Volume 14 Issue 1

LEVIATHAN

BORDERS and BELONGING

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DEAR READERS,

I am pleased to bring you our first issue of Leviathan for this academic year: 'Borders and Belonging.' In a world that increasingly challenges established notions of identity and dimensions of all kinds, this issue covers a range of topics that shape our understanding and place within the contemporary world. When we think about borders many of us may think of national borders on a map, stagnant and unchanging. However, as the essays in this issue exemplify, our world is shaped by many types of borders and rarely are even the borders of states as concrete as we imagine. Similarly, our notions of belonging often artificially restrict how we view and interact with the world. The pieces in this issue of Leviathan seek to challenge the fixity of both borders and belonging, and present unique perspectives on how the world is constructed by our social interactions.

Thanks to the hard work of the Leviathan editing team and the support of the Edinburgh Political Union, this issue of Leviathan includes more and longer essays than our previous issues. This has allowed us to provide a platform for more students to express their ideas and issues they are passionate about. Under the theme of 'Borders and Belonging', our writers have presented a diverse set of views on the complex intersections between identity, culture, and geographical boundaries, offering nuanced perspectives on the human experience of inclusion and exclusion.

Our issue begins with Amelia Chesworth's highly relevant investigation of the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, emphasizing the important of territory in the historical dispute. Isabella Chambers follows, examining the ways in which social media challenges predominant perceptions of refugees and their stories. Directly addressing issues of belonging, Molly McKenzie analyses the dangers of allowing states to strip citizenship from individuals, which leaves many stateless. Following, Samhita Gadang demonstrates the harmful effects of the 'model minority myth' which exemplifies the Asian American communities but simultaneously isolates them. Drawing on personal experience, Nina Shariff argues that in contrast to traditional concepts of territorially bound ethnic or national groups, the Ismaili community has maintained a sense of identity and community despite the community's transnational nature. Jordan Fox focuses on Hong Kong, and the development of a distinct Hong Kong identity that continues to exist despite Mainland China's efforts. After, Allie Mackey observes the disconnect between the US Democratic Party's promises and the Party's concrete actions especially in areas such as housing and policing. Grappling with the overturn of affirmative action in the US, William Fieni-Thies argues in favour of other policies to address the critical inequality in higher education.

Addressing directly the nature of borders, Johanna Nesselhauf provides the Spanish-Moroccan border as a case study for the socially constructed nature of borders and the impact of borders. Examining the history of Hong Kong, Adeline Cheung presents the concept of 'liminality' to understand Hong Kong identity and arguing in favour of a more imaginative approach to current debates about Hong Kong. Recounting the tragic history of the Armenian Genocide, Julia Bahadrian analyses how the event has shaped Armenian culture and the groups self-perception. Revisiting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gwynne Capiraso provides an account that focuses on the role of British imperialism in fermenting war. Finally, Emmi Wilkinson provides a wonderful deconstruction of the myth of Nordic perfection by emphasizing the regions troubled relationship with the Sámi people.

This issue is only possible thanks to the committed work from the Leviathan team, our writers, and the Edinburgh Political Union. I would like to thank you for all that you have contributed over these months and the time that you have given up making this issue as great as possible. We have already begun work on our next issue of Leviathan, 'Revolt and Reform', which will be even larger than this issue.

I hope that you enjoy reading these pieces as much as we have been working on them!

Sincerely,

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Land, Not Faith

Amelia Chesworth

The prolonged and pervasive issue of possession and dispossession of land is integral in understanding the current conflict between Israel and Hamas. The violence is not an isolated phenomenon, nor can it be conceptualised through an exclusively religious lens. Whilst Hamas (quoted in Middle East Eye 2017, 1) claims to be operating within an Islamic 'frame of reference' and the Israeli Knesset (governing legislative body) proclaimed Israel as the 'national home of the Jewish people' in 2018, the ownership of land is the predominant vector through which any expression of sovereignty is made (Benvenisti and Lustig 2018). The possession of land was integral in the determining of fortunes in Mandatory Palestine in the twentieth century, becoming synonymous with sovereignty (Cleveland 2017, 31-59). It was the ownership of land that provided for the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948, ending the British and United Nations (UN) mandate and signalling the success of the cause of Zionism over Palestinian Arabs. The increasing establishment of illegal settlements by Israelis is indicative of their dominance, with 279 settlements across the occupied West Bank and fourteen in occupied East Jerusalem, including at least 147 that are illegal even under domestic law (High Commissioner for Human Rights 2023). It is impossible to understand the current state of hostilities without reference to historical claims to land, the support given to claims of sovereignty by international actors, and the organisational capabilities of both sides.

Firstly, it must be said that Zionism and Judaism are not synonymous. Judaism is a monotheistic Abrahamic faith based on beliefs and practices derived by G-d (God) and revealed to Jewish people through the Torah (Hebrew Bible) and subsequent writings in the Talmud, a record of rabbinic debates from the third and sixth century on the teachings of the Torah (Freeman, n.d.; Posner, n.d.). In this manner, Judaism is a religion, whereas Zionism is a nationalist political movement, established 150 years ago by Theodor Herzl. Herzl (1896) called for emigration to the so-called Jewish 'historic home' as a reaction to oppression of Jewish people in diaspora, such as historic instances of expulsion as seen in England under Edward I (1290) (Byrne 2017), and nineteenth- and twentieth-century pogroms in Eastern Europe, such as the Kishinev pogrom in 1903 that prompted Herzl to advocate for temporary Jewish refuge in Uganda (Jewish Virtual Library 2023). As the movement is in itself nationalist, it includes Jewish people who are both religious and secular, united by the common goal of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. It is therefore inaccurate to suggest that all religious Jews are Zionists, or that all cultural Jews support the state of Israel. Belief is a spectrum, and the targeting of any Jewish person for the actions of the Israeli government is inexcusable. This is an especially pertinent point when one considers antisemitism in the United Kingdom rose by 147% percent over the course of 2023 with 66% occurring on or after 7 October (Community Security Trust 2024).

It is similarly important to note that Hamas' ideology

and methods are not necessarily reflective of the belief of the broader Palestinian population. Hamas was formed by members of the Islamist organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood (Robinson 2023). The Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s operated under founder Hasan al-Bana's call to unite religion and politics through a return to a strict Sunni interpretation of the Qur'an, and this was developed into an Islamic Resistance Movement (English translation of Hamas) after the first Palestinian Intifada (uprising) in 1987 (Sharp and Iyengar 2023), whilst the PLO was established in 1964 as an organisational framework that contains most Palestinian associations to give voice to Palestinian national consciousness (Robinson 2023; Hamid 1975, 90). Whilst Hamas have governed over the territory of the Gaza Strip since 2005, the Palestinian Authority (PA) have governed over the West Bank since the mid-1990s as a result of the Oslo Accord negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) (Al Jazeera 2023). In this manner, the extent to which a Palestinian national consciousness can be orated is questioned because of split leadership. Hamas cannot be considered to be wholly representative of the Palestinian people as it does not have the international recognition afforded to the PA and can be instead conceptualised as a breakaway group associated with extreme Islamic fundamentalism (Al Jazeera 2023). Yet, whilst religion and the concept of jihad may motivate their acts of terror as displayed on 7 October, it must be noted that it is the issue of land dispossession and oppression of the Palestinian people that has provoked certain sects of Palestinian resistance to the types of extremism currently being displayed by Hamas (Hubbard and Abi-Habib 2023).

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Claims to the Holy Land were made by both Israelis and Palestinians on a historical basis: the Jewish tie to Abraham and his descendants, and the Palestinian's link to the Philistines and early Arab settlers (Gelvin 2014, 7–11). The Zionist turn towards statehood occurred due to the issue of Jewish oppression in the diaspora (Cleveland 2017, 32). The First Zionist Congress of 1897 institutionalised these beliefs, demonstrating that since the late nineteenth century, the Zionists had the administrative organs from which a state could be constructed (Cleveland 2017, 33). Palestinian nationalism was similarly routed in homogenising a diaspora decimated by early Turkish invasions and later European imperialism (Gelvin 2014, 11–12). Palestine became a British mandate in 1923 after it was conceded by the Ottoman Empire and given formal sanction by the League of Nations (Cleveland 2017, 35-6). In this manner, Britain's decision to institute the Balfour Declaration in 1917 was viewed by indigenous Palestinians as a continuation of imperialism, as it dictated the rights of Jewish migration to the mandate territory (Gelvin 2014, 90-1). Prior to this declaration, approximately 25,000 Jewish settlers resided in Palestine due to the four 'aliyot' (waves of immigration) under the Ottoman Empire. This immigration was limited, standing at seventeen percent of the total population (figured calculated in 1931) (CJPME 2013). Yet, the Balfour Declaration was a result of talks between the Zionist Chaim Weizmann and the Faysal of Syria, facilitated by the British, that gave de-jure legitimacy to Zionists to possess land in the region (Cleveland 2017, 35). The role of Britain is salient in that the British government were convinced of the power of Jewish people in national governments, a common antisemitic trope (Cleveland 2017, 35). Resultantly, Britain believed that appeasing Zionists would subsequently increase Jewish pressure on the Russian state to remain in World War I (Cleveland 2017, 35).

