him, he will not play.”85 An enslaved black man commanding such power must have certainly surprised an unacquainted white onlooker. Former slave James Deane of Maryland reminisced nostalgically, “At corn-shucking all the slaves from other plantations would come to the barn, the fiddler would sit on top of the highest barrel of corn, and play all kinds of songs, a barrel of cider, jug of whiskey, one man to dish out a drink of liquor each hour, cider when wanted.”86 Other accounts corroborate the centrality of the fiddler at corn-shucks—former slave Wheeler Greshman of Georgia recalled that “after corn was piled high in the barn,” slaves would “gather around to the tune of an old fiddle in the hands of a plantation musician, they would sing and shuck corn until the whole pile was finished.”87 Seasonal cotton-pickings achieved similar levels of festivity; former slave Ed McCree of Georgia reminisced that after picking cotton and having a feast, “some of dem Niggers played fiddles for de others to dance down til dey was wore out.”88 These gatherings, filled with dance and drink, offered a brief escape from the menial labor of the plantation even amidst tasks demanded by enslavement. This contradiction no doubt put strain on enslaved fiddlers, switching constantly between dualities, but it probably brought more sincere amusement than performing at white balls.

The more down-to-earth plantation events for enslaved fiddlers were weekends and post-work dances. Sometimes these were blowout events; other times they were simple gatherings in front of slave quarters. Even if there were other musicians on the plantation, the fiddler assumed the leadership role at these dances because of the instrument’s naturally high pitch as well as his social status. Through his showmanship and keen understanding of how to rile up an audience, the fiddler provided collective relaxation. Former slave Kate Betters of Mississippi told of her frolic experiences: “An dey’d fotch ole Jim Long from ’cross de ribber to play. He’d come wid he fiddle, grin-nin’ cause he shore quz a notable fiddler. When dat old ’him ’ud shake dat bow, you

couldn’t help you foot a-pattin a leetle….In er minute, dey all ’ud be flyin roun de room an’ old Jim, he ’us be a-rockin like a boat on de ribber…he big foot set way out, er-pattin to keep de time.” With this extravagance and flair for musical drama, Long created an opportunity for slaves to express themselves and get lost in the music. In return for his service, he felt both deep personal pride and community respect. At the end of the dance, Long’s face lit up, “he teef a-grinnin like de full moon.”

Sometimes this escapism was physical as well as psychological: the popularity of fiddle frolic often served as a pretense for other slaves to get off their own plantations, earning passes to see well-known fiddlers nearby. James Lucas remembered of frolics: “Dey was always a fiddler an’, on Chris’mus an’ other holidays, de slaves was lowed to invite dey sweethearts from other plantations.” Through the ritual of the frolic, the fiddler’s mobility privileges extended beyond himself to other bondmen. Despite these moments when fiddlers could temporarily loosen their own bonds of oppression as well as those of others, these inter-plantation activities were always under constant white scrutiny. Former slave Abbie Lindsay explained, “[Slaves] could go to parties too, but when they went to them or to anything else, they had to have a pass. When they went to a party the most they did was to play the fiddle and dance.” As Bill Crump characterized the tricky process of earning a pass, “My daddy wus a fiddler, an’ he sometimes played fer de dances at de Cross Roads, a little village near de marster’s place. All what ain’t been mean could go, but de mean ones can’t, an’ de rest of us has ter habe a pass ter keep de patterollers from gittin us.” As the ringleader of sorts, the fiddler was held responsible if anything went wrong: Former slave Addie Vinson remembered, “Old man John was de fiddler on our place, and when de patterollers cotched him dey beat him up wurst of all, ’cause him and his fiddle was all de tine drawin’ niggers out to do dances.” Even when privileged with the ability to switch between audiences, the fiddler’s elevated position in the enslaved community also meant that the burdens of racial hierarchies fell particularly hard on him to remind him of his place in antebellum Southern society: special but still a slave.

Even though the fiddler provided the essential music for frolics, slave masters were the ones who ultimately wielded control over these events. Their approval was required for the event to take place, to approve the event and provide the venue. Particularly rich masters would provide special provisions for frolics, playing it off as kindliness. Former slave Alice Hutcheson of Georgia remembered that while “white folkse danced de twistification up at de big house, but us had regular old break-

downs in a house what Marster let us have to dance in.” Building special platforms and halls for fiddlers to lead frolics was not an uncommon show of white plantation masters’ benevolence. However, this ostentatiousness disclosed a white surveillance of frolics under the guise of generosity. In the logic of paternalism, Black pleasure and community bonding could fit into the mold of benevolence only if properly controlled and monitored. The very space of the frolic, granted by the master to his slaves, reflected white control. Even frolics in front of slave cabins were limited by a strict curfew, enforced by overseers. This constant scrutiny also applied to corn-shuckings and Christmas celebrations. Former slave Lewis Brown remembered that at corn-shuckings, “Sometimes big rich white people would give dances out in the yard and look at their way of dancing, and doing. Violin players would be colored.” They granted dances in order to observe and restrict them, forcing the fiddler into an awkward position of negotiation. He served to stimulate frivolity—but not so much frivolity as to stir up trouble.

Occasionally, masters provided the fiddle music themselves, usurping the role of mirth-makers. Former slave Aoie Thomas recalled that on his plantation, “the youngest of the masters furnished the music. He played the fiddle and liked to see the slaves dance.” Another former slave, Easter Huff, shared a similar experience: “Master was a good white man. He was a grand fiddler and he used to call us to de big house at night to dance for him. I couldn’t do nothin’ except jump up and down and I sho did git tired.” The logic of slave owners seemed akin to that of slavers on the Middle Passage: frolic dances tired slaves out and kept them in a good mood, all while presenting slavery with a happy face. They recognized the sway that the fiddler wielded over enslaved audiences and thus attempted to capitalize on this performer-audience dynamic, mobilizing music as control.

Despite these paternalist machinations, the emotional power that enslaved fiddlers infused into community gatherings is evidenced by their universally high frequency across ex-slave narratives across all Southern states. In remembering the few fun times during slavery, former slaves almost always brought up the fiddler. Nostalgic for positive memories during the harsh Great Depression, Wheeler Greshman characterized fiddle dances at yearly corn-shuckings as the “happiest times of my life.” Based on their prevalence in the WPA archives, these dances gave slaves comforting memories that enabled them to persevere and that they held onto for the rest of their lives.

95 Camp, 117.
Many interviewed by the WPA suggested that there was no other source of amusement on plantations. Besides the fiddle dances, former slave Samuel Taylor “never heard [his] father speak of any other type of amusement.” Though many of these accounts are inherently biased because of the time passed and the respondent’s young age at emancipation, they speak to psychological role that the fiddler served for other subjugated people without many available outlets. Despite the constant scrutiny that white masters and onlookers accorded to his performance, the enslaved fiddler provided an invaluable source of momentary happiness through his music and enabled the survival of fellow slaves.

In addition to Christmas and corn-shuckings, the enslaved fiddler also facilitated slave weddings. However, only slaves attended these events, in contrast to mixed attendance at funerals. Unlike other celebrations, weddings tended to attract less white surveillance and allowed more intimate community bonds to show. Former slave Pierce Cody described weddings as more private yet festive affairs, as “Attendants at marriages were rare. After the ceremony, the guests danced far into the night by music from the fiddle.” As former slave Frank Gill from Alabama recalled, “My aunt married up at de big house an’ dey give her a big dance. Dey had de fiddle and had a great big time. Dey jes jumped over de broom.” Considering the rareness of celebrating an enslaved individual on a plantation, plus the vulnerability of black families to being broken apart, the pomp of these weddings took on special significance. Former slave Richard Moring described weddings as “a big affair” attracting slaves from different plantations because “de band which wus banjoes an’ fiddles wud play an’ de neighbor in’ folks ‘ud come.” Though Austin Grant of Texas did not receive black shoes for his wedding, his wife, Sarah Ann Brackins, had a white dress, and they “danced half the night at her house and two men played the fiddle.” Yach Stringfellow, also from Texas, was similarly proud of his wedding: “[His wife] wore white and maasa fix supper and git de fiddler and all sich.” The legendary Uncle Dick, as previously characterized by Mamie Hanberry, was known as a wedding staple. Fiddlers were so instrumental at weddings that former slave Ike Thomas of

Georgia recounted the story of an enslaved fiddler getting married who had to fiddle for his own wedding “most all night” but received leftover food the next day. The presence of the fiddler marked these rare moments of black commitment and public intimacy, elevating them to a communal celebration. This implies that the role of enslaved fiddlers to provide merriness extended beyond the constrictiveness of white balls into a more intimate territory within their own communities.

The generational aspect of fiddle training encouraged close family ties, used not only to support the wider community but also their close loved ones. Former slave Katie Arbery of Arkansas reflected fondly on her memories of her fiddler father: “Pappy used to play that on his fiddle and have us chillun tryin’ to dance. Used to call us chillun and say, ‘You little devils, come up here and dance’ and have us marchin.” Another former slave, Ellen Betts, shared similarly playful memories: “My pa was fiddler and we’d cut de pigeon wing and cut de “buck and every other kind of dance. Sometime pa git tired and say he ain’t gwinetcr play no more and us gals git busy round pop him corn md make candy, so to ’tice him to play more.”

In a violent world where slave owners regularly broke apart enslaved families, these loving moments of bonding shared over the fiddle were particularly precious. Former slave Mack Chaney, whose father was an African-born fiddler, remembered later in life how his father not only played fiddles for dances but also sang emotionally about his own mother, who had been left behind in “Africa—Dat Good Ole Land.” These connections to friends and family harken to ancestral African roots, where fiddlers served not just as entertainers but as storytellers and historians, and offer a glimpse into the intimate lives of enslaved fiddlers.

Fiddling as a display of affection extended to fiddlers’ wives as well: ex-slave Mari-ah Robinson’s husband Peter “played de fiddle all over de country and I rid horseback with him miles and miles to dem dances.” Through his fiddling, he gained for them a certain independence that allowed for romantic time away from the plantation. Especially considering the antebellum racial hierarchy’s systematic emasculation of black men, enslaved fiddlers powerfully used their talent to solidify their roles as fathers and husbands. Enslaved fiddlers, whose social importance was based on their use of conviviality to entertain white society and sustain enslaved communities, also had a private side outside of the realm of public performance. In this personal context, their private fiddling strips down the myth of the mirth-maker to its emotional core: the joy of creating and sharing music.

Despite these important and intimate roles within the enslaved communities, the

111 Hine, 308.
enslaved fiddler’s public role whipping up frenzied frolics provoked some religious backlash among Christian slaves, who considered fiddling to be the devil’s work. Scholar Dena J. Epstein believes this prejudice against secular music to have been provoked by American evangelical movements, as these distinctions between sacred and secular music cannot be traced to Africa. This rejection of fiddle playing may have well been a tacit recognition that fiddle dances were intended as a distraction, to preoccupy slaves with physical pleasure to distract them from their oppression. Masters sometimes used the fiddle to distract slaves from revivalist sentiments. According to the memoir of fugitive slave John Thompson, his master Mr. Wagar “bought at auction a man named Martin, who was a fiddler” with the purpose of bringing “[his slaves] back to their former ignorant condition.”

“What the whip had failed to accomplish, the fiddle completed,” explained Thompson, “for it is no easy matter to drive a soul from God by cruelty, when it may easily be drawn away by worldly pleasures.” When Martin’s fiddle mysteriously disappeared, “a glorious revival of religion sprang up.” This account suggests that within slave communities, the “mirth-making” of enslaved fiddlers could be twisted as an agent of white control, and that all the while enslaved people were aware of these machinations. When becoming religious, former fiddlers distanced themselves from the instrument. Uncle Bill had a similar experience: “I used to play the fiddle for dances when I was young, but not after I joined the church.” As former slave Willis Winn forcefully characterized his conversion, “When I joined the church, I burned my fiddle up.” However, other enslaved fiddlers found ways to navigate this chasm and further consolidate their popularity. Louis Fowler remembered a fiddling preacher named Allen Beave, “de preacher man and de leader in all de parties, cause him can play de fiddle.” The fiddle’s ambivalent religious meaning—contested by white masters, black audiences, and enslaved fiddlers themselves—reflects how the instrument served as a powerful material site interpreted based on a complex web of racialized demands dependent on who was playing the fiddle and who was listening.

**Enslaved Fiddlers as Agents of Resistance**

These fissures behind the mirth-making façade remain beneath the surface of most recorded depictions of enslaved fiddlers, but many expressed rebellion against this imposed social role in covert and overt ways. One method of resistance was disobe-

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113 Epstein, 208.
115 Taylor, 423.
dience—though not blatantly violent rebellion, it purposefully antagonized white society. Demonstrating the continuity of African fiddle traditions, this trickster behavior alludes to traditional stories of Br’er Rabbit, a mischievous fiddler who used his talents to pull pranks and outsmart his foes. He wielded his fiddle as a kind of magic wand to defend himself against predators or win the hand of a maiden. These legends trace back to West, Central, and Southern Africa, though they were particularly present in the Akan speakers of the Gold Coast, where most slaves traced their origins. These stories, like the griot, were threads of African fiddle culture that survived the Middle Passage. The disobedience of enslaved fiddlers, defying the supposed paternalist submissiveness of slaves, represents the tension between African roots, resistance, and the oppressive colonial script of mirth-making.

Not all resistance was explicitly confrontational. John Davis, a traveler in the late 18th century, recorded an incident regarding the enslaved fiddler, Orpheus, onboard his ship. Much to the agitation of passengers and crew members, Orpheus ran off into the woods and got drunk. Though he later returned, his refusal to play the mirth-maker on demand communicated his personal reluctance to perform a racialized social role on demand. Another method of resistance was slyness. A Scottish traveler, Alexander Hamilton (not the founding father), described with annoyance an enslaved fiddler onboard his ship, who lied to him about having “an estate of houses by heritage in Glasgow, swore he was born a gentleman for five generations, and never intended for the plough.” This bragging suggests an ironic self-awareness of a fiddler’s privilege as well as his simultaneous oppression. It may be that the fluidity of enslavement on a boat, which was less tied to a fixed racial dynamic than a plantation, may have encouraged this subversive behavior.

