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Welcome

to the ninth edition of the Netherlands American Studies Review, the bi-annual student journal of the Netherlands American Studies Association (NASA). Our aim is to showcase excellent student work related to North American history, politics, literature, and society written at Dutch universities.

In this first issue of 2024, you will find five carefully selected pieces that reflect the topical diversity and interdisciplinary nature of our field in the Netherlands. Our contributors cover a variety of issues, ranging from the ways in which literary and cinematic interpretations of the Middle Passage represent death to the engagement of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) with second-wave feminism, and from an analysis of the current political debate on US military aid to Ukraine to an exploration of the significance of the film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) to the American war effort in Iraq. These papers were written by students in different stages of their higher education, ranging from the early stages of their bachelor's to the final stages of their master's.

We are thankful for all the students who sent us their work, for the editors who worked tirelessly to select and fine-tune these papers, and, of course, for the NASA Board, which has supported us throughout the process. We are proud of the final product and hope it will inspire you as much as it did us.

As I conclude my tenure as editor-in-chief of the NAS Review, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated editorial team, our student authors, and the NASA for their unwavering support over the past years. It has been an honor to contribute to its development and to witness the excellent student work published in the journal. I am delighted to introduce my successor, Nicolas Turner, whose editorial experience and commitment to excellence makes him exceptionally well-suited for this role. Thank you again for the opportunity of serving as your editor-in-chief.

Warm regards,

Christine Mertens
Editor-in-Chief

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A Radical Legacy? Learning from Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) during the war in Iraq, 2003-2006

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This paper is a shortened version of a thesis written in the BA History

In the summer of 2003, the Pentagon invited several military officers and civilian experts to a rare screening of Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers*, a depiction of the 1956-1957 conflict between the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and the French army during the Algerian War of Independence. The invitation read:

How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film.¹

Clearly, the event organizers were attempting to show the relevance of the film to the ongoing US war in Iraq; although President Bush declared that major combat in Operation Iraqi Freedom had ended in May 2003, the insurgency that ensued over the summer was killing increasing numbers of US soldiers each month.² In this light, the relevance of *The Battle of Algiers* and its account of French *paras*' efforts to combat the FLN's bombing of cafes in the French Quarter of Algiers seemed clear: both operations were matters of counterinsurgency.³ This article will trace how Pontecorvo's film was deployed in various contexts following the US invasion of Iraq, and will argue that the US military's use of the film reveals an underlying contradiction to American policy applied in fighting this war.

Since its first screening in 1966, Pontecorvo's movie has been an inspiration for militant revolutionaries and counterinsurgency strategists alike. First, the film is a classic demonstration of the workings of revolutionary warfare. The FLN-members are difficult to identify as they blend in with the general population of the *kasbah* and remain, therefore, mostly unknown to the colonial rulers. In an attempt to break down the cellular structure of the FLN, the French paramilitaries revert to the extreme use of torture on their Algerian captives to gather intelligence quickly and locate the leaders of the independence movement. The sympathy of the filmmakers clearly aligned with the Algerian national cause and the fight for independence.⁴ Both its content and its context aligned it with those international movements that sought freedom from colonialism and imperialism, and who did not shy away from the use of violence to attain it.

Second, the film not only inspired anticolonial, Third World, and Marxist movements, but also their opponents. After the French Colonel Mathieu is called to Algiers following the FLN announcement of a general strike of all activities within the *kasbah*, Mathieu and his paramilitary army are given full control of all police activities regarding the FLN. They install

checkpoints around the Muslim Quarter, screening everyone that goes in or out, impose a curfew, and preemptively arrest a large part of the male population in an attempt to isolate the communicative network of the FLN. Torturing prisoners to gather intelligence on the names and whereabouts of different cell operators turns out to be effective. The man being tortured in the movie's first scene eventually appears, at the film's end, to be the person who gives away the location of the last remaining FLN leader, Ali la Pointe, after which the *paras* successfully bomb his hideout and eliminate him. On a technical level, the counterinsurgency methods of Colonel Mathieu are shown as being harsh but effective. The apparent operational success of the French in deploying this aggressive approach has resounded with students of counterinsurgency. For them, the film can be regarded as a blueprint for successful counter-revolutionary warfare, with the challenges faced by the French, and their successes, accurately portrayed.⁵

Academic literature on the film and its political importations can be characterized along two different strands. In the first strand, scholars like Sohail Daulatzai and Robert Stam have interpreted the film through the prism of postcolonial theory and the works of Frantz Fanon. They argue that *The Battle of Algiers* sympathizes not only with the Algerian struggle but with all revolutionaries alike, laying bare the violent logics of colonialism and imperialism.⁶ In the second strand are those for whom the message of the film is not so clear-cut. Stephen Whitfield and Cory Browning argue that the two-sided portrayal of violence only speaks to the political ambiguity and 'polyvalency' of the film, explaining why it served numerous counterrevolutionary forces and imperialist states throughout the Cold War.⁷

Few scholars, however, have located the film in the context of the war in Iraq and the American political importation of it, with the 2003 Pentagon screening only receiving scholarly attention from Daulatzai, in which he presents it as a 'rewriting' of Pontecorvo's message.⁸ In this article, I argue that American officials initially used the film to point out the flaws in US strategy, taking heed of the tactical mistakes made by the French in Algeria, but ultimately failed to reflect upon the film's underlying political message. In doing so, I aim to escape a straightforward dichotomy between revolution and counterrevolution, arguing instead that a critique of French methods only served to optimize the counterinsurgency operation and portray the 'humane' face of a new approach to American warfare in Iraq.

While President Bush spoke of celebrating Iraqis welcoming American troops with open arms, US soldiers were over the summer of 2003 increasingly met with IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), car bombs, and ambushes on patrols and convoys.⁹ The response by the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) headquarters in Baghdad to the growing insurgency was to stop the eruptions of violence with brute force. Facing rising numbers of American casualties, the CPA ordered sweeps of civilian neighborhoods in the capital. Soldiers rounded up suspects and filled military prisons, with numbers rising from 3,500 to 18,000 over the month of August.¹⁰ Once there, prisoners were subjected to extreme methods of interrogation and torture.¹¹ As American forces barricaded themselves in heavily guarded bases and checkpoints, they

unleashed airstrikes on neighborhoods deemed hostile in Baghdad, Fallujah and Tikrit.¹² The tactic of ‘search and destroy’, as military planners in the Pentagon called it, thus increasingly targeted innocent Iraqi civilians.

Why was this approach chosen? This question is particularly vexing, given that, as Colin Kahl and Thomas Ricks have noted, the initial response by the CPA only drove the general population into the arms of the insurgents.¹³

One part of the answer points to a lack of counterinsurgency training and thinking within the US military before and during the War on Terror. After the US defeat in the Vietnam War, the US military moved away from counterinsurgency doctrine. Attempts to ‘win hearts and minds’ in Vietnam proved to be futile, as the army simultaneously carpet-bombed rural areas and rained napalm on entire villages; afterwards, counterinsurgency matters were relegated to the Special Forces and the CIA.¹⁴ In the 1980s and 1990s, the military steered away from counterinsurgency doctrine and instead focused on kinetic forms of warfare, preferring a direct confrontation with enemy soldiers instead of policing an area to find guerrillas among the population.¹⁵ When confronted with a growing insurgency in Iraq, there was no clear strategy to fall back on.

The absence of a doctrine also explains the reaction of the Bush administration to the growing insurgency in 2003. Repeatedly, the insurgency was played down, ignored, or denied entirely. In the summer, the president’s response to attacks on US troops was quite telling: “There are some who feel that the conditions are such that they can attack us there. [...] My answer is: Bring ‘em on. We’ve got the necessary force to deal with the security situation.”¹⁶ The negligence of the American political establishment and its military response only added fuel to the fire.

The mass imprisonment of civilians and instances of psychological, physical, and sexual torture at Abu Ghraib form a clear example of the American blind spots in dealing with the insurgency in Iraq. Because the search for Al-Qaeda members meant dealing with an unknown enemy that wore civilian clothes and concealed itself among the population, US troops were forced with the task of gathering intelligence on the identity and whereabouts of its foe.¹⁷ Torture practices to gather intelligence, even before gruesome photos from the US-run prison at Abu Ghraib were released by CBS News in April 2004, were mostly counter-effective.¹⁸ Consequently, innocent civilians became collateral damage to the war effort, harming the military’s effort to gather trustworthy intelligence in a growing guerrilla war.¹⁹ Not unlike the example shown in *The Battle of Algiers*, the tactics of brute force, indiscriminate violence, and torturing of innocent civilians to attain this intelligence turned out to be counterinsurgency-pitfalls, only strengthening resistance to the occupation.

In response to the mounting casualties, the Pentagon’s division for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SOLIC), tasked with the responsibility of ‘thinking aggressively and creatively on issues of guerrilla war,’ came up with the idea for a showing of Pontecorvo’s classic film.²⁰ Reportedly, SOLIC invited an array of military officers and civil experts to reflect on the

message of the film and discuss the pitfalls of a counterinsurgency campaign wherein the search for ‘terrorists’ was the main goal.²¹ This marked the beginning of a period where *The Battle of Algiers* became relevant in the minds of the US military and experts on counterterrorism.

As the insurgency started to take hold over the course of 2003, interest in the film reflected growing sentiments that the occupation in Iraq was going nowhere fast. The invitation announcing the Pentagon screening—with its assertion that the French strategy “succeeds tactically, but fails strategically”—illuminated these concerns. SOLIC wanted to reflect on the mistakes made by the French in Algeria, particularly the notion that defeating terrorism militarily wouldn’t always lead to the desired political outcome. The flyer implied a fear of an insurgency that would only grow and spread to the rest of the population. On November 17, Democrat Jim McDermott (WA) expressed his doubts in a US Congress hearing of the approach taken by the Bush administration in Iraq up to that point, similarly drawing a parallel with the French experience: “If people really want to understand what is going on here, go watch the movie *The Battle of Algiers*. The French went through exactly the same thing in Algeria. There has not been a country in the 20th century that invaded a sovereign country and came out whole. Everybody loses.”²² The Pentagon screening, its accompanying flyer, and McDermott’s criticism showcase the uses made of the film in a critique of the course of the invasion.

The attempt to cast doubt starkly contrasted with sentiments in the political class and in the military. Mentions of *The Battle of Algiers* within the military demonstrated a glorification of the brutal French methods which the film highlights. When reflecting on an incident in late 2003 where US troops forced an Iraqi civilian to jump from a bridge, one soldier of the accused battalion excused such rough handling by saying (to a *Washington Post* reporter): “It’s a little like the French colonel in *The Battle of Algiers*. [The French officer said:] ‘You’re all complaining about the tactics I am using to win the war, but that is what I am doing - winning the war.’”²³ In 2004, a military policeman in Iraq wrote in an email, later released by the Pentagon, about the treatment of detainees by US troops: “Reportedly they showed *The Battle of Algiers* in defense circles before the Iraq War to sensitize them to these very pitfalls. Did they use it as a training film?”²⁴ In other words, the film did not necessarily invite a critical approach towards the methods used by the French, with some US soldiers seeing themselves in the French *paras* and Colonel Mathieu. The glorification of French methods by the military demonstrated, therefore, a different set of responses to the film than those at SOLIC, resonating more clearly with the approach taken by the Bush administration towards the invasion. These divergent understandings of the film as it returned to sudden relevance in 2003 are reflective of the broader disagreement over the film that has existed since its release in 1966, with debate over the film’s message and its political undertones. In the three years after 2003, however, it became increasingly clear that the progress of the Iraq War and criticism of the administration’s approach added a new dimension to this debate.

Critics of the administration also recirculated *The Battle of Algiers* among a wider public to demonstrate how the US was sinking deeper into the quagmire in Iraq. In January 2004, the

film was re-released in the United States and started running in select theatres.²⁵ In October, The Criterion Collection released a special edition DVD-set, equipped with documentaries that provided context to the film. The most notable of these documentaries was *The Battle of Algiers: A Case Study*, a 24-minute roundtable discussion between counterinsurgency strategists on the lessons the film provided for counterinsurgency operations.²⁶ This discussion explicitly laid out the meaning the film could have for the US military in Iraq, coming from prominent critics of the Bush administration concerned with ‘optimizing’ the war strategy.

According to the panel members, the major lesson to be learned was that acting like the French in Algiers would turn out to be a losing strategy. First, Michael Sheehan, former State Department Counterterrorism Coordinator, argued that the FLN’s tactics were successful: by setting off bombs in cafes, they provoked a violent reaction from the government and made it lose credibility in the eyes of the general population, and in the long run lead to the overthrow of the regime.²⁷ Secondly, Richard Clarke, former National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, contended that the violent methods used by the French only worked to recruit new members for the FLN, while it was crucial in such an operation to ‘show the lie’ of the insurgents’ message and retain public support for the government.²⁸ What Clarke and Sheehan understood was that even if the US military could succeed in ‘beheading the tapeworm’ in Iraq, victory was not guaranteed. If *The Battle of Algiers* was to serve as any kind of inspiration for dealing with an insurgency, it was mostly an example of how *not* to go about it.

The mistakes of the French in the film were used instead to show the need for clear political strategy and postwar planning in Iraq. Sheehan noted that, at its core, counterterrorism should seek to “delegitimize the enemy, and organize those you are seeking to defend to support you.”²⁹ Clarke added to this by arguing that even if the counterinsurgency operation in Iraq was successful in crushing the insurgency and its network, winning ‘the battle of ideas and values’ of the civilian population would determine the long-term result.³⁰ The stress on a political strategy that provided for the population was in line with the sentiment put forward by the announcement flyer of the Pentagon screening. Given that both Clarke and Sheehan were very critical of the way the campaign in Iraq had been going up to that point and explicitly called for a change of direction in the roundtable, they were in line with SOLIC’s intention a year earlier at the Pentagon to take a stand against the ‘search and destroy’ campaign. The film was being used at the roundtable to convey a political message, and push viewers to consider alternative strategic approaches.

Among those advocating for a different approach was General David Petraeus, who, as a division commander during the first year of the Iraq War, had gained hold of the northern city of Mosul and led a relatively stable campaign that enhanced local nation building.³¹ In late 2005, when appointed as commanding general at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Petraeus started pushing counterinsurgency theory back into the minds of the US military. He assembled a team of military experts and scholars to draw up the *U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5, Counterinsurgency*, which was to be the guidebook for

turning the US military into an effective counterinsurgency force in Iraq.³² In it, Petraeus demonstrated the pitfalls of counterinsurgency, such as a failure to adapt to unconventional forms of warfare, campaigns of cordon and capture that fail to provide security for the population, the use of torture to gather intelligence, and retreating troops into heavily protected bases away from civil society.³³ Instead, he argued for a ‘population-centered’ approach to counterinsurgency that would shift the focus from the insurgents to the civilian population.³⁴ In such an approach, the safeguarding of the population and their humanitarian and political concerns becomes the highest priority. Petraeus and his co-authors proposed that this was a necessary trade-off to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of ordinary civilians, ensuring their safety and preventing them from supporting the insurgents’ cause. They contended that in Iraq, a failure to heed this approach was what had caused the insurgency to grow and reduced the US’s chances of winning the ultimate political victory it sought.³⁵

During the new phase of the counterinsurgency campaign, after General Petraeus was appointed Commanding General of the Multinational Forces in Iraq in 2006, *The Battle of Algiers* moved from the margins to the forefront of the political arena and came to stand at the core of strategic planning in Iraq. This second phase of the war was characterized by the return of the French counterinsurgency doctrine that was developed after the Algerian War.³⁶ When its lessons were integrated into the new field manual in 2006, Petraeus and his co-authors were deeply interested in the French example, and *The Battle of Algiers* provided an apt illustration of the doctrine that was rolled out.