The British colonial administration then went further in recognising the 1920 National Assembly, a Zionist legislative body. This action legitimised the accruement of approximately ten percent of cultivable land by the Jewish National Fund by 1939 (Cleveland 2017, 46). The Zionist purchase of land in the interwar period signalled the belief that "to claim 'property' in land is to aggregate at least a limited form of sovereignty over the land" (Yacobi and Milner 2022, 45). Concurrently, Palestinians were being dispossessed of land, despite their population still outnumbering Israelis two to one by 1946 (Smith 2017, 252). As cultivable land was bought up by centralised Zionist organisations, the Shaw Report of 1929 noted that the primary tension between the two communities was the 'creation of a landless class of discontented Arabs' (Cleveland 2017, 47). Whilst historians such as Shabtai Teveth would argue that Jewish settlers were "heroic" in their efforts to compromise with Palestinian leaders, who themselves were "exceedingly inept" in their diplomatic efforts and constant refusal to negotiate on agreements, Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian-American historian, highlights that Palestine

was consistently undermined as a Mandate (Teveth 1989, 26; Smith 2020, 257). The British did not honour the precedent set in other Arab mandates of sovereignty residing with the national majority, since all the agreements required the acknowledgment of the Balfour Declaration, which "denied [Palestinians] the rights which should flow from majority status" (Khalidi 2012, 18). In this manner, there was little incentive for Palestinian leaders to make accommodations for Zionists. It could be said that Palestinian leadership was ineffective of its own accord, citing the ancient rivalries between houses al-Husayni and Nashashibi as causes of factionalism and therefore an inability to coordinate policy or ideology (Smith 2017, 252). Yet, the continuous efforts of the British to manipulate and divide Palestinian leadership must be recognised. It was the British who appointed two members of the feuding families as Mufti and Mayor of Jerusalem, and it was the British who rejected the creation of an Arab Executive at the Third Palestinian Arab Congress in 1919, arguably the best attempt at homogenising the Palestinian approach. Even the later creation of the Arab Higher Committee in 1936 was viewed as too late to solve factionalism (Cleveland 2017, 48). In this manner, the Israelis were afforded the institutions, relative ideological homogeneity, and international support to launch claims to land sovereignty, whilst Palestinian efforts were thwarted by the British.

The British only offered the Palestinians terms that all parties knew that they could not accept, facilitating settler colonialism through a provision in the Balfour Declaration that required Palestinians to relinquish their claims to sovereignty (Cleveland 2017, 38). The Arab Revolts of 1936–1939 were thus emblematic of a militant advocation for sovereignty, demanding "restrictions on immigration and land sales and the establishment of a democratic government" (Cleveland 2017, 48). However, it was seen as a turning point for Palestinian fortunes as factionalism and the absence of a cohesive central leadership saw Israeli's troops, supported by Soviet Union weaponry and 20,000 British soldiers, overwhelmed "spontaneous and locally led" Palestinian protests (Cleveland 2017, 49). It should be noted that the Zionist relationship with Britain did fracture between 1945 and 1947, as the Jewish Agency defied the 1939 migration quotas by bringing Jewish people to Palestine illegally, as well as carried out acts of terror such as the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British minister of state in the Middle East, in 1944 (Cleveland 2017, 52). However, the early British financial and political support for the Zionist cause, the horrors of the Holocaust, and the US' continuous lobby for a Jewish state and uncontrolled migration, had already cemented Israelis' legitimacy over migration and land ownership (Cleveland 2017, 31-61). In this manner, the sabotage campaign against the British did not discredit this legitimacy – rather, it proved to be a driving factor that forced the British to hand over the mandate to the UN. Thus, it allowed the narrative of the massacre at Dayr Yasin (9 April 1948) and the consequent migration of Palestinians to be dominated by Israeli sources. The official Israeli position was that Arab leaders were telling Palestinians to leave the region in preparation for an annihilation of Israel that would see Arab armies "push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive" (Teveth 1989, 29). However, emerging historiography characterised by Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim argues that scare tactics and regionally led expulsions by the Israelis occurred, and that "their extent was greater" than first conceptualised (Beinen 2004, 43).

Morris convincingly argues that Israeli reports betray themselves in admitting that seventy percent of Arabs had fled due to "direct, hostile Jewish operations," and the prevailing conclusion sides with Palestinian Arabs (Teveth 1989, 29; Beinen 2004, 38). The forcible seizure of land by the Israelis as a result of the UN resolution to partition Palestine in 1947 and the subsequent proclamation of the state of Israel on 14 May 14, 1948, is characterised by Palestinians as the 'Nakba', or 'the Catastrophe' (Jewish Voice for Peace 2015). These events led to an Arab League invasion of Israel comprising of Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen (Office of the Historian 2023). However, the League was ultimately too divided to be a match for the Israelis, who received considerable backing from the United States under President Harry Truman through their official recognition of the state of Israel (Smith 2017, 251). Furthermore, territorial ambitions can be observed in the collusion between King Abdullah of Transjordan and Israeli politician, and future Prime Minister, Golda Meir (Shlaim 1998, 428). King Abdullah's maintenance of a defensive position and "tacit alliance" with the Israelis is yet another example of how land ownership, or the potential of it, played a defining role, in this case of splitting the Arab cause and diminishing the chance of Palestinian success in the invasion (Shlaim 1998, 2).

The Nakba is further proven as an act of Israeli aggression against Palestinians through Ilan Pappé's (2007) examination of "Plan Dalet," a strategy im-

plemented by Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion in 1948. This strategy invoked the Jewish Brigade to gain control of Palestinian villages through "occupation, destruction and expulsion," and this often occurred with extreme violence, such as the occupation of Tantura by the Alexandroni Brigade on May 21, 1948 (Pappé 2007, 106-7; Pappé 2007, 155). Pappé highlights that Brigade members shot 110 to 230 Palestinian men and rounded up Palestinian women and children to "see their dead husbands, fathers, and brothers and terrorise them" (al-Khatib's recording of a Palestinian's testimony in Pappé 2007, 159). The Nakba shattered the Palestinian population, with the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia fleeing the territory in exile, mostly to surrounding Arab states, leaving a largely rural class largely concentrated in Egyptian-controlled Gaza. After the Nakba, Israel now possessed seventy-eight percent of Palestine, twenty-five percent more than the UN partition plan dictated (Jewish Voice for Peace 2015, 3). Resultantly in 2023 there are an estimated seven million Palestinian refugees, and this number can only be inferred to be ever-increasing due to the ongoing conflict (Refugees International n.d.).

Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians is an undeniable atrocity, with approximately 1,507 Israelis killed by Palestinians from the beginning of the First Intifada (December 1987) to post-Cast Lead in 2012 (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2012). However, whilst the violence enacted by the Israeli government is rooted in the expansion of land settlements, such as the seizure of East Jerusalem in 1967 that was defined by the UN Resolution 2334 (2016, 2) as a "flagrant violation under international law," the violence from Palestinians is rooted in attempts to establish sovereignty stolen from them. The importance of land ownership imbues all factors that contributed to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the possession of land signified sovereignty. This sovereignty has been used to expand territory since 1948, thus further dispossessing Palestinians of land and invoking certain sects of Palestinian resistance to the types of extremism currently being displayed by Hamas. The role of Britain should not be forgotten in this process, as it impeded Palestinian political organisation by exploiting historical family divides, and by legitimising Israel's rule.

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This article has been edited by Jasmine Khelil (Regional Editor for the Middle East and North Africa Region) and Toni Dumitriu (Chief Regional Editor), copy edited by Milly Mason Holt (Copy Editor) and Gesa Maassen (Chief Copy Editor), peer reviewed by Kushmila Ranasinghe (Peer Reviewer), checked and approved by the following executives: Grace Hitchcock (Deputy Editor-in-Chief) and Jay McClure (Editor-in-Chief).

Artwork by James Wake

Empowering Marginalized Voices: The Role of Social Media in Redefining Refugee Narratives

Isabella Chambers

Spreading information is a hallmark of human society. From town criers of old to today's tweets, the way we give and receive information is ever-evolving. Globalisation has resulted in unprecedented levels of human interaction and more people than ever before have access to channels through which to receive information. Mainstream media is the biggest disseminator of information and can be conceptualised as for-profit TV broadcasts, newspapers, and radio programs (McCurdy 2012, 245). However, the digital age has brought competition in the information-sharing sphere: social media. Social media allows any person with access to a phone and internet connectivity to share their perspective. Previously marginalised voices can be brought to the forefront of crises that involve them. The paradigm shift in media consumption carries profound implications, particularly when examining how refugee narratives are framed and portrayed. This article delves into the neo-colonialist implications of Western mainstream media's homogenisation of the refugee narrative. By examining case studies derived from mainstream media and social media representations of the Syrian refugee crisis, this article argues that social media serves as a potent instrument in challenging neo-colonialist stereotypes and presenting a more authentic narrative.

The homogenisation of refugee narratives refers to the tendency of media outlets to present refugees and their experiences in a standardised, one-dimensional manner, often reducing their stories to oversimplified tropes and clichés (Wojcieszak 2008, 359). One of the most prevalent ways mainstream media homogenises refugee narratives is through dehumanisation and victimisation. Particularly, fringe media outlets are intent on capturing a wider audience; they deploy visual strategies to construct an 'otherness' associated with vulnerable communities (Bleiker et al. 2013, 402). This 'denial of humanness' is a mechanistic way of transforming the 'other' into passive objects deprived of their agency, thus refugees are viewed as a collective mass of victims, rather than acknowledging the individual harms suffered (Martikainen and Sakki 2021, 237). Their stories are reduced to tragic stereotypes. News outlets have articles dedicated to the facts and figures of the crisis, naming tens of thousands of dead refugees in the Mediterranean as an example of failed policy (BBC News 2015). By focusing on immediate conflicts or disasters without delving into the structural, economic, and political factors that contribute to displacement, the viewers are left with an incomplete picture (Hadžić 2021, 64). This oversimplification can lead to a shallow understanding of the root causes, hindering efforts to address and prevent future refugee crises (Coleman and Ross 2010, 137).

More insidiously, the homogenisation observed in these narratives can be attributed to a manifestation of neo-colonialist attitudes within mainstream media. Neo-colonialism, defined as a contemporary form of colonialism where powerful nations exert influence and control over less powerful nations through various means, finds significant relevance in shap-

ing the portrayal of refugees in the media (Holohan 2019, 14). Mainstream media functions as a potent tool for moulding public opinions, influencing global perceptions, and guiding policy decisions in ways that align with their interests. Selective coverage of refugee crises is one manifestation of neo-colonialist attitudes, as media outlets tend to prioritise regions of strategic importance while neglecting others, creating an unjust hierarchy of attention and assistance (Scott, Wright, and Bunce 2023). The Syrian refugee crisis overshadowed other conflicts throughout Africa and Southeast Asia because of the strategic importance of the Middle East to energy resources in Europe (Scott, Wright, and Bunce 2023). The framing of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis by some media outlets to serve the political interests and policy objectives of Western countries can be seen as an extension of neo-colonialist attitudes. Furthermore, the documented 'CNN Effect'—where media framing justifies political responses to humanitarian crises—can be attributed to the American public's support of strategic intervention in the region, such as through the air strikes ordered by President Donald Trump (Doucet 2018, 141).