Illicit backwoods parties offered another method of rebellion. Despite the paternalist intentions for frolics, enslaved people often subverted these restrictions by hosting their own secret frolics away in the forests. As recalled by ex-slave Henry Wright, a fiddler himself, “Sometimes the slaves slipped away to the woods to indulge in a frolic.” The fiddler made these gatherings possible by providing the music; the lack of white surveillance allowed for a looser performative dynamic with his fellow bondmen as the audience. Using his musical talents to rebel, the fiddler also took advantage of his keen ears to serve as the lookout for patrols and protect the rest of his community. At these backwoods frolics, fiddlers performed European fiddle tunes like the cotillion as they did at white balls, but in this content, it was to challenge white cultural hegemony. Enslaved partygoers would imitate white people’s dances to

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120 John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America* (1803).
121 Alexander Hamilton, “Hamilton's Itinerarium; Being a Narrative of a Journey from Annapolis, Maryland, through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rh,” 1744, 84.
123 Camp, 111.
One exceptionally audacious account exhibits the capacity of slaves to subvert white control of their secret gatherings. As described by one anonymous former slave from Georgia, local barn frolicks had music supplied by an enslaved fiddler who had previously escaped and lived in a cave. He would sneak in and out of plantation frolicks, despite “his marster tryin to catch him for a long time.” Not even the dogs could trail him “cause he kept his feet rubbed with onions.” Tauntingly, he sang a song that went, “ Fooled my marster seven years, expect to fool him seven more.” The fiddler, as someone whose social role demanded them to pivot between both white and black audiences, occupied an ideal position to perform these public subversions.

Despite the slave owners’ script of paternalist benevolence on plantations, the frequency of fiddlers in runaway slave advertisements reveals a deep discontent beneath the facade of performed mirth. Advertisements in North Carolina and Virginia newspapers contain 103 cases of fiddlers who ran away. The descriptions of runaways offered by slave owners offers a glimpse at enslaved fiddler demographics, as runaway fiddlers were foremost identified by their fiddler identity because of its economic value. Though these detailed descriptions were ostensibly provided with the purpose of capturing runaway fiddlers, privileging the slave owners’ point of view, close analysis can help unveil the perspective of fiddlers on the run.

Many seem to be mixed race, as 43 out of 103 cases were “mulatto.” This ambiguous racial identity, plus the fact that they were all men, helps flesh out the complicated social position of fiddlers, who were probably selected by masters to perform for both white and black audiences because of their lighter skin. In 1795, the runaway Sam was characterized by his master Robert Freeman as being “so near white, that he may easily impose himself for a white man.” Most mixed-race cases seem to fall into an “elite fiddler” category, suggesting that lighter skin accorded a higher place in enslaved hierarchies. Disturbingly, these mixed-race fiddlers may have well been privileged because they were the descendants of slave owners themselves. Their marked presence in the runaway databases reveals the covert radicalism of many mirth-makers who outwardly performed mirth yet did not forget their oppression and in fact used their privilege to escape. This “elite” position is perhaps best understood by what they stole away with: they took fancy and new clothes, again highlighting the importance of external markers of dignity to top fiddlers’ sense of self. For example, in 1767 Virginia, David Gratenread, a mixed-race slave described as “very well known by most people, plays the fiddle extremely well,” stole away with:

- a new brown cloth waistcoat, rappelled, lined with white taminy, and yellow gilt buttons, a new pair of buckskin breeches, gold laced hat, a

124 Camp, 76.
fine Holland shirt, brown cut wig, and several old clothes that I cannot remember, except an old rappelled kersey waistcoat. I believe he has carried his fiddle with him.127

Slave-owners also recognized fiddlers’ augmented ability to economically sustain themselves: one petulant advertisement published almost a year after Samuel Berry ran away pointed out, “It is needless to mention his clothing, as he has been out so long, and as he plays the fiddle, he has many opportunities of changing his dress.”128

Being young men of an average age of 28, they made the most of the mobility associated with their youth. As fiddlers, many used their previous experience moving around to escape. At least 35 cases of runaway fiddlers are accused by slave owners of attempting to pass as freemen, indicating that fiddlers were well aware of their privilege as lighter-skinned, skilled slaves and capitalized on this in their resistance. Demonstrating the geographic mobility and knowledge of enslaved fiddlers, 26 cases of these runaways are assumed to have taken off on vessels. Runaway fiddlers took these boats to free states or hid out in local areas and evaded capture. In 1834, the owner of the runaway Gabriel of North Carolina guessed that he was hiding out “in some of the neighborhoods in which he has been hired” as a fiddler.129 One elite runaway, Tony, racially falling “between black and yellow,” was “well known in and about Wilmington, as he was one of the fiddlers to the assemblies”—he took his fiddle and escaped with other runaways through the backwoods of North Carolina.130 Elite fiddlers, privileged by white with limited mobility, capitalized on their advantages to escape.

This irony was not lost on rich slave owners, who in losing their most valuable slaves found themselves deprived of both wealth and entertainment. Facing a loss of profit as well as humiliation, they offered high prizes for their slaves’ return. One 1780 slave owner noted of the runaway Iverson’s Sam, “this fellow is well known in most parts of the state, as he has for many years waited on me to play the fiddle. Whoever takes up the said negro shall have 500 dollar reward.”131 Their determination to reclaim their human property also exposed their brutality: in 1805, the Virginian owner of Ben, who “plays the fiddle very well and formerly played for a black dancing manner by the name of Hardy Artise,” offered $10 for his return and an equal amount “for his head, and no questions asked.”132 Slave owner Joseph Smith offered a reward of $1,000 for his runaway fiddler John, who “has had five fingers on

127 Richard King (Virginia Gazette, May 7, 1767), The Geography of Slavery.
128 Virginia Gazette, July 18, 1771, p. [4], col. 1.
129 G. & C. Partee, (Salisbury, NC: Western Carolinian, August 8, 1835), N.C. Runaway Slave Advertisements.
130 Goodin Ellerson (Wilmington, NC: Wilmington Sentinel and General Advertiser, June 18, 1788), N.C. Runaway Slave Advertisements.
131 Loftin Newman (Richmond: Virginia Gazette [Dixon & Nicolson], November 25, 1780), The Geography of Slavery.
each hand, but has had once cut off the side of each," presumably a punishment for previous misbehavior. In the 1746 case of runaway fiddler John of Williamsburg, his owner William Newgent insisted, "As he ran away without any Cause, I desire he may be punish'd by Whipping, as the Law directs." Despite masters’ efforts to portray themselves as kindly patrons, the limited privileges given to enslaved fiddlers were quickly revoked in the face of resistance, and the true brutality underlying the master-fiddler relationship was brought out from beneath the surface.

The advertisements reflect the intense discomfort of slave owners, as the ultimate resistance of even the most elite enslaved fiddlers undercut myths of paternalist benevolence and happy mirth-makers. They attempt to explain away this disobedience by denigrating fiddlers’ character: the once simpleton fiddler is now portrayed as a sneaky manipulator. In at least 20 cases, runaway fiddlers are described as “artful” and “cunning.” Runaway slaves forced slave owners to acknowledge disparities between the myth of the carefree noble savages who sawed away on the fiddle for white amusement and the reality of non-consenting enslaved fiddlers. Slave owners also pin many as "sullen" or “down-cast,” indicating that enslaved fiddlers perhaps started to publicly resist the repressive mirth-maker role long before running away.

Though many runaway fiddlers were light-skinned, took fancy clothes, and fetched high rewards, not all fell into the characteristics associated with elite fiddlers. Some were skilled workers like carpenters, shoemakers, or blacksmiths, taking both fiddles and their tools with them. Others were darker-skinned and worked in the fields, stealing away with only field hand clothes. While some slave owners praised the musical skill of their more elite fiddlers, underlining their economic value, others qualified their slaves’ fiddler identity by noting that they only play “tolerably well.” In placing their enslaved fiddlers on an existing hierarchy of talent, they demonstrate that the social category of enslaved fiddler was not limited to elite mirth-makers. Many lived rough lives removed from the pomp and ceremony of privileged elite fiddlers. Joe of North Carolina seemed to have led a hard life, marked by the “large scar on one of his hands, occasioned by a burn, and a small piece of one of his ears has been bit off in fighting.” The overrepresentation of elite mirth-makers among white people’s accounts from the antebellum era may be because their high-class exterior fit more easily into ideals of supposed racial inferiority and enslaved happiness, not because there were more of them.

133 Joseph Smith (Richmond: Virginia Gazette [Dixon & Nicolson], October 25, 1780), The Geography of Slavery.
134 William Newgent (Williamsburg: Virginia Gazette [Peters], March 27, 1746), The Geography of Slavery.
135 Francis Pearce (Williamsburg: Virginia Gazette [Dixon & Nicolson], February 26, 1779), The Geography of Slavery.
136 Bennett Armstrong (Norfolk: Norfolk Herald [Willett & O’Connor], August 2, 1800), The Geography of Slavery.
137 Thomas Nattell (Virginia Gazette [Purdie & Dixon], May 16, 1771).
Even through the reductive lens of irritated slave owners, intimate lives of enslaved fiddlers can be detected throughout the advertisements. For example, some enslaved fiddlers ran away to pursue family ties and romantic connections, as previously supported by their roles as husbands and fathers in enslaved communities. At least five men ran away to find their wives—one used the increased artificial liberty of Christmas to run off with his wife, a “free Mulatto.”\(^\text{139}\) Dick, a Virginian fiddler, ran away with a female slave named Clary who was the property of the state’s governor at the time.\(^\text{140}\) Giving a glance into the complex ways in which antebellum individuals translated prescriptive hierarchies into real life, two enslaved fiddlers ran away with white women.\(^\text{141, 142}\) Their descriptions are ambiguous as to whether they ran off together romantically or if the enslaved fiddlers were carried off by force. Considering that romantic relationships between white women and enslaved men necessitated coercion and made it impossible for enslaved men to freely offer consent, these illegal pairings suggest that runaway enslaved fiddlers complicated the antebellum South’s organization of race and gender in more ways than one.\(^\text{143}\)

Other runaway fiddlers reflect the diversity of the transnational enslaved experience. In 1790, Mark, who was born on the island of St. Jago and spoke Portuguese, ran away from his Virginia plantation with multiple African-born slaves who because of their multiple enslavements and slaves were all “accustomed to go by water in river craft, and are well acquainted with all the harbours and creeks, on some of which I expect they will be found lurking.” William Allason, the man who claimed to own Mark, portrayed him as “very active, and remarkable for his ingenuity,” evidenced by the fact that he had “no particular trade by being capable of doing something at almost every kind of business.” In addition to playing the fiddle, he was a strong whistler and player of the French horn. He enjoyed “marches and church musick, particularly that belonging to the Roman Catholick religion, which he professes.”\(^\text{144}\) Despite the brutality of enslavement and the disruption of forced migration, Mark demonstrates how enslaved individuals sustained rich identities that intersected with that of a fiddler. These varied identities were public enough for even slave owners, who generally reduced their enslaved fiddlers to stereotypes, to take notice. Abraham Camp, who ran away in 1836 from a plantation in North Carolina, stands out for having “one-fourth part Indian blood,” reflecting the oft-forgotten history of Native

\(^{139}\) Hamilton Jones (Williamsburg: *Virginia Gazette* [Dixon & Hunter], January 28, 1775), *The Geography of Slavery.*


\(^{141}\) Thomas Connelly (Raleigh, NC: *The Star*, November 15, 1811), N.C. Runaway Slave Advertisements.


\(^{144}\) William Allason (Richmond: *Virginia Gazette* [Dixon & Nicolson], August 9, 1780). *The Geography of Slavery.*
Americans’ enslavement and their contributions to the emergence of American fiddle culture. Abraham also had “scars inflicted on him for his misbehavior”—this brutality against enslaved fiddlers even before they ran away reveals that bargaining with paternalism did not guarantee protection and that the supposedly benevolent slave owner exchange with fiddlers was much more tenuous than Genovese argued. The runaway Anthony, “well-known in Raleigh and many parts of the State,” was also ethnically mixed, being of “white, Tuscarora, an Negro” descent. In addition to playing a little on the fiddle, he reportedly:

- works and walks fast, is lively and talkative, full of anecdote which he relates in character with much humor, is an excellent pressman…tolerable carpenter and joiner, a plain painter, an excellent manager of horses, drives well and rides elegantly, having been accustomed to race riding, is fond of cockfighting (and of man fighting when drunk) and is said to heel and pit with much skill; he can bleed and pull teeth, knows something of Medicines, is a rough barber, a bad but conceited cook, a good Sawyer, can lay brick, has worked in the corn field.

The material site of the fiddle brought together this wide range of individuals, ranging from elite fiddlers to amateur scrapers, through the shared identity of enslaved fiddler. The fiddler’s social category ranged from occupational to recreational, with complex lives that expanded beyond the instrument itself. However, the fact that at least 22 percent of runaway fiddlers on record took their instrument with them is evidence of the personal and social importance of the fiddle. Through a myriad of strategies, enslaved fiddlers reinterpreted the instrument’s power for their own freedom and survival.

**Conclusion**

After the Civil War, the fiddle became increasingly dominated by white Southerners as black musicians shifted to the guitar. The popularity of the enslaved fiddler continued only in the mockeries of minstrel shows, which perpetuated the specter of a musically talented yet childish mirth-maker. Many black musicians turned instead to guitars likely because of the fiddle’s unpleasant ties to slavery. Though black fiddlers made appearances on “race records” during the 1920s and never fully disappeared, the public face of modern fiddle culture is white, Southern, and Celtic. Nonetheless, many former enslaved fiddlers passed on timeless musical traditions to their children. Notable direct descendants include ragtime pianist Scott Joplin and blues artist Mance Lipscomb. Frederick Douglass took great pride in his grandson Joseph Douglass, a groundbreaking concert violinist who was famous around the world.

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146 John Humphrey (Annapolis: Maryland Gazette, September 20, 1814).
147 Miller, 510.
The enslaved fiddlers’ musical footprint, blending African and European influences in a uniquely American ethos, can be heard throughout contemporary music today. The fiddle, in all its personal majesty and rich African roots, was a powerful tool of survival in the hands of enslaved people. The enslaved fiddler, as a social role that connected the lives of hundreds of musicians who lived throughout antebellum America, cannot be reduced to any monolith of pure confrontation or pure collaboration of white supremacy. Enslaved fiddlers existed across a spectrum of resistance, and in seeking to survive in the face of oppression, they all participated in some form of resistance or another. Though they were certainly entertainers and providers of amusement, enslaved fiddlers existed beyond the coercive racial performance of mirth-making for the white gaze. They used this capacity for joviality to sustain themselves, their communities, and their loved ones. Despite being privileged in the racial hierarchy, enslaved fiddlers did not forget their chains, and they used the advantages associated with their social role to resist covertly and overtly. Though they are only explicitly remembered by the occasional film or slave culture studies scholarship, their triumphs and sacrifices are what gave birth to the joyful hypocrisy that is American music.

Frederick Douglass and his grandson Joseph Douglass, the concert violinist⁴⁹

⁴⁹ https://thelionofanacostia.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/fred-joseph-douglass.jpg


Chesnut, Mary Boykin Miller. *A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator from South Carolina, 1859–1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army.* New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905.