Indeed, over the course of 2005-2006, the film was integrated into US military education and strategy in Iraq. Petraeus, one journalist noted, “never tires of watching Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*, a cult film he shows to all his visitors.”³⁷ Later on, in 2009, Petraeus admitted himself that he had been wary of the mistakes made by the French in Algeria – torture methods for interrogation and attacks on the local population – and made sure not to repeat them in Iraq during the ‘Surge’ period.³⁸ In the film’s coda, it is made clear that the violent methods of the French made them lose the sympathy of the Algerian people; for Petraeus and the new generation of military leaders, this was exactly what was to be avoided in their counterinsurgency mission.

The film was consequently used to enhance critical thinking on Iraq among a wide military audience, with the introduction of the counterinsurgency field manual in 2006 leading to Pontecorvo’s film returning to military instruction in the United States. Counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen, who co-wrote the field manual and served on the personal staff of Petraeus in Iraq, instructed young captains “to become familiar with exotica such as *The Battle of Algiers*,” in order to translate the principles from the manual into action.³⁹ In the introduction to his well-known ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Insurgency’, Kilcullen tried to prepare other young officers for the upcoming challenges:

Your company has just been warned for deployment on counterinsurgency operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. You have read David Galula, T.E. Lawrence and Robert Thompson. You have studied FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, and now understand the history, philosophy and theory of counterinsurgency. You watched *Black Hawk Down* and *The Battle of Algiers*, and you know this will be the most difficult challenge of your life.⁴⁰

Pontecorvo's film was thus being named in one breath with Galula's theories and the new counterinsurgency manual, by one of the pioneers of the Petraeus Doctrine. French mistakes in Algeria were analyzed to reflect on political strategy in Iraq, with *The Battle of Algiers* as the filmic counterpart to recirculating theory on counterinsurgency.

If Pontecorvo's film was in any way instructive for American efforts, the Petraeus Doctrine could show how. The Pentagon screening in 2003 was, therefore, not simply a 'rewriting' of the film's message to advocate for barracks and checkpoints, indiscriminate bombings, or the use of torture in military prisons, but a foreshadowing of the consequences these things would have. In this light, it was less of an endorsement of these tactics than Daulatzai has argued it was.⁴¹ It took a complete overhaul of political strategy, however, for top officials in the military to recognize the film's full message.

Where should we place this analysis within the field of interpretations of the film? The interest in *The Battle of Algiers* between 2003-2006 was not primarily in order to justify torture as an effective interrogation method, or to alienate students from democratic laws and practices, as happened in Argentina in the 1960s.⁴² Readings of the film during the war in Iraq were rooted mostly in criticism of these practices, and were critical of the fact that the first years of the war dealt so little with the wellbeing of the civilian population. Despite this, American military readings of the film also lay bare the imperial undertones of US actions in Iraq. Neither the attendees at the Pentagon screening nor Petraeus viewed the film through an anticolonial lens or identified in any way with the film's calls for national liberation and self-determination of the Algerian people. The reasons that have made it appeal so much to anti-colonialists, leftists, and militant revolutionaries – the degree of violence justified in fighting for national liberation, the inherent asymmetry of the colonial system, the fallibility of democratic states when confronted with violent dissent – were rarely touched upon in this period.

Although the film was used by opponents of the war to critique the early period of the US occupation, American military and political audiences continued to identify with the French position in Algiers. According to a Defense Department official who attended the Pentagon screening, the film was shown to let viewers discuss the challenges faced by the French.⁴³ In the Criterion documentary, Clarke and Sheehan stressed the tactical and political similarities between the FLN and Al-Qaeda as terrorist groups that endanger the stability of the regime.⁴⁴ Petraeus himself was known to be a big fan of Jean Lartéguy's 1960 novel *Les Centurions*, which follows a group of French *paras* during the Algerian War, and pushed for it to be translated and reissued in 2007; sharing his fascination for *The Battle of Algiers*.⁴⁵ American viewers of the film,

clearly perceived the challenges faced by the French in the 1950s to be the same ones that they were facing in the early 21st century.

Yet the identification with the French shows the limits of the Petraeus Doctrine and the extent to which concern for the wellbeing of the population was primarily inspired by strategic interests. Criticism of French counterinsurgency methods had little to do with morality; torturing innocent civilians and indiscriminate bombings in urban areas were viewed as merely tactical mistakes. In the film, the two different press conferences with Colonel Mathieu deal with exactly these moral quandaries. Famously, captured FLN-leader Ben M'Hidi retorts to a question on the FLN's tactics of café-bombing with "Give us your bombers, sir, and you can have our baskets." Later, General Mathieu lays bare the logic of colonial violence by arguing that torture is a necessary evil in order to maintain control in Algeria. Neither at the Pentagon screening, nor in the discussion between Clarke and Sheehan, nor in David Petraeus' reception of it, were the moral questions that these scenes put forward discussed. Although Sheehan briefly reflected on torture as a morally ugly thing, he concluded his critique of its use as being ultimately "self-defeating" for the counterinsurgent's cause.⁴⁶ This conclusion is demonstrative of what the growing appeal to 'hearts and minds' entailed. Even though the Petraeus Doctrine put the wellbeing of civilians at the core of the counterinsurgency mission, this safeguarding was more instrumental than intrinsic to the American war effort in Iraq.

As the war in Iraq progressed between 2003 and 2006, the growing relevance of the film thus lays bare an underlying contradiction in American political policy. The US military's fascination and identification with the French colonial army, which was ultimately trying to forcefully hold on to one of France's colonial possessions against an anti-colonial uprising, was rarely reflected upon. As counterinsurgency doctrine that had fallen from favor for several decades—because the Vietnam War and human rights abuses in Latin America had left it stained with blood—was quickly revamped in Iraq. In her introduction to the 2006 field manual Sarah Sewall – who as director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy advised Petraeus on how to deal with civilian protection in Iraq – only slightly addressed this issue. She noted that although the new manual drew upon colonial and imperial teachings from the past, the standards of behavior in counterinsurgency had evolved.⁴⁷ She justified the doctrine by arguing for the new kind of threat Islamic terrorism posed, one that was of a different *nature* to revolutionary and emancipatory groups in the twentieth century. This new kind of enemy "leavens the fight with suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, and the threat of weapons of mass destruction."⁴⁸ This presentation of the seemingly new and radical nature of the post-9/11 foe was enough to make American audiences forget the imperial undertones of counterinsurgency, and the Petraeus Doctrine reinforced this amnesia by portraying itself as a 'humane' alternative to what had gone before.

By their identification with the French in the film and a reluctance to reflect on its anticolonial themes and messages, political and military audiences between 2003-2006 therefore

only selectively applied the film's lessons. For American audiences, the film merely functioned as a blueprint for what *not* to do in a counterinsurgency campaign.

In conclusion, the renewed interest in *The Battle of Algiers* during the US war in Iraq offers both a new way of reading the film, adding a dimension to the scholarly dispute over the film's meaning since the 1960s, and provides a deeper understanding of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. First, the development of the US war in Iraq allowed Americans to both be inspired by the film and view it with a critical eye. In particular, as the war progressed and the death toll of innocent civilians rose, the film was increasingly used to criticize the US military's early 'search and destroy' approach to counterinsurgency, both from outside and within the military establishment. Criticism of French methods, however, was primarily rooted in the desire to optimize the American war effort in Iraq, rather than engaging with the film's deeper anti-colonial message. By their identification with the French in the film and a reluctance to reflect on its anticolonial themes and messages, political and military audience between 2003-2006 therefore only selectively applied the film's lessons. In this sense, it merely functioned as a blueprint for what *not* to do in a counterinsurgency campaign. Second, the role which *The Battle of Algiers* played during this period lays bare the underlying intentions of US political strategy in Iraq. While American interpretations of the film differed between 2003 and 2006 on a tactical level, viewers consistently saw the challenges the French faced in Algeria reflected in their own mission in Iraq. The new counterinsurgency manual presented itself as the 'humane' alternative to the strategy that was utilized early in the war, a new approach that would be cognisant of international law and human rights and would safeguard the civilian population. By drawing so heavily on the experience of the French in Algeria, however, Petraeus and his colleagues revamped a doctrine that was steeped in colonial and imperial tradition, one that the US military had tried to move away from following the debacle of Vietnam. For American officers and soldiers to see themselves in Colonel Mathieu and his comrades was to build on the violent legacy on colonialism. Sympathy for the population was only generated to serve the political goals of security and control in Iraq, not as a way to reflect on the broader implications of American imperialism and interventionism.

Notes

¹ Michael T. Kaufman, "The World: Film Studies; What Does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers'?", *New York Times*, September 7, 2003.

² Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (London: Granta, 2005), 30.

³ Russel Crandell, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 366.

⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, *Fifty Years of the Battle of Algiers: Past as Prologue* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 25-29.

⁵ Thomas Riegler, "The Battle of Algiers - Blueprint for Revolution/Counterrevolution?," *Resistance Studies Magazine* 3 (2008): 56.

⁶ Daulatzai, *Fifty Years*; Robert Stam, "Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema: The Politics of Identification" in *Empires of Vision* (New York: Duke University Press, 2020). The work of Alain O'Leary follows a similar strand of thought,

although he focuses less on the political importations of the film. See: Alain O’Leary, “The Battle of Algiers at Fifty,” *Film Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2016).

⁷ Stephen J. Whitfield, “Cine Qua Non: The Political Import and Impact of the Battle of Algiers,” *LISA: Littératures, histoire des Idées, Images et Sociétés du monde Anglophone* 10, no 1 (2012); Cory Browning, “Frames of the Algerian War: Pontecorvo’s *La Bataille d’Alger* and the ‘War on Terror,’” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 23:3 (2009); Thomas Riegler, “The Battle of Algiers.”

⁸ Daulatzai, *Fifty Years*, 79.

⁹ Sebastian Kaempf, “The U.S. War in Iraq” in *Saving Soldiers or Civilians? Casualty-Aversion versus Civilian Protection in Asymmetric Conflicts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 222.

¹⁰ McCoy, *Torture and Impunity*, 104.

¹¹ McCoy, *Torture and Impunity*, 106.

¹² Kaempf, “The U.S. War in Iraq,” 224.

¹³ See, for example, Colin H. Kahl, “COIN of the Realm: Is There a Future for Counterinsurgency?,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 1, 2007; Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Sarah Sewall, “A Radical Field Manual,” in *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual no. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication no. 3-33.5*, eds. John A. Nagl, David H. Petraeus, and James F. Amos (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007): xli.

¹⁵ Kahl, “COIN of the Realm.”

¹⁶ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 172.

¹⁷ Crandell, *America’s Dirty Wars*, 381.

¹⁸ Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 31.

¹⁹ Danner, *Torture and Truth*, 32.

²⁰ Kaufman, “The World: Film Studies.”

²¹ Kaufman, “The World: Film Studies.”

²² U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Iraq Watch*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rep. 11199-11204, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CREC-2003-11-17/CREC-2003-11-17-pt1-PgH11199>.

²³ Thomas E. Ricks, “Commander Punished as Army Probes Detainee Treatment,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/04/05/commander-punished-as-army-probes-detainee-treatment/74c6b3ec-ff86-40e4-99bd-cbc754458f46/>.

²⁴ Department of Defense, *The Battle of Algiers Movie at Pentagon*, Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff Freedom of Information Act Requester Service Center, FOID Library 15-F-0740 (Washington: Department of Defense, 2015), https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Other/15-F-0740_The_Battle_of_Algiers_Movie_at_Pentagon.pdf.

²⁵ Stuart Klawans, “FILM: Lessons from the Pentagon’s Favorite Training Film,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/04/movies/film-lessons-of-the-pentagon-s-favorite-training-film.html>.

²⁶ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, “A Case Study.”

²⁷ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, “A Case Study,” 2:45.

²⁸ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, “A Case Study,” 7:39.

²⁹ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, “A Case Study,” 11:02.

³⁰ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, “A Case Study,” 21:12.

³¹ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 20.

³² Kahl, “COIN of the Realm.”

³³ John A. Nagl, David H. Petraeus, James F. Amos, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual no. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication no. 3-33.5* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 51.

³⁴ Nagl, Petraeus, Amos, *The US Army*, 48.

³⁵ Kaempf, “The U.S. War in Iraq,” 229.

³⁶ While often received as a complete overhaul of military tradition, Petraeus’ ideas were strongly rooted in historical examples and theories of counterinsurgency. Most notably, the influence of David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964) is both implicitly and explicitly present in the manual. Galula devised his theory of counterinsurgency by analyzing the mistakes made by the French colonial army during the Algerian War, in which he was a captain between 1956 and 1958. Galula first propagated the idea of a ‘population-centered’ approach to counterinsurgency because the French army had failed to provide for the general population of Algeria and therefore only further mobilized the FLN in their revolutionary struggle. The French theorist understood counterinsurgency as a

political practice, and not merely a military one. Petraeus' appeal to win the 'hearts and minds' of the population, therefore, was hardly new. See, for example: David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006); Michael P.M. Finch, "A Total War of the Mind," *War in History* 25, no. 3 (July 2018); Sewall, "A Radical Field Manual."

³⁷ Guy Sorman, "The New American Soldier," *City Journal*, January 30, 2009, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/the-new-american-soldier>.

³⁸ Sorman, "The New American Soldier."

³⁹ George Packer, "Knowing the Enemy," *New Yorker*, December 10, 2006, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/12/18/knowing-the-enemy>.

⁴⁰ David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Insurgency," *Military Review* no. 3 (2006): 134-139.

⁴¹ Daulatzai, *Fifty Years*, 79.

⁴² Marie-Monique Robin, *Escadrons de la mort: l'école française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), 234.

⁴³ Kaufman, "The World: Film Studies."

⁴⁴ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, "A Case Study," 18:25.

⁴⁵ Helen Andrews, "Lessons of Algeria," *Claremont Review of Books*, Winter 2016/2017, <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/lessons-of-algeria/>.

⁴⁶ Clarke, Isham, and Sheehan, "A Case Study," 11:04.

⁴⁷ Sewall, "A Radical Field Manual," xxxiv.

⁴⁸ Sewall, "A Radical Field Manual," xxxiv.