"Rather than providing informative insights into the underlying reasons for refugee status, mainstream media tends to prioritise sensationalising the issue."

Neo-colonialism manifests as the strategic manipulation of narratives to favour powerful nations, resulting in a discernible pattern of selective coverage, perpetuation of stereotypes, and even the rationalisation of intervention (Doucet 2018, 154). Rather than providing informative insights into the underlying reasons for refugee status, mainstream media tends to prioritise sensationalising the issue. The broad strokes used to depict all Syrian refugees create a susceptibility to cultural and racial stereotyping, thereby perpetuating detrimental biases. This distortion in portrayal creates negative biases towards refugees and serves the interests of entities financing mass media outlets. The manipulation of the public's perception of refugees can be leveraged by politicians to advance anti-immigration rhetoric or, in more extreme cases, to justify military intervention (Doucet 2018, 144). The entanglement of media portrayal with neo-colonialist agendas thus contributes to a skewed narrative that prioritises certain perspectives at the expense of a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex factors contributing to the refugee experience (Kosho 2016, 86).

The potential of social media in the context of combatting neo-colonial representations in mainstream media is multi-faceted. One of the key strengths lies in its accessibility. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram allow refugees to directly communicate their experiences and perspectives to a global audience. This direct communication has the power to counteract the homogenisation and stereotyping often perpetuated by mainstream media (Ihejirika and Krtalic 2020, 52). Social media offers a more nuanced and humanising portrayal of refugees. A striking example of this is evident in the case of Bana Alabed, a Syrian refugee whose public prominence surged through her Twitter account. Alabed utilised Instagram and YouTube to share a compelling visual chronicle of her experiences and daily life amidst the ravages of war in Aleppo (Alabed 2016). This multimedia storytelling not only served to humanise the Syrian conflict but also presented a first-hand and unfiltered account of its profound impact on civilians (Alabed 2016). Through visual content, Alabed transcended the limitations imposed by mainstream media narratives, offering a nuanced perspective that countered prevailing stereotypes and neo-colonialist tendencies. The authenticity inherent in her visual storytelling on social media platforms facilitated a direct connection with a global audience, fostering empathy and understanding that mainstream media often fails to convey. By presenting authentic and diverse stories through the power of visual media, refugees like Alabed leverage social platforms to challenge neo-colonialist portrayals, offering a more complex, human, and unmediated glimpse into the complexities of their lives amidst conflict. This not only enriches the broader discourse but also contributes to reshaping global perceptions and dismantling the entrenched biases perpetuated by mainstream media.

Social media also serves as a way of mobilising grassroots campaigns showing solidarity with refugees. These campaigns are instrumental in challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy and understanding among the public. For instance, the #RefugeesWelcome campaign gained momentum on social media, encouraging individuals and organisations to express support for refugees. This grassroots movement provided a counter-narrative to the prevailing anti-refugee sentiment in some countries (Refugees Welcome, n.d.). Through the vast reach of social platforms, people from all corners of the world can express solidarity and offer support. These campaigns can encourage people to sign petitions, attend rallies, and pressure governments to adopt more compassionate refu-

gee policies. Social media has empowered refugees to seize control of their narratives and present their truth. No longer does information have to be filtered through the neo-colonialist lens or intrinsic biases of those at mainstream media networks. This movement has the potential to transform public perception and engagement with refugee issues, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate approach to this global challenge.

Challenges and limitations inevitably accompany the powerful tool of social media activism in its mission to challenge mainstream media's portrayal of refugee narratives. The digital divide and accessibility issues stand as significant hurdles in this endeavour. Access to personal devices is hindered by financial constraints, which can limit their consistent and secure engagement (Ragnedda and Gladkova 2020, 2). Limited connectivity, especially in refugee camps and low-resource host countries, further restricts their ability to participate, share their stories, and access information that counters mainstream narratives (UNCHR Innovation Service 2020, 69). Digital literacy disparities among refugees also pose challenges, with varying degrees of proficiency in online communication and navigation affecting their effectiveness in activism and voice amplification (Ragnedda and Gladkova 2020, 5). In addition to the digital challenges, social media activism itself is not without its limitations. The same platforms that enable activism can paradoxically propagate misinformation and fake news, jeopardising efforts to provide accurate and balanced refugee narratives. The sheer volume of content on social media further complicates the task of ensuring that important messages are heard and retained by a broader audience, given limited attention spans and the risk of narratives getting lost in the noise. Additionally, sharing personal stories on social media can expose refugees and activists to privacy and safety risks, particularly in cases where they may still be vulnerable or living in dangerous environments (Sayimer et al. 2017, 388).

The evolving landscape of media and its influence on public perceptions demands a critical examination of whose voices are prioritised and whose stories are left untold. Mainstream media's homogenisation of refugee narratives has perpetuated stereotypes, dehumanised refugees, and played a role in neo-colonialist agendas (Holohan 2019, 14). However, the rise of social media offers a transformative opportunity to challenge and redefine these narratives. It empowers marginalised voices by allowing refugees to share their authentic perspectives and showcases the diversity of their experiences, thereby combatting the neo-colonialism present in mainstream media portrayals (Ihejirika and Krtalic 2020). Additionally, social media fosters global solidarity and support, bridging geographical and cultural divides. Nevertheless, challenges and limitations persist, including the digital divide, the potential for misinformation, and privacy concerns. Addressing these limitations is crucial for the effectiveness of social media activism. As we move forward, it is imperative to empower marginalised voices and create a more inclusive, empathetic, and balanced portrayal of refugee narratives in the media. By doing so, we can work towards a future where every voice is heard, every story is respected, and where the power of the media is harnessed to foster understanding and compassion for refugees worldwide without the imposition of third-party bias.

"Social media has empowered refugees to seize control of their narratives and present their truth."

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Artwork by James Wake

Denationalisation and Discrimination in International Law

Molly McKenzie

Involuntary citizenship loss, most prominently employed to enable an individual's expulsion or exclusion from a territory, will hereafter be referred to as denationalisation (Gibney 2020, 2554). Denationalisation is implemented in many countries at a quickening pace (Bolhuis and Wijk 2020, 351), most prominently as a penal practice.

In recent years, denationalisation has been employed more frequently throughout Europe, with some very high-profile cases drawing attention to the human rights implications of the measure. For example, in R (on the application of Begum) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2020), Shamima Begum, at fifteen years old, left the UK to join the Islamic terrorist group ISIL. The UK stripped Begum of her British citizenship on the premise that Begum was eligible for Bangladeshi citizenship due to her ethnicity, in pursuit of protecting national security (Ibid). Bangladesh denied responsibility for Begum and her entry into the state, leaving Begum stateless. She now lives in a Syrian refugee camp (Ibid).

It should be made clear that denationalisation, as an isolated act, is not in violation of international law. Under Article 3(1) of the 1997 European Convention on Nationality (the ECN), states have the right to decide who is and is not a citizen of their territory. However, denationalisation has serious consequences on other protected rights (Human Rights Joint Committee 2014, paragraph 159). The 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) explicitly outlines the prohibition of discrimination. It bans penal practices that arbitrarily discriminate against particular offenders or groups of offenders and requires that comparable cases be treated alike (Tripkovic 2021, 1052). Denationalisation cannot operate in conjunction with existing international law, most notably the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the ECN, without breaching the ECHR. This article will explore the reality of domestic applications of denationalisation, showcasing that denationalisation cannot be employed without acting in direct violation of existing international laws on statelessness and discrimination, encouraging the employment of alternate penal practices that do comply with these provisions.

Dual Citizens

The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness is the key provision that address statelessness. Ending statelessness is a goal of many countries, most notably the sixty-one states party to the 1961 Convention. For denationalisation measures to ensure congruence with this Convention, denationalisation is conditional on the individual holding another citizenship. This is because the individual will not be rendered stateless by the process of denationalisation from one of their nation states, allowing the state to comply with the 1961 Convention. Accordingly, denationalisation primarily affects dual nationals. Denationalisation subject's individuals guilty of the same crime to unequal punishment (Lenard 2018, 78–79).

If a dual national and a mono-national were convicted of the same crime, denationalisation would only be a feasible punishment available to the dual-national, as the mono-national would be rendered stateless by denationalisation, causing the state to be in violation of the 1961 Convention.

The ECN declares its intention "to avoid discrimination in matters relating to nationality" (The ECN, see Preamble), more specifically "on the grounds of sex, religion, race, colour or national or ethnic origin" (The ECN, Article 5(1)). Further, citizens "in possession of another nationality shall have, in the territory of that State Party in which they reside, the same rights and duties as other nationals of that State Party" (Ibid, 5).

Denationalisation directly contradicts this. To operate in conjunction with the 1961 Convention, states must differentiate between citizens who hold another citizenship and those who don't. In other words, discriminating against citizens based on their national or ethnic origin. Citizens who hold more than one citizenship often come from two different national backgrounds, acceding to citizenship of both through *jus sanguinis*. To justify discriminating against individuals based on national or ethnic background, in pursuance of national security, is a weak justification and does not fulfil the responsibility to avoid discrimination in matters relating to nationality as illustrated in the ECN.

"To justify discriminating against individuals based on national or ethnic background, in pursuance of national security, is a weak justification and does not fulfil the responsibility to avoid discrimination in matters relating to nationality as illustrated in the ECN."

However, Matthew Gibney argues that this segregation is justified as, unlike ascribed statuses like race and sex, holding a second citizenship is a choice that comes with advantages and disadvantages (Gibney 2013, 656). Peter Schuck agrees, arguing that the price to pay for the advantages that come from holding a second citizenship (such as voting in multiple countries and holding two passports) justify the risk of denationalisation; denationalisation restores the balance between mono-nationals and dual nationals (Schuck 2018, 178). Schuck and Gibney's remarks show a lack of regard for the harm that is done to an individual affected by denationalisation. Holding multiple passports and voting in multiple countries does not justify an individual being exposed to the effects associated with denationalisation; removal of access to healthcare, education, right to work, free movement rights, right to vote, right to hold public office, *inter alia*. Especially since these individuals are exposed due to their national or ethnic origin. To remove these rights due to their national or ethnic background, with the defence of 'restoring the balance' between mono and dual nationals, is entirely disproportionate.