Tell it Slant: 
Emily Dickinson, the Dash, and the Daisy

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This article focuses on Emily Dickinson's work through the intersection of two lenses: her use of the dash and her use of the Daisy persona. As recent Dickinson scholarship has explored, her punctuation has been historically undervalued, both by her editors and her readers. However, these marks were essential to the form and meaning of her work, and removing them has been an attempt to ignore the complications her work may entail. In this article, I explore how Dickinson's punctuation is significant in the context of the Daisy persona, a flower whose representations were often clearly in line with standards for nineteenth-century American women, and which makes an appearance through several of Dickinson's letters and poems. However, in Dickinson's work, the images of the Daisy that could quite easily represent traditional womanhood are disrupted and complicated by Dickinson's use of the dash, creating a Daisy that both rebels and submits.

Emily Dickinson was a prolific poet born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1830. Over the 55 years that she was alive, she lived a fruitful creative life in which she produced nearly 1,800 poems, though only 10 of them were ever published during her lifetime. All of the publications were done anonymously, and at the motivation of others in her social circle. Upon Dickinson's death, her sister, Lavinia, burned the majority of her correspondence, as requested by Dickinson. However, in that process, Lavinia found more than 800 of Dickinson's poems bound up in 40 booklets, now referred to as “fasicles,” tucked away in Dickinson’s room, with even more unbound, collected manuscripts, now referred to as “sets.”¹ The deconstruction of these fasicles was the first moment of posthumous editing of Dickinson's work² and the beginnings of her introduction to public criticism, which Dickinson herself never sought. Yet, with her posthumous publication, she has never escaped it.

This criticism has come from scholars across a range of disciplines, but in recent years the discussion surrounding Dickinson's unique style of punctuation, particularly the dash, has been growing rapidly. Scholars have interpreted and assigned meaning to Dickinson's dashes in many ways, but my contribution to that body of work focuses on how her use of varied dashes functions within the context of the Daisy persona she crafted across the Master letters and a handful of her poems. I will argue that Dickinson strategically used the dash in its various forms of angle and length

² Also, in Sharon Cameron's book Choosing Not Choosing (1993), she argues that the poems collected in the fasicles should not be read apart from one another because these fasicles “embody the problem of identity” (Cameron 4), making these poems interconnected in ways that require each other's contexts. Because the fasicles were an undeniably conscious construction on Dickinson's part, widely believed to be a form of self-publication, I find it necessary to mention these manuscript booklets. However, because of the focus of my own argument being on instances of the Daisy persona—which occur beyond the bounds of certain fasicles—I will not be engaging with Cameron's scholarship, though I recognize the significance of this work.
to complicate her representations of femininity through the Daisy persona by both complying with and subverting the expectations of “true womanhood.”

Lavinia’s discovery of these poems was the beginning of a long history of contention around Dickinson’s unique style and use of punctuation. Even in the context of Dickinson’s education in “New England traditions of self-definition,” which prompted her to “[resist] social and literary pressures to conform,” her style was still considered strange. As Cheryl Walker argues in her essay “Dickinson in Context,” although it is important to note that Dickinson would have known, read, and possibly learned from the work of her published female contemporaries, she was, “... by nature a nonconformist. It is certainly the case that her poems in toto sound like no one else’s, male or female.” Her unique qualities were quite clear: Dickinson’s structure was not simple but stark, her capitalization was ambiguous and did not follow prescribed patterns, she sometimes included variant word choices in her manuscripts, and her poems were often sceneless. However, her unusual use of punctuation, particularly the dash, was also a significant characteristic of her poetry, and often the one most troubling to her editors. Not only did Dickinson’s dashes frequently interrupt her poetry’s constructions, but the dashes themselves were often unusually formed. The dashes came in varying lengths and angles, titling upward and pointing downward on occasion. Because of obvious typescript restrictions in conveying these various dashes, and the editorial normalization practices of her editors, these marks proved too difficult to translate from Dickinson’s handwriting into print, at least at first.

However, before any of these intricacies in her punctuation were brought to readers’ attention, the publication of Dickinson’s poetry went through a complex process that involved the alteration and sanitization of her work. When Lavinia discovered Dickinson’s poetry, she approached Susan Dickinson, Dickinson’s sister-in-law and intimate friend, to help with the initial publication. Susan continued Dickinson’s pattern of publishing in journals and “only the stature of the journal had increased.” When that process was not moving along to Lavinia’s satisfaction, she took the manuscripts to Mabel Loomis Todd, the longtime mistress of Susan’s husband and the Dickinsons’ brother, Austin. Along with Todd, Lavinia enlisted the help of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who had been both a literary critic and good friend of Dickinson’s. Todd and Higginson then went on to publish Poems by Emily Dickinson in 1890, and when that proved successful, they published a second book the next year. Todd, without Higginson’s help, then went on to publish a book of Dickinson’s letters in 1894 and a third book of her poems in 1896.

All of these editions were full of significant changes to Dickinson’s manuscripts—“They gave titles to poems, which otherwise rarely had them...adjusted texts to public standards of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and altered them in

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the interests of conventional usage and of clarity in rhyme, rhythm and meaning.”

These edits continued to be implemented into the first complete collection of Dickinson’s poetry eventually published by Thomas H. Johnson in 1955, which was full of similar editorial influence. Only relatively recently has R. W. Franklin transcribed the entirety of Dickinson’s poems with the original capitalization, spelling, language (including variants), and punctuation (though only one short dash is used throughout Franklin’s collection).

However, the recognition of these editorial interventions prompted scholars to turn to Dickinson’s manuscripts, discover the changes made by her previous editors, and uncover what was missing from Dickinson scholarship because of these normalizations. One such scholar was Ellen Louise Hart, who brought forth arguments that illuminate the history of editing that Dickinson’s work has undergone, particularly in her letters to Susan. In “The Encoding of Homoerotic Desire: Emily Dickinson’s Letters and Poems to Susan Dickinson, 1850–1886,” Hart addresses Johnson’s editorializing by elaborating on the ways in which Johnson omitted and rearranged certain parts of Dickinson’s and Susan’s correspondence.

One such instance that Hart notes is when Johnson classifies the poem “Morning” as a letter because it does not use symbolic language, though Hart argues that in every other way, “The writing has the form of a poem: it appears in stanzas; it uses line divisions and its lines are metered.” But the significance of Johnson’s edits lies not just in his change of the classification of “Morning” to a poem. Hart wants readers to recognize that as long as editors take it upon themselves to restructure Dickinson’s poems and letters, there are gaps in our knowledge and analysis of her work. Hart says of “Morning” that, “as long as this poem is not available to students, teachers, and general readers, as long as scholars and critics relegate the text to the categories ‘insignificant’ and ‘unreadable,’ one more piece of evidence that Dickinson loved Susan all her life and designed a future in which to extend and transform that love is removed from view.” For Hart, the significance of these edits is particular to the popular misunderstanding of one of Dickinson’s most important relationships, but this concern is applicable to Dickinson scholarship across the board. By attempting to ignore or normalize Dickinson’s language and structure, we lose sight of the important intricacies of her work.

The concerns that Hart shows for both emphasizing the importance of Dickinson’s relationship to Susan as well as preserving Dickinson’s own editorial choices are combined in her joint book with Martha Nell Smith, *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson’s Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. This book addresses the idea that even before Dickinson’s poems were normalized by various editors, the very structure of Dickinson’s work was disturbed. Dickinson would often blur the lines...
between poetry and personal correspondence, either sending poems in the place of letters, including several lines of poetry in an otherwise entirely prose letter, or combining the two modes of writing so intricately that one was not extractible from the other. In this book, Smith and Hart argue that the delineation between Dickinson’s letters and poems is mostly due to the editors of her work rather than the poet’s personal distinctions. They claim that there are three general genres instead of two: letters, poems, and “the genre identified by Susan [Dickinson] as the ‘letter-poem.’” The letter-poem, a category that includes signed poems and letters with poems or with lines of poetry, will be seen [in Open Me Carefully] as a distinct and important Dickinson genre.” This division of Dickinson’s work into the binary of poetry and prose was a division that ignores Dickinson’s authority in her work and can prevent the possibilities of deeper analysis—much like critics’ dismissal of Dickinson’s punctuation.  

Hart also applies the methods that she uses to reconstruct Dickinson’s correspondence in a later article, “The Elizabeth Putnam Manuscripts and New Strategies for Editing Emily Dickinson’s Letters.” This article takes the reader through an analysis of the Putnam manuscripts—letters written by Dickinson to her friend Maria Whitney, later donated by Elizabeth Whitney Putnam to the Houghton Library—and is careful to note the places in which Todd, much like Johnson, edited Dickinson’s work. For example, Hart notes at one point that a certain line cut is “consistent with Todd’s concern that Dickinson not appear irreverent, a concern Todd notes in her diary . . .” and later mentions that Todd also changed capitalizations in another letter “to conceal Dickinson’s unorthodox lower case letters that begin pronouns representing deity.” This article is a thorough and carefully composed exposure of Todd rewriting Dickinson and how this affects the poet’s work, but it is also an article that exposes the dangers of using the Johnson editions. Hart shows this by explaining how William Shurr’s New Poems of Emily Dickinson did not actually expose new Dickinson poems, but plucked lines out “opportunistically” to create these apparent poems. She explicitly attributes his misunderstandings to not working with actual Dickinson manuscripts, but instead relying on Johnson, who “regularly ignored Dickinson’s line breaks and occasionally dropped capitalization beginning a new line if it interfered with his stanza format,” among other editorializing strategies.

Along with Hart, Paul Crumbley also grapples with the history of Dickinson’s
punctuation. In the opening of his book *Inflections of the Pen*, he responds to a Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar quote about the effects of Dickinson’s dashes, which spurs his own analysis of Dickinson. According to Gilbert and Gubar, these dashes in Dickinson’s poems work by “rending pauses, silences like wounds in the midst of speech,” and Crumbley uses this description to hint toward the underlying reason that scholars have been “reluctant to embrace Dickinson’s stylistic innovations” for quite a while. While Hart notes the personal motivations of Todd’s editing process, Crumbley argues that the dismissal of Dickinson’s punctuation stems largely from the fear that the disjunction the dash produces “can threaten to dismember both the speech conventionally associated with poetic voice and . . . the self that language presumably communicates.” For Crumbley, the inclusion of the dash complicates a simple and straightforward understanding of Dickinson’s poetry, which he argues is what makes her poetry compelling rather than daunting or wicked, as past editors have described it. The “editorial normalization,” as Crumbley calls it, of Dickinson’s punctuation has purposefully tamed her poetry and forced it to conform to the idea of “an ideally unified self,” avoiding the complications and discomfort of the “uncertainty of identity” editors would have had to confront otherwise.

To keep from falling into the trap of editorial normalizations in his transcriptions, Crumbley purposefully includes a range of dashes in his representations of Dickinson’s poetry, including six lengths of dashes, five heights relative to the line of type, and several angles. In taking the dashes of Dickinson into account, Crumbley comes to his own interpretation of the function of Dickinson’s punctuation. He argues that “Once we are sensitive to the range of voices that Dickinson signals by means of dashes, we can understand the poems as her refusal to silence the many rebellious voices that registered clearly in her own mind despite the considerable social pressure of more orthodox opinion seeking to enforce conformity.” His focus on Dickinson’s punctuation is essential to his understandings of her poetry—the dashes are purposeful moves toward disjointing unity and producing a multiplicity of voices. While I find this analysis compelling, I will venture to explore the ways that the dash—instead of encompassing several voices—gives one of Dickinson’s voices in particular, the Daisy, the space to be multifaceted and complicate her representations of femininity. Regardless of my departures from their literature, it is because of scholars like Hart and Crumbley that we have become more and more keenly aware of the ways that Dickinson’s work has been misrepresented, and how that misrepresentation has

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17 Crumbley, *Inflections of the Pen*, 15–16

18 While my representations of Dickinson’s manuscripts will not involve the same number of intricate dashes as Crumbley, I will be incorporating the angles and varying lengths of the dash into my quotes of Dickinson’s manuscripts. I will be consulting the Emily Dickinson Archive (edickinson.org) for the manuscript images.

negatively impacted the cultural and scholarly understandings of her poetry.

Dickinson’s contemporaries had mixed reviews of her work. Though there were some people who had extremely positive reactions to her work and some with extremely negative reactions, all critiques of Dickinson tended to acknowledge her unusual style. One anonymous review in the Nation said: “With all its inequalities and even oddities on its face, there is power enough on many a page of this little book to set up whole volumes of average poetry; and the public will inevitably demand to know more of the thoughts and mental processes of Emily Dickinson.” An even more positive anonymous review in the Critic said, “Miss Dickinson’s poems, though rough and rugged, are surprisingly individual and genuinely inspired.” Though the two of these reviewers see merit in her work to varying degrees, both of these anonymous writers do make it a point to mention that her style is not as polished or conventional as they expected it to be.

However, the negative critiques of Dickinson’s poetry tend to expose an explicitly dismissive and gender-biased attitude about her poetry’s structure and punctuation, even when her form had been normalized by her editors. This attitude can be seen in an article published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1892, by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, a poet and literary critic himself. In the article, “In Re Emily Dickinson,” Aldrich wrote,

> It is plain that Miss Dickinson possessed an extremely unconventional and grotesque fancy. She was deeply tinged by the mysticism of Blake, and strongly influenced by the mannerism of Emerson...But the incoherence and formlessness of her versicles are fatal...an eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village (or anywhere else) cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar.

Although it is never explicitly stated, Aldrich, like many other critics, was quick to dismiss Dickinson’s poems because of their apparent feminine faults. His attribution of her poems’ weaknesses to poor education, eccentricity, and dreaminess are all coded ways of condemning her for being a woman writing poetry—and worse, unconventional poetry. While it is most likely true that even if her poems had been published under a male name, Dickinson still would have received criticism for their unusual structure, the criticism was certainly heightened because of her gender. It is important to note that Dickinson’s transgression of conventional forms was considered to be a weakness that, although it manifested in her poetics, was based in her position as a woman. The language of Aldrich’s criticism itself is laced with gendered implications.