***The Handmaid's Tale* and its Interaction with Second-Wave Feminism**

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This paper was written for the course 'American Literature, 1917 to the Present' for the BA English Language and Culture

Imagine a world where women's bodies are state property, their identities erased, and their freedoms obliterated—all under the guise of preserving societal order. Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* thrusts readers into this chilling dystopia, offering a stark reflection on the values of second-wave feminism from the 1960s and 1970s. Although first-wave feminism during the 19th and early 20th centuries had already made some gains for women, such as the right to vote, they had still not reached equality on a wide scale. Second-wave feminism gave women a new-found sense of independence and made it possible for them to shape their own lives to an unprecedented degree. Second-wave feminists sought to challenge traditional gender roles through activism, scholarship, and cultural production. Key issues addressed by second-wave feminism included reproductive rights, sexual liberation (in the form of the contraceptive pill), and the recognition of domestic labor as valuable. The movement also raised awareness about issues such as marital rape and domestic violence, leading to the establishment of numerous women's shelters and support services. However, the women of Gilead, the fictional world wherein the events of *The Handmaid's Tale* take place, find themselves stripped of all these rights. Due to a fertility crisis, women are constrained to specific traditional roles within the fundamentalist theocratic regime that has supplanted the United States. The Handmaids, the women who can still bear children, "become wards of a state-sponsored matriarchy that instructs them in their grim lot of surrogacy."¹ In other words, they are forced to bear children for the regime.

This paper explores how *The Handmaid's Tale* interacts with second-wave feminism by delving into the feminist themes embedded within the novel. By examining the ways in which the novel engages with the core principles of second-wave feminism, such as reproductive rights and autonomy, this paper aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of both the text and the historical context in which it was written. Ultimately, this paper contributes to ongoing conversations about gender, power, and resistance in literature and society. The academic debate surrounding the link between the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and second-wave feminism is both complex and multifaceted, reflecting the intricacy of the text and the movement it echoes. At the heart of this debate lies the following fundamental question: To what extent does the novel align with the values, concerns, and objectives of second-wave feminism? Scholars such as Bassmah B. AlTaher and Shirley C. Neuman argue that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a representative product of second-wave feminism, embodying its core themes and reflecting its socio-political context.² They assert that the novel's exploration of women's reproductive rights, gender inequality, and patriarchal oppression is evidence of its feminist essence. Moreover, AlTaher and Neuman maintain that Atwood's portrayal of a dystopian society wherein women

are subjugated and stripped of their autonomy resonates with the feminist critique of patriarchal structures and societal control over women's bodies. In their view, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a powerful indictment of systemic misogyny and gender-based violence, making it a vital contribution to second-wave feminist literature.

However, the debate is far from settled, with other scholars like Zahra Sadeghi and Narges Mirzapour offering a more nuanced perspective. They argue that while *The Handmaid's Tale* engages with feminist themes, its portrayal of gender relations is not limited to the concerns of second-wave feminism. Instead, they assert that Atwood's narrative transcends the boundaries of any single feminist wave, drawing on a broader spectrum of feminist thought and addressing issues that remain relevant across different feminist movements. For example, they claim that the novel's exploration of the intersections between gender, power, and religious fundamentalism speaks to broader feminist concerns about how sexism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as colonialism and racism.³ Similarly, critics such as Laura West point to Atwood's reluctance to label both her work and herself as explicitly feminist, suggesting that she has consistently avoided aligning *The Handmaid's Tale* with any specific movement or ideology. Instead, Atwood has described the novel as speculative fiction, highlighting its dystopian elements rather than its feminist themes.⁴ This ambiguity has led scholars such as Kim Loudermilk to argue that *The Handmaid's Tale* defies easy categorization within the framework of second-wave feminism, encouraging readers to interpret its themes and messages more expansively.⁵ Building upon these perspectives, this paper aims to delve deeper into how *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques second-wave feminism while simultaneously reflecting it, underscoring the novel's true complexity and relevance.

Published at the height of the Reagan era, *The Handmaid's Tale* arrived in bookstores at a moment of right-wing backlash against the gains made by feminism over the previous two decades. A new type of women's movement was making its way to the forefront, one comprised of anti-feminists who argued, in the words of feminist and scholar Alice Echols, that feminism should be seen "not as the bearer of opportunity but rather as an agent of female vulnerability and loss, a movement designed to knock women off their enviable pedestals."⁶ Anti-feminists sought to roll back hard-won rights such as the right to abortion, contraception, equality in the workplace and society at large in favor of traditional gender roles that were organized around religion and family values. They believed that feminism's demand for equality posed a danger to women, potentially subjecting them to the military draft and forcing them into the workforce. The religious right also fervently voiced fears that the demise of the traditional family structure, particularly the heterosexual, nuclear family, would lead to moral decay and the unraveling of social order.

This pushback is reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*, with life in Gilead defined by an extreme anti-feminist ideology. *The Handmaid's Tale* is most often described as "a dystopian world".⁷ Because of a crisis in the dropping of fertility rates and high counts of child mortality,

women's rights have been stripped back and the Handmaids are forced to bear children for the commanders and their wives to ensure the survival of humanity. Women cannot vote, read, write, own property, make their own money or hold any kind of position. The United States has been transformed into the theocratic dictatorship of the Republic of Gilead, where the military is used to enforce religious teachings and a patriarchal hierarchy wherein women are positioned in a way that best enables them to serve the men around them. While women are always subjugated to men no matter their status, among the women in Gilead there is a hierarchy based on how the men around them perceive them and if they can bear children. There are the 'Wives' who are high-ranking women within Gileadean society who wear blue to signal their virtue, blue being representative of the Virgin Mary. Then there are the Aunts, often older women who have already gone through menopause and are employed to train the Handmaids. Furthermore, there are the Martha's (domestic servants and nannies for high-ranking families), the Econowives (poorer women who fulfil the role of Wife, Handmaid, and Martha all at once in their home), and the Unwomen (a Handmaid who has been convicted of a crime or who cannot get pregnant, the lowest status in Gilead). Gilead maintains its power by always employing strict surveillance, suppressing all information not deemed suitable, operating "re-education centers", and using totalitarian violence.

In many ways, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a stark warning about the potential consequences of ideological extremism and societal regression. This is reflected in the novel as it is a culmination "of the agenda articulated during the 1980s by America's fundamentalist Christian Right."⁸ In creating *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood created a version of society wherein the religious right triumphed and by doing so "her dystopia touches a sense of reality", warning society of the potential ramifications of social change for better or for worse.⁹ Through the creation of Gilead, Atwood constructed a chilling portrayal of a society where the values and doctrines of religious conservatism have risen to the forefront. In crafting this dystopian world, Atwood accurately reflected societal anxieties and apprehensions, injecting her narrative with a sense of sinister plausibility. By taking inspiration from the ideological currents of her time, Atwood delivered a warning to contemporary society, urging readers to consider the potential consequences of societal shifts, whether toward progress or regression. In essence, *The Handmaid's Tale* serves not only as a cautionary tale but also as a provocative commentary on the fragility of social progress and the enduring power of ideological extremism.

The Handmaid's Tale also reflects the values of second-wave feminism. The narrative offers a poignant critique of a society rampant with male power structures wherein women are relegated to second-class status, which is a traditionally feminist endeavor. Several second-wave feminist issues are discussed in the book such as abortion, birth control, pornography, and women's place within society. One of the core concerns of second-wave feminism is the right to reproductive freedom, a theme prominently explored in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the Republic of Gilead, women's bodies are controlled and used primarily for reproduction, echoing the feminist struggle against laws and societal norms that restrict women's control over their own

bodies. The protagonist, Offred, is forced into sexual servitude to bear children for the ruling elite, which is a stark representation of the loss of reproductive autonomy. This mirrors real-world issues that second-wave feminists fought against, such as restrictive abortion laws and lack of access to contraception, underscoring the importance of bodily autonomy. The novel also delves into the loss of identity and individuality, another crucial concern for second-wave feminists who argued against the societal tendency to define women primarily through their relationships with men. In Gilead, women are stripped of their personal identities and are identified only by their roles and the men to whom they belong, such as "Handmaids" or "Wives." Offred, whose name literally means "Of Fred" (indicating her Commander), symbolizes the erasure of women's identities and autonomy. This resonates with second-wave feminist critiques of how women's identities were often subsumed by their roles as wives and mothers, rather than being recognized as individuals with their own rights and aspirations.

Feminist rhetoric is also scattered throughout the narrative and comes to the forefront when Offred remembers her life in pre-Gileadean society with some fondness. Even though Offred does not describe herself as a feminist, she remembers her feminist mother, and yearns for her pre-Gilead life. For example, when Offred's mother visited her while Offred's husband was cooking, Offred's mother remarked: "You young people don't appreciate things... You don't know what we had to go through, just to get you where you are. Look at him, slicing up the carrots. Don't you know how many women's lives, how many women's *bodies*, the tanks had to roll over just to get that far?"¹⁰ Offred's mother considers Offred and other women like her, who reject the label of feminist, as "just a backlash" and that history will vindicate her and feminism.¹¹ Offred remembers her earlier negative reactions to her mother's feminist activism and comes to terms with how her mother was right. Put differently, "the novel points out the horror that could result from an enactment of reactionary, antifeminist politics"¹², proving the need for the feminist movement and the protection of women's rights.

Another reflection of feminist values present in *The Handmaid's Tale* comes in the form of the underground resistance movement called Mayday. Mayday is a secret group consisting mainly of women who operate a covert cell system to dismantle Gilead from the inside out. Mayday is a clear manifestation of feminist resistance: women in Gilead who refuse to accept their subordinate status and who fight back against the patriarchal system. Resistance and rebellion are also larger themes within *The Handmaid's Tale*, specifically resistance against totalitarian and patriarchal systems which is a core value of second-wave feminism and is reflected in the large-scale protests and marches of the time. Although Offred does not actively rebel against the extreme gender norms of Gilead, in her own way, she does commit small acts of resistance against the Gileadean regime. For example, she steals butter to use as a face cream and begins a sexual relationship with the Commander's chauffeur. Even her internal dialogue can be seen as an act of resistance. By describing what she sees and experiences in elaborate ways, Offred refuses to become the mindless object that the Gileadean regime wants her to be and keeps her autonomy as an individual. This internal dialogue ultimately helps her to maintain

her pre-Gilead identity and sows the seeds for her later escape from Gilead. These small acts of resistance are contrasted with more aggressive acts of resistance, such as Moira escaping the Red Center by attacking the Aunts and Ofglen being an active member of Mayday. By focusing specifically on Offred's story, however, the novel is arguing that even small, barely perceptible acts of resistance matter and that they deserve to be admired. All these acts of resistance and rebellion, big or small, become symbols of the need for feminist activism to counter the extreme patriarchal, totalitarian systems that seek to oppress not just women, but everyone who does not have power in society.

Furthermore, Atwood's portrayal of women's complicity in their own oppression reflects second-wave feminist discussions about internalized patriarchy. Characters like Serena Joy, the Commander's Wife, and Aunt Lydia, who trains the Handmaids, illustrate how women can perpetuate misogynistic norms. Joy, who once advocated for traditional roles for women, now suffers due to the system she helped create, highlighting the complex ways in which women can be both victims and enforcers of patriarchy. This duality speaks to second-wave feminists' efforts to highlight and dismantle not just overt sexism but also the subtle, internalized attitudes that contribute to women's oppression. The socio-political backdrop of Gilead, with its rigid class structure and severe punishment for dissent, reflects second-wave feminism's focus on the intersections of gender, class, and power. The stark division between different classes of women—Handmaids, Wives, Marthas, and Econowives—demonstrates how patriarchal oppression is compounded by class hierarchies. Second-wave feminists often highlighted how these intersecting structures of oppression impact women differently based on their socio-economic status, a concept later elaborated upon by intersectional feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale* reminds readers of the fragility of hard-won freedoms and the need for constant vigilance and activism to preserve and extend women's rights.

At the same time, *The Handmaid's Tale* also rejects some of these feminist values and offers a critique of second-wave feminism. While showing what would happen when anti-feminist ideology is fully realized, *The Handmaid's Tale* also shows a vision of a society wherein some feminist ideals are fully developed. One of the critical aspects the novel addresses is the focus on reproductive rights. Second-wave feminists fought fiercely for control over their own bodies, particularly in terms of access to contraception and abortion. However, Atwood takes this focus to an extreme in Gilead, where women's value is reduced solely to their fertility. The regime enforces reproduction through the Handmaids, women who are forced into sexual servitude to bear children for the elite. This twisted implementation of reproductive control serves as a cautionary tale, suggesting that an overemphasis on reproductive issues—whether by banning or mandating it—can lead to similarly oppressive outcomes. The extreme nature of Gilead's reproductive policies reflects fears that such crucial feminist issues could be manipulated to justify new forms of control over women's bodies.

Furthermore, one of the main issues highlighted by second-wave feminism is the objectification of women under the male gaze and the threat of physical harm women experience

while living under patriarchy. Offred herself also reflects on the dangers she faced in pre-Gileadean society. She says: “I never ran at night; and in the daytime, only beside well-frequented roads. Women were not protected back then.”¹³ Offred also recalls a burning of pornographic magazines she attended with her feminist mother when she was little. Later in the Red Center, when Offred is being indoctrinated to participate in Gilead, the Handmaids are shown images of sadistic pornography and Take Back The Night marches organized by feminists to underscore how unsafe women were and how much better this new society supposedly will be for them. Aunt Lydia then explains the benefits of the new system: “Consider the alternatives. You see what things used to be like? That was what they thought of women, then.”¹⁴ In Gileadean society, there is no pornography or threat of violence against women. However, this protection comes at the expense of the liberty of women in Gilead, since this safety is largely predicated on the fact that they are under constant surveillance and control. This is a critique of how second-wave feminist ideals could go too far if fully realized.¹⁵ Atwood, in other words, shows how easily feminism can be perverted and used for nefarious ends. As Aunt Lydia says: “There is more than one kind of freedom. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don’t underrate it.”¹⁶ However, by restricting male liberty and access to women, women have not achieved liberation but the total opposite, complete subordination.

Additionally, Atwood critiques the scope of second-wave feminism, which was often criticized for primarily representing the concerns of middle-class white women while overlooking the intersecting oppressions of race and class. In Gilead, the stratification of women into rigid classes—Handmaids, Wives, Marthas, and Econowives—highlights how feminist movements can fail to address the diverse experiences and needs of all women. Handmaids are valued solely for their reproductive capabilities, Wives are given a semblance of authority within their households, Marthas are relegated to domestic servitude, and Econowives bear the burdens of both reproductive and domestic labor. This segregation within the female population underscores the complexity of women's oppression and suggests that feminism must be inclusive to be truly effective.