Consequently, for denationalisation to operate in conjunction with the 1961 Convention, states must discriminate against individuals based on national or ethnic background. This is in clear contradiction with Articles 5 and 17 of the ECN, and as such, denationalisation cannot be employed in conjunction with existing international law on statelessness and non-discrimination. The prohibition of denationalisation is consequently encouraged by this article, to encourage state compliance with international law.

Naturalised citizens

Not only is there a distinction between mono and dual nationals, but also between naturalised and native citizens. There are eight European Union (EU) countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, and Malta), whose respective grounds for denationalisation apply only to naturalised citizens (Mentzelopoulou 2018, 7). This distinction between naturalised and native citizens can lead to the creation of a "second class of citizens" (Shachar and Baubök 2014). Under the ECN, states shouldn't discriminate against nationals based on "whether they are nationals by birth or have acquired its nationality subsequently" (The ECN, Article 5(2)). This shows that denationalisation operates in contradiction with international law, specifically those relating to the prohibition of discrimination between naturalised and native citizens within the territory of the state. To treat perpetrators of a crime differently based on their citizenship status (mono or dual), or how they acceded to said citizenship (whether by birth or through naturalisation) assumes a connection between crime and citizenship (Gibney 2020, 2554), this separation reflects "informal social and political understandings of the subordinate standing of some ethnic and racial groups" (Ibid, 2552).

Not only are the social implications of the classifications of individuals based on "national origin" and "birth" detrimental to the state but are prohibited under international law. Resolution 32/5 of the UN Human Rights Commission provides a non-exhaustive list of discriminatory grounds under which deprivation of nationality is prohibited: "race, colour,

sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status, including disability" (UN Human Rights Council, 2016, paras. 2 and 4). The practice of denationalisation is in clear contradiction with this resolution, and as such should be prohibited to encourage state conformity with international law.

Patti Lenard, a prominent academic in the field of citizenship law, makes the argument that in many countries people who are mentally or physically disabled are often afforded different punishments compared with other perpetrators of the same crime (Lenard 2018, 104). As such, this unequal treatment of criminals is not unheard of, nor inappropriate. The argument that punishments are often discriminatory based on factors outside the crime committed, is a valid rebuttal of the argument that denationalisation is inherently discriminatory. To treat all people the same is a well-established contradiction of equality, because not all people are the same. To treat perpetrators of a crime differently due to their mental or physical state is commonly considered just as it affects the individual's ability to rehabilitate and be reintegrated into society. However, though valid, this argument is weak in response to the discrimination felt by individuals of minority national or ethnic backgrounds. These individuals that Lenard refers to are already at a disadvantage compared with other perpetrators of similar crimes. Whereas, to treat perpetrators differently based on national origin and mono/dual citizen status, is not in response to the needs of the individual and their reform, instead, it is in pursuance of wider state interests. Discrimination in pursuit of "levelling the playing field" between those who are already at a disadvantage is a common and relatively uncontroversial tool for reaching equality. Discrimination based on national origin and mono/dual citizen status is not in pursuit of equality, but of wider state interests, and as such cannot be compared to Lenard's example of perpetrators with physical or mental disabilities.

Denationalisation can only be employed in line with the rules on statelessness under the 1961 Convention by states violating the rules under the ECN, as states must divide their citizenry by discriminating against individuals based on their national origin and mono/dual citizen status. Similarly, denationalisation can only be employed in line with the ECN if states disregard the 1961 Convention by allowing for denationalisation to be employed against mono nationals and dual nationals alike. Prohibiting denationalisation would achieve uniformity between these two conventions, allowing for them to be implemented to their full effect, allowing for naturalised citizens to have "the same rights and duties as other nationals" (The ECN, Article 17) and dual nationals "to avoid discrimination in matters relating to nationality" (Ibid, see Preamble).

Conclusion

Due to international regulations on statelessness and discrimination, denationalisation acts as a catch-22 provision, in that it cannot be employed without breaching international law in some respect. Thus, this article argues for the prohibition of denationalisation, to enable and encourage state compliance with international law, and the essential protection of the individual. The prohibition of denationalisation would serve to protect individuals from abusive treatment from states wishing to pass on their responsibility for citizens to a neighbouring state, while achieving uniformity between the conventions on statelessness and nationality and their intentions to protect the rights of the individual, which denationalisation directly undermines. This article encourages the employment of an alternative method by states in protecting national security, of which there are many, that do not directly undermine the rights of the individual. The prohibition of denationalisation is consequently endorsed by this article to enable further protection of individual human rights, stability within the international community, and state compliance with international law.

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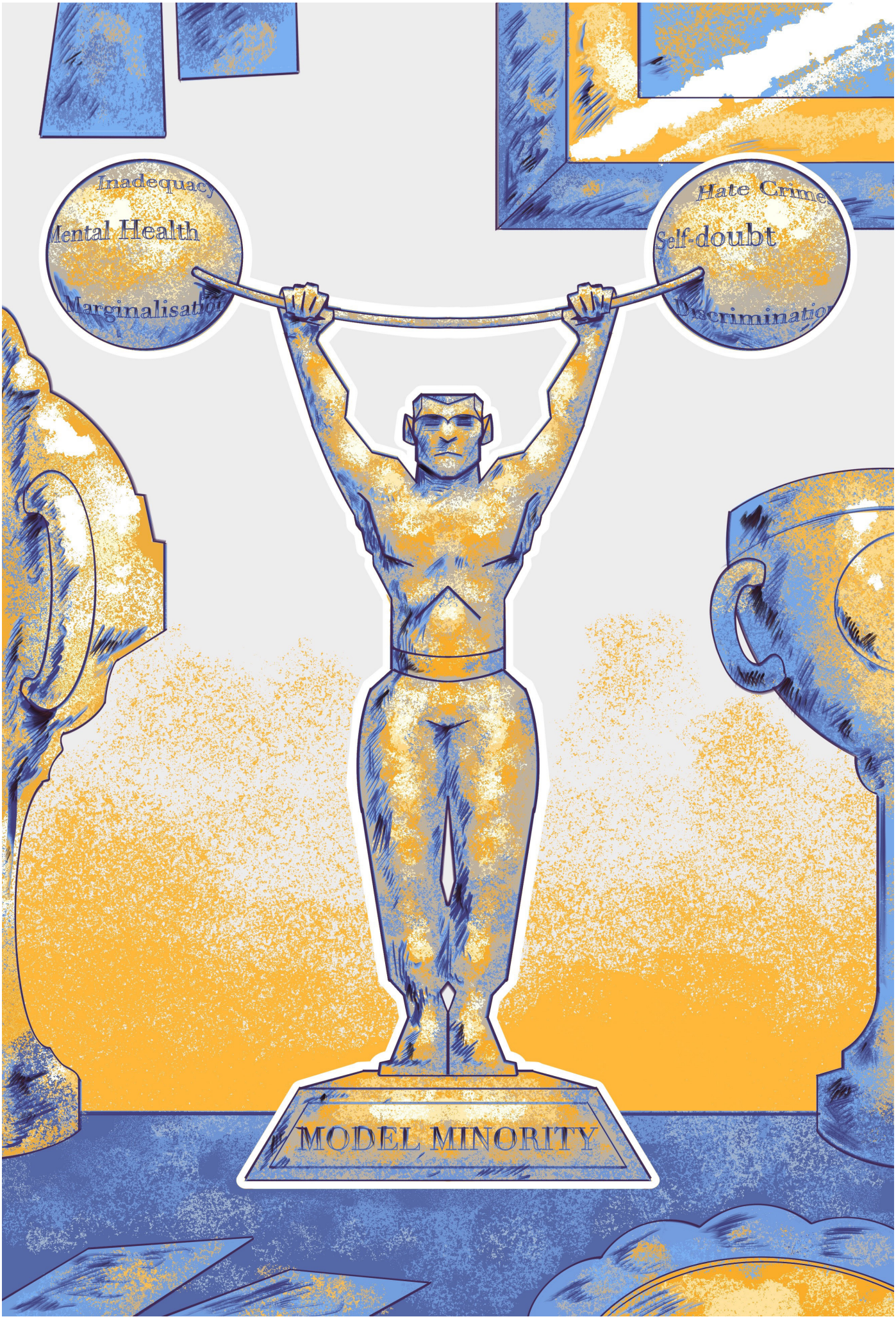

Artwork by James Wake

Battling Racial Hierarchies: The Model Minority Myth

Samhita Gadang

The Asian American experience has a complex relationship with American society. One of the most significant factors of this relationship is the 'model minority myth'. The 'model minority myth' refers to the stereotyping of Asian American groups as communities of economic and educational success, which provides other minority groups with a 'model' of how one can achieve success in American society (Matriano et al. 2021, 292). In order to understand imposed racial hierarchies and their implications upon a multicultural society, there needs to be a discussion of the model minority myth. This article will explore the consequences of the model minority myth for Asian Americans and racial hierarchies through four sections. The first section will detail the conception behind the myth. The second section will explore how it perpetuates conditional belonging. The third section will examine how it erases individual experiences. The final section will focus on its harmful influence on other immigrant and minority communities within the United States.

Background of Model Minority Myth

The model minority is believed to have originally come from a New York Times article in 1966 by the sociologist William Petersen to describe the Japanese American community and their successful integration into American society after World War II (Yi and Hoston 2020, 73). This stereotype later incorporated other ethnic groups such as Chinese Americans, Indian Americans, and Korean Americans (Yi et al. 2022, 124). Ellen Wu, a prominent scholar on the Asian American experience, argues that the model minority myth was utilised in two ways: to portray the United States as the destination for immigrants, and to diminish the emerging civil rights movement by pointing towards the success of other minorities (Wu 2013, 7–8). Thus, from its conception, the model minority myth has been intertwined with the immigration experience of Asian Americans.