21 Ferlazzo, Critical Essays on Emily Dickinson, 30.
In 19th-century America, women were strictly confined by social norms to a certain set of virtues. According to Barbara Welter’s essay “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” “True, feminine genius . . . is ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent; a perpetual childhood.” This version of genius that women were allowed to access was not only considered inferior to the male genius—which a woman was directed to devote herself to so as to “aid him in his arduous career” (Welter 160)—but was also emphasized as an infantilized, submissive state. These virtues ensured that the feminine genius was socially regarded as inferior and stunted from its ideal growth. In addition, the landscape of American education in the 19th century for women was under debate. Women of certain privilege were allowed an education, but, according to Welter, the questions of if and what they should read were still quite complicated. Welter notes that women in the literature of the period were shown as “dangerously addicted to novels” (Welter 165)—implying there was a danger in women reading in the first place—however, “If she simply couldn’t help herself and read them anyway, she should choose edifying ones from lists of morally acceptable authors” (Welter 165). The values of “true womanhood” controlled this aspect of women’s lives as well and blocked them from an education as rigorous as their male counterparts. Women were allowed an education, but that education must include “the gentle science of homemaking” (Welter 166) and female seminaries “were quick to defend themselves against any suspicion of interfering with the role which nature’s God had assigned to women. They hoped to enlarge and deepen that role, but not to change its setting” (Welter 168). The restriction of women’s education meant that any associations beyond domesticity, piety, and purity were often negative. Silliness and stupidity were feminine traits. Translated into the sphere of poetic criticism, where grammar, structure, and rhyme were prized to the point of editorial intervention, this meant that Dickinson’s penchants for seemingly random capitalization, slant rhymes, and abnormal punctuation were widely considered both symptoms of a weak—coded feminine—poet.

Aldrich furthers his contempt for Dickinson’s work by elaborating on an apparent history of poor critical reception throughout the whole of his short article on Dickinson’s poetry in Atlantic Monthly. In the opening of the article, Aldrich quotes a previous, unnamed critic as saying “that [Emily Dickinson] might have become a fifth-rate poet ‘if she had only mastered the rudiments of grammar and gone into metrical training for about fifteen years.’” Initially, Aldrich sets himself apart from this critique by saying that the critic was possibly exaggerating. However, upon further reading, Aldrich’s opinions of her work are clearly consistent with his predecessor. He states, “If Miss Dickinson had undergone the austere curriculum indicated, she would, I am sure, have become an admirable lyric poet of the second magnitude.”


24 Buckingham, Emily Dickinson’s Reception in the 1890s, 283.

25 Buckingham, Emily Dickinson’s Reception in the 1890s, 283.
Aldrich then goes on to edit one of her poems in his critique, editing the first stanza of “I taste a liquor never brewed” to rhyme, and putting in consistent punctuation—adding a semi-colon on the second line, putting a period at the end of the stanza, and printing his version of Dickinson’s lines in the margins of her work for a comparison clearly meant to favor his edits. While it is clear that Aldrich takes issue with Dickinson’s work beyond her structure—even if she had the strictest poetic discipline, he would only class her as a second-grade poet—it is still the core of what he brings up as a tangible fault in her work. What keeps her a second-grade poet in his estimation is subtly indicated in Aldrich’s final paragraph. In his final stab at Dickinson’s work, he says:

If Miss Dickinson’s disjecta membra are poems, then Shakespeare’s prolonged imposition should be exposed without further loss of time, and Lord Tennyson ought to be advised of the error of his ways before it is too late. . . . Miss Dickinson’s versicles have a queerness and a quaintness that have stirred a momentary curiosity in emotional bosoms. Oblivion lingers in the immediate neighborhood.26

Aldrich attacks Dickinson’s work with sarcastic comments pitting her against iconic male poets and condescendingly writes her as a passing fancy too queer to last. The language of his critique seems intent to pit her work against the male genius in a demeaning manner and align Dickinson with queer frivolities, non-explicitly calling her a strange and uneducated woman not worthy of much attention.

However, it is Dickinson’s position as a woman and a poet that offers an important lens through which to read her poetry, given the situation of women in 19th-century America. As Welter establishes in “The Cult of True Womanhood,” the world around women in 19th-century America was constantly shifting, full of possibility, and never entirely certain. However, there was one thing that could be depended upon for stability: “a true woman was a true woman” (Welter 152).

Among a long list of qualities that vary in specificity, Welts points out that women like Dickinson were required to have a core set of characteristics that kept them safely within the role of a “true woman.” As Welts argues, “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. . . . Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (Welter 152). Each of those cardinal virtues has more complex implications in a woman’s life at the time, but the domestic sphere in particular had a myriad of smaller and miscellaneous expectations of women. In the context of Dickinson’s poetry, one quality in particular is quite interesting to me as a reader of Dickinson’s work—“She was expected to have a special affinity for flowers” (Welter 165).

The significance of this particular affinity can be seen in a book published in 1842

26 Buckingham, Emily Dickinson’s Reception in the 1890s, 284.
by Lucy Hooper27, *The Lady’s Book of Flowers and Poetry; To Which Are Added, a Botanical Introduction, a Complete Floral Dictionary, and a Chapter on Plants in Rooms*. Chapter by chapter, Hooper introduces flowers and compiles their popular poetic mentions, including a dictionary of these flowers’ meanings. A flower that appears in this book is also repeatedly used throughout Dickinson’s poetry and Master letters—the daisy.

The daisy is defined by Hooper as a signifier of *innocence*.28 However, through the poetic context that Hooper provides, the daisy is more than just *innocence*—it is a trait-for-trait representation of the four cardinal virtues of the cult of true womanhood. For example, Robert Millhouse’s “To a Daisy, Blooming in the Depth of Winter”29 mourns both the daisy’s loss of “virgin charms” and the fact that the flower will never “greet the nuptial tribes of May.”30 The idea that virgin purity and marriage were so highly prized that they required mourning when lost is also emphasized by Welter in her explanation of the importance of the cardinal virtue of *purity*. She notes that “True Women were urged, in the strongest possible terms, to maintain their virtue” (Welter 154) and that “The marriage night was the single greatest event of a woman’s life” (Welter 154). Similar connections occur between the daisy and each of the other three cardinal virtues that Welter mentions. As for *piety*, William Wordsworth refers to the daisy as “A Nun demure.” *Submissiveness* can be seen in the way that Wordsworth later refers to the daisy as “Sweet silent creature” and describes how he wants to share in its “meek nature.” Finally, *domesticity* is seen in Mary Russell Mitford’s reference to the daisies as “Home-loving pretty ones.”31

In Dickinson’s poetry, the flower daisy becomes *Daisy* and functions as a feminine persona of a woman, but not quite in the expected manner. In *Emily Dickinson: Personae & Performance*, Elizabeth Phillips explains that

> [Dickinson] dramatized herself but also others’ lives by appropriating the genre of the dramatic monologue, particularly whenever she wanted to go beyond the limits of ‘actual’ experience and autobiography. Having found the histrionic imagination especially congenial, Dickinson disclaimed that she was always writing in propria persona. Like many authors, she assumed many personae; and the experiences in the poems are often transformations of episodes in the lives of personal friends, literary characters, and historical figures for whom a fictive “I” is only a convenient term.32

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27 Lucy Hooper (1816–1841) was a 19th-century American poet who was also a keen and accomplished botanist.


29 Robert Millhouse (1788–1839) was an English Spenserian poet best known for his work *Poetical Blossoms*. The poem quoted in Hooper’s book is taken from *Poetical Blossoms*, published in 1823.


As Phillips indicates, these personas not only help separate Dickinson the woman from the narrators in her poems, but they also helped her expand the experiences her poems could detail, consequently widening the experiences and expressions of womanhood that her poetry represented. Considering that the traits of true womanhood and the poetic representations of daisies are so easily comparable, this creates a clear and captivating juxtaposition when the daisy is used as a symbolic representation of not-so-typical women by a highly scrutinized female poet. But beyond the initial surprise of the juxtaposition, a key method by which Dickinson creates these complex images is her unique punctuation—in particular, the way that Dickinson uses the dash. I believe that the intersections of Dickinson’s dashes and Daisy persona are moments when Dickinson intentionally uses punctuation to disrupt persona—but not entirely disfigure it. With the symbolic femininity of the daisy in mind, Dickinson constructs images of femininity that do not fit neatly within the characteristics of “true womanhood,” but also still follow some of those feminine tendencies. She complicates images of femininity, particularly in the context of these feminine representations’ relationships to male figures.

This can be seen in the most sustained use of the Daisy persona in Dickinson’s poetics, the controversial Master letters. These three Master letters are surrounded by much debate. To whom did Dickinson write them? How much of the content of the letters is imagined? How much is a response to real interactions? All three of these questions have prompted great pieces of scholarship; however, the development of the Daisy persona is what fascinates me.

In the second of the three Master letters, the Daisy persona appears in the first few lines. These opening lines are a clear departure from the personal voice of Dickinson and begin the work of crafting the persona of Daisy.

Oh – did I offend it
[Didn’t want me
 to tell it the truth]
Daisy – Daisy offends it who
bends her smaller life to
his (it’s) meeker (lower) every day –
who only asks a task  

Dickinson begins the letter with “I,” but using the dash, quickly cuts that personal

33 The question of who “Master” is has long been the subject of debate, but the most prominent cases have been made for Charles Wadsworth and Samuel Bowles. Scholars are unsure whether these letters were ever sent. This has sparked debate about how much of these letters is performative and how much is response to real interactions, but most responses seem to include a combination of those possibilities. I will base all arguments on the idea that these letters have an element of self-dramatization to them and will not focus on who the possible recipient of these letters was.

34 R. W. Franklin, ed., The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson, (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1986), 22–23. This edition includes the manuscripts as well as the transcribed text. I add textual characteristics that Franklin’s transcription does not include, such as the angled dashes. Future references will be cited in the text as “L” for letters.
voice off and replaces that “I” with “Daisy.” She retracts the first-person construction of the first line asking if she offended “it” and rewrites this same thought in the third person, asking if Daisy offended the ambiguous “it”—the Master figure, or recipient of the letter. Even in that phrase, Dickinson repeats Daisy as though to reaffirm that the speaker is indeed Daisy, that it is not Dickinson herself being portrayed on the paper here. In these opening lines, Daisy seems perfectly submissive and at the will of Master. Daisy not only “bends her smaller life to / his,” pointing out textually her physical submissiveness, but the poet also points a great deal of the dashes in the quoted section at a downward angle, as though indicating meekness, like a downward-cast gaze. For instance, in the line “who only asks / a task,” due to the way that “task” is set off not only by dashes but also by downward dashes, this phrase is cast in a submissive tone. Not only do these markings create hesitation as Daisy asks the task, but their downward angle again indicates a downward-cast gaze or physical submission. This physical meekness is textually repeated a few lines down:

A love so big it scares
her, rushing among her small
heart – pushing aside the
blood – and leaving her
(all) faint and white in the
gust’s arm \  

(1.2)

In these lines, Daisy is portrayed as emotionally overwhelmed to the point of being physically weak, faint, and white. Not only is the tone of Daisy’s approach in the first lines of the letter meek, a meekness that is reinforced by her dashes, but this image is further emphasized by the diminutive description of “her small heart,” and yet another downward-angled dash at the end of the stanza. Marietta Messmer also points out this submissive tone in her own discussion of the Master letters in her book *A Vice for Voices: Reading Emily Dickinson’s Correspondence*. Messmer claims “the scales frequently tip toward the pole of complete self-abasement in her so-called Master letters,” an observation which I agree with in part. I certainly see the self-abasement of Daisy in the opening stanzas and throughout the letter, as she portrays herself as weak—saying it with her meek language and implying it with her punctuation—and humbles herself before Master consistently. However, there are moments of assertion in this letter that push back against the idea of Daisy in “complete self-abasement.” Just after Daisy is “faint and white in the / gust’s arm \,” she shows her strength in “Daisy – who never flinched / thro’ that awful parting \.” Though Daisy may be meek in the text of the letter, she asserts that she has stood strong, emphasized by the dashes keeping that sentiment held together. She moves to assert some composure through the dash after parting, though the line ends on a downward dash that brings
back the image of Daisy kneeling or bowing her head to Master.

The back-and-forth of Daisy's submissive lines and small assertions of power or strength continue throughout the rest of the second Master letter. She negotiates with Master's authority in the lines “but must she go un— / pardoned – teach her grace – [preceptor] / teach her majesty –” (L2). The submissive, meek tone is perpetuated as Daisy not only submits her will to Master, but puts herself in a physically submissive position as well. Dickinson writes:

Daisy kneels ✓
a culprit – tell her
her fault – – Master ✓
if it is small
eno [sic] to cancel with
her life, she is satisfied –
but punish – do[not]nt banish
her — Shut her in prison ✓

(L2)

This moment can be read as physical submission—Daisy submits herself, physically and metaphorically to Master, both with the image of kneeling and the downward-pointing dashes after “kneels,” “Master,” and “prison.” But the moment can also be read as a negotiation. Just after Daisy demands to know her fault, this question is set off by two dashes, elongating the pause and building tension before she directly addresses Master. Before even proposing a punishment, she addresses Master with a downward dash and rea

affirms a sense of submission, but the phrasing of the following lines makes her seem as though she has a measure of power in the situation. She waits for Master to tell her of her fault, but also waits to hear the magnitude of the apparent fault to be satisfied with punishment—only if her fault “is small / eno” is she “satisfied.” By implying that her submission rests on her satisfaction with Master’s explanation of her fault—putting conditions on her submission—there is a small display of possible power in this line. Though we do not see that power acted upon in the text of the letter, the implication that Daisy could reject Master’s control over her is still there and complicates the submissive image we may ascribe to Daisy.

As she accepts the ambiguous fault Master ascribes to her, Daisy asks not to be banished, but rather punished and shut in prison. In this moment, Daisy begins a negotiation that again implies a certain amount of power on her part. The dashes in these lines set off Daisy’s proposed punishment from the rest of the line, putting Daisy’s suggestion on equal footing with the banishment Master apparently proposes, which is also set off by dashes. However, again, the final, downward-pointing dash after “prison” indicates submission or resignation and pulls back on some of the assertiveness that the previous lines established. This assertiveness could also be detracted by pointing out that the negotiations Daisy asks for are to keep her closer to Master, not to break away from his hold. These complications in Daisy’s power are all intentional, though they may seem incompatible. Daisy admits herself a culprit
without knowing her fault, but she negotiates for her punishment—though the punishment she asks for intentionally keeps her closer to Master. Alongside a submissive and often meek depiction of Daisy seeking to bend herself to the will of Master, Dickinson’s dashes also allow room for Daisy to have power of her own. These dashes intentionally disrupt Daisy’s pleading and negotiations, combining the two otherwise conflicting attitudes into one character who can simultaneously be dependent on but resistant to Master she addresses.