The novel also depicts its feminist characters, such as Moira and Offred’s mother, as characters who cannot achieve their goals and whose actions have horrible consequences. Moira and Offred’s mother chose to promote many of the controversial issues that second-wave feminism stood for like reproductive rights and banning pornography. By taking extreme stances, however, they inadvertently allied with antifeminist parties. This cleared the way for the formation of Gilead and created conditions which arguably oppressed women even more. Here, Atwood is critiquing second-wave feminist policies, in the words of scholar Kim Loudermilk, as “ineffective at best, nefarious at worst.”¹⁷ Moira and Offred’s mother are also in pursuit of a women’s culture, a sisterhood of sorts which propagates a world wherein women live together free of male influence. In many ways, this women’s culture is realized within Gilead where women and men live largely separate from each other except for the sexual ceremony that is

required for reproduction. In this culture, women's roles are clearly defined, and they all work together to keep Gileadean society running. For example, when a Handmaid gives birth all the other Handmaids assemble around her to help her through it in what is called a birthing ceremony. While attending one of these birth ceremonies, Offred has a mental dialogue with her mother: "You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one."¹⁸ Of course, this is not remotely the women's culture that her mother meant because in Gilead, even though women rarely have to interact with men, every aspect of their lives is controlled by men. In the character of Moira, we see this same wish for a women's culture, but rather "in the form of a lesbian-separatist community."¹⁹ In a way, she gets her wish when, after trying to escape, she is caught and sent to Jezebel's, a brothel which serves high-level commanders and foreign dignitaries. While she is still forced to cater to men and have sex with them, she says, "It's not so bad, there's lots of women around. Butch paradise, you might call it."²⁰ Gilead is thus actually a perversion of the women's culture Moira and Offred's mother wanted. However, ironically it is many of their actions that allow the Christian fundamentalists behind Gilead to take over. In pursuit of their second-wave feminist ideals, they inadvertently allied with the very parties wishing to curtail women's rights even further. This reflects the main criticism of second-wave feminism as a movement that when taken to the extreme, curtails liberty instead of granting it.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a brilliant novel which asks complicated questions about women's rights, liberty, and feminism. In the end, the novel simultaneously reflects and critiques the core values of second-wave feminism. While reflecting the need for feminism by depicting the dystopian male-dominated society of Gilead, it also critiques some second-wave feminist values such as the banning of pornography and the desire to create a women's culture free of male influence. These values are shown to be susceptible, when taken to the extreme, to be co-opted by the very parties trying to strip women of all their freedoms. This reflects Atwood's overarching critique of feminism as a movement which can sometimes restrict liberty instead of affording it. By simultaneously reflecting and critiquing the core values of second-wave feminism, the novel prompts readers to confront the nuanced realities of feminist discourse and its potential pitfalls. Moreover, Atwood's exploration of the consequences of extremist ideologies serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the dangers of dogmatism and the importance of critical engagement with political positions. The relevance of these findings extends beyond the confines of the novel, inviting readers to reflect on the complexities of contemporary feminist movements and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Ultimately, In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood does not simplistically glorify or villainize second-wave feminism but challenges us to interrogate our beliefs and actions, ensuring that we remain vigilant in the pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

Notes

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⁶ Echols, Alice. *When The Anti-Feminists Roared Back*. Democracy Journal, June 28, 2017.

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Postcoloniality Obscured: A Historiographical Essay on Okinawa's Anti-base Movement Towards Reversion (1965-1972)

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This paper was written for the course 'Democratizing Histories' for the MA Asian Studies

On the night of December 20, 1970, in the city of Koza in Okinawa, a US serviceman under the influence of alcohol hit an Okinawan pedestrian with his car. The US military police allegedly allowed the soldier to leave the scene without examining the condition of the victim. Soon after, a riot erupted in the town that had accumulated around the US Air Force's Kadena Air Base.¹ Koza, present-day Okinawa City, served as an entertainment district catering to US military personnel shipped to Asia to fight the Cold War era's 'hot wars'. It attracted displaced farmers whose soil was claimed for US military installations in the wake of World War II.² Earlier protests against the US military uncovered a division between base and base *town* workers. Although both were dependent on the US military for their livelihoods, base workers spearheaded protests while bartenders and sex workers from the base towns steered clear of them.³ On this late December night at the height of the Vietnam War, however, base town workers joined what journalists described as "a rampage" of 5000 people "storming into" Kadena Air Base and "setting fire to scores of cars."⁴ Koza's barmen and -women supported this riot by mixing Molotov cocktails in the bars where they had previously welcomed the very US servicemen that fellow rioters now dragged out of vehicles.⁵

The Koza riot differs from earlier protests in both its spontaneity and the support it enjoyed from base workers as well as base town workers, both of whom were dismayed that the US military police appeared to be unwilling to persecute US servicemen for crimes committed against Okinawans.⁶ Noting that riots can also be interpreted as "spontaneous rebellions," ethnic studies scholar Wesley Uenten defines the events of December 20, 1970, as the "*Koza Uprising*," explaining that it reveals an 'Okinawan consensus' underlying apparent divisions.⁷ He interprets this consensus as a "'Third World' consciousness" that had developed as a result of Okinawa's disenfranchisement by the late Japanese empire and the US military, both of which he perceives as "colonial ruler[s]."⁸

It is important to ask why this 'Third World' consciousness resulting from decades of 'colonialism' was not expressed until late in the Okinawan movement, a year after the announcement that the Ryukyu Islands, collectively named 'Okinawa', would return to Japan after being ruled by the US military since 1945. At first, the US military's presence on Okinawa overlapped with the postwar US occupation of Japan. In 1952, however, Japan regained its independence while Okinawa remained under the jurisdiction of the US military. During the next decade, the US military closed bases on the Japanese mainland while establishing new ones on Okinawa. This sparked a protest movement against the bases that also argued for Okinawa's return to Japan. In 1969, US President Richard Nixon and Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato

announced that Okinawa would revert to Japanese control in 1972.⁹ Although this was initially perceived as a step towards demilitarization, it sparked new protests when it became clear that the military bases would stay.¹⁰ To this day, Okinawa continues to host over seventy percent of Japan's US military bases on only 0.6% of Japan's soil, despite the successful completion of reversion in 1972.¹¹

This historiographical essay examines how recent scholars have interpreted the short-lived sense of victory among those who argued for reversion during the late 1960s. It focuses on historians who point towards the obfuscation of the history of Japanese imperialism to explain why reversion appeared a realistic avenue to the amelioration of the Okinawans' plight. Among them, anthropologist Lisa Yoneyama argues that scholars themselves have been complicit in the obfuscation of Okinawa's colonial past by neglecting to take a transwar approach to history. Because Cold War-era historians either examined prewar histories of 'imperialism' or postwar histories of the 'Pax Americana', she explains, they failed to recognize the similarities between Japanese and American rule on Okinawa.¹²

Because a transwar approach is still rarely used, this essay examines three strands of scholarship respectively focusing on the prewar, early postwar, and Vietnam War era. Based on their temporal focus, these strands of scholarship explain the reversion movement differently, blaming the obfuscation of Japanese imperialism on actors as varied as prewar-era Japanese bureaucrats, postwar-era US officials, and American and Japanese antiwar activists. Their narrow temporal focus has led scholars to hold merely one of these groups accountable for the obfuscation of Okinawa's colonial past. This essay, therefore, argues for taking a longer-term approach to history to explain why Okinawa continues to host a disproportionate number of the US military bases on Japanese soil. This approach could enable scholars and activists to hold all actors involved accountable for the persisting US military presence, as well as prevent the present-day anti-base movement from veering away from its anti-militarist goals.

The obfuscation of Okinawa's colonial past dates back to the prewar era. Whereas the anti-base activists of the 1960s blamed the United States for Okinawa's predicament, scholars of the prewar era argue that the islands did not fare much better under Japanese control. Noting that Okinawans bore a disproportionate part of the burden of Japan's defense during the Pacific War, historian Courtney Short interprets prewar Okinawa as a *de facto* colony of the Japanese empire. Agreeing with this premise, sociologist Koya Nomura argues that the Japanese electorate continues to perceive Okinawa as a colony to this day, as it refuses to move US military bases from Okinawa to the mainland.¹³ These scholars explain that assimilationist policies and a prefectural status concealed Okinawa's colonial predicament during the prewar era.

Scholars of the immediate postwar era point towards US foreign policy objectives to explain why this colonial predicament was not uncovered after the Japanese empire collapsed in 1945. Historians Yukiko Koshiro and Naoko Shibusawa emphasize that the perceived need to refashion Japan as an anticommunist ally dissuaded US officials from holding Japan accountable for its imperialist past. Sociologist Mire Koikari adds that American investments in the Japanese

economy exacerbated financial disparities between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, making reversion seem more attractive. Yoneyama and literary scholar Annmaria Shimabuku observe that Okinawans concealed their memories of Japanese imperialism when interacting with mainland Japanese allies. Conceding that Okinawans were complicit in the obfuscation of their colonial past, these scholars emphasize that Okinawans reached out to mainland Japanese allies because the latter's financial status made them seem better equipped to negotiate with the US military, blaming the disparities between Okinawa and the mainland on US foreign policy.

Focusing on the 1960s, the last strand of scholarship discusses the impact of American and Japanese antiwar activists on the Okinawan movement. Although these activists identified as anti-militarist and anticolonial allies to the 'Third World', scholars argue that they contributed to Okinawa's reversion to its former 'colonial ruler'. Historians Yuichiro Onishi and Simon Avenell concede that American activists aided the anti-base movement by inspiring Okinawans to identify as 'Third World' citizens. Both, however, emphasize that Americans misinterpreted Okinawa's historical relationship with Japan. Because they viewed this relationship through the lens of the Vietnam War, antiwar activists tended to perceive the US as the primary perpetrator of racist violence in Asia – at least before it became clear that Okinawa's reversion would not lead to its demilitarization. This precluded them from uncovering the history of Japanese imperialism.

Historians examining the prewar era trace the obfuscation of Okinawa's colonial past back to the seventeenth century, noting that years of being governed by mainland Japanese rulers affected Okinawans' self-identity. The Ryukyu Islands had been an independent kingdom since 1429. In 1609, it was invaded by the Satsuma clan from mainland Japan. Noting that Satsuma representatives perceived Okinawans as less civilized and exploited them economically, Short takes this moment as the starting point of Japanese imperialism towards Okinawa. In 1879, the Ryukyuan King abdicated, and his kingdom was annexed by the Japanese state. It became known as 'Okinawa Prefecture', named after its biggest island.¹⁴

Building on this history, Nomura argues that Okinawa's colonial condition became obscured by the Japanese empire's assimilationist policies from 1879 onwards. Upon annexation, he explains, Okinawans were encouraged to assimilate into the modern Japanese culture propagated by the Meiji government. Assimilationist policies towards Okinawa, however, were not always recognized as such. Instead, they were sometimes conflated with the nationalist policies imposed on mainland Japanese citizens, who were encouraged to become 'modern Japanese subjects' following the Meiji restoration of 1868. Nevertheless, the assimilationist policies dovetailed with a condescension from mainland Japanese citizens that enticed Okinawans to abandon their heritage. Therefore, Nomura argues that Okinawa's incorporation into the metropolitan state via nationalism signals colonialism, noting that utilizing nationalism to unify the citizenry became standard practice within the Japanese empire.¹⁵

Historians of the Pacific War agree that Okinawans' incorporation into the larger project of Japanese nationalism helped obfuscate the colonial character of Okinawan-Japanese relations. Short, moreover, emphasizes that Okinawans were aware of the contradictions of their second-rate citizenship and complicit in the concealment of their native culture.¹⁶ Focusing on the experiences of US military personnel during the Battle of Okinawa (1945), she argues that the Americans were surprised that some Okinawans welcomed them as liberators. Hoping to differentiate between Okinawan enemies and allies, the US military decided that the successful execution of their mission depended on a critical examination of Okinawans' ethnic and racial identity. Subsequently, officers were tasked with interviewing Okinawan prisoners of war. Their reports laid the groundwork for the postwar occupation of Okinawa (1945-1972) and were constantly re-evaluated based on conversations with Okinawan collaborators.¹⁷

As Short's analysis suggests, Okinawans negotiated their position within the postwar order, affecting the extent to which they were perceived as Japanese. Anthropologist Lisa Yoneyama explores the dilemmas of identification in the wake of the Pacific War. Through her analysis of *The Cocktail Party* (1967), by Okinawan novelist Oshiro Tatsuhiro, she reveals that Okinawans were both victims and perpetrators of Japanese imperialism. This hampered their ability to identify with either the decolonizing world or mainland Japan. Affirming the positions of Nomura and Short, Yoneyama views prewar Okinawa as a *de facto* colony, urging scholars and politicians to acknowledge the colonial conditions that were concealed by nationalism and a prefectural status. Furthermore, she agrees that Okinawans negotiated their perceived identity with the Americans during the US occupation. She adds, however, that Okinawa's colonial predicament was not only obscured by the conflation between colonialism and Meiji-era nationalism but also by Cold War-era scholarship, noting that historians failed to recognize the similarities between Japanese and American rule on Okinawa because they either focused on the prewar, or the postwar era.¹⁸

As neither fully colonial nor metropolitan, postwar Okinawans found themselves in a liminal position under the overlapping influences of the US military and the late Japanese empire. This position was not only confusing to Americans but also to the Japanese. As Yoneyama reveals, Okinawans' wartime memories and their postwar occupation by the US military complicated the relationships between them and their mainland Japanese allies. *The Cocktail Party* focuses on an Okinawan man struggling to convince a US military official that the soldier who raped his daughter should be tried at a civilian rather than a military court – knowing that the latter was not likely to persecute servicemen for crimes committed against Okinawans. He consults his mainland Japanese friend, a leftist activist and journalist, who is willing to help but unaware of prewar Japanese imperialism towards the Ryukyu Islands. Yoneyama emphasizes that the journalist's ignorance persists because the protagonist conceals his memories of the Battle of Okinawa – when the imperial Japanese military used Okinawan citizens as human shields – out of courtesy.¹⁹ Her analysis thus suggests that Okinawan citizens consciously foregrounded or concealed parts of their identity depending on their audience.

Yoneyama interprets the Battle of Okinawa as a turning point in Okinawan identity formation. At this time, she agrees with Short, many Okinawans welcomed the American invaders, hoping they would liberate them from Japanese imperialism. When it became clear that the Americans would stay, however, it appeared as though the islands had merely transitioned from one colonial condition to the next. As mainland Japanese citizens remained insufficiently aware of prewar racism towards the Ryukyans, a reversion movement could manifest despite this history.²⁰ After reversion left Okinawans with a disproportionate number of military bases, they became increasingly vocal about the injustices perpetrated by the imperial Japanese military during the Pacific War. In 1993, over eighty percent of Okinawan respondents opposed the official narrative about the Battle of Okinawa, arguing that it was “a reckless battle which sacrificed countless Okinawan lives” rather than, as the Japanese government suggested, “an unavoidable battle necessary for the defense of the fatherland.”²¹

This signals that the dichotomy between mainland Japanese and Okinawan experiences persisted throughout the postwar era. As stated, scholars argue that this was facilitated by assimilationist policies imposed during the prewar era and by Okinawans’ efforts to conceal their memories of the Pacific War. Okinawa’s status as neither part of the imperial Japanese metropole nor a formal colony hindered the formation of an Okinawan nationalism. Nevertheless, during the 1950s, Okinawan residents were able to forge a movement against the US military’s presence. Although these anti-base protests culminated in Okinawa’s reversion to Japan, scholars suggest that they were not primarily pro-Japanese or ethno-nationalist. Instead, residents protested in hopes of using the soil the bases occupied for agriculture, tourism, and non-military industries.²² They could deploy their ambiguous identities, portraying themselves as Okinawan or Japanese, depending on their audience.