Perpetuation of Conditional Belonging

The model minority myth generates a sense of conditional belonging, meaning that Asian Americans only belong within American society if they achieve certain expectations. The myth is closely tied to the 'perpetual foreigner' stereotype, which portrays Asian Americans as outsiders, regardless of their citizenship or heritage (Wu 2023, 45-46). Paradoxically, individuals may feel they belong superficially but are also perceived as outsiders in their own country. Conditional belonging can be explored further in the rise of Asian hate crimes in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been 9,081 hate crime incidents against Asians in the United States from March 19th, 2020 to June 30th, 2021 (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center 2020, 1). This rise in Asian hate illustrates that Asian Americans may have not been truly accepted into American society and will continue to be perceived as outsiders (Yi et al. 2022, 133–134).

While there are positive connotations associated with the myth, scientific studies have shown that positive stereotypes can still lead to damaging consequences (Gupta, Szymanski, and Leong 2011, 102). The Asian American community may feel that to belong in society they have to live up to expectations of a high socio-economic position. A failure to meet these high expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, psychological problems, and suicidal thoughts (Yi et al. 2022, 124). The model minority stereotype can encourage Asian Americans to ignore or minimise their mental health issues, especially if they believe that all Asians are well-adjusted and have no problems (Gupta, Szymanski, and Leong 2011, 102). Mental health and the rise in Asian hate crimes during the pandemic help demonstrate how the conditional belonging which develops from the model minority myth can eventually lessen a community's ties to American society.

Erasure of Individual Experiences

The Asian American community is complex, consisting of many different cultural and ethnic groups. Therefore, stereotyping the members of these communities as a hallmark of success can lead to a homogenisation that erases individual experiences by assuming that all members of the group share the same path to success and face the same challenges (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center 2020, 6). By focusing on the perceived success of Asian Americans, the myth tends to downplay or ignore the struggles, discrimination, and hardships that many individuals within the community face. The impact of homogenisation can be illustrated by the Southeast Asian American community and their refugee status in the US. Asian Americans score higher on measures of economic success compared with the overall US population. In 2019, the median annual household income headed by Asian people was $85,800, compared with $61,800 among all US households (Buidman and Ruiz, 2021). However, this varies among sub-groups of Asian American, for instance, Burmese Americans have a drastically different income of $44,000 per year compared to the overall income level (Ibid). At over two-point-five million, Southeast Asian immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos compose fourteen percent of the entire Asian American population in the country, growing by 38 percent between 2000 and 2010 (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center 2020, 10). However, nearly one-point-one million Southeast Asian Americans are low-income, and about 460,000 live in poverty (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center 2020, 10). Moreover, this stereotype is perpetuated by data policies that group or aggregate all Southeast Asian American individuals under the larger Asian American racial category, further obscuring the specific challenges and needs of this community (Ibid, 6). By addressing how the model minority myth conceals the experiences of individuals in the Asian American community, a more multicultural society will be achieved as it would celebrate the differences among individuals.

"By focusing on the perceived success of Asian Americans, the myth tends to downplay or ignore the struggles, discrimination, and hardships that many individuals within the community face."

The model minority myth can be harmful to other marginalised communities as the acceptance of the model minority myth could lead to internalised racism and further marginalisation of these communities (Matriano et al. 2021, 292). The racial triangulation theory, developed by scholar Claire Jean Kim in 1999, explores the complex dynamics of racial positioning and power relations of Asian American immigrants in society (Ibid, 292). The theory highlights the ways in which Asian Americans occupy an intermediate or 'in-between' status, where they are simultaneously positioned above and below other racial groups such as African Americans (Ibid). The model minority myth can lead to the internalisation of this belief against other minority communities and pits minority groups, which could otherwise be allies, against each other. For instance, one popular Japanese-language newspaper editor, Howard Imazeki, urged African Americans in 1963 to 'better themselves' before asking for equal rights (Wu 2013, 166–168). The model minority myth proves to be problematic as it perpetuates stereotypes within the Asian American community and outside of it. Most concerningly, it gives governments, companies, and institutions of power a mask for their own systemic racism as it reinforces the role a minority community should play in society.

The 1992 Los Angeles riots demonstrate how minorities can be pitted against each other. The riots erupted in the wake of the acquittal of four police officers who had been captured on video brutally beating Rodney King, an African American man, during a traffic stop. The riots took place on April 29th 1992, and spread throughout southern Los Angeles, specifically Koreatown (Yi and Hoston 2020, 78–79). CNN reports that the damages caused approximately one billion dollars in damage (Lah 2017). During the riots, how-

ever, Korean immigrants were denied any protection by the police as the police instead sought to contain the violence before it travelled to more affluent white neighbourhoods (Yi and Hoston 2020, 78–79). The media framed this as a problem between the African and Korean American communities and tensions between the two communities rose to an all-time high (Ibid). The Los Angeles riots can be used to highlight how the model minority myth can distract communities from overarching systems of oppression.

"Ramaswamy's words display the harmful nature of how the model minority myth can pit immigrant and marginalised communities against each other when they should truly be allies against systems of oppression."

Vivek Ramaswamy is a current example of how the model minority myth can be embodied within the Asian American community. Ramaswamy is contesting for the Republican nomination for the President of the United States. Ramaswamy drew headlines at the first Republican primary debate as a distinct step away from the usual Republican President's look (Gupta 2023). However, Ramaswamy throughout the debate details his hard-working nature and success as an example of the American Dream (Ibid). In his book Nation of Victims (2022), Ramaswamy details that indeed at one time racism was so extreme, that it required a governmental response; however, he argues that time has passed, and African Americans have become 'the gold standard of constitutional victimhood' (Ibid). Ramaswamy essentially denies the nature of systematic racism and falls victim to internalising the model minority myth, by using the success of Indian Americans against African Americans. Ramaswamy's words display the harmful nature of how the model minority myth can pit immigrant and marginalised communities against each other when they should truly be allies against systems of oppression.

Understanding and fighting against the model minority myth is key to dismantling racial hierarchies in the United States. Within this article, the model minority myth is shown to create a false sense of belonging and to conceal certain struggles within the Asian American community. Furthermore, the model minority myth contributes to systems of oppression in America and pits minorities against each other when they could be potential allies. To foster authentic belonging, it is essential to dismantle this myth, embrace diversity, and promote an environment where individuals can belong unconditionally, free from stereotypes and expectations. This will create a more genuine and inclusive sense of belonging, where individuals are valued for their unique experiences and identities.

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Artwork by James Wake

Belonging Beyond Borders: To What Extent Does the Ismaili Community Challenge the Notion of Nation-State Identity?

Nina Shariff

In considering the concept of 'belonging' concerning borders, our attention is often turned to the concept of a nation-state, which is defined by Max Weber as a 'human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber et al. 2009, 78). The idea of a 'human community' alludes to a sense of belonging that individuals in that community have; Weber defines this as inextricably linked to legitimacy and territory (Mitropolitski 2011, 1–2). This pre-eminent narrative of nation-states consequently demonstrates a distinct relationship between belonging and geographical borders.

However, our understanding of belonging should transcend geographical territory and national identity and rather be understood as a sentiment, one that binds people together, the fabric of a society. The view that borders are what delineates belonging is, therefore, reductionist. The diasporic Ismaili community is a clear example of this and hence presents a challenge to the prevalent notion of nation-state identity.

The Ismaili Community

The Ismaili community is a unique example of a religious, migratory, transnational people. They do not identify with a specific geographical territory due to historic migration and persecution (Farhad Daftary 2020). Despite this, they retain a formidable sense of belonging. Ismailis adhere to a strand of Shia Islam, who recognise the Aga Khan IV as their Imam, who acts as their living religious and worldly guide (The Ismaili 2020). The Imam of the time is responsible for the interpretation of the Quran and religious scripture; Ismailis are distinct in this sense as this interpretation seeks to extract values through which mu'mins, followers, should live their lives as opposed to more literal interpretations of Islam (Nanji, n.d.).

Today, Ismailis are a diverse community of fifteen million people living in twenty-five different countries (Islamic Publications Limited 2024). Groups in the community have experienced different routes of migration, though generally following the movement of the Imamate, the office of the Imam (The Institute of Ismaili Studies 2022). Broadly, the migrational history of Ismailis is as follows. Originating in Mecca, the community was transformed through ancient Persia before arriving in Cairo, where the Fatimid dynasty was established. The Ismailis settled in Persia (modern-day Iran) after that. Then they moved on to India holding British colonial ties which continued towards the west where the current seat of the Imamate is based between Geneva and Lisbon (Farhad Daftary 2020).

The resulting migration disturbs many of the assumptions the nation-state model holds. Brubaker argues that the idealised conceptual model of the nation-state, which is what Ismailis challenge, rests on congruences such as the borders of a state should match the nation as an imagined community, expressed through citizenship, culture, and location (Brubaker 2010,

68). Migration threatens this understanding, as not only does it allow for a sense of belonging to be created across borders through movement, but also for belonging to be derived from another, more abstract source. This point of departure is crucial in understanding the three key features of the Ismaili community that contribute to its defiance of the idea of nation-state identity:

-The nature of the Imam's legitimacy and authority
-The ability to integrate into and combine culture
-The institutional dimension

The Nature of the Imam's Legitimacy and Authority

The Imam is the undisputed living leader of the Ismaili community, believed to be the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammed (The Ismaili 2020). Historically, divisions in Islam have been the result of successive disputes, such as the splits between Shia and Sunni Islam and further splits within the main sects, such as Twelver and Sevener strands (Malbouisson 2007, 15–19). This is not the case with Ismailis, who use hereditary lineage to nominate an Imam (Andani 2016). This results in cohesion within the community, fostering a sense of belonging to the community bound by an understanding of the legitimacy of the Aga Khan. This expresses Weber's view of legitimacy in human communities within nation-states. However, it challenges this model, as legitimacy here is not derived through institutions and mechanisms such as democracy but rather historical leadership underpinned by religious legitimacy. The result is a community that has devotion, trust, and a sense of connection with their leader, which often starkly contrasts the relationship between society and state leaders. The explanation for this is the difference in the sources of legitimacy. Scholars who have assessed the creation of nation-states have established that premodern states have developed into modern states when leadership shifts from personalistic rule based on blood relation or tribal affinity to something more formal (Spruyt 2002). Tied to Weber's definition of a state, it can be inferred that, therefore, to form a human community (belonging), legitimacy should be derived from something more formal. The Ismaili community challenges this, as it is led by an Imam without legal, democratic processes, eliciting a sense of trust and devotion of the Ismaili people in the Imam. This illustrates the lack of formal borders and state infrastructure necessary to experience belonging. This is exemplified through the historical persecution and ensuing migration seen with Abbasids, Berbers, and Mongols (amongst others) (Tejpar 2019), which resulted in a community not affected by a lack of a state because they derive their belonging from the personal rather than spacial. Ismailis feel a sense of belonging to the community, bound by the Imam regardless of where the Imamate is seated at then. This supersedes the nation-state model, highlighting how borders are not a prerequisite to belonging. Instead, devotion and legitimacy to a leader, which is religious in this case, can foster a sense of belonging within a community.