Kamilla Denman supports this method of understanding Dickinson’s dashes in her essay “Emily Dickinson’s Volcanic Punctuation.” Denman argues for the deliberate nature of Dickinson’s punctuation, stating that her marks were not careless mistakes on the part of the poet, but an integral part of the poet’s “exploration of language, used to deliberately disrupt conventional grammatical patterns and create new relationships between words,” among other arguments about the possibilities of creating musical and rhythmic effects. However, the most important point I draw from Denman’s work is that initial argument for deliberate disruption and exploration of language. Without the dashes, these effects would be lost—as Denman puts it, “Were the sentences to be made complete and the poem conventionally punctuated, the essence of the experience it describes would be lost.” Similarly, in this section of the Master letters, if the dashes were lost, there would be little nuance to Daisy’s assertions. The language is still submissive, but the way the dash both puts Daisy’s voice in conversation with Master’s and brings an added dimension of meekness to the forefront is gone. As Denman argues, much of the power of Dickinson’s poetry comes from her disregard for conventional rules of grammar and punctuation. Alongside the language of the poem, the dash creates visual and metaphorical disruption that “reshapes and enriches language.” That is lost when we look only to the language—it is essential that both Daisy and dash are present in this letter to create submissive yet subversive images of womanhood.

In continuing that multifaceted depiction of femininity, Daisy is continually referred to in a diminutive way, “I’ve got a cough as / big as a thimble \,” (L2) with a diminutive dash at the end, but also manages to withstand the pain of a Tomahawk in her side. Messmer argues that this is part of Daisy playing a dual role, both “the demurely insignificant little flower / girl dependent on the sun and the most powerful ruler of the sky itself.” However, I think that the power of Daisy is not quite so binary in this letter. Though it may be easy to gloss over this letter with its downward dashes and imagery to think of Daisy as a typical show of submissive femininity, there is a complexity in the portrayal of Daisy that prevents such a reading upon closer look—but it is not outright rebellious. Daisy is undeniably submissive to Master in an overall sense, but she does push back in small, valuable ways. This resistance

37 Denman, “Emily Dickinson’s Volcanic Punctuation,” 28.
38 Denman, “Emily Dickinson’s Volcanic Punctuation,” 23.
does not culminate in power that puts Daisy and Master on equal footing, like the more extreme example that Messmer uses, but Daisy's resistance to submission is significant.

If you saw a bullet
hit a Bird – and he told you
he wasn't shot – you might weep
at his courtesy, but you would
certainly doubt his word –
One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's
bosom – then would you believe?

(L3)

In this letter, the question seems deliberate and demanding. The dashes are all short, sharp, and evenly spaced as the example of the bird is given, as though Daisy is being deliberately slow in speech to emphasize the comparison. But as soon as Daisy begins to ask of her own pain, the dash is dropped and the language seems rushed and hurt, emphasized by the underlined word but clear in the tone of the language. But instead of being emotionally overwhelmed and weakened as in the second letter, this dash is not downward pointing or emphasized by meek imagery in this letter. This dash actually serves to interrupt the line's construction and snaps Daisy back from being a waylaid victim to a demanding voice. She demands that her pain be seen, and demands belief of Master—“then would you believe?”

But after the question of belief is settled, a different kind of belief is brought forth—belief in God. She describes the heart that God built in her, outgrowing her and becoming tired, but then mentions “Redemption.” With piety being the most important tenant of true womanhood according to Welter, this image of Daisy doubting God or becoming tired of religion is particularly loaded. After this expression of outgrowing her faith, she says, “You remember I asked you / for it \ you gave me something / else \ I forgot the Redemption.” (L3) Daisy giving up Redemption and a pious relationship is a transgressive move on its own. However, with the downward-angled dashes setting aside the phrase “you gave me something else,” there is a coy, possibly sexual implication in this passage that directly defies the important values of piety and purity of “true womanhood” by adding dimensions of sexuality and religious irreverence to the Daisy persona. In the next lines, she actually claims “I am older – tonight,” the opposite of the diminutive self-referencing of the past letter.

However, Daisy does succumb to referring to herself as small yet again—this is within the lines:

“Tell you of the want” – you
know what a leech is, don’t
you – and Daisy’s arm is small –
and you have felt the Horizon –
hav’n’t you – and did the
sea – ever come so close as
to make you dance?

(L3)

The physical vastness of the Horizon that Master has felt compared to the smallness of Daisy’s arm does put the two of them in a physical power dynamic; however, with the insertion of “you / know what a leech is, don’t you,” offset by dashes, Daisy complicates the narrative again. This time, it is with the vague and confusing interjection of “you / know what a leech is, don’t / you.” Is it that Daisy is offering her arm up to be taken by the leech to spare Master, as Messmer argues? That interpretation would involve a sacrifice that, while submissive in that it is an act of weakening her body, is a move for power in a way that shows Daisy taking on the role of the protector. Or in this moment is Daisy setting herself up for comparison with the leech? This would make it appear as though she wants to suck the knowledge from Master. Though she may be physically small here, this leech line is followed by a series of questions about worldly experiences, implying a desire for knowledge that transcends the domestic bounds of the cardinal virtues of “true womanhood.” In either interpretation, this confusion is introduced by the dashes and indicates a shift—or at least a desire to shift—the bounds of power in Daisy’s favor. This is a break from the role of the “true woman” in that the desire for this knowledge breaks the bounds of domesticity, but it also reinforces the fact that Master is indeed the one with the knowledge, and Daisy looks to him for that.

This desire for the knowledge and position of Master shows up again in the lines:

– but if I had the Beard on
  my cheek – like you – and you – had Daisy’s
  petals –and you cared so for
  me –what would become of you?

(L3)

This role reversal ends in an almost demanding question, a question that asks whether Master would survive as Daisy. The lines are fragmented by dashes, which serve to disrupt the proposal Daisy is putting forth and imply that this reversal is not an easy idea to come to. Instead, it is so strange to Daisy that it cannot be clearly articulated without disjunction or interruption. The way that the sentence ends on “what would become of you,” which is also emphasized by a dash, makes this possible role reversal seem like a serious question. By ending on this note, there is an implication of both Daisy’s strength and a genuine desire to have the position of Master—or at least a curiosity about it.

Throughout the rest of the letter, Daisy falls back into a narrative of hoping and waiting for Master to come and be together with her. However, her previous expression of her desire for knowledge and even reimagining their situation in which she

40 Messmer, A Vice for Voices, 132.
has the Beard, and consequently the power, is a powerful moment not to be overlooked, though it may get lost in Daisy’s expressing the desire to be together. By imagining herself as the one with the Beard, Daisy’s submissiveness again becomes a contested trait—when she imagines a reversal of roles, Daisy forces Master to bear the emotional burden for a change. But beyond just conferring the emotional work onto Master’s shoulders, these lines continue to imply a desire on Daisy’s part for knowledge that earlier sections of the letter also include.

This desire for knowledge—and power, to a certain extent—transgresses the bounds of “true womanhood.” Though in this way Daisy is, again, not entirely submissive, her reliance on Master for knowledge still puts her in a subordinate position to him that her desire to have the Beard complicates. By having the persona of the Daisy symbolically stand in for women, Dickinson also complicates the relationships between men and women here. It is significant that this feminine figure is both not entirely submissive, and not entirely free. This complication gives complexity to Daisy’s character that would previously be one-dimensional as the history of male-dominated poetry about women tends to show. Daisy not only controls the narrative in this correspondence, she breaks the rules of submission occasionally, although she falls back into the conventional power dynamic by the end of the letter. These Master letters can be seen as Dickinson celebrating that complexity in female characters and representations of women, which she continues to build throughout her poetry even through the smallest of glimpses, like in her poem “The Clover’s simple Fame.”

The Clover’s simple Fame  
Remembered of the Cow –  
Is better than enameled Realms  
Of notability.  
Renown perceives itself  
And that degrades the Flower –  
The Daisy that has looked behind  
Has compromised its power –

6 degrades] profanes

(P1256)

In “The Clover’s simple Fame,” Dickinson makes the point that simplicity “is better than enameled Realms / Of notability,” which degrades one’s position. As Dickinson puts it exactly, “Renown perceives itself / And that degrades the Flower – / The Daisy that has looked behind / Has compromised its power –” (P1256). That com-

parison rests on the perception of the Clover as a simpler and satisfied figure, whereas the Daisy is depicted as arrogant and concerned with the opinions of others. The structure of the poem has the two stanzas mimic one another in both line number and punctuation, putting a direct comparison between the two plants structurally, in addition to the metaphorical comparison of the poem. The Clover is passive and stays within the domestic sphere—its fame is simple and only the Cow remembers it, but there is no expression of distaste for that fate. In fact, this simple fame is ranked above the realms of notability of the Daisy, prizing the domesticity of this plant, similarly to how true womanhood prizes domesticity among its four cardinal virtues.

On the other hand, the Daisy “perceives itself,” and is therefore degraded because of its impious preoccupation with image and earthly, rather than heavenly, realms. Though the comparison does intend to degrade the Daisy, or a woman who is concerned with her perception, the poem ends on a dash, not a period. With that short dash being the main structural difference between the first and second stanzas, it can significantly change the interpretation of this poem, though it may be small. This dash leaves the poem’s ending open and emphasizes the fact that the power is compromised, but not revoked. The Daisy’s loss is because she was concerned with external validation, while the Clover does not suffer such a fall thanks to a satisfaction with simplicity. The Clover has one simple dash in its lines, separating its “simple Fame” from the “enameled Realms,” structurally separating the flower from the temptations to which the Daisy falls prey. In comparison to the Daisy, this devalues arrogance and extravagance, but the dash at the end of the poem prevents the poem from ending on a total devaluing of the Daisy. This compromised power is not the end, but is left open, with the possibility for change.

This possibility of feminine power is mirrored in “The Daisy follows soft the Sun –,” though it is complicated and refigured in the new context.

The Daisy follows soft the Sun –
And when his golden walk is done –
Sits shyly at his feet –
He – waking – finds the flower there –
Wherefore – Marauder – art thou here?
Because, Sir, love is sweet!

We are the Flower – Thou the Sun!
Forgive us, if as days decline –
We nearer steal to Thee!
Enamored of the parting West –
The peace – the flight – the Amethyst –
Night’s possibility!

(P161)

“The Daisy follows soft the Sun –” is a poem that depicts the personas of the Daisy, a woman, and the Sun, a man. In this poem, the Daisy steals nearer to the Sun for warmth and the poem opens with this image of dependency, but the conversation between them is muddled by the dash, and the power dynamic is similarly muddled. The poem at first depicts the Daisy in a lower position to the Sun—she “Sits shyly at his feet –.” However, when the Sun wakes, the poem continues: “He – waking – finds the flower there – / Wherefore – Marauder – art thou here? / Because, Sir, love is sweet!” Both the words “waking” and “Marauder” are emphasized by the dashes that offset them within the poem, making the Sun the vulnerable figure, and the Daisy the aggressor. By having the word “Marauder” set off by dashes, Dickinson complicates the linear narration of the poem and brings important ambiguity to the power dynamics in these lines. It may be either that the Sun is calling the Daisy a Marauder, or the Daisy is interrupting the Sun to call him this. Either way, the interjection of the dashes confuses the dialogue between the characters and allows the Daisy to be less than perfectly submissive in this context. Though this stanza is then immediately followed by the Daisy’s sweet justification and pleading for the Sun’s forgiveness in the next stanza, this momentary vulnerability on the Sun’s part in favor of power on the Daisy’s part is significant nonetheless.

The Daisy is depicted as being reliant on the Sun for his warmth and love, but the increasingly disjointed, increasingly frantic phrases at the end of the poem, punctuated by dashes, indicate an excitement for the night and its possibility: “Enamored of the parting West – / The peace – the flight – the Amethyst – / Night’s possibility!” This moment of building excitement, seemingly almost frantic and bereft of full thoughts, is not necessarily pictured as a desperate escape from the Sun, but a romanticized desire for the night. The relationship between the Daisy and the Sun is not quite submissive but not equal, either. She asks for forgiveness, but she is also possibly the Marauder and actively seeks the night away from the Sun. She steps outside of the boundaries of the feminine flower figure, but does not directly reject the hierarchy in place. In short, the Daisy does not go to either extreme. This representation of women in the feminine figure of the Daisy is again not entirely submissive, nor entirely independent. There are moments of complexity allowed for in this persona that require a more nuanced understanding of the feminine figure to emerge from the imagery that may not have otherwise been possible without the disjunction of the dashes in this piece. The dash in this poem gives space for the Daisy to imagine her life without the Sun, while it also directly puts her in submission to the Sun at times. This duality created by the dash makes the subordinate position that the Daisy would normally be in open to a more powerful interpretation.

This duality, and the other subverted relationships seen in Dickinson’s poems and letters alike, complicate our understanding of femininity in her work. These complicated reconfigurations are particularly powerful because of the feminized persona of the Daisy. This persona is involved in a history of representations of the Daisy that is by far more often aligned with traditional feminine characteristics, as in the four cardinal virtues of “true womanhood.” The dash and the Daisy work together in these contexts to foster new, complex understandings of the feminine figure—while
she may be submissive or meek as Daisy is with Master, she may also make demands and forgo the respect for piety we expect of her. She may depend on the Sun—or any other male figure—but she is also excited about the possibility of the night, or independence from that same figure which she relies on. Neither submissive nor subversive alone accurately describe Daisy’s portrayal. There is an open-ended quality to the way that Dickinson constructs these representations of women that is particularly successful because of the particular persona of the Daisy working in conjunction with Dickinson’s dashes.

The possibility of doing this with Daisy alone could have been interesting, surely. However—as Denman, Crumbley, and Hart argue—Dickinson’s use of the dash makes this understanding far more nuanced and fruitful. The way that Dickinson employs the dash in these contexts interrupts the text and opens it up to ambiguities, playing on language in ways that force the reader to think of interpretations that they may not have been prompted to see in a poem that follows every grammatical and syntactic rule. In light of these complexities and their many possibilities, we owe it to Dickinson to read her work with all its irregular punctuation and unique style, and investigate the results. With Daisy, we see new possibilities for feminine rebellion that are conscious of the difficulties of these transgressions. Dickinson creates a Daisy that is intentionally complicated—she treads carefully around the virtues of true womanhood and nudges boundaries, occasionally crossing them, but pulling back. Daisy fits the ideals of neither the traditional nor the radical conceptions of women, but that is the root of her significance. In creating a persona that can rest somewhere in the middle of those two extremes, Dickinson gives a woman, fictional though she may be, the privilege of an intentionally multifaceted representation that gives significance to her rebellions without ignoring her submission.

Bibliography


The Politics of Plague: 
International Intervention in a Neoliberal State

Jessica Thea

Surat, a port city on the western coast of India, set the world into a panic when an outbreak of plague rattled the city in 1994. India, a newly neoliberal state, became vulnerable to international actors looking to exploit the health crisis and harness the power gap in the state’s emerging civil society. The outbreak served as a perfect storm to allow for international intervention, as it came during a period of economic liberalization and furthered sociopolitical instability. Using Cochin, a port city similar to Surat that was not affected by the outbreak, as a comparison, I analyze the role of INGOs (international nongovernmental organizations), or service and humanitarian nonprofit groups, as mechanisms for global surveillance and policing in the city of Surat. This project explores the intersection of neoliberal economic policies and vulnerable sociopolitical conditions, and the consequent establishment of global surveillance vis-à-vis NGOs in Surat.