Historians of the postwar era argue that the obfuscation of Okinawa’s colonial past was perpetuated after the Pacific War, observing that Japan’s defeat gave rise to a victim mindset that dissuaded citizens from acknowledging their imperial legacies.²³ Agreeing with Nomura that Japanese citizens were unwilling to account for their wartime past, these historians also hold the United States accountable for concealing Okinawa’s colonial history. Furthermore, they argue that the Cold War alliance between the US and Japan made reversion seem more attractive. First, they note that the financial disparities between Okinawa and Japan widened because the US invested in mainland Japanese industries while burdening Okinawa with military bases. Second, scholars argue that American organizations helped rekindle affinity between Okinawans and mainland Japanese citizens. The connections they forged and the contrast between a militarized Okinawa and a prosperous Japan convinced some Okinawans that reversion would be in their best interest.

Scholars of the immediate postwar era blame both the US and Japan for the obfuscation of Japanese imperialism. Sociologist Mire Koikari and historian Naoko Shibusawa note that the US framed the postwar occupation of Japan as a liberating rebirth of the nation, arguing that this created a historical amnesia about its imperial legacies.²⁴ Historian Yukiko Koshiro agrees with

this view but adds that the US and Japan legitimized *each other's* practices during the Cold War. As US officials increasingly worried that Asia would turn communist, she explains, they hoped to retain Japan as a powerful ally.²⁵ The US, therefore, provided Japan with military backing, procurement orders, and financial aid. Japan, in turn, adopted the narrative that US foreign policy was benevolent. Koshiro concludes that this “collaboration was built on a shared racist view of the world” for which neither side felt compelled to admit guilt.²⁶ This affected Okinawa because it increased prosperity in Japan – making reversion seem more attractive – while dissuading the Japanese from accounting for their imperial history.²⁷

Scholars of the immediate postwar era suggest that American soft power initiatives contributed to pro-reversion sentiments. Koikari, for instance, observes that US-sponsored humanitarian organizations facilitated contact between Okinawans and mainland Japanese citizens. Put simply, she explains, pursuing humanitarian objectives – e.g., improving the standard of living via knowledge-sharing – made the US involvement in Asian affairs seem more benevolent. For this purpose, US officials established ‘Future Homemakers’ organizations in Japan and Okinawa during the late 1940s, when the US still occupied the Japanese mainland. Although these organizations were established to facilitate exchanges between Americans and their target populations, the Future Homemakers of Okinawa and Japan started meeting with each other from 1958 onwards, rekindling the affinity between (elite) Okinawan and mainland Japanese women. Becoming a platform for dialogue and friendship, the Future Homemakers organizations aided Okinawans’ identification with Japan.²⁸

Okinawans’ growing affinity with the Japanese distracted them from recognizing Japan’s complicity in burdening Okinawa with US military bases. As literary scholar Annmaria Shimabuku explains, Japanese citizens protested the US military’s presence on the mainland during the 1950s. She observes that these protests were spearheaded by the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP). These left-wing politicians feared that poorer areas of Japan would deteriorate as a result of the bases, arguing that the bases would exacerbate socio-economic inequality as soldiers drove up the demand for sex and alcohol in their peripheries. Some agreed with right-wing politicians that mixed-race ‘occupation babies’ born from sexual encounters between American GIs and Japanese women would hamper the social cohesion within a purportedly mono-ethnic Japanese state.²⁹ Emphasizing that these mainland Japanese leftists did not protest the transfer of the bases to Okinawa, Shimabuku suggests that they did not perceive the islands as part of Japan. This is significant because the JSP supported Okinawa’s reversion, indicating that its views on the islands had changed by the late 1960s.

Besides blaming mainland Japanese politicians for burdening Okinawa with the military bases, Shimabuku notes that some Okinawans were reluctant to oppose them because of their precarious economic conditions. Taking a Marxian approach to history and building on philosopher Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics, she emphasizes that the Japanese empire secured labor power by incorporating surplus populations from its colonies. These populations became “racialized as cheap labor against the formation of an ethnically ‘Japanese’ middle

class.”³⁰ In the postwar era, she explains, Okinawans continued to serve as Japan’s surplus population, as the Japanese disproportionately burdened them with military bases. This allowed an ostensibly mono-ethnic post-occupation Japan to experience unprecedented economic growth.³¹ In response to their biopolitical disenfranchisement, Shimabuku argues, the most destitute Okinawans developed “a strategy for living in the here and now.”³² This means that they disengaged from activism in favor of focusing on their personal lives.

This strategy was predominantly practiced by sex workers from the base towns, who refused to join anti-base protests because they were financially dependent on the US military. Shimabuku defines these sex workers as working-class subjects “who could not be mobilized under a political platform before the state” because of their semi-legal status.³³ During the 1950s, most Okinawans opposed the US military’s presence via elections, protests, and by refusing to accept the meager compensations the US offered as rent for confiscated land. The protesters failed to include sex workers in their ranks because they assumed that the women’s reluctance to openly criticize their patrons revealed compliance rather than financial needs.³⁴ Their lack of sufficient numbers enticed activists to reach out to overseas allies, allowing mainland Japanese and Americans to dominate the Okinawan movement.

The Okinawan People’s Party (the OPP, affiliated with the Japanese Communist Party) was one of the organizations to reach out to mainland Japanese allies. Shimabuku explains that it misunderstood its own electorate and “played into the polarizing tactics of the U.S. military by pushing an ethno-nationalist identification with the Japanese state.”³⁵ Put simply, she argues that the OPP undermined the anti-base movement by aligning Okinawans with mainland Japanese, although the Japanese had shifted the burden of the US-Japanese security alliance to Okinawa in the first place.³⁶ Hence, like Nomura, Shimabuku suggests that the cooperation between mainland Japanese and Okinawans helped steer the movement away from anti-militarism. Although the Japanese appeared to be in a better position to negotiate with the US, the OPP’s decision to cooperate with mainland Japanese pro-reversionists undermined the anti-base movement – not in the least because reversion granted Okinawans little political influence as merely one percent of the Japanese electorate.³⁷

Scholars focusing on the immediate postwar era thus reveal that mainland Japanese, Americans, and Okinawans all set the stage for the reversion movement. They argue that the Cold War alliance between the US and Japan helped obfuscate the legacies of Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, they note that reversion became more attractive because Japan experienced unprecedented economic growth while Okinawa’s economy was skewed towards the needs of the US military. Lastly, they observe that Okinawa’s internal diversity made it difficult to forge a sufficiently large indigenous anti-base movement, enticing activists to garner support from overseas allies. Some of these activists used political connections and American organizations to reach out to mainland Japanese. Others came into contact with Americans who passed through Okinawa as soldiers of the Vietnam War.

The last strand of scholarship this essay discusses focuses on the involvement of American and Japanese New Left activists in the Okinawan movement. In the United States, the New Left rose after the Old Left's Popular Front coalition had been "eradicated" by McCarthyism during the 1950s.³⁸ In Japan, the Old Left's socialist and communist parties remained active throughout the Cold War era. Nevertheless, some Japanese leftists argued that the Old Left's preoccupation with proletarian revolutions was outdated.³⁹ Therefore, they chose to adopt the rhetoric and practices of American activists, identifying as part of a transnational New Left. Because they were often involved in protests against the Vietnam War, American and Japanese New Leftists tended to perceive the US as the primary - or sole - perpetrator of imperialist violence in Asia. This dissuaded them from scrutinizing Japan's imperialist past. Scholars have argued that the transnational New Left undermined the anti-base movement, despite it being opposed to the US military's presence in Asia and cognizant of Japan's complicity in the Vietnam War.⁴⁰

Even if they ultimately undermined the anti-base movement, scholars suggest that Japanese New Left activists were inspired by their transnational contacts to grapple with the legacies of Japanese imperialism. As Yoneyama noted, Cold War-era history writing helped obfuscate the similarities between Japanese and 'US imperialism'.⁴¹ Furthermore, scholars have suggested that the Cold War alliance between the US and Japan made Okinawa's already obscure colonial history even easier to ignore, allowing the Japanese to perceive themselves as victims rather than perpetrators of war.⁴² Historian Simon Avenell argues that the 1960s were a turning point for this trend, noting that Japanese antiwar activists slowly started to grapple with their imperial legacies as they met other Asian nationals with whom they protested the Vietnam War. Based on their conversations with overseas activists, some concluded that antiwar protests were self-righteous and unfitting for those unwilling to recognize their own complicity in the subjugation of others.⁴³

This growing awareness divided the Japanese New Left into pro- and anti-reversion activists. Those opposing reversion, Avenell argues, connected the Japanese government's consent to the Vietnam War with its consent to the US military's presence on Okinawa, signaling that it was not on the Okinawans' side. Makoto Oda, the spokesperson of the antiwar group *Beheiren*, moreover, connected Japan's complicity in the US military's conduct with earlier transgressions of the Japanese empire, holding the Japanese electorate accountable for both.⁴⁴ Other activists, however, often spoke *for* fellow Asians rather than *with* them, undermining the anti-base movement by overstating the affinity between Okinawans and mainland Japanese.⁴⁵

Japanese antiwar activists increasingly but insufficiently recognized Japan's complicity in the US military's presence on Okinawa. On the one hand, historian Yuichiro Onishi notes that Oda warned that American and Japanese government officials would deploy Okinawa's reversion to undermine the anti-base movement.⁴⁶ On the other, he emphasizes that American activists criticized the Japanese New Left for being reluctant to adopt race-based activism. Antiwar activist Jan Eakes, for example, criticized the Japanese for failing to perceive Japan's

disenfranchised citizens – e.g., immigrants and those whose ancestors were colonized or lower-caste – as “Japan’s Black people” central to its liberation from militarism.⁴⁷ Hence, Onishi indicates that, although the Japanese were inspired by New Left ideas about race and colonialism, they were reluctant to alter their strategies. This precluded them from asking whether Okinawans were ‘Japan’s Black people’ – and thus formerly colonized – too.

Foregrounding Japanese activists’ reluctance to grapple with their imperial legacies, Onishi suggests that American activists did not sufficiently understand Okinawans’ plight either. He concedes that Black Americans inspired Okinawans to formulate an “ideological language that helped them affirm their commitment to carve out liberated spaces,” noting that identifying as non-white became a political choice signaling Okinawans’ opposition to the military bases.⁴⁸ However, he also argues that the masculinist language of Black radicalism helped obscure the gendered dynamics of US-Okinawan relations, in which power disparities were most distressing to sex workers.⁴⁹ Uenten appears to be less critical of the impact of Black GI activists. Agreeing that the language of race was important to the Okinawan movement, he emphasizes that mutual affinity and the positive example set by GIs inspired by and affiliated with the Black Panther Party contributed to Okinawans’ decision to spare Black servicemen and their property during the Koza Uprising.⁵⁰

New Left influences from the US and Japan divided the Okinawan anti-base movement into Old and New Left camps. Shimabuku observes that the Old Left uniformly promoted reversion during the 1960s. The Okinawan People’s Party, for instance, agreed with its mainland counterpart, the Japanese Communist Party, that national unification needed to precede the dismantling of capitalism. The OPP’s ousted leader Kotaro Kokuba, conversely, joined the New Left and criticized reversion as a ploy to undermine the anti-base movement, as mainland Japanese activist Makoto Oda did.⁵¹ Despite increased engagement with the Japanese and American New Left, however, New Leftists remained a minority in Okinawa. Furthermore, Shimabuku emphasizes that they – like the Old Left – failed to grow their movement because they did not perceive sex workers as working-class allies.⁵²

Okinawan leftists’ inability to grow their movement enabled mainland Japanese activists to overshadow Okinawan voices. Shimabuku argues that this was problematic because it obfuscated the plight of those most intimately affected by the military bases. Agreeing with Yoneyama that Japanese allies were sometimes unable to understand Okinawans’ needs, she observes that Japanese New Leftist documentary maker Tetsuro Nunokawa disregarded the needs of the women he argued to help.⁵³ On the one hand, Shimabuku argues, Nunokawa criticized fellow Japanese leftists for desiring “to recapture Okinawa from the United States as if she were an object.”⁵⁴ On the other, he and his crew were unable to overcome this tendency themselves, as they hired the women they interviewed despite these women’s assertions that they preferred not to be sex workers.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the documentary reveals the sex workers’ perspectives on the bases, showing one who explained: “If Okinawa reverts to the mainland, only people in the government will get rich.”⁵⁶ As Shimabuku argues, this signals that base town

workers opposed the US military's presence without believing that Okinawa's reversion to Japan would reduce it. Hence, their inclusion in the Okinawan movement could have provided a counterweight to its pro-reversion sentiments, steering the movement towards anti-militarism instead.

Therefore, scholars argue that influences from the American New Left insufficiently aided the Okinawan anti-base movement, allowing it to veer towards reversion. First, scholars observe that the rhetoric and ideas of the American New Left did not prevent the promotion of reversion on ethno-nationalist grounds. Although it inspired Okinawans to identify as non-white, their Japanese allies were hesitant to make this perspective central to their activism. Second, scholars agree that Japanese activists started to grapple with the legacies of Japanese imperialism but emphasize that they did so too little and too late. Third, they indicate that neither the Americans nor the Japanese were able to include base town workers in their protests. As base town workers were wary of reversion but joined the Koza Uprising, activists' failure to include them may have undermined the anti-base movement, allowing it to veer towards reversion.

In conclusion, this historiographical essay has examined three strands of scholarship explaining how the Okinawan anti-base movement culminated in Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972. The scholars discussed agree that activists were insufficiently aware of the colonial character of prewar Okinawan-Japanese relations. They differ, however, in the explanations they provide for activists' inability to uncover Okinawa's colonial past. Nomura and Short, for instance, suggest that assimilationist policies and Okinawan agency helped obscure the colonial character of prewar Okinawan-Japanese relations. Historians of the immediate postwar era, conversely, blame the US-Japanese security alliance for dissuading the Japanese from grappling with their imperial legacies. Lastly, historians of the long 1960s argue that activists failed to uncover the history of Japanese imperialism because they perceived Okinawa through the lens of the Vietnam War, leading many to identify the US rather than Japan as the prime perpetrator of 'imperialism' in Asia.

Depending on their timeframe of focus, scholars thus blame the obfuscation of Okinawa's colonial past on causes as diverse as imperial Japanese nationalism, US foreign policy goals, and the shortsightedness of activists. A narrow temporal focus leads scholars to hold merely one of these groups accountable for Okinawa's predicament. During the 1960s, activists embraced Okinawa's reversion as a realistic avenue towards demilitarization because they solely blamed the US for the existence of the bases. What they missed, however, was the perspective that Japan was also responsible for the US military's presence on Okinawa and disinclined to reduce it after reversion.

As Okinawa continues to this day to host over seventy percent of Japan's US military bases on less than one percent of Japan's soil, it is important to understand why the earlier anti-base movement failed to achieve a reduction in the US military's presence. During the 1960s, few activists recognized the similarities between prewar Japanese and postwar American rule on

Okinawa. The difficulty activists experienced in uncovering Japan's complicity in the US military's presence underscores the necessity of tracing the history of contentious US military bases back to the prewar era – before they were established. This might preclude present-day anti-base movements from missing their anti-militarist objectives too.