The Ability to Integrate into and Combine Cultures

A crucial principle of the Ismaili faith is the idea that its followers adhere to Islamic ethics rather than inflexible dogma (Tottoli 2018, 245). This is facilitated by the Imam's interpretation of the faith in conjunction with the worldly advice provided to the community. This permits Ismailis to integrate, modernise, and approach new cultures flexibly, which segues into a crucial Ismaili principle: pluralism. The Aga Khan often stresses this idea of pluralism as not only a modern-day important value Ismailis should subscribe to, but something embedded within Ismaili history: the focus on inclusion, acceptance, and understanding is integral to the way Ismailis should live their lives (Dewji 2017). This value of pluralism, combined with Ismailis' devotion for the Imam, results in a transnational community that flexibly integrates into the host societies in which it lives. From a personal standpoint, the map of my family's Ismaili migration roughly follows that of the Imamate, extending to East Africa and the United Kingdom. In turn, this results in language, food, and cultural practices from a combination of Middle Eastern, Indian, and East African traditions. For example, the language we speak is a mixture of Kutchi (from the Kutch region), Gujarati (from Gujarat, India), Swahili (from East Africa), as well as a few Farsi words (from Iran). Similarly, the food we eat and cultural practices, such as wedding traditions, all transpire in the same blended manner. This is a testament to the way that Ismailis amalgamate subcultures and, through this, create features that would compromise national identity. Rather than having a national language, dish, or cultural practice, Ismailis cultivate

"Instead, devotion and legitimacy to a leader, which is religious in this case, can foster a sense of belonging within a community."

their own through a combination of cultures they have integrated throughout history. This underscores how Ismailis challenge the pre-eminent notion of nation-states identities and further create their sense of belonging across nation-states and borders.

The Institutional dimension

Ismaili leadership has historically sought to protect its people, and the Imam of the modern age have built on this by going further than protection and towards improvement in quality of life. Today, this transpires in two ways: firstly, through Jamati, an institutionally reinforced religious community, and secondly, through the wider non-denominational Islam and secular institutions. The Jamati institutions focus on Ismailis' social, economic, educational, and health concerns on a regional level through national councils. These institutions are transnational regarding where they work but have the Imam as an overarching head (Tottoli 2018, 244–58). The wider, non-denominational institutions are all Aga Khan organisations, including the Aga Khan Development Network, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and the Aga Khan Universities (Patel 2003, 211–12). These are not limited to just improving the quality of life of Ismailis but the broader societies in which they live, thus further integrating Ismailis into their host communities. This global organisation is not a new concept, however, but is rooted in Ismaili history as seen through the Ismaili proselytising missions of da'wa under the Fatimid empire, who also organised themselves transnationally (Tottoli 2018, 253).

The Jamati and Aga Khan institutions adopt roles that the state assumes in the nation-state model. For example, Jamati Institutions and the Aga Khan himself were directly involved in the evacuation of Asian Ismailis from East Africa under persecution from Idi Amin. The Aga Khan used mechanisms of diplomacy to negotiate agreements with the Canadian and British governments (CBC News 2016). The protection of citizens and diplomacy are two typical responsibilities of the state under the nation-state model, both were undertaken by a body not part of a state- Jamati institution led by the Aga Khan. This is a testament to how the Ismaili community disputes the nation-state model by having something other than the state with a territory carry out state functions. Through these processes, the Ismaili manifests as a community that inhibits the sentiment of belonging without any land.

Conclusion

Belonging is not constrained to geographical territory. Several factors contribute to the feeling that one belongs to a community. Though the nation-state model provides a basis for disciplines of International Relations and Politics and, in a sense, allows for simplicity, it should not be the only concept tied to belonging. Ismailis identify with not only their unique combined cultures or the host communities in which they live but also the Imam as a core constant within a dynamic history of migration, persecution, and change. Being a British national who grew up in Singapore with an Ismaili heritage, the idea that belonging should be confined to a nation-state is entirely reductionist to me. I identify with the West, having grown up exposed and educated here. However, my habits and social familiarity come from growing up in Far East Asia, and further, my culture, heritage, and faith are derived from this amalgamation of Ismaili identity. To me, belonging is a concept entirely beyond borders.

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Artwork by Rebeca Sterner

HOW HAS CHINA'S GROWING AUTHORITY OVER HONG KONG INFLUENCED LOCAL IDENTITY?

Jordan Fox

Introduction

The handover of Hong Kong from the British colonialists to the People's Republic of China (PRC) was the beginning of a political experiment – a hybrid regime that would allow Hong Kong to remain a capitalist, semi-autonomous region under the rule of communist China (Chan 2019, 443). Thirty years later, China's rapidly growing influence over Hong Kong and local resistance to state-building efforts have prompted queries into what it means to be Hong Kong in the context of China and Chinese in the context of Hong Kong. I argue that the Hong Kong identity remains distinct from a national Chinese identity due to the city's multicultural history and prominent liberal values. This is demonstrated by reviewing the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and what Hong Kong identity refers to. From there, an exploration into the emergence of the localist movement will be conducted to connect the concept of protecting Hong Kong's identity to the popularised support of the localist ideology.

One Country, Two Systems

When Hong Kong was handed back to the People's Republic of China in 1997, the framework, "One Country, Two Systems," was granted in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and would make the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) for fifty years after the handover date. Hong Kong could maintain its existing social and economic systems, hold a high degree of autonomy with "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong," and make gradual progress towards full democracy (Chen 2017, 70–71). While national defence and foreign affairs were set by the central Chinese government, the local government had special administrative powers to manage local matters and would be elected by local people. These conditions were set in order to create stability and assurance that the Handover would not change Hong Kong's way of life (Jiang 2017, 87–89).

Hong Kong has never experienced parliamentary democracy in its history. Under British colonialism, Governors were directly appointed by the British Crown, and senior expatriate officials, who composed the top tier of civil service bureaucracy, were appointed by the Governor (Chen 2017, 71). However, in the years leading up to the handover, the British began implementing minor democratic reforms, working towards implementing universal suffrage. This included adding civil and political rights into Hong Kong's mini-constitution, broadening the voting base for elections, and establishing a governance structure including a Chief Executive and independent judiciary. "One Country, Two Systems" would gradually continue this democratisation process, even under an authoritarian Chinese regime (Gordon 2015, 351–352).

While promises to respect Hong Kong's political system were made under the 1984 Sino-British Joint Treaty, there were concerns regarding the reliability

of China to uphold such promises. These concerns were amplified by the Chinese Communist Party's lethal response to the 1989 pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square. Emigration applications in Hong Kong spiked with nations such as Singapore announcing an immigration quota of 25,000 for blue and white-collar workers (Cheung 2014, 102–103). The sheer number of locals emigrating out of Hong Kong was a testament to the fear and uncertainty that plagued the minds of many at the time. While a significant number of middle-class Hong Kongers migrated back during the relatively stable early years of the Handover, they returned with foreign passports as a form of insurance (Cheung 2014, 103).

Hong Kong Identity

Jiang (2017, 112–113) claims that "One Country, Two Systems" created a paradox between being a Hong Kong and a Chinese citizen. Hong Kongers held different rights to Chinese citizens, such as greater political freedoms and the right to abode in the United Kingdom if born during colonial rule. Nonetheless, Hong Kong citizenship does not formally exist, as citizenship reflects national sovereignty. Hong Kong residents are therefore recognised as Chinese citizens but follow Hong Kong and not Chinese laws (Jiang 2017, 111). "One Country, Two Systems" created a legal difference in the rights of Hong Kongers compared to those in China. However, when investigating the difference between Hong Kong and Chinese identity, significant analysis is needed of the socio-cultural and political values of Hong Kong that affect how Hong Kongers position themselves in the identity discourse.

Culturally and ethnically, there is a consciousness of shared Chinese tradition and cultural elements. For example, most Hong Kongers are ethnically Chinese and continue to adopt traditional Chinese symbols, such as the celebration of Chinese holidays. Additionally, while simplified Chinese is used in Mainland China, a traditional Chinese dialect, Cantonese, is the official language of Hong Kong (Vickers and Kan 2003, 176–177). Despite these similarities, a psychological separation during British rule was created between Colonial Hong Kong and the Chinese Communist state. The economic success of Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a higher standard of living and an excellent material contrast to the dire consequences of the Cultural Revolution in China (Chan 2014, 26). The British used this narrative to perpetuate the "othering" of China as backward and chaotic to prevent the formation of a Chinese identity that could contest colonial authority (Chan 2014, 26; Ma 2007, 150–153). Despite being under colonial rule, the greater political freedoms in Hong Kong allowed for the formation of their own political identity. This contrasted to the political identity in China which revolved around the Chinese state and the Communist Party (Tang, Hung, and Ho 2022, 3). As a result, liberal values consisting of freedom of speech, the rule of law, and the right to participate in politics, emerged as the core values of the city (Ortmann 2017, 125). The political identity, rooted in liberal values, had therefore seeped into the cultural identity of Hong Kong (Tang, Hung and Ho 2022, 3). The significance of these values to Hong Kongers is evident in the protestor turnout against acts of Chinese nationalisation; an estimated 1.7 million people, a quarter of the population, took to the streets during the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill movement (Kuo 2019). A stark contrast of political freedoms between Hong Kong and China became a prominent feature of local identity, one which Hong Kongers have attempted to preserve (Ortmann 2020, 320).