Introduction

“International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power.”

—Hans J. Morgenthau

We live in a global world where international power hierarchies have become entrenched, indisputable, and naturalized. The lives of the most vulnerable are routinely subject to the interests of the strong. International politics seems less a dialogue between states and more of a game that trades in the redistribution of resources and the continuing exploitation of the poor. It is a game of power accumulation and redistribution, of competition and exploitation. In this world, conceptions of aid and assistance become fuzzy, and the beneficiaries of such support are not always those who are posited as being in need of redress.

My project investigates the ways in which different actors exploit vulnerabilities in order to increase power. Specifically, I analyze the different actors involved in the 1994 plague outbreak in Surat, India. The plague was a perfect storm; directly following the liberalization of the Indian economy and further inducing sociopolitical instability in the region because of the health crisis, the plague catalyzed the infiltration of international actors in India via NGOs. This project investigates the implications of neoliberalism and the use of NGOs as a mechanism for global surveillance. My project analyzes the stakes of neoliberalism and the effect of NGOs on the consolidation of state power and conceptions of state sovereignty in India.

The 1994 plague outbreak is a model situation for investigating these issues, as the outbreak fell at an incomparable economic and sociopolitical crossroad. Economically, the plague occurred in the wake of economic liberalization. Throughout the 1980s, the Indian government integrated several policies that opened up the state’s markets and shifted the national economy from a left-leaning model of state inter-

vention that almost resembled socialism, to a right-leaning model in which the ruling elites recommitted themselves to a more capitalist model of development. In 1991, the government culminated its efforts to liberalize the economy, and India officially entered the international arena as a neoliberal state.

The current global economic infrastructure and the concept of a global market has not long been in existence. Beginning in the late 1970s and ‘80s, the world saw an economic revolution that challenged prior notions regarding global markets. A new doctrine of neoliberalism infiltrated the world economy and became the central guiding principle of economic management on an international scale. Neoliberalism is a political economic theory that centers on the liberation of “individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” The state, therefore, only serves to provide institutional frameworks to accommodate such practices. As a result, deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have been common strategies implemented in neoliberal states.

Neoliberalism is characterized legally and theoretically as a model of freely functioning markets and free trade. Competition, both on a small scale between individuals and firms, as well as on a large scale between territorial entities (cities, regions, nations), is seen as a central peg in the enhancement of productivity and efficiency. Consequently, to ensure this competition, sectors formally in the sphere of government regulation in this model become privatized and deregulated. This privatization and deregulation can be seen across all realms of society, including welfare, education, health care, and even pensions.

Long before India opened its markets and liberalized its economy in the early 1990s, however, Surat found its position as an international city. Situated on the coast of India between major water routes such as the Arabian Sea and the Tapi River,

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4 The effects of neoliberalism on developing countries have been studied extensively since the rise of globalization and global markets. There is a wealth of literature analyzing the benefits and consequences of liberal economies across the world. Scholars in the fields of economics, political science, geography, and international relations, among others, have studied the implications of globalization on various margins throughout the world. Geographer David Harvey, a prominent scholar in social sciences and the humanities, traced the uneven geographical developments associated with neoliberalism in his survey book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. In his work, he evaluates the effects of neoliberalism across time and borders. Comparing models of neoliberal policies in the United States and the UK to those of more developing countries such as Taiwan and Indonesia, tying in the effects of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization, Harvey uses statistical analysis to dissect the uneven effects of an open market across the globe. He concludes, “The evidence assembled here suggests that uneven development was as much an outcome of diversification, innovation, and competition between national, regional, and in some instances even metropolitan models of governance as it was an imposition by some hegemonic outside power, such as the US” (Harvey, 124). That is, there are so many factors that contribute to the results of neoliberal economic policy; there is no easy answer. Harvey’s extensive work is the first to compare models all over, and it shows that there is no common thread or result of opening the markets.
the city of Surat was the ideal port city, and it quickly became a major player in the international economy. Influenced by the markets of world economies, the city developed relationships with Western powers as early as the 16th century. Because of its importance in trade and its status as a commercial center under both the Mughal Empire and British imperialism, Surat city has long been an integral part of the world market. However, the rhetoric about Indian participation in the world market solidified in the 1990s when India became a neoliberal state.

The state of Gujarat specifically has an interesting relationship with neoliberalism. Gujarat has always had a strong aspiration to become a recognized actor in the global economy. From the 1990s, Gujarat began applying neoliberal reforms in their most extreme forms. Marked by a severe deregulation of the labor market and attack of any opposition to the new economic structure, Gujarati leadership in the neoliberal age became known for politics of exclusion.5

Although neoliberalism has become a dominant economic trend in the international community, many of the ideology’s critics have garnered much support analyzing the negative effects of liberalization for developing countries. Naomi Klein is a leading scholar, and her critique of neoliberalism has given new language to the trend. Her book The Shock Doctrine coined the phrase “disaster capitalism.” She explains this phenomenon in which powerful actors in the international community exploit the vulnerabilities of the weak. She defines this trend as “the rapid-fire corporate reengineering of societies still reeling from shock” (Klein, 24).6 I will situate my project within this critique, arguing that international forces in the form of international NGOs, or INGOs, come in the aftermath of the outbreak and exploit the instability of the state of Gujarat in order to seize power and further the agenda of the international community, rather than helping those they claim to serve.

INGOs are an important mechanism of disaster capitalism during this time, as the 1990s marked a period of rapid growth in the nongovernmental sector of international aid. It was not until the 1970s when the presence of NGOs across the international community surged. NGOs began playing an increasing role in large institutional conferences, bridging together small interests of specific nations with the overall global agenda of the United Nations and the international community at large. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, just as globalism became the forefront of international relations, NGOs found their place as solutions to longstanding development problems. As policies of economic liberalization took over global markets and as borders opened allowing for the free flow of people, goods, and services across states, international aid in the form of NGOs flourished.

Nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, are institutions that are integrated in the landscapes of development, human rights, humanitarian aid, and other areas of public action. NGOs generally serve two related functions: first, they provide ser-


vices to needy populations and regions, and second, they stabilize, advocate for, and
campaign toward political and economic change to improve social spheres globally.
According to scholar David Lewis, a specialist in the field of international politics,
“NGOs are also active in a wide range of other specialized roles such as democracy
building, conflict resolution, human rights work, cultural preservation, environmen-
tal activism, policy analysis, research, and information provision.”

The functions of NGOs and INGOs are wide ranging. Scholars Anton Vedder et al. address a new and emerging concept in their book *NGO Involvement in Interna-
tional Governance and Policy: Sources of Legitimacy*. The literature shifts from a broad-
scope understanding of NGOs as a tool of development and start to untangle the
concept of NGOs in governance. They argue, “Internationally operating NGOs are
increasingly involved in international politics and policy-making. They have become
powerful players in the international arena. In many respects, their involvement re-
sembles activities and policies that, until recently, were typical of traditional national
authorities, or by international governmental authorities rather than by NGOs.”
Furthermore, the authors investigate the reasons in which NGOs have the legitimacy
to exert such power. This book affirms my theory that NGOs do have international
agendas and furthermore the capacity to effect change, positive or negative, in the
areas in which they are situated.

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9 In October 1995, the United Nations had its 20th anniversary conference on the United Nations, NGOs and Global Governance: Challenges for the 21st Century, which addressed the changing nature of
global governance in development efforts. A briefing on the conference succinctly explains the connection
to the importance of constructing an effective system of global governance in response to emerging global, social problems. Furthermore, the briefing argues that global
governance is a political counterweight to the globalization of the world economic system, as economic
globalization has left poor people in poor countries at a disadvantage. Global governance serves to balance
this by providing public goods and international mechanisms to finance them, vis-à-vis NGOs. This is
explicit, the briefing states: “NGO work at the international level is a manifestation of the emergence of
global or international civil society.” However, this still weakens state sovereignty of developing countries,
and does not ensure that these governing institutions will be held accountable to people on the ground.
Conversations regarding disaster capitalism and INGOs can be expanded to public health programs more generally. Beginning in 1992, the World Health Organization began to shift its efforts in the realm of public health to better account for the heavy emphasis on global interconnectedness that was rapidly overtaking the world. The plague fell right in the middle of this overhaul of the global public health system as it was, thus becoming an essential disease to be considered in the new world of global surveillance.

Officially, the World Health Organization adopted a revision of International Health Regulations in 2005 by the 58th World Health Assembly. Although this legislation was formally adopted in 2005, the ideology of global surveillance began in the 1990s, once the World Health Organization acknowledged the importance of instituting a more global public health regime. This revision committed member states to programs of adequate preventive and reactive measures against the spread of disease internationally. That is, the international community, through channels of grants and funding, implement networks of surveillance in order to create a “global outbreak intelligence.” However, this funding aims to prevent the spread of a disease once an outbreak is reported, rather than putting money toward bettering conditions of vulnerable regions, such as through improved sanitation programs. The money is used to keep outbreaks isolated, not to prevent them from occurring. Global surveillance inherently protects the powerful countries in the international hierarchy, as it prevents disease from spreading from developing countries where the outbreaks are more likely to fester. Again, the powerful are protected, whereas the vulnerable are left out to dry.

The Outbreak

Plague has been a disease long feared throughout the world. Historically, plague

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10 This is not to say that all NGOs inherently serve to manipulate the happenings on the ground of developing countries in order to weaken the sovereignty of said states and further international agendas. However, even if only a percentage of all NGOs do participate in global governance, a huge effect can be felt. Scholar James Rosenau explains this pattern. “Even if only a small proportion of NGOs preside over steering mechanisms, their contribution to global governance looms as substantial when it is appreciated that more than 17,000 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in the nonprofit sector were active in the mid 1980s and that in excess of 35,000 transnational corporations with some 150,000 foreign subsidiaries were operating in 1990.” His use of steering mechanisms is another term for global governance, as he defines steering mechanisms as the mechanism “of a social system and its actions that endeavor to provide security, prosperity, order and continuity to the system…. A term that highlights the purposeful nature of governance.” Steering mechanisms command change in some way. His argument about numbers shows that over time, there is a huge increase in the amount of transnational actors in the form of NGOs, and a percentage of them engage in steering mechanics. This is concurrent with evidence found in India in the aftermath of the 1994 plague outbreak.


has destroyed civilizations and massacred populations. In the 1300s, almost a third of the population on the European continent fell victim to the “Black Death”; 20 to 30 million people died. In the mid-1800s, the disease took the lives of 12 million people in China. Societies across the globe came to fear the atrocities associated with plague, and because of these devastating histories, plague has become an intensely dreaded phenomenon in global health. Although these mass epidemics of plague are not seen in modern history, the disease stays with us today both biologically as well as symbolically.

Plague is an infectious disease caused by bacteria by the name of Yersinia pestis. The bacteria are found mostly in fleas, and are then transferred to rats and rodents on which these fleas feed. Humans then contract the bacteria from rodent or flea bites. Because of this transfer of bacteria, plague outbreaks are usually associated with poor sanitation, weak health institutions, overpopulation, and other negative social and economic conditions.13

There are three forms of plague: bubonic, septicemia, and pneumonic. The 1994 outbreak in Surat was one of both pneumonic and bubonic plague. In the bubonic form, which is the most common form, bacteria infect the lymphatic system of the body. The lymphatic system is a major component of the immune system, and includes organs such as the tonsils, adenoids, spleen, and thymus. Pneumonic plague is the most serious form of plague, as it involves the infection of the lungs and the consequent development of pneumonia. Plague more generally begins and spreads quickly, and includes symptoms of shortness of breath, chest pain, cough, fever, weakness, and sometimes bloody or watery sputum.14

India is no stranger to the conditions that are conducive to the spread of disease. In a study led by Reuters and the Associated Press, a daily news provider based in India, several interviews had been conducted between August and October of 1994 in an attempt to understand the conditions that drove the spread of this plague outbreak. Surat was a breeding ground for infectious disease. In that period, over 1.5 million people lived in the city, and the majority of these inhabitants lived outside the city limits in slums and shanty towns. These environments were vile. The pathways in the slums were covered in garbage, open sewers, rotting animal carcasses, and pools of stagnant water.15 August is also the height of the monsoon season in India, and Surat faces floods that spread the waste even farther throughout the city. Rats and fleas thrive in this setting, thus allowing for the easy spread of plague.16

Newspaper reports tell the story of the government’s insufficient efforts to prevent an outbreak like that of the plague. On September 21, 1994, the day that the first incident of plague was reported in Surat hospitals, a headline in the Asian Age, a popu-

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lar Indian newspaper that circulates information about all South Asian nations, read: “Sins of Omission: Black Death haunts government.” The article explains that the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) foresaw this outbreak. The writer, Meenal Baghel, tells a sad story. The NICD for seven years had been warning the government of the possibility of such an outbreak. However, rather than listening to these warnings, the government actually shut down the plague surveillance unit that had been in place since 1987. The head of the NICD explains, “The unit was shut down because it was generally believed that plague had been eradicated from the country and allowing the plague eradication unit to operate would be a waste of money.” However, after a study done by the NICD, it was clear that the government simply ignored several indications of the presence of Y. pestis in Marathwada. This led to the outbreak of 1994, which started in Maml.

Plague first infiltrated India via the small village of Maml, situated in the southern state of Maharashtra in mid-August. During this time, the warning sign of ratfall, or the pattern of domestic rats falling from rafters onto the floors of residences and dwellings, was noted across the village. Days later, “doctors in Maml village…found thirty-five people with tumors in their armpits and groins, symptoms of bubonic plague.” The elected head of Maml, also known as the sarpanch of the village, complained to state health officials, but the village received no help for a full month.

The first confirmed death from the plague changed the way officials handled the onset of the outbreak. On September 21, 1994, an article about plague infecting the village hit the front page of The Asian Age. Just two days later, an article published on September 23 told a much more gruesome story. The headline on the front page read: “Pneumonic Plague Hits Surat, 30 Killed.” The article went on to report that at least 85 persons with symptoms of plague had been admitted in the Surat Civil Hospital. Because of the large influx of patients, the hospital organized a special ward for the transfer of plague victims. As of the September 24, there were 24 deaths confirmed to have been caused by the plague. With the number of persons admitted to the Surat Civil Hospital going up to 205, residents began to panic and evacuated the infected city. Another headline in The Asian Age read, “300,000 flee Surat to escape Black Death.”