Notes

¹ “U.S. Servicemen Disperse Crowds With Tear Gas,” *Japan Times*, December 21, 1970, 1.

² Annmaria Shimabuku, *Alegal: Biopolitics and the Unintelligibility of Okinawan Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 54-55.

³ *Ibid.*, 96-107.

⁴ “U.S. Servicemen Disperse Crowds With Tear Gas,” 1.

⁵ Wesley Iwao Uenten, “Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent: The 1970 Koza Uprising in U.S.-Occupied Okinawa,” in *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 108.

⁶ Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 119.

⁷ Uenten, “Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent,” 110.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁹ Thomas R.H. Havens, *Fire Across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan 1965-1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 199-203.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 203-204, 214-221.

¹¹ Koya Nomura, “Undying Colonialism: A Case Study of the Japanese Colonizer,” trans. Annmaria Shimabuku, *New Centennial Review* 12, no. 1 (2012), 105.

¹² Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 46-52.

¹³ Koya Nomura, “Colonialism and Nationalism: The View from Okinawa,” trans. Ronald Y. Nakasone, in *Okinawan Diaspora*, ed. Ronald Y. Nakasone (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 114; Nomura, “Undying Colonialism,” 102-107.

¹⁴ Courtney A. Short, *Uniquely Okinawan: Determining Identity During the U.S. Wartime Occupation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 9-10.

¹⁵ Nomura, “Colonialism and Nationalism,” 113-115.

¹⁶ Short, *Uniquely Okinawan*, 9-11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

¹⁸ Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 46-52, 57, 60-61, 67-69.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53-54, 59-61, 67-69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-68; Short, *Uniquely Okinawan*, 12.

²¹ Ishihara Masaie, “Memories of War and Okinawa,” trans. Douglas Dreistadt, in *Perilous Memories: the Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. Geoffrey M. White and Lisa Yoneyama (New York: Duke University Press, 2020),” 88.

²² Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 62-76.

²³ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the wake of World War II* (New York: Norton & Company, 1999), 29-30, 119-120.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-30; Mire Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy: Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 4-5; Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Alley: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Pirai: Harvard University Press, 2006), 4-8.

²⁵ Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 10-11, 16, 40-44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁷ Mire Koikari, *Cold War Encounters in US-Occupied Okinawa: Women, Militarized Domesticity and Transnationalism in East Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 188-192.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-10, 185-187, 193-200.

²⁹ Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 4-8, 15-16, 22-28, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

³¹ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 361-362.

³² Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 10-13.

- ³³ Ibid., 66.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 66-72, 79.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 67.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 79-82.
- ³⁷ Nomura, “Undying Colonialism,” 105-109.
- ³⁸ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 369-370, 388-389.
- ³⁹ Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 79-82.
- ⁴⁰ Simon Avenell, *Asia and Postwar Japan: Deimperialization, Civic Activism, and National Identity* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2023), 121-122.
- ⁴¹ Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 61-63, 66.
- ⁴² Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 29-30, 119-120; Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy*, 4-5; Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms*, 10-11, 16, 40-44; Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Alley*, 3-6.
- ⁴³ Avenell, *Asia and Postwar Japan*, 11, 15-21, 122-124.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 124-130. *Beheiren* is an acronym for *Betonamu ni Heiwa o! Shimin Rengo*, or “The Citizen’s League for Peace in Vietnam.”
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 179-181.
- ⁴⁶ Yuichiro Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in 20th-Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 156-159.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 162-165.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 153.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 172-177.
- ⁵⁰ Uenten, “Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent,” 104-105, 111-114.
- ⁵¹ Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism*, 156-159.
- ⁵² Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 93-107.
- ⁵³ Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 59-61, 67-72.
- ⁵⁴ Shimabuku, *Alegal*, 111-112.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 112-116.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 116-119.

Republican Isolationism: A Threat to the US-led Liberal International Order?

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On Thursday, February 24, 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine, marking the beginning of the War in Ukraine. The ongoing war and Russia's refusal to withdraw has refocused attention on the durability of the United States-led liberal international order, particularly given China's increasingly influence and alignment with Russia.¹ This liberal order has been broadly understood as a rules-based system in which sovereign countries cooperate multilaterally through institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).² Initially, the start of the War in Ukraine seemed to suggest a strengthening of the international order. However, since 2023, scholars like political scientist Joseph Nye, US foreign policy expert Jordan Tama, and Professor of Foreign Policy Analysis and Transatlantic Relations Roberta Haar, have warned that rising Republican isolationism risks undermining support for Ukraine and the broader US-led liberal international order.³ Isolationism, the notion that US interests are best served by a retreat from international commitments, has a long lineage in American history, dating back to the country's foundation.⁴ However, several scholars, including Joseph Nye, trace the resurgence of isolationism to the Donald Trump presidency and view ongoing debates around US military support for Ukraine as further evidence of this isolationist turn within the Republican party.⁵ There is concern among many commentators that these isolationist sentiments could lead to reduced US military support for Ukraine, a shortfall which Europe would be poorly prepared to make up.⁶

This article draws on contemporary political commentary, opinion polling, and an analysis of the positions of key political actors to examine the current position of the Democratic and Republican parties on military aid for Ukraine, placing those debates into the broader history of America's international engagement during the twentieth century and the development of the concept of the liberal international order. It argues that growing Republican resistance to US support for Ukraine represents a resurgence of isolationism, and a potential threat to the transatlantic relationship and the broader US-led liberal international order. In doing so, this paper builds on the recent scholarship of Nye, particularly his claim that the biggest threat to the US-led liberal international order comes from within, rather than from external threats, such as the rise of China.⁷ It extends Nye's argument by examining how internal threats, which includes the resurgence of isolationist sentiments, are already developing in the Republican Party.⁸

The US-led liberal international order is based on the ideology of liberal internationalism. Liberal internationalism is rooted in the idea that sovereign countries are interdependent and cooperate multilaterally based on institutions, international rules, free trade, and democracy.⁹ The development of liberal internationalism can be traced back to the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, and was deeply intertwined with the beginning of liberal democracy in the US and Western Europe.¹⁰ The newly developed, and globally powerful, liberal democracies aspired to create a so-called liberal Western order, in which democracies “cooperate for mutual gain and protection within a loosely rules-based international space.”¹¹ It is worth noting that this vision was often only extended to a small number of powerful countries, many of which themselves possessed significant overseas empires.¹² It was this European vision of a rule-based, mutually beneficial global structure that came to underpin the US-led liberal international order that was developed in the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly in the wake of World War II.¹³ Although a shared value of democracy therefore underpins this US-led liberal international order, many critics argue that democracy is often used as a rhetorical tool to hide a deeper power-based relationship that conditions the functioning of the global order.¹⁴

Despite this critique, scholars such as John Ikenberry argue that key tenets of the US-led liberal international order are international openness in terms of economies and societies; multilateral relations and cooperation based on international rules and institutions; and cooperation on security through solidarity created by shared values of democracy.¹⁵ This article builds on Ikenberry’s own analysis of the decline in leadership of that liberal order by focusing on the impact of growing Republican isolationism on several of these areas: multilateral relations, cooperation based on international rules and institutions, and cooperation on security issues.¹⁶ It should be noted that this is not the first time the US-led order has faced threats and criticism, including during its apparent high-point of US leadership in the Cold War and, more recently, during the War on Terror that followed the World Trade Center attack in September 2001. However, Nye and Ikenberry identify the rise of Chinese power since the end of the Cold War as a major external challenge to the US-led liberal international order.¹⁷ Nye argues that a decline in US leadership in the liberal international order could lead to a Chinese-led international order, which is unlikely to be liberal or democratic.¹⁸ Even if China’s power is growing, however, Nye does not think China will surpass the US. Instead, he argues that the greatest threat to the US-led liberal international order comes from within, from the populism and isolationism that have become more articulate since Trump’s presidency.¹⁹

Former US President Donald Trump posed a challenge to transatlantic relations and the US-led international order during his term in office between 2017 and 2021. His “America First” slogan reflects his isolationist conviction that other countries take advantage of the US through international organizations, such as NATO, and that, therefore, the US should look inward and rely on itself.²⁰ This attitude expressed through his lack of support for multilateral institutions such as the EU, which even led him to characterize the EU as a “foe” in 2018 and encourage states like the UK to leave the EU.²¹ During his term, Trump also threatened to withdraw from NATO if European countries would not increase their defense spending.²² In addition to challenging the EU and the position of the US in the transatlantic security alliance, Trump also pulled out of several international institutions and agreements, including the Paris Climate Agreement (2017) and the Iran Nuclear Deal (2018). Furthermore, he announced the US withdrawal from the World Health Organization

(WHO) in 2020.²³ Trump also challenged international openness in trade, imposing tariffs on European imports and companies and failing to implement the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), initiated during the Obama administration.²⁴ Trump also more fundamentally challenged the shared values of democracy and human rights that underpin the US-led liberal international order. For instance, he embraced autocratic leaders, such as the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has restricted human rights and democracy.²⁵ Through all these actions, Trump challenged many of the key tenets of the US-led international order, complicating transatlantic relations.

Following this disruption, it was a key priority of President Joe Biden to show the world, and the EU in particular, that “America is back.”²⁶ He rejected Trump’s isolationist foreign policy by rejoining important agreements and partnerships such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the WHO. Biden also set out to strengthen trade relations between the US and the EU by creating the US-EU Trade and Technology Council. The 2021 US National Security Strategy and the European Commission alike defined this Council as being based on the common democratic values of the US and EU, presenting it as a reiteration of the commitment to the transatlantic relationship.²⁷ The Council was specially designed to cooperate on common goals such as lowering trade barriers between the United States and the European Union, bolstering global cooperation, and promoting innovation.²⁸ These actions by President Biden were intended to enhance transatlantic relations and cooperation by promoting free trade and multilateral cooperation through institutions. The war in Ukraine inspired even stronger transatlantic cooperation on security issues, as the US and the EU both strongly criticized the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Together, the US and EU coordinated support for Ukraine, while implementing sanctions against Russia.²⁹ With the 2024 elections coming up in November, however, concerns are rising about the future of transatlantic support for Ukraine. These concerns are partly driven by the growing isolationist sentiments in the Republican Party, stretching beyond just Trump to former Republican primary candidates, Congressional members, and voters.³⁰

American isolationism did not start with Donald Trump. In fact, the idea of American withdrawal from the world had its roots in the founding era of the United States.³¹ Isolationist appeal comes partly from the geography of the US: surrounded by wide stretches of oceans on both sides, the illusion is created that the US is removed from affairs and conflicts on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.³² Isolationism never meant a complete withdrawal from the world - even advocates accept that the US be involved in international trade and international treaties that directly benefited US interests - but instead it reflects a desire to stay separate from international security affairs when US interests are not directly threatened.³³ This means that although the US is financially and militarily capable of intervening in the war in Ukraine, it may choose to refrain from doing so since Russia does not pose a direct threat to the US. Isolationism had often been the preferred course of action regarding Europe until the moment the US was drawn into World War. Although the US did eventually intervene in World War I, it was hesitant to enter the war in Europe and waited until 1917 to do so. The notion of ‘American exceptionalism’ has also played a key role in underpinning isolationism, with isolationists in the lead-up to the American entry to World War II arguing that the US

is morally superior to other nations and should lead by example rather than imposing itself through military force.³⁴ This debate between isolationists and internationalists came to a sudden end when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese on December 7, 1941.³⁵ This attack demonstrated that the oceans were no longer a protective barrier and that US interests were directly at stake in the war.³⁶

Isolationist sentiments persisted, however, throughout the postwar era.³⁷ For example, influential Senator Robert Taft ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1952 and advocated for a return to isolationism.³⁸ Currently, the ongoing dispute between internationalism and isolationism was particularly present in the 2024 primaries, with Republican candidates deeply divided on the United States' place in the world, especially with regard to the War in Ukraine. Former Republican primary candidates for the 2024 elections Mike Pence, Nikki Haley, and Chris Christie, for instance, expressed their support for providing Ukraine with American aid. Candidates Ron DeSantis, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Donald Trump, conversely, are very skeptical of American involvement.³⁹ During the first Republican Primary Debate, Ramaswamy argued that it is ridiculous that the US spends military resources to protect somebody else's border, explaining that the US could use that power to protect itself from its own invasion on the southern border, a reference to immigration from Mexico.⁴⁰ The reference to immigration was one of the arguments of isolationist Republican House of Representatives members who were against the 2024 Senate bill for a new financial support package for Ukraine, which the House Speaker, Mike Johnson, refused to bring to a vote for two months.⁴¹

Republican voters are similarly divided on US support for the war in Ukraine. A CNN-SSRS poll from February 2022, right after the start of the war, showed that 65% of the Republican respondents thought that the US should do more to protect Ukraine, whereas 35% thought the US has done enough already.⁴² In July 2023, the same CNN-SSRS poll demonstrated that only 40% of the Republican respondents thought that the US should do more to fight Russian military aggression in Ukraine, whereas 59% thought that the US has already done enough.⁴³ An opinion poll from October 2023 indicated that only 30% of the Republican respondents perceived the defense and protection of Ukraine as the responsibility of the United States.⁴⁴ In short, opinion polls reveal that Republicans have become increasingly hesitant to provide military aid to Ukraine during the period between February 2022 and October 2023.

There are optimistic and pessimistic responses to this growing isolationist sentiment in the Republican Party on transatlantic relations and the US-led international order. The optimistic view acknowledges that Republican (and by extension American) traditions of internationalism and isolationism have always gone back and forth.⁴⁵ This means that the waxing and waning of isolationism as reflected in the Trump and Biden presidencies is a normal occurrence and nothing to be worried about. According to this view, the US would merely temporarily swing towards isolationism if Trump were to be reelected. Trump's successor, in other words, might reinstate strong transatlantic ties. Furthermore, despite isolationist sentiments in the Republican Party, there are still many Republican congressional members and voters who support alliances such as NATO.⁴⁶ Moreover, there is a substantial

majority among Democrats who support US intervention in the war in Ukraine. The opinion poll from July 2023 shows that 61% of the Democrats think the US should do more, against 38% of the Democrats who think the US has done enough.⁴⁷ Hence, even if Republicans grow more isolationist, there will still be many Americans supporting American military aid for Ukraine.