Patterns of identification as either a Hong Konger or Chinese have vacillated overtime ever since the Handover (Yew and Kwong 2014, 1088–1092). Local identity surveys have aimed to gauge the change in a respondent's self-identification of being "Hong Kongese," "Chinese," or "both" over time. However, Ma (2007, 150) argues that these surveys are problematic due to its mutually exclusive conception of identity. The treatment of identity as discrete assumes that if one becomes more nationalistic, one loses local attachment and vice versa. Additionally, factors behind feeling a greater sense of local or national identity are treated as constant, thus disregarding the dynamisms of the socio-political landscape and its impact on the perception of China (Ma 2007, 150–151). Examples of such factors include the shift in perception of China from an under-developed nation into an economic powerhouse, the powerful effects of nationalist propaganda pushed onto the local mass media, as well as the surfacing of China's human rights violations (Ma 2007, 151–152). The discrete design of recent identity questionnaires do not capture the full complexity of local and national identity as it disregards the ability for Hong Kongers to feel connected to certain degrees and varying aspects of Hong Kong and Chinese identity. This includes the dynamic socio-political factors that affect one's perception of both Hong Kong and China.

Chan (2018) uses Hong Kong's famous tea cafés (caa-can-Teng) and its incorporation of various cultures in local food to highlight an alternative framework for analysing Hong Kong identity. First appearing in the 1940s, these tea cafes imitated British-colonial coffee shops as Western food was considered a luxury. The tea cafes sold variations of affordable Western food, such as milk tea and canned meat sandwiches, and were especially popular with the immigrant working class. Most migrants were from different regions of China, influencing different ethnic Chinese flavours and cooking styles on dishes such as Fujian fried rice and Cantonese wonton noodles. Southeast Asian migrants also influenced the café menu, resulting in dishes like Malaysian Beef Curry and Singaporean fried vermicelli. These additions were inventions and not authentic to their regional origins. However, they emphasize the influence of a sizable migrant background in shaping a unique local identity (Chan 2018, 314–315). The development of the tea café menu illustrates the creation of a Hong Kong identify rooted in shared experiences of migration. Analysis regarding Hong Kong identity should therefore reflect upon the population and its history by considering how the interactions between different aspects of different cultures have contributed to the formation of a local identity.

"The development of the tea café menu illustrates the creation of a Hong Kong identify rooted in shared experiences of migration."

Localism in Hong Kong

The localist movement in Hong Kong took its theoretical mark after the publication of Chin Wan-Kan's On the Hong Kong City State (2011), where he advocated that Hong Kong needs to put Hong Kong first by freeing itself from Beijing's control and differentiating the city from the Mainland (Kwong 2016, 65). As the interpretation of localism in Hong Kong is heavily debated, this essay uses a broader definition of Hong Kong localism as an ideology that prioritises local welfare through autonomous power, which is constitutionally protected and respected by the national government (Lam 2017, 73).

There is a consensus across the Hong Kong localist literature that opposes the increasing political control of the Chinese government and sees the Hong Kong identity as distinct and something to protect from the Chinese government's growing influence. Nonetheless, with over forty-five localist organisations formed in the years following the 2014 Umbrella Revolution, the ideology is heavily divided on their end goal and the methodology that should be employed to achieve it (Lam 2017, 77-78). For example, the extent of political autonomy desired by localists ranges from having greater self-determination under Chinese rule to achieving independence and complete autonomy (Lam 2017, 83–85). Furthermore, while soft-liners advocate for non-violent means of protests, those following a more radical rhetoric see forceful confrontation as a necessary form of retaliation (Kwong 2016, 66–68).

Within the broader spectrum of the Hong Kong democracy movement, there are also disagreements between localists and the pan-democrats, the traditional pro-democracy party. Pan-democrats agree with prioritising the locality in resource allocation. However, while localists see Hong Kong as a separate political entity that should prioritise its local democracy, pan-democrats believe that the democratic movement in Hong Kong is intrinsically linked to the success of the democratic movement in China (Kwong 2016, 63–65). Pan-democrats also see localism in Hong Kong as a movement with the potential to turn into xenophobia through its anti-China sentiment. For example, the term "locust" has been used by some localists to refer to Chinese immigrants and tourists coming into Hong Kong (Lam 2017, 89). Vickers and Kan (2003, 174) argue that the manifestation of political grievances through racist sentiments as opposed to holding political bodies responsible is a primary concern within the localist camp. However, the issue of racism is not isolated in the localist movement and instead extends into a significant institutional problem with Hong Kong society. This is seen through instances of racism towards other ethnic groups, such as long-established Filipino, Indian and Pakistani communities (Vickers and Kan 2003, 174).

To address the polarity of localist discourse, Veg (2017, 327) disaggregates localism on the basis of ethnocultural or civic identity. This argument sees it as imperative to distinguish those who identify localism on an ethnocultural basis from those who aim to protect the civic nature of the locality. Civic identification is based on historic territory, laws, institutions, civic rights, and duties, while ethnocultural identification relies more on ethnic descent, language, and customs (Veg 2017, 326). Although some localists follow an ethnocultural lens, the Hong Kong localist movement largely rejects this definition of Hong Kong as an ethnic state or localism as a nativ-

ist movement. Instead, it casts their identification in the civic mode where people are organised based on political positionality rather than ethnic origin (Pang 2020, 208–209).

Conclusion

The Chinese government's rapid control over Hong Kong has raised issues regarding the preservation of Hong Kong's identity. China has embarked on a mission of state-building and naturalisation to obtain greater central control through measures such as the "new Hong Kong policy," which would allow Beijing to exercise supreme constitutional powers (Fong 2017, 530–531). As a result, the world has borne witness to a back-and-forth interaction between the Chinese government and the persistent pro-democracy movement who continue to advocate for the protection of civic values and Hong Kong identity.

The Hong Kong identity is constituted by the city's experiences as a British colony, a large migrant haven, an international financial centre, and a Chinese region. The rapid expansion of Chinese authority over Hong Kong has propelled the establishment and popular support for the localists, whose popularity has been driven by a feeling throughout the locality to resist Beijing's state-building. The pro-democracy movement took a massive hit with the passing of the National Security Law, which established China's authority over Hong Kong. Nonetheless, the consistent retaliation towards Chinese aggression in the past has shown the movement's resilience. Time should be taken to assess the flaws of the pro-democracy and localist movements to provide a stronger and more united front for future pro-democracy efforts.

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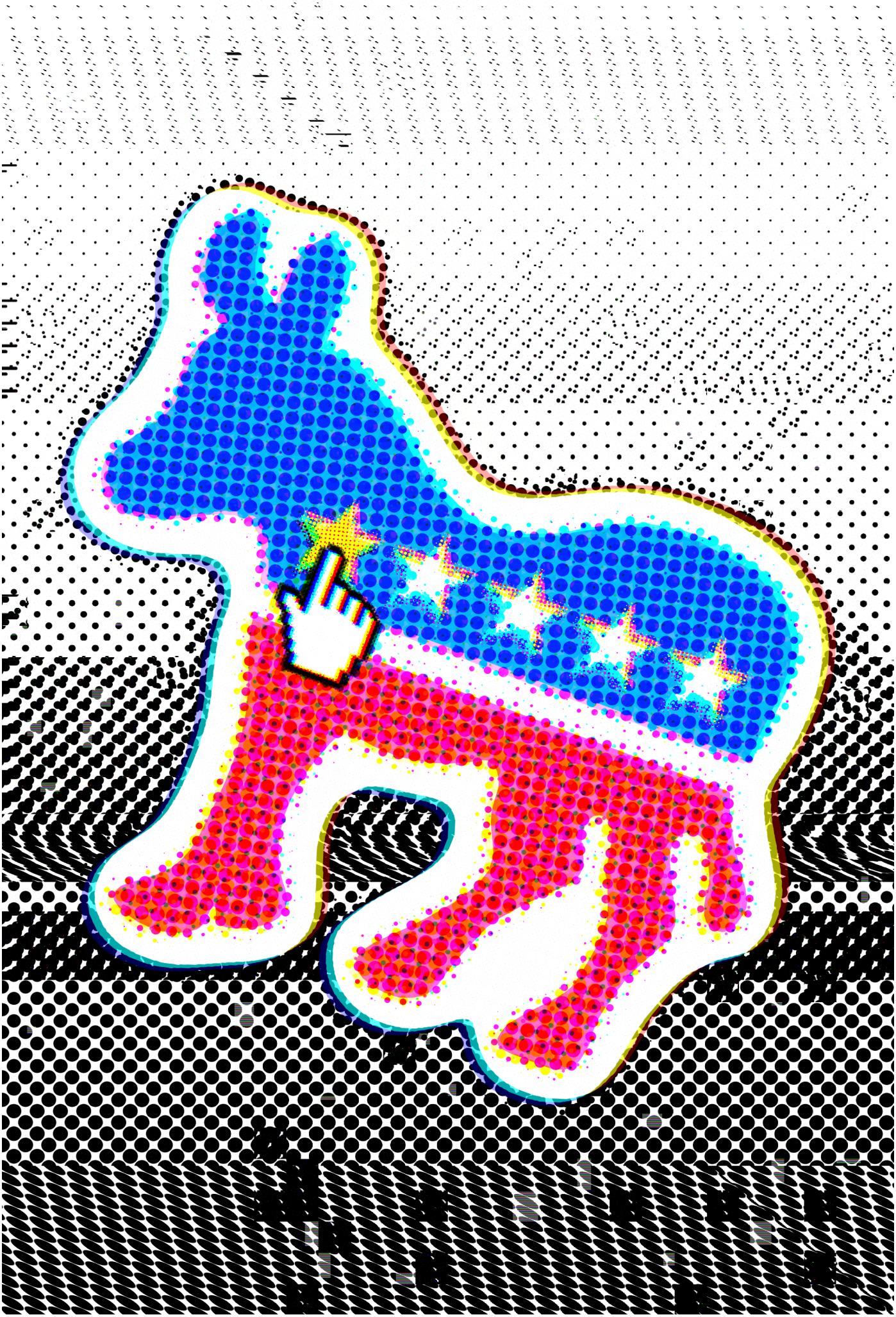

Artwork by James Wake

Does the Democratic Party Fail to Support its Voters? An Analysis of the Party's Contradicting Rhetoric and Action

Allie Mackey

In America's current political climate, an epoch increasingly characterised by partisan allegiance, every election is allegedly "the most important…ever" (Kelly 2018; Winters 2022; @JoeBiden 2020). However, in many instances, the urgency with which Democrat (D) leaders stress their unique ability to meet the interests of their voters during the campaign season is not replicated throughout their stints in office. This phenomenon highlights inconsistencies between the legislation that the party passes and the tenets it underlines to attract voters, both in its 2020 Party Platform (The Democratic Party 2020) and in the campaigns of individual leaders. Particularly emblematic of this pattern are the party's approaches to housing and policing, which its platform characterises as issues of extreme significance, in cities such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York City (The Democratic Party 2020, 21, 36). The party's repeated disregard for the will of its voters begs the question, to whom does the Democratic Party really belong?