As people fled from Surat to neighboring cities and states, they brought with them plague bacteria and thus the outbreak began to spread. By September 24, five people in Bombay showed plague-related symptoms, including high fever and swollen lymph nodes. They were placed in isolation in two city hospitals. Of these five persons, four had arrived in Bombay from the state of Gujarat where the outbreak first developed. Furthermore, in the 24 hours between the publications of these newspapers, an additional 12 people were confirmed to have died of plague, bringing the

17 Article 2
18 (John, 1994, p. 972)
19 Article 3
20 Article 5
death toll up to 36.\textsuperscript{21}

Figure 1

Within the next three days, cases were reported in seven states: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Figure 1 shows a map of India with the affected states shaded to visually demonstrate the spread of the disease. Over the course of three weeks, however, the Indian state successfully contained the spread of the outbreak; officials reported the last case of pneumonic plague in the city of Surat during the first week of October. The actual number of deaths resulting from this outbreak is hard to calculate for a number of reasons. First, because of the nature of plague outbreaks and the conditions conducive to the spread of the disease, people living in poverty are primarily the victims of plague. Poor people often cannot afford medical care, and therefore they do not always seek medical assistance. In effect, there is no confirmed record of plague deaths by medical examiners for those who did not seek treatment. Additionally, it was in the state’s interest to minimize the severity of the outbreak, as Surat is a major industrial city. Overestimating the number of cases of plague could have affected the financial stability of the factories in the city. Thus, the formal numbers might not accurately reflect the reality of the scope of the outbreak. Finally, allowing news of the spread of disease to circulate would affect India’s tourism. Overreporting the outbreak would have detrimental effects financially and politically because the tourism industry would be
greatly and negatively affected. That said, the total official number of deaths reported nationwide was 234, the majority coming from Surat.22

Although the state’s unpreparedness for disease prevention caused the initial outbreak, the Indian government did an efficient job curbing the spread of the disease. The outbreak was contained in a mere three weeks from the first official confirmed report of a victim of plague. Handling the disease was difficult, as hundreds of thousands of Surat residents fled, hoping to escape contracting the disease. After news spread nationally about the outbreak, the government sounded red alerts in large cities such as Delhi. The NICD issued guidelines about plague diagnosis and prevention to Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, states bordering Surat, that were the likely destination of those that fled the infected city. By September 23, between 250,000 and 300,000 residents fled the city.23

In order to calm the panic in Surat, the government mandated the closing of schools, colleges, cinema halls, government public gardens, banks, and restaurants for a minimum of seven days. The civic administrator of the city, Kundan Lal, in a statement to the press, explained that large consignments of medicines had been ordered from the Gujarat government. The city established 24 medical teams to specifically treat victims of plague. Doctors began taking preventive measures and distributed medicine free of charge to residents of Surat.24

A medical surveillance panel of experts was set up in Delhi, and these experts distributed guidelines on the treatment of the disease to the city’s 19 hospitals. Furthermore, the NICD organized a plague-monitoring unit at the NICD headquarters, whose main function served to evaluate the situation in Surat and Maharashtra.25

Government officials sealed off train routes between Delhi and Surat in order to prevent the spread of plague to other states. Passengers were not allowed to board or deboard at Surat station; the station here even stopped selling tickets. Additionally, the train stations and airports in Delhi became checkpoints, and medical officials screened passengers coming from infected cities at these locations. Panicked Delhi residents bought out Tetracycline in bulk; people exhausted the four-month stock of the antibiotic in just two days.26 Like those in Surat, the civic authorities in Delhi by September 30 closed all schools and cinema halls. This mandate would last until the government contained the outbreak.

Bombay, too, took several measures to tackle the threat of plague. Several Bombay hospitals including Kasturba Hospital, Govandi Hospital, and Kandivali Centenary Hospitals set up isolation wards. Like those in Delhi, Bombay authorities restricted the entry of people into the city. Furthermore, officials fumigated all public transportation, including trains, buses, and vehicles carrying goods and foodstuffs into

22 Article 12
23 Article 5
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Article 7
the city at checkpoints along the national highways. These preventive measures in Delhi, Bombay, and other smaller cities were extremely effective in containing the disease. Medical examiners confirmed only three plague-induced deaths in Delhi. The Indian government completely eradicated the disease by early October.

The government’s fast-acting response to the outbreak is fully and solely responsible for quelling the outbreak. The international community’s response to the outbreak in India most clearly reflects a pattern of isolationism. International actors cut themselves off from the infected state rather than provide assistance to the vulnerable region. The effects of this isolationist approach can be seen across various sectors including trade, tourism, and foreign investment.

Tourism immediately halted for the Indian state during this time. Countries canceled flights to and from India. By the September 27, cities across Asia were put on high alert. Asian countries adopted a “wait and see” policy in reaction to the plague. This means that airports and other gateways began ordering tight medical checks for Indian travelers. Officials in countries such as China, South Korea, Bangladesh, and the UAE also warned people against visiting India. Non-Asian countries soon followed suit. An article written in Asian Age on September 30 was titled, “India Virtually Taken Off World Airline Map.” The article outlines the countries’ reaction to the plague-infected state. Six Gulf countries including Russia, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Commonwealth of Independent States, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Pakistan completely closed themselves to any exchange with India. Additionally, Middle Eastern states and the U.S. banned any flights between themselves and India.28

The halt in the tourism industry hurt India’s economy terribly. The tour company Thomas Cook, an organization that leads in-bound tours, shut down from the lack of business. The general manager of the in-bound tours division of Thomas Cook made a statement on September 27, analyzing the situation. “As the announcement was made in the foreign media over the weekend, the reactions will come in by tomorrow. I would anticipate a number of cancellations because of the headlines in the newspapers abroad which will declare, ‘Plague in India’ without specifying the area where the plague is.”29 August is the beginning of the tourism season for India, as it is the end of the monsoon season and the temperatures are not too hot for foreigners.

The effects of this were dire and immediate. The decline in tourism caused several events and festivities to be canceled, costing the state millions. For example, Deepavali, an annual festival of lights that occurs in Northern India, was canceled. This alone incurred a total business loss of over 260 million US dollars in Surat alone.30 Furthermore, India’s trade industry took a severe hit because of the outbreak. Surat is an industrial city and a hub of trade in India. Industries such as diamond and textile trade formed the backbone of Gujarat’s economic base, and were devastated by the

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27 Ibid.
28 Article 17
29 Article 12
plague. Not only did over 300,000 people flee the city, robbing Surat of a significant portion of its workforce, but also 400 textile processing mills shut down because of the plague. Just one week into the crux of the crisis cost the city of Surat more than $650 million in industrial losses and the decline in tourism.31

Additionally, with the implementation of neoliberal policies, foreign investment and foreign capital had been leading factors in the surge of the Indian economy during this time. However, from the start of the outbreak, foreign firms began evacuating expatriate workers from parts of plague-hit Western India. For example, French, Swedish, and Japanese companies began withdrawing staff from Gujarat and suspended all projects by September 28, and would stay out of India until the outbreak was contained.32

The Aftermath

The aftermath of the plague left the city of Surat in disarray. The crisis left room for aid organizations in the fields of public health, sanitation, education, and all other sectors of society to come and clean up the mess that the outbreak left in its wake. Analyzing the various INGOs and NGOs that entered the scene after the plague provides a lens through which we can conceptualize international intervention. The increase of INGOs and NGOs immediately following the plague is significant, especially when compared to a control city, Cochin (also known as Kochi).

Cochin, similar to Surat, is a port city on the western coast of the country. It is circled in pink on Figure 1. This city was not affected by the outbreak in 1994. Apart from this deciding factor, though, Cochin is very similar to Surat. Cochin, like Surat, is a very strategic city, as it intercepts trade routes from the cape of Africa, North America, and various Gulf countries. The two cities historically have been internationally focused locations, speaking to their strategic importance for international actors.

The two cities have even more in common than just a history tied to the international community. For example, both cities share similar statistics in terms of population and economic development, making them comparable on many contingencies. Taken from the 1990 Atlas of India, Figures 2–5 are maps comparing the population and economic development of the cities. Both Surat and Cochin have estimated town populations over 1 million. Additionally, both have an estimated index of levels of economic development between 100 and 150 or more.33 Because these cities are similar in size and economic development, it is clear that they would attract similar types of organization and intervention.

32 Article 13
Figure 2: Surat Population, 1990

Figure 3: Cochin Population, 1990
Figure 4: Surat Economic Development, 1990

Figure 5: Cochin Economic Development, 1990
Between 1980 (the peak of the spread of NGOs worldwide) and 2000, a total of 38 NGOs were established in the city of Surat. Of those 38 NGOs, however, 24 were established between 1994 and 2000. Over 63.158 percent of the NGOs established in the two decades examined here occurred in the years immediately following the plague outbreak. Comparatively, the city of Cochin saw much fewer NGOs in these decades. Only eight NGOs were established during this time. Three of those NGOs were established between 1995 and 2000. Although 37.5 percent is still a hefty proportion, it is nowhere near as significant as the proportion of NGOs that were established in Surat during these five years.

As you can see from the graphical representation of NGOs established in the two cities between 1980 and 2000, the discrepancy in both the total number of NGOs as well as the percent increase of NGOs after the plague in 1994 is substantial. The number of NGOs is significantly lower in Cochin than in Surat. Furthermore, as demonstrated by this graph, the establishment of NGOs in Cochin over time is linear. There is a constant rate of change over time; the increase in the number of NGOs in the city is not in any way affected by the plague outbreak. The trend line formula for this graph as listed above is 0.4835x - 2.1263.

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Surat, on the other hand, experienced an exponential increase in NGOs over this period. The rate at which the number of NGOs increases gets increasingly larger over time, as represented above. Exponential growth means that the function is increasing rapidly, much more rapidly than that of linear growth. It is clear that after the plague in 1994, the number of NGOs escalates fervently. In just these five years, the number of NGOs increased by 171.426 percent. This comparison confirms that the plague served as a perfect catalyst for international actors to enter the scene in Surat.

The number of NGOs is an important measure on which to compare these two cities. However, it is also important to note the types of NGOs entering the scene. In Surat, all but one of the NGOs established after 1994 are classified as charitable trusts, and list a wide range of problems they aim to aid. Below is a chart listing the organizations in Surat founded between 1995 and 2000, along with their NGO classification and the key issues they address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chief Functionary</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Key Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gramvikask Elavnitrus T</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Jitendrakumar Balashanker Trivedi</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Education, women’s empowerment in rural and urban areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinduniya Sewa Trust</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Gramin Vikas</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries, agriculture, biotechnology, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Din Duniya Seva Trust</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Bahadurbhai A. Pathan</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Art and culture, children, education and literacy, health and family welfare, rural development and poverty alleviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shree Manav Seva Trust</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Mohanbhai Narottambhai Patel</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Health and family welfare, provides health facilities to check up on and provide medicines to poor patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Chief Functionary</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Key Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shree Akhil Dang Jilla Jan Utkarsh Mandal</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Mr. Amit C. Vani</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Agriculture, art and culture, children, education and literacy, health and family welfare, information and communication technology, right to information and advocacy, rural development and poverty alleviation, science and technology, sports, tribal affairs, urban development and poverty alleviation, vocational training, women's development and empowerment, youth affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shree Sargam Manavseva Charitable Trust</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Karshanbhai Prajapati</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Health, education, women and child welfare disaster management, HIV/AIDS prevention and control, rural development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidhyasagar Education Trusa</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>H. V. Ahir</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Agriculture, art and culture, children, drinking water, education and literacy, health and family welfare, HIV/AIDS, new and renewable energy, rural development and poverty alleviation, women's development and empowerment, youth affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shree Keshav Smruti Trust</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Shree Saraswati Vidyamandir</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Education and literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shree Surat Charitable Trust</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Devenbhai Mafatlal Patel</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>All types of charity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Chief Functionary</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Key Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shree Nutan Education And Trust</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Hardevsinh U. Chudasama</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Education and literacy: old age home/senior home called Shantiniketan Vrudhashram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahas</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Dr. Vibha Marfatia</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Partners with national aid prevention program and works with female sex workers on education and treatment of HIV/AIDS; counseling and general health care clinic to provide nutritional and referrals to institutional care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manovikas Charitable Trust</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Mohan Deo</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Differently abled, education and literacy, health and family welfare, micro finance (SHGs), nutrition, rural development and poverty alleviation, tribal affairs, vocational training, recipient of Government of Gujarat Award for Excellence (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mlp Charitable Trust</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Atmaram Parmar</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS awareness program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lokdrashti Charitable Trust</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Dr. Prafullshiroya</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS: a team of 17 doctors to treat patients for four days; 714 blood donation camps were arranged; collected 42,612 units of blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shramjivim Ahilakalya Nitrust</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Naishdbhai N. Desai</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Women's development and empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Chief Functionary</td>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Key Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shramjivi Mahila Kalyan Trust</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Archana Desai</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Children, health and family welfare, legal awareness and aid, vocational training, women's development and empowerment; training classes, income generation programs, and literacy programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekta Trust</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Dr. Oliver G. Solanky</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS: disposal of dead bodies, hospitalization of sick people in poverty, blood donation camps, emphasis on regardless of caste or color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ambedkar Vavasi Kalyan Trust</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Shree Jayeshbhai L. Vankar</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Self-employment courses, institution hostel, medical projects, agricultural projects, specific numbers identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surat Manavseva Sangh</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Shri Bharatbhai V. Shah</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Hospital reforms: nutrition efforts, provision of medical instruments, charity to poor patients, ambulance facility construction, blood donation camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekata Mahila Sangathan Surat</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Vilshu S. Upadhyay</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Human rights, women's empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majlis E. Dawatul Haq</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Mulana Mo Ilyas</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Education and literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Politics of Plague

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chief Functionary</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Key Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devanshi Infotech</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Dinesh Vankar</td>
<td>Section 25 Company</td>
<td>Computer education, information communication technology, labor employment, education and literacy, micro finance, rural development and poverty alleviation, children, vocational training, youth affairs, women's development and empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avani Gramy Vikas</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Vijay Patel</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Clean water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society Surat</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The fact that almost all of these NGOs are charitable trusts illuminates the international nature of this intervention, as they are part of a special categorization of nongovernmental organizations that are inherently international. Charitable trusts fall under the umbrella of voluntary organizations (VOs), which encompass societies, trade unions, and section 25 charitable companies in addition to trusts. Almost one million VOs were registered in India as of 2000; India has the largest number of these organizations compared to any other Asian state. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) India conducted a study on the voluntary organizations in India during this time. According to this study, 80 percent of the funding of voluntary organizations in India came from foreign investments. Out of the approximately one million VOs in India, only 18,000 are registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act of 1976. 