A more pessimistic view is that growing isolationist sentiments could lead to reduced US support for Ukraine. If Trump becomes president, the US and the EU will potentially become more divided over support for Ukraine, which will likely reduce Ukraine's chances of winning the war. Even if Trump does not become president, Republicans could bring down the general US public support for US military support for Ukraine, as the opinion poll of July 2023 shows that overall, Americans who support US involvement in the war in Ukraine make up only 48%, whereas Americans who think the US has already done enough make up 51%.⁴⁸ This reveals that the American public is not only divided, but moreover leaning towards cutting down on support for Ukraine. Even during Biden's presidency, growing resistance to the war among Republicans led to a delay of several months in funding for Ukraine, a crucial period during which Russia made gains.⁴⁹ Rising isolationism in the Republican Party could therefore have a significant impact on the war in Ukraine. Moreover, a failure in Ukraine could weaken the liberal international order and transatlantic relations, as the liberal international order has been dependent on American leadership and the EU has become dependent on US military aid.⁵⁰ This view raises the possibility that isolationist sentiments will lead to a failure to support Ukraine in the war.⁵¹

As the US approaches the 2024 elections, the potential for a shift towards greater isolationism raises concerns about the future of transatlantic relations and global stability. Despite some optimism about the cyclical nature of American foreign policy, the trend towards isolationism within the Republican Party and the declining public support for military aid to Ukraine requires close attention. Following Joseph Nye's argument, the greatest threat to the US-led liberal international order comes from within. It is therefore likely that increasing isolationist sentiments in the Republican Party could lead to reduced US support for Ukraine, which would weaken transatlantic relations and the US-led liberal international order. Europeans must wait to see how the US elections in November 2024 will shape the next four years of transatlantic relations, while also preparing for the potential outcomes.

Notes

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¹⁷ Ikenberry, “Cracks in the Liberal World Order,” 2; Nye, “The Rise and Fall of American Hegemony From Wilson to Trump,” 72-74.

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The Cultural Afterlife of the Middle Passage: Representations of Death in *Amistad* and “atlantic is a sea of bones”

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This paper was written for the course 'Deep Rivers: The Great Migrations in African American History' for the MA North American Studies

The Middle Passage has formed the inspiration for numerous literary and cinematic works, amongst which are Steven Spielberg's film *Amistad* (1997) and Lucille Clifton's poem “atlantic is a sea of bones” (1987). These texts take diverging approaches to telling the story of the Middle Passage, the transatlantic voyage through which European slave traders transported millions of enslaved Africans to the Americas, which not only shapes the cultural memory of the Middle Passage but also continues to affect contemporary issues. Both works build upon a development that started in the 1980s, a decade which has proven to be pivotal in the evolution of Black American literature. African American women writers, especially, were instrumental in redefining the Black literary culture as one that catered to a Black American audience rather than a white audience.¹ Central to this evolving literary tradition was a movement toward a more imaginative and narratological interpretation of history.² In their engagement with Black history, the narratives produced by these women writers were “defying and denying the hold that traditional ways of representing slavery held on creative imaginations” and representing the past as “a dynamic force that they can bend and shape at will to offer significantly revised ways of achieving African American literary creativity.”³

Such subversive literary reinterpretations of Black history, and specifically the Middle Passage, contest the dominant narrative of ‘white enslaver/Black victim’ that has been constructed around the history of slavery.⁴ These interpretations present a “totally different set of characters and totally different possibilities for what those characters can achieve or how they can exist in the world.”⁵ American cinema mirrored these literary developments; film scholar Robert Burgoyne argues that late twentieth-century “historical films seek, on the whole, to recover a different message from the past, a message that will validate the increasingly hybrid and polycultural reality of American life.”⁶ By “combining the viewpoints of dominant and nondominant peoples,” these historical films offer a novel perspective on American history that contributes to a reconstruction of the American cultural identity.⁷

One way in which narratives of the Middle Passage can challenge the ‘white enslaver/Black victim’ binary is through the contrast between realist and speculative interpretations. According to literary scholar Ruth Mayer, “to capture events that were never documented in writing by the one who experienced them might very well require another structure than the realist ones of representation.”⁸ The inevitability of speculation in constructing a narrative around such histories, she argues, can result in different representations of the Middle Passage: to attempt to accurately “reconstruct a lost history” is to limit the fantastic or mythic qualities of a historical narrative in order to tell a story as close as possible to the ‘truth’. Highly speculative stories, however, might attempt “to dismantle the established [history] and give scope to altogether different, highly fantastic scenarios instead.”⁹

An engagement with speculative or fantastic representations of the Middle Passage can thus contribute to the challenging of the dominant historical narrative.

This paper argues that while Clifton's "atlantic is a sea of bones" humanizes the enslaved by highlighting their agency over their oppression, Spielberg's *Amistad* is primarily concerned with offering a realistic portrayal of historical events and does little to challenge the dominant narrative of the Middle Passage. Both of these cultural objects emerged from the aforementioned cultural movement: Clifton was a major contributor to the shifting literary tradition of the 1980s, while Spielberg's work was produced in the aftermath of this cultural revival. By using two different cultural texts – a film and a poem – this analysis seeks to underline that despite the different mechanisms behind these cultural objects, they both complicate the dominant historical narrative of the Middle Passage. Therefore, this paper will approach both cultural objects as texts to deconstruct, thereby allowing for a comparative analysis. Additionally, it is important to take note of the ways in which Spielberg and Clifton's individual identities influence their portrayals of the Middle Passage: Spielberg is a white man and Clifton is a Black American woman. While gender can play an important role in shaping literary and cinematic narratives, this paper is especially interested in how Clifton and Spielberg's ethnicities inform their interpretations.

Central to this paper is an examination of the ways in which Spielberg and Clifton represent death. Because the fictionalization of death within the context of the Middle Passage can have a substantial impact on the portrayal of the agency of Black Americans – death as a demonstration of white domination and Black suffering; or death as escape, consciously chosen over another fate – it is important to consider how literary and cinematic interpretations choose to represent death. However, while many scholars have written about the cultural memory of the Middle Passage in Black American literature, representations of death have not yet been centralized in their analysis. Instead, literary scholars such as Jennifer Terry and Ramesh Mallipeddi approach the study of the Middle Passage from a memory studies perspective, while Rinaldo Walcott and Raphaël Lambert study the narratological representations of the Middle Passage.¹⁰ Literary critic Joanne Chassot is one of the few scholars to engage directly with the way death is implicated in narratives of the Middle Passage. In *Ghosts of the African Diaspora: Re-Visioning History, Memory, & Identity* (2018), she considers the traumatic reality behind the high mortality rate of the enslaved during the Middle Passage, examining the 'living dead,' figures neither alive nor dead, to uncover the lived experience of the Middle Passage.¹¹ While Chassot is primarily concerned with spectrality in narratives of the Middle Passage, this paper also considers the physical and practical implications of death.

This analysis of *Amistad* and "atlantic is a sea of bones" is structured around three themes. The first part is concerned with the conceptualization of the sea as a site of suffering as well as resistance. The second part considers how the issue of anonymity is incorporated into representations of death. The third part revolves around the memories of the dead and their portrayal as both vengeful hauntings and empowering ancestral spirits. By examining these three themes, this paper assesses how each of the cultural objects discussed offers a

representation of the Middle Passage that complicates or contests the dominant historical narrative.

First, any narrative about the Middle Passage necessarily centralizes the Atlantic Ocean. As such, it is important to examine how the sea is conceptualized in both works. Literary scholar Evie Shockley argues that the Middle Passage can be considered, and is often remembered, as a cultural and historical ‘rupture,’ in which the sea is the physical representation of the fracture between Africa and the Americas.¹² Mayer, too, argues that the Atlantic is an “in-between space,” a “paradigmatic space of openness and indeterminacy which gains so radically contradictory connotations once it becomes the setting for abduction, violation, enslavement, and revolt.”¹³ The contrast between the liminality Mayer describes and the captivity of life aboard a slave ship is a central theme in both works. Spielberg’s *Amistad* and Clifton’s “atlantic is a sea of bones” engage with this contrast between liminality and captivity to conceptualize the Atlantic as a site of suffering as well as resistance.

Spielberg’s *Amistad* tells the story of the slave ship the *Amistad*, on which a slave revolt takes place that leaves the captives in charge of the ship. The rebellious captives are ultimately forced to give up their control over the *Amistad*, and the film turns from the Atlantic to the American shores, where the fate of the enslaved is determined in court. In *Amistad*, the liminality of the sea is foregrounded by portraying the sea as an unfathomable, empty space. After the slave revolt has proven successful, a distant shot of the ship suggests it is isolated within the vast, open expanse of the Atlantic.¹⁴ The sea thus seems endless, preventing the enslaved from knowing which way is home and how to get there. In this instance, the liminality of the sea is a disorienting isolation that reinforces the captivity of the enslaved.

This contrast between liminality and captivity is further expanded upon when a British ship encounters the *Amistad*, still under the control of the captives, and sets out to take command over the ship. The leader of the revolt, Cinqué, jumps into the ocean, swimming in a bid to escape from the British. As Cinqué is swimming, his horizon tilts and shifts continuously, reflecting the destabilizing effect the sea has on him and his fellow enslaved.¹⁵ Once Cinqué realizes his escape attempt is futile, he lets himself sink below the surface of the ocean. Underwater, the sea seems serene; Cinqué does not struggle, but instead appears placid and tranquil.¹⁶ The music also changes to reflect this momentary respite. During the chase, the frantic percussion of the soundtrack is overlaid with the shouting of the British sailors and Cinqué’s panting as he swims. Once underwater, however, all background noise fades and is replaced by gentle, melodic vocalizations. Here, the freeing liminality of the sea is contrasted with the isolating effect of the ocean, which is underlined by Cinqué’s inability to get away from his pursuers. The sea is thus not only a liberator but also a facilitator and reinforcer of Cinqué’s captivity.

Cinqué’s conscious choice to let himself sink into the ocean constitutes an act of resistance. In this moment, he considers choosing death over a life in slavery, thereby retaining his agency in spite of the dehumanization inherent in his enslavement. Ultimately, however, he resurfaces and is captured by his British pursuers. To Cinqué, the sea does not

offer salvation. To a nameless enslaved woman, however, the sea *does* offer an escape. Holding a baby in her arms, the woman lets herself fall off the *Amistad* into the ocean.¹⁷ This woman evidently envisages the sea to be a liberator from a worse fate than death, not only for herself but also for her baby. In these instances, Mayer argues, the Atlantic Ocean emerges as “a realm beneath existing lines of power and signification.”¹⁸ Here, the liminality of the sea – the indeterminacy of the Atlantic, a site of nothingness that both isolates and liberates – allows the enslaved a small degree of agency, in which their own life becomes a tool of resistance.

Clifton’s “atlantic is a sea of bones” explores the contrast between liminality and captivity not from the perspective of the enslaved, but from a contemporary perspective. As such, this poem looks back upon history, engaging with the cultural memory of the Middle Passage rather than with the lived experiences of the enslaved. Below is the full text of the poem:

*atlantic is a sea of bones.
my bones.
my elegant afrikans
connecting whydah and new york,
a bridge of ivory.
seabed they call it.
in its arms my early mothers sleep.
some women leapt with their babies in their arms.
some women wept and threw the babies in.
maternal armies pace the atlantic floor.
i call my name into the roar of surf
and something awful answers.*

The poem’s speaker thus conceives of the Atlantic Ocean as “a sea of bones,” with “a bridge of ivory” forming between Africa and the Americas, suggesting the deaths of the Middle Passage are inextricably intertwined with the Atlantic.¹⁹ Similar to *Amistad’s* conception of the sea, this poem offers two opposing interpretations of the Atlantic: the sea as a liberator, a place of comfort and serenity, and the sea as a threat, reinforcing the captivity and isolation of the enslaved. In the lines “some women leapt with their babies in their arms / some women wept and threw the babies in,” the sea, and by extension death, is imagined as a savior rather than a threat.²⁰ The use of the term “seabed” figures the sea as a place of tranquility: the “seabed” is a resting place upon which the speaker’s “early mothers sleep,” a site of comfort and serenity.²¹ By evoking such serene imagery, the Atlantic, and the liberation it offers through death, is imagined as a site that offers a sense of peace after a life of suffering.

On the other hand, the violence of the sea is highlighted through “the roar of surf,” which portrays the sea as a savage and vicious creature.²² The contrast between the peaceful and violent perceptions of the Atlantic is further reinforced in the line: “in its arms my early mothers sleep.”²³ The personified sea holds the “early mothers” in its arms. This can be understood as a soothing and affectionate gesture, in which the sea cradles the dead with

something akin to reverence. Alternatively, in this line the sea can be interpreted as an oppressor, holding the dead captive below the surface. As such, the poem conceives of the sea both as a site of serenity and violence. The liminality of the Atlantic offers liberation through death, but simultaneously it reinforces the captivity of the enslaved, not only in life but also in death.

The sea thus plays a central role in shaping the Middle Passage narrative in *Amistad* and “atlantic is a sea of bones”. Both these texts offer portrayals of the sea not only as a place of isolation and disorientation but also as a liberator. Representing the Atlantic Ocean as a potential site of escape allows Spielberg and Clifton to emphasize the slight degree of agency the enslaved retained during the Middle Passage. Rather than presenting death as something solely inflicted upon the enslaved by their oppressor, these narratives suggest that consciously and independently choosing death constitutes an act of resistance. By engaging with the ambiguity of death as an act of release and an act of violence, these texts do not approach the Middle Passage according to the ‘white enslaver/Black victim’ binary, but offer a narrative of resistance and self-determination, even under the harshest of circumstances.²⁴

Second, the way in which both works engage with the irreversible anonymity of the enslaved shapes their narrative of the Middle Passage. Very few first-hand accounts of the Middle Passage survive in narrative form. By contrast, quantitative records detailing the number of slaves bought, sold, and deceased have been incorporated into an extensive corpus.²⁵ Within these records, the enslaved are considered to be objects or commodities and are reduced to complete anonymity. Spielberg and Clifton each incorporate the issue of anonymity differently in their representations of the Middle Passage and of death in particular. While Spielberg does not actively challenge the enforced anonymity of the enslaved, Clifton reframes the captives’ obscurity to offer a story of empowerment rather than oppression. The way in which these texts engage with the anonymity of the enslaved informs how their narratives contest or conform to the dominant historical narrative.

Spielberg’s film does not deviate much from the historical accounts of the *Amistad* in its treatment of anonymity and does not explicitly challenge the obscurity to which the enslaved have been condemned. Only one captive, Cinqué, is given a name, a voice, and a distinctive individuality. The other captives only function as a group. They are Cinqué’s nameless shipmates and little distinction is made between them or between their various cultural backgrounds. Their anonymity is foregrounded when a number of captives are disposed of during the Middle Passage. During this scene, a group of enslaved men and women are chained together and, when one of them is thrown overboard by the crew, the others are dragged down into the Atlantic as well.²⁶ By portraying these numerous deaths in one single sequence, the emphasis lies on the number of deaths rather than on the victims themselves, while no effort is made to emphasize their humanity or individuality.

Instead of centralizing the African captives, Spielberg primarily focuses on the American men who are portrayed as the saviors of the enslaved. The abolitionists who concern themselves with the defense of the *Amistad* captives, aided by former president John Quincy Adams, are awarded a significantly higher degree of individuality than the enslaved. With these characters, legal scholar Jonathan van Patten argues, Spielberg has taken some

liberties. Not all of the American abolitionists are based on real people, for instance, and Adams' involvement in the trial has been overstated significantly. According to Van Patten, however, “[s]torytelling does not have to be factual to teach us important truths.”²⁷ While this is certainly true, the fact that Spielberg draws on the distortive effects of storytelling to bring white American men – and, notably, a former US president – into a more central and heroic position within the story, but *not* to challenge the anonymity or dehumanization of the enslaved, is an important factor that shapes his Middle Passage narrative. In their analysis of *Amistad*, film scholars Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper offer an explanation for these narrative choices. They argue that the subject of slavery in American film is often treated with “a bland political relativism,” in which the effort to offer a humane portrayal of the enslaved is “married to a contradictory but pragmatic need to rescue some aspect of what constitutes ‘America’ in the eyes of the audience.”²⁸ According to this theory, the predominantly white American context in which *Amistad* was produced and received informs the positions of both the African captives and the (white) American abolitionists. Spielberg’s narrative of the Middle Passage places the experience of the enslaved as secondary to the American abolition movement. As such, *Amistad* makes little effort to contest the anonymity of the enslaved and is instead more concerned with upholding idealistic notions about American history and identity. Consequently, Spielberg’s approach to the issue of anonymity mostly conforms to the dominant historical narrative of the Middle Passage.

While Spielberg largely maintains the obscurity of the captives, Clifton weaponizes the historical anonymity of the enslaved and presents it as a strength. The speaker conceives of the Middle Passage victims as an anonymous collective. They are referred to as “my early mothers” and “maternal armies,” thereby casting each one of them into the same empowering, ancestral role.²⁹ This anonymous collective is thus not an impersonal, estranged group – instead, as Rachel Elizabeth Harding argues, Clifton bridges the divide between personal and collective history by envisioning them as “mothers.”³⁰ This emphasis on kinship is reinforced by the speaker’s identification with these ancestors in the first lines: “atlantic is a sea of bones / my bones / my elegant afrikans.”³¹ Here, the speaker bridges the gap between the past and present, bringing the Middle Passage victims out of oblivion and into a contemporary context.

The anonymity of the “early mothers” is not only shaped by this sense of kinship. It is also strongly associated with a vengeful anger. The “maternal armies” that “pace the atlantic floor” contrast the warmth associated with motherhood with the violence of warfare.³² This juxtaposition evokes the image of a fiercely protective ancestral connection, which is further emphasized in the poem’s final lines: “i call my name into the roar of surf / and something awful answers.”³³ The use of ‘something’ rather than ‘someone’ contributes to the dehumanization of the enslaved, though the ominous subtext of these lines suggests that, here, the dehumanization of the enslaved is being reclaimed in a contemporary context. While the anonymity of the victims of the Middle Passage cannot be changed – their identities are irretrievably lost – the *perception* of this anonymity *can* be changed. To be a nameless captive in the Atlantic slave trade is to be oppressed and passive. To be integrated into cultural memory as a menacing, anonymous collective, conversely, is to be empowered.

The obscurity of the Middle Passage victims thus becomes a strength rather than a loss. Clifton's narrative casts the anonymous masses as an empowering ancestral body. Consequently, their dehumanization becomes a signifier not of oppression, but of vengeance.

The cultural objects discussed in this paper thus take distinct approaches to the issue of anonymity. Spielberg's *Amistad* makes little effort to humanize the enslaved, who are secondary to the white American characters within the narrative. Spielberg distorts the historical narrative, not to foreground the humanity of the enslaved, but to present a more idealistic version of American history and of abolitionism in particular. Clifton, on the other hand, does not try to circumvent the anonymity of the victims of the Middle Passage. Instead, her work reframes their anonymity and dehumanization to turn them into figures of power, redemption, and vengeance, rather than figures of oppression and suffering. As such, the representations of the anonymous captives – both alive and dead – shape two deeply distinctive narratives of the Middle Passage.

Third, Spielberg and Clifton take diverging approaches to the representation of hauntings. With death being an inevitable element of the Atlantic crossing, the cultural response of the enslaved to death was an important aspect that shaped the experience of the Middle Passage. In precolonial West African cultures, historian Stephanie Smallwood argues, “death entailed a change that resulted not in disconnection or disappearance but rather in its antithesis: a new kind of connection in the form of ancestral involvement in the life of kin and community.”³⁴ As such, death “preserved and indeed strengthened an unbroken continuity” – one that was ultimately disrupted by the transatlantic slave trade.³⁵ Dying at sea or on the other side of the Atlantic was believed to sever the connection between the soul of the deceased and the realm of the ancestors. Their disappearance from their ancestral lands, Smallwood explains, was believed “to put saltwater slaves beyond both the physical and metaphysical reach of kin.” As such, the Middle Passage threatened the enslaved “in their capacity to die honorably and thereby continue to exist meaningfully.”³⁶ Many narratives of the Middle Passage engage with these deep-rooted concerns about death and kinship through representations of spectrality. The two works discussed in this paper conceptualize ghostly figures and memories of the dead in distinct ways. Whereas Spielberg primarily presents spiritualism as a cultural difference between the African enslaved and the American abolitionists, Clifton portrays hauntings as a means of signifying the lasting impact of the Middle Passage.

In Spielberg's *Amistad*, ghosts are only a marginal part of the narrative. The first mention of spectrality is made when the captives of the *Amistad* are held in an American prison. The enslaved want to honor a deceased shipmate. When the warden prevents them from carrying out their ritual, unrest spreads among the captives. During a visit from the captives' lawyer, Mr. Baldwin, the warden explains: “One of them died last night. We tried to take the body away to bury it.” Mr. Baldwin replies: “Well, what do they want? They want to live with it?” The interpreter Mr. Baldwin has employed provides him with an answer: “They want to bury him. They have to bury him according to their Poro beliefs. Otherwise, his soul will haunt them forever.”³⁷ The way Cinqué and his shipmates engage with spirituality is thus exclusively focalized through an American perspective, which effectively distances Mr.

Baldwin and his fellow Americans from the concept of spectrality and ‘Others’ the cultural beliefs of the enslaved.

This distance is reinforced when spirits are discussed for the second and final time in the narrative. In preparation for the final trial deciding the fate of the Amistad captives, Cinqué and John Quincy Adams discuss their defense. Before leaving, Cinqué suggests they will not be alone during the trial: “I will call into the past, far back to the beginning of time, and beg [my ancestors] to come and help me at the judgement. I will reach back and draw them into me. And they must come, for at this moment, I am the whole reason they have existed at all.”³⁸ In his final speech during the trial, Adams draws on this conversation: “See, the Mende believe that if one can summon the spirit of one’s ancestors then they have never left, and the wisdom and strength they fathered and inspired will come to his aid.”³⁹ Having made this statement, Adams invokes previous American presidents to question whether or not the founding principles of the US should allow for the oppression of the Amistad captives. Here, African spirituality is again focalized through an American perspective. Spielberg thus chooses not to represent how spectrality affects the African captives but is instead concerned with how their beliefs can be integrated into American culture. *Amistad* finds resolution by turning to familiar American structures of law and order. Adopting this American-centric perspective limits Spielberg’s ability to represent the “estrangement and angst” of the Middle Passage, which, as Mayer suggests, are more adequately portrayed through “fantastic, mythic, or grotesque narratives.”⁴⁰ Prioritizing the American perspective over the African perspective in *Amistad*, therefore, reinforces rather than contests the marginalization of the enslaved and their culture.

The ghosts in Clifton’s “atlantic is a sea of bones” function as a connection between the past and the present. These ghosts are not figured as passive specters, but as “maternal armies” that “pace the atlantic floor.”⁴¹ Their pacing constitutes a repetitive motion, signifying restlessness and a lack of resolution, which implies that the trauma that caused their ghostly presence has not yet been resolved. Although slavery was abolished long before this poem was written and the civil rights movement had, to an extent, reformed American society, “atlantic is a sea of bones” suggests that the oppression of the Middle Passage captives continues to impact American society into the twentieth century. According to sociologist Avery F. Gordon, “haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done.”⁴² In the poem, this ‘something-to-be-done’ is a call for change in the present: by framing the oppression of the Middle Passage victims as an unresolved trauma, Clifton suggests that this oppression continues to shape contemporary generations through persistent racial inequality.

This connection between past and present is reinforced in the final lines of the poem: “i call my name into the roar of surf / and something awful answers.”⁴³ The Atlantic ghosts respond to the call of the speaker as an ominous, vengeful entity. The tenderness with which these hostile ghosts are described earlier in the poem – as “my elegant afrikans” and “my early mothers” – reinforces the connection between the speaker and the Middle Passage victims.⁴⁴ This kinship suggests that the speaker and other (imagined) descendants of the Middle Passage victims face the same struggle against racial oppression. As such, the

spectrality in Clifton's work calls attention to the fact that the past is not really the past, as the historical oppression and inequality that shaped the Middle Passage continue to haunt the present.

The distinct approaches to ghostliness in these two works thus highlight different aspects of the Middle Passage and the way the enslaved experienced it. *Amistad* frames the spectrality of the enslaved through an American lens, thereby centralizing the American perspective rather than the perspective of the Middle Passage captives. By contrast, Clifton's poem emphasizes the way in which the past continues to affect the present, using the figure of the ghost to suggest that the trauma of the Middle Passage has not yet been resolved. Hence, Spielberg and Clifton choose to approach spectrality in different ways that respectively foreground the cultural difference between African captives and white Americans and a lack of resolution to the cultural trauma of the Middle Passage.

In conclusion, *Amistad* and "atlantic is a sea of bones" each tell a different story about the Middle Passage. The speculative liberties taken in both texts shape their engagement with and subversion of the dominant historical narrative. As evidenced by this analysis, Spielberg largely conforms to the dominant historical narrative. While *Amistad* emphasizes the resistance of the captives, it does little to contest the anonymity of the enslaved, nor does it engage with the redeeming or defiant interpretations of spectrality. Clifton's poem, by contrast, takes an almost mythical approach to the Middle Passage which subverts the dominant historical narrative. Through her representations of the sea, anonymity and spectrality, Clifton portrays the enslaved as autonomous agents and individual humans rather than as oppressed victims. Death, inevitable as it is in the history of the transatlantic slave trade, thus plays an important role in shaping the cultural memory of the Middle Passage and its victims.

The renewed attention to African American history and the Middle Passage in American literature and cinema remains of great importance in the twenty-first century. Numerous films, poems, and novels continue to build upon the cultural movement of the 1980s, offering a variety of new interpretations of the Middle Passage. Among these works are Guy Deslauriers' film *Passage du Milieu* (2000) which portrays the lifeless monotony and everyday violence of the Middle Passage instead of focusing on a single dramatic incident, Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy* (2008) in which the Middle Passage is recalled alternately from the perspective of the slave traders and the enslaved, and Rivers Solomon's novella *The Deep* (2019) which offers an Afrofuturist interpretation of an underwater world populated by the descendants of the enslaved who did not survive the Middle Passage. The distinct approaches these works take to remembering and focalizing the Middle Passage allow them to tell different stories of suffering, dehumanization, and resistance.

Comparing the various approaches to representing the Middle Passage in these cultural objects reveals the importance of assessing the ways in which literary and cinematic works engage with history. Through diverging focalizations - prioritizing either white American or Black American perspectives - the film and poem discussed here offer distinct interpretations of history. These interpretations are not only relevant in relation to the

histories with which they engage but also within the present-day context. Cultural objects that perpetuate the silencing of the African enslaved during the Middle Passage do little to contest the enduring marginalization of Black Americans in contemporary US society. Cultural objects that challenge the silencing implicit in the dominant historical narrative of the Middle Passage, conversely, can offer an interpretation of history that empowers rather than oppresses. Therefore, it is of great importance to be aware of the ways in which cultural objects mediate history and the effects their interpretations have on contemporary society.

Notes

¹ Trudier Harris, "Those Dazzling African American Women Writers of the 1980s," in *African American Literature in Translation, 1980-1990*, eds. D. Quentin Miller & Rich Blint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023): 19.

² Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 4.

³ Harris, "Those Dazzling African American Women Writers," 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at US History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸ Ruth Mayer, "'Africa as an Alien Future': The Middle Passage, Afrofuturism, and Postcolonial Waterworlds," *American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): 556.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 566.

¹⁰ Rinaldo Walcott, "Middle Passage: In the Absence of Detail, Presenting and Representing a Historical Void," *Kronos* 44 (2018): 64; Jennifer Terry, "'When the Sea of Living Memory has Receded': Cultural Memory and Literary Narratives of the Middle Passage," *Memory Studies* 6, no. 4 (2013); Ramesh Mallipeddi, "'A Fixed Melancholy': Migration, Memory, and the Middle Passage," *The Eighteenth Century* 55, no. 2 (2014); Raphaël Lambert, "The Slave Trade as Memory and History: James A. Emanuel's 'The Middle Passage Blues' and Robert Hayden's 'Middle Passage'," *African American Review* 47, no. 2/3 (2014).

¹¹ Joanne Chassot, *Ghosts of the African Diaspora: Re-Visioning, Memory, & Identity* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2018), 39.

¹² Evie Shockley, "Going Overboard: African American Poetic Innovation and the Middle Passage," *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 4 (2011): 795.

¹³ Mayer, "'Africa as an Alien Future'," 556.

¹⁴ Steven Spielberg, *Amistad* (Glendale: DreamWorks Distribution, 1997): 00:05:30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 00:16:10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 00:16:40, 00:16:46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 01:21:35.

¹⁸ Mayer, "'Africa as an Alien Future'," 561.

¹⁹ Lucille Clifton, "atlantic is a sea of bones," in *Next: New Poems* (Rochester: BOA Editions, 1987), line 1, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ Harris, "Those Dazzling African American Women Writers," 20.

²⁵ Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

²⁶ Spielberg, *Amistad*, 01:23:30.

²⁷ Jonathan K. Van Patten, "The Trial of Cinqué - Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*," *South Dakota Law Review* 67, no. 1 (2022): 94.

²⁸ Trevor McCrisken and Andrew Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 41.

²⁹ Clifton, "atlantic," 7, 10.

³⁰ Rachel Elizabeth Harding, "Authority, History, and Everyday Mysticism in the Poetry of Lucille Clifton: A Womanist View," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 1 (2014): 38.

³¹ Clifton, “atlantic,” 1-3.

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ Ibid., 11-12.

³⁴ Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 58.

³⁵ Ibid., 59.

³⁶ Ibid., 61.

³⁷ Spielberg, *Amistad*, 01:07:20-01:07:48.

³⁸ Ibid., 02:07:05-02:07:55.

³⁹ Ibid., 02:16:00.

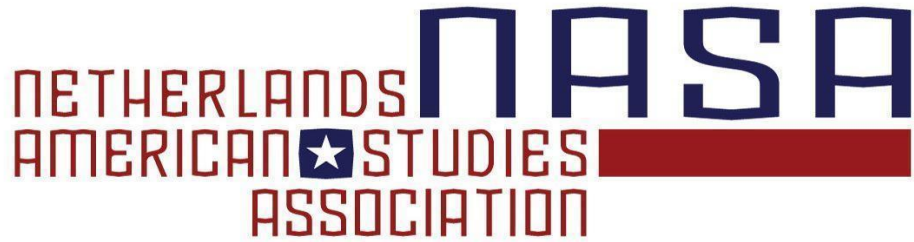
⁴⁰ Mayer, “‘Africa as an Alien Future’,” 555-56.

⁴¹ Clifton, “atlantic,” 10.

⁴² Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xvi.

⁴³ Clifton, “atlantic,” 11-12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3, 7.



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