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act of 1976 (FCRA) is an “act to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution foreign hospitality by certain persons or associations, with a view to ensuring that parliamentary institutions, political associations and academic and other voluntary organisations as well as individuals working in the important areas of national life may function in a manner consistent with the values of sovereign democratic republic, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.” Although this act was created in order to manage and regulate foreign contributions in the humanitarian sphere, there are many loopholes in the act that organizations exploit in order to keep foreign funding under the radar.

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38 Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976.
The act is ridden with anomalies that allow for organizations to avoid registering under the act. Most important, the act does not clearly or adequately define foreign contribution. The act does not clearly define “foreign source” either. The government of India admitted that “the act is open to misuse, misinterpretation, and laxity in implementation.” One example of the laxity of implementation involved an NGO by the name of the Islamic Research Foundation. This organization received funding by foreign funding after receiving an FCRA license. However, this organization had been involved in illegal activities and is suspected in being connected with the bombing of the Holey Artisan Café in Dhaka. Minister of State Affairs Kiren Rijiju released a statement about giving a license to this corrupt organization, saying, “We are very clear that any organization which is involved in some illegal activities or case is pending we don’t renew their licenses. So, there was some lapse found and action is being taken.” From this incident, it is clear to see that the FCRA is not the most effective in vetting the organizations receiving foreign funding, and therefore there is little regulation on a national level of charitable trusts and their influence on the people in the cities around them.

International actors, as represented by the INGOs defined above, are proponents of neoliberal ideologies, as it is the preferred economic policy of major international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, as well as powerhouses such as the United States, which are the dominant funders of these organizations. Furthermore, neoliberalism promotes the increase of foreign organizations, such as INGOs and other firms, on the ground in these places. Because of this, there has been an increase in rhetoric around “civil society,” which maps onto neoliberal policies. This perpetuates a cycle: as international actors enter the scene in developing countries, they advocate for policies and structures that further support intervention that is international in nature.

The withdrawal of the state in societal practices under neoliberalism has created a new realm of “civil society.” Contemporary notions of civil society have been conceived as the aggregate of nongovernmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and the will of citizens or individuals and organizations in a society that are independent from the government. NGOs are one example of the types of organizations that begin to fill the gap left by the retreat of the state. Anthropologist Maximilian C. Forte explains the relationship between NGOs and the neoliberal construction of civil society as he states, “NGOs provide legitimacy to neoliberal globalization by filling in the gaps in the state’s social services created by structural adjustment programs—a neoliberal solution to a problem first created by neoliberalism itself.”

40 Ibid.
As scholar Sangeeta Kamat, a specialist in the field of globalization and education reform especially with respect to South Asia, writes in her work on theorizing NGO discourse in a neoliberal era, “The contemporary context of neoliberal economic policies and structural adjustment represents a vindication of liberal norms, and the ascendance of NGOs is theorized in this context. An analysis of recent policy positions on NGOs and their role in promoting governance and development is illustrative of the complex ways in which NGOs, at local and international levels, are being incorporated into the neoliberal model of civil society.” That is to say, the surge of NGOs in developing countries occurred as these countries adopted neoliberal policies. These two trends, NGO-ization and neoliberalism, coexist and become synonymous. The relationship between these two trends is symbiotic in nature; neoliberalism allows for the initial NGO-ization, while the influx of INGOs further advocates for neoliberalism.

Conclusion

The 1994 outbreak of the plague was the perfect storm that allowed for international and nongovernmental intervention in Surat and the larger state of Gujarat. The health crisis, coupled with the economic, social, and political landscape of Gujarat at the time of the outbreak, created an environment of vulnerability that was exploited by international actors in order to get their foot in the door of the region. Neoliberalism opened Surat further to the international community, making the city’s affairs a larger international concern. The spotlight fell on the plagued city, and opportunities for global surveillance were left in the disease’s wake.

This study explores the effects of neoliberalism, and the consequent surveillance that follows, on developing states. It expands the conversation of disaster capitalism, arguing that not only do states exploit health crises, but this exploitation invariably leads to neoliberal outcomes. As the world becomes connected, and competition is the dominant force of the global market, losers become necessary. Aid, therefore, becomes contradictory. In a power hierarchy, aid must come with strings that benefit the powerful, so as to not disrupt the world order.

The plague and its aftermath further provides a lens to the contemporary rise of security apparatuses. Policing and surveillance of vulnerable people’s bodies increases under neoliberalism, and this is just one instance that sheds light on the relationship between economic liberalization and global policing; the crisis merely catalyzed the process. There is an inherent link between a global market in which countries’ successes and failures are dependent on the well-being of other states and the need to survey, if not directly influence, those other states.

The neoliberal environment in India at this time created endless possibilities in terms of policing, social activism, and the transparency between the government and

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its people. What complicates all of these factors is that NGO-ization became a part of disaster capitalism. Attempts from both national and international actors to better the circumstances in cities throughout India, attempts to do good, became part of a situation where we see the diversion of state and international resources toward policing and surveillance. Again, the contradictions of aid are apparent. The beneficiaries of aid are murky, as actors involved in doing good are also motivated by their own self-interests. Those receiving the aid, further, become monitored and recorded; bodies are never free of security apparatuses in this neoliberal age.

The plague is just one example of the contradictions and exploitation associated with NGO-ization and aid in a neoliberal world. It sheds light on the inherent connection between disaster capitalism and neoliberal ideologies. This case almost provides a formula. If the social, economic, and political atmosphere lends itself to foreign intervention, and a health crisis provides a clear and easy path for international actors to enter the scene, the political and social implications are drastic.

Bibliography


Commemorating the East St. Louis Race Riots

Allie Liss

Discussion of racial tension in St. Louis immediately brings to mind the death of Michael Brown nearly three years ago in Ferguson, Missouri, and the indignation and political movements it incited. Most people, both inside and outside of the St. Louis community, don't understand the full extent of the history of discrimination and violence specific to our city. 2017 marks the 100-year anniversary of the East St. Louis race riots targeted at the African American citizens of the city, which destroyed hundreds of homes, took hundreds of lives, and forced thousands of citizens to flee. While East St. Louis, Illinois, and Ferguson, Missouri, are separated by only about 10 miles, the two events are rarely seen as part of a cohesive historical arc of regional racial inequality and violence.

In the beginning of 1917, black workers were brought in to replace striking white workers at the Aluminum Ore Company in East St. Louis. While the black workers were paid less-than-fair wages and operating in terrible conditions, their employment incited increasing anger and distrust among the existing white immigrant population. On May 28, 1917, circulating rumors of an attempted robbery of a white man by an armed black man began to circulate. In response to this news, on top of already mounting tension, angry mobs formed beating all black pedestrians and streetcar and trolley riders. Eventually, the governor called in the Illinois National Guard, and the violence dissipated. But the events of May 28 were a mild prelude to the violence just over a month later. On the night of July 2, 1917, hundreds of homes were burned down and hundreds of people were killed in a racially motivated act of violence. White rioters burned down homes, forcing the black inhabitants to choose between burning alive in their homes or fleeing into a mob of angry gunfire. Thousands more black East St. Louis residents fled the city settling in other areas around St. Louis, including Kinloch and Ferguson.

The East St. Louis 1917 Centennial Commission and Cultural Initiative was formed in 2014 under the leadership of Chairman John A. Brown in order to create a multifaceted and ongoing commemoration of the race riots through education, cultural programming, and historical documentation. The commission aims to ensure that the East St. Louis race riots are not forgotten and, furthermore, that they become an important piece of the collective history of the city and its residents. While there have already been a number of events over the past three months, the main commemoration will begin with a conference at the East St. Louis Higher Education Complex May 26–28 with Charles Lumpkins, the author of American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics, serving as the keynote speaker. There will be a cultural event sponsored by the commemoration commission each weekend spread out across the city until the 100-year anniversary on July 2–3. Commemoration programs will include artistic work, cultural activities, academic programming,
and more. By offering a variety of activities and events, and spreading them out over both time and space, the initiative hopes to encourage participation by as many residents and interested community members as possible.

While this commemoration is specific to East St. Louis and the events that took place there, it simultaneously draws attention to the way that we hold these things in our personal, communal, and institutional memories. Artistic representation, historical documentation, and cultural remembrance activities are all powerful ways to both meaningfully interpret and reclaim the historical significance of an event. We remember the East St. Louis race riots not only because they are an important historical event; the consequences of the East St. Louis race riots have affected, and will continue to affect, the physical, social, economic, and political landscape of the entire region. One cannot begin to understand current racial divides and sentiments in this city without understanding the imperative role that the East St. Louis race riots play in that history.

This violence has left both a lasting physical and emotional scar on the city of East St. Louis. The areas that were burned down in the fire were never rebuilt, and many pillars of the black community either were killed, or fled and never returned. While the race riots have particular significance locally, they also incited change nationally. The NAACP and the Urban League both cite the East St. Louis race riots in their organizing principles. The current mayor of East St. Louis, Emeka Jackson-Hicks, was quoted last year in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch as saying, “We can’t own our future without owning our past.”

This commemoration will not ideally be a one-time event. The goal is to make this a starting point for both ensuring that the race riot is adequately remembered and documented as a historical event, and that it can become a part of the greater history of racial violence and oppression in the St. Louis community. Hopefully this can help to draw an arc between the race riots in the early 20th century and everything going on in Ferguson and with the Black Lives Matter movement today. While it is imperative to recognize the importance of the race riots, this story is not unique to St. Louis; it is part of a pattern that persists across the country. By commemorating the race riots, and recognizing the effects of this dark moment in our history, we can move forward and create positive change.
About the Seniors

Marie Bissell, a senior from Louisville, Kentucky, is graduating with degrees in Linguistics and Anthropology, with a minor in Philosophy. Her primary research interests include language attitudes, linguistic geography, and experimental methods in sociolinguistic research. She is particularly interested in attitudes towards regional dialects of English in the United States as well as the interactions between language and gender. She will continue her work in this field after college by pursuing a doctoral degree in Linguistics in the fall. Marie owes a great deal of thanks to her mentor, Dr. John Baugh, and the Merle Kling Undergraduate Fellowship, including her cohort and the Center for the Humanities’ faculty and staff.

Shivani Desai, a senior from Cincinnati, Ohio, is graduating with a degree in Anthropology: Global Health & the Environment with minors in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Political Science. Throughout her academic career, she has pursued her passions for health equity, reproductive justice, community-based research, and political advocacy, taking her interests from feminist internships in St. Louis to reproductive health study and research in Geneva, Switzerland and Iganga, Uganda. She hopes to continue working within the field of women’s health policy and advocacy in the future. Shivani is deeply grateful to her mentor, Dr. Shanti Parikh, as well as her cohort who endlessly supported, challenged, and guided her throughout the fieldwork and writing process.

Shaun Ee, a senior from Singapore, is graduating with degrees in International and Area Studies and Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology. During his undergraduate studies, he has sought to combine these two driving passions (the study of societies, and the study of minds) in his project, which focuses on both individual and communal processes in the formation of Kenyan national identity. His research has been profoundly shaped by his roots as an international student and citizen of a post-colonial country, and he hopes to continue working through a transnational lens during his future employment. He is indebted to his mentor Dr. Timothy Parsons and the Kling Fellowship for continual support.
About the Seniors

Max Hofmeister, a senior from Kansas City, Kansas, is graduating with a degree in Economics. He has a fascination for agriculture and how it affects the economy, environment, and public health. His interest in economics developed through studying economic theories that challenge mainstream thought: behavioral, ecological, and Keynesian economics, and by approaching economics from other disciplines, such as history, anthropology, and environmental studies. He plans to attend graduate school after a few years working for a think tank, nonprofit involved in agricultural or economic development, or a farm. His project would not have been possible without the guidance and tireless patience of his mentor, Dr. Venus Bivar, and the support of the Fellowship and his cohort.

Emily Murphy, a senior from Chicago, Illinois, is graduating with a degree in History and minors in Sociology and French. She is deeply passionate about exploring changing meanings of gender and race throughout history and mobilizing the humanities to understand what it means to be human. She plans to continue asking these questions by pursuing a master’s degree in historical sociology in Paris in the fall. She would like to thank Professor Lerone Martin and the Merle J. Kling Undergraduate Fellowship for all their support and inspiration. She would also like to honor her subjects, the fiddlers who suffered enslavement. She hopes that her article can do justice to both their lasting artistic contributions and incredible perseverance.

Mary-Claire Sarafianos, a senior from Columbia, Missouri, is graduating with a degree in English Literature, concentrating in creative non-fiction writing, and a minor in Text & Tradition. Over the course of her undergraduate career, she has pursued her studies in literature and writing across the globe, from St. Louis to Oxford. She has taken these studies beyond the classroom by working at her local radio station, the Department of Special Collections, and interdisciplinary academic journals. Though she will continue to dedicate herself to literature, Mary-Claire will be entering the workforce rather than attending graduate school, at least for now. She would like to thank her mentor, Vivian Pollak, and the Kling Fellowship, without which this would not have been possible.
About the Seniors

Jessica Thea, a senior from Chappaqua, NY, is graduating with a degree in International and Area Studies with a concentration in International Development, and a minor in Psychology. Her academic career has been marked by an interest in human rights development, political advocacy, and the contradictions of international aid. As her interests are deeply rooted in international affairs and the power dynamics of a globalized world, she has spent time researching at the National Archives of India located in Delhi, India. She hopes to continue her work in international development after college, entering the workforce before attending law school to pursue a degree in Human Rights Law. Jessica owes an immense amount of gratitude to her mentor, Dr. Shefali Chandra, and the Merle Kling Undergraduate Fellowship for providing her endless guidance and support throughout this process.
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We are also indebted to our faculty research mentors, who have helped us develop into serious scholars in our disciplines. Our exceptional faculty mentors—John Baugh, Shanti Parikh, Timothy Parsons, Venus Bivar, Lerone Martin, Vivian Pollak, and Shefali Chandra—have supported us through the highs and lows of conducting extensive research projects for the past two years. With their guidance and encouragement, we have tackled tough questions and come out of the process as stronger writers, researchers, and scholars of the humanities and humanistic social sciences. You showed us how to think critically about ourselves and our worlds, and we will take these lessons with us as we transition into our post-undergraduate lives.

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Lastly, we would like to thank the Kling Fellowship Class of 2016—who welcomed us and taught us the ropes—as well as the Kling Fellowship Class of 2018—whose progress towards project completion is nothing less than impressive. These cohorts on both sides of our time here have made our Kling cohort experience one that is unforgettable, and to the new Kling Fellowship Class of 2019—we are excited for you to begin this process and cannot wait to see how your projects will change during your time in the program. We wish everyone the best in their future endeavors, and we hope to remain connected to the Fellowship in the future.

—Senior Kling Fellows 2017