Housing

Perhaps the most glaring example of the Democratic Party's failure to represent its proclaimed ideals lies in its approaches to addressing homelessness. While the party platform mentions the word "housing" more than one hundred times, this nominal emphasis evidently fails to translate to a broader implementation of progressive housing policies (The Democratic Party 2020, 2-78). The platform specifically iterates Democrats' "[commitment] to ending homelessness in America" through the government's implementation of "aggressive steps," "especially" focused on the expansion of affordable housing (The Democratic Party 2020, 21). Despite this proclamation, Democrat representatives have failed, and in some cases, refused, to expand affordable housing.

California is a prime example of this incongruity. Home to an estimated 172,000 people experiencing homelessness, the state accounts for thirty percent of America's total homeless population, despite comprising only twelve percent of the nation's populace (Margot and Moore 2023, 4). On one hand, the party platform emphasises the need for a "housing-first approach" to the homelessness crisis, arguing that "having a stable and safe place to live" is a vital first step in rehabilitating people facing other challenges, including mental illness and substance abuse disorders (The Democratic Party 2020, 21). The value of this approach, focused on rehabilitation and investment in mental health services, has been corroborated by researchers and scholars alike (Mahomed 2020). The platform even goes as far as declaring that "poverty is not a crime, and it should not be treated as one" (The Democratic Party 2020, 37). Notwithstanding this commitment, the criminalisation of homelessness has been increasing in America for more than a decade (Dholakia 2022), with some Democratic politicians helping spearhead this approach to the crisis and directly contradicting the humane principles outlined in the Platform. For example, Eric Garcetti (D), the Mayor of Los Angeles from 2013 through

2022, and current ambassador to India for President Joe Biden's administration, has staunchly advocated for using criminalisation to solve homelessness (Stieglitz 2021). As recently as 2021, Garcetti signed into law a series of amendments proposed by the LA City Council which reinstate prohibitions to "sit, lie, sleep, store, use, maintain, or place personal property upon any street, sidewalk, or other public right-of-way" throughout "much" of Los Angeles County (L.A.M.C. § 41.18, 2021; Homelessness Policy Research Institute 2021, 1). Violation of these laws may result in fines for people experiencing homelessness and forced removal from their encampments (Homelessness Policy Research Institute 2021). As the LA Times reports, 2016 saw 14,000 arrests of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, a thirty-one percent increase from 2011, and most of these arrests were for nonviolent or minor offenses (Holland and Zhang 2018). These arrests are still rising seven years later, undermining any claims of the legislation's long-term benefits (City News Service 2023). Evidently, LA has taken clear strides towards criminalising homelessness, even though it is governed by overwhelmingly Democratic representatives.

The genesis of this legislation is perplexing; despite being proposed by the LA City Council, which is officially nonpartisan but led by a nearly all-Democratic cohort (LA City Government 2023), and enacted by a Democratic mayor, the policies directly contradict the party's proclamations for improving the homelessness crisis. The party's actual policies stray far from those of the 2020 Platform, which condemns the way in which "our system has criminalised poverty" (The Democratic Party 2020, 35). The platform's use of passive language here is particularly interesting, as it effectively absolves the party of its role in establishing and maintaining the very "system" it criticises, which prioritise the use of fines and punishment, rather than rehabilitation, as a response to homelessness. Though California is a stronghold for Democrats (Baldassare et al. 2019), two in three of the state's voters consider current governor Gavin Newsom's approaches to the homelessness crisis "poor" or "very poor" (DiCamillo 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that the Democratic Party is insufficient in responding to the will of its voters and its own party platform regarding homelessness.

"The platform's use of passive language here is particularly interesting, as it effectively absolves the party of its role in establishing and maintaining the very "system" it criticises..."

Policing

Addressing issues within policing and the criminal justice system is another cornerstone of the Democratic Party's 2020 Party Platform. However, policing has yet to undergo any major reform, even in cities and states governed by Democratic leaders. In fact, police departments prosper in Democratic strongholds, such as Atlanta, where Mayor Andre Dickens (D) has been outspoken in advocating for the establishment of a new police training facility (Alfonśesca 2023). The facility's proponents argue that it will allow for adjusted police training with a larger emphasis on de-escalation, ultimately lowering police brutality (Moving Atlanta Forward, n.d.). Conversely, its opponents, who have dubbed the facility 'Cop City,' argue that it will serve as a training ground for "urban warfare tactics," directly contradicting the party platform's call for a complete "overhaul of the criminal justice system from top to bottom" (The Democratic Party 2020, 35). $67 million of the $90 million cost of developing the facility will be funded by taxpayers (Thigpen 2023), despite citizens not having received any opportunity to vote on its development, which was passed by the Democratic city council and mayor. Polls indicate that seventy-three percent of Democrats want the opportunity to vote on its construction, aligning with mass protests that have occurred in the wake of the facility's announcement (Fox 5 Atlanta Digital Team 2023). Still, Dickens has continued the contentious development, which is backed primarily by affluent and largely white residents and corporate donorship (Hassan and Keenan 2023; Simon 2023; Black Alliance for Peace 2023). The influence of corporate donorship in this initiative is particularly notable given the 2020 party platform's assertion that "private profit should not motivate the provision of vital public services, including in the criminal justice system" (The Democratic Party 2020, 38). Dickens' potential alignment with corporate donorship at the expense of his own voters is emblematic of the party representatives' tendency to stray from the interests of those who elected them to office.

Further fueling the hypocrisy is the party platform's recognition of the disproportionate targeting of Black people by American police officers and institutions (The Democratic Party 2020, 35). The platform highlights the ways in which this circumstance contradicts multiple intersecting axes of the party platform, including its commitment to racial justice, reformation of the criminal justice system, and the "[restoration]

and strengthening [of]" democracy (The Democratic Party 2020, 55). Therefore, Dickens' advocacy for the initiative concurrently undermines multiple concerns that the party claims are of paramount significance. This irony is not lost on the residents of Atlanta, where an estimated forty-eight percent of residents are Black (United States Census Bureau, 2022). As one resident commented at the City Council meeting when the initiative was approved, "I cannot believe I am standing here, pleading with you not to spend the tax dollars of a Black city, to tear down a forest in a Black neighbourhood, to increase the policing and caging of more Black people. All this in a city with Black leadership…" (Thigpen 2023). Prioritising the construction of a new police training facility rather than investing in social services to benefit the welfare of the broader community, such as public education, contributes to the very same over-policing that the party condemns in its platform (The Democratic Party 2020, 35). The GOP is also adamant in its "support and gratitude" for police officers and the wider institution they serve, condemning "politicized second-guessing from federal officials" as a means of accountability (The Republican Party 2016, 39). As a result, some Democratic voters find themselves choosing between "the lesser of two evils" when deciding between their own party and the GOP; studies indicate this principle was the most influential factor among Trump and Clinton voters alike in the 2016 presidential election (Pew Research Center 2016). In this way, Democratic leaders may experience only limited consequences when they contradict the will of their constituents, and Atlanta's "Cop City" highlights this disconnect between Democratic voters and their representatives.

Similar trends in police funding can be seen in Democratic hubs like New York City, where, in April 2023, Mayor Eric Adams (D) announced that the New York Police Department (NYPD) would be receiving annual pay raises, costing the city a total of $3 billion (Beck-Aden and Siff 2023). To finance this, all other city agencies, bar the Department of Education and City University New York, would undergo budget cuts, collectively amounting to $1 billion (Beck-Aden and Siff 2023). New York City taxpayers currently spend $29 million every day on the NYPD, yet the organisation's gaping flaws and shortcomings, particularly in relation to its disproportionate targeting of Black and Latino people, continue to play a decisive role in the department's influence on the community (Lieberman 2023; Ostadan 2022). This legislation is emblematic of the stark contrast between Adams' 2021 policy agenda, which he promoted during his campaign, and the policies he has enacted during his time in office. For instance, he promised to establish a watchlist of police officers who have exhibited misconduct, though, after nearly two years in office, he has failed to do so (Adams 2022; Geringer-Sameth 2022). As eighty-nine percent of Democrat voters call for "major changes" in policing (Crabtree 2020), Adams' inconsistencies reflect a clear departure from the will of Democrat voters. While local legislation is often lauded for more closely representing citizens than federal legislation, these instances in NYC and Atlanta suggest that some Democratic representatives are reluctant to act on the desires of their voters when they contradict the leaders' own interests.

Conclusion

Evident in approaches to housing and policing, Democratic leaders in numerous cities across America stray from the will of the constituents that elected them, leaving the party with disappointed voters and falling approval ratings (Saad 2023). During the campaign season, the platform underscored the value of a "housing-first" approach to the homelessness crisis, emphasising the significance of rehabilitation rather than criminalisation (The Democratic Party 2020, 35). Nonetheless, cities such as LA highlight the party's unwillingness to reflect these values in their legislation once their leaders enter office. Additionally, the platform proposes the need for comprehensive police reform (The Democratic Party 2020, 35), though cities including Atlanta and NYC continue to receive immense funding with little push for reform from Democrat representatives. In these ways, Democrats demonstrate a lack of commitment to issues of great importance to its voters, though its disillusioned constituents, perceiving the party as the "lesser of two evils," remain begrudgingly loyal (Saad 2023; Pew Research Center 2016). This unwillingness by the Democratic Party to represent the interests of its voters, coupled with its voters' still unwavering loyalty to the party, points to potential systemic issues with America's political institutions and the lack of choice it provides for its citizens. If this party, deemed by its voters as the "lesser of two evils," fails to represent the interests of its people, then perhaps no one does.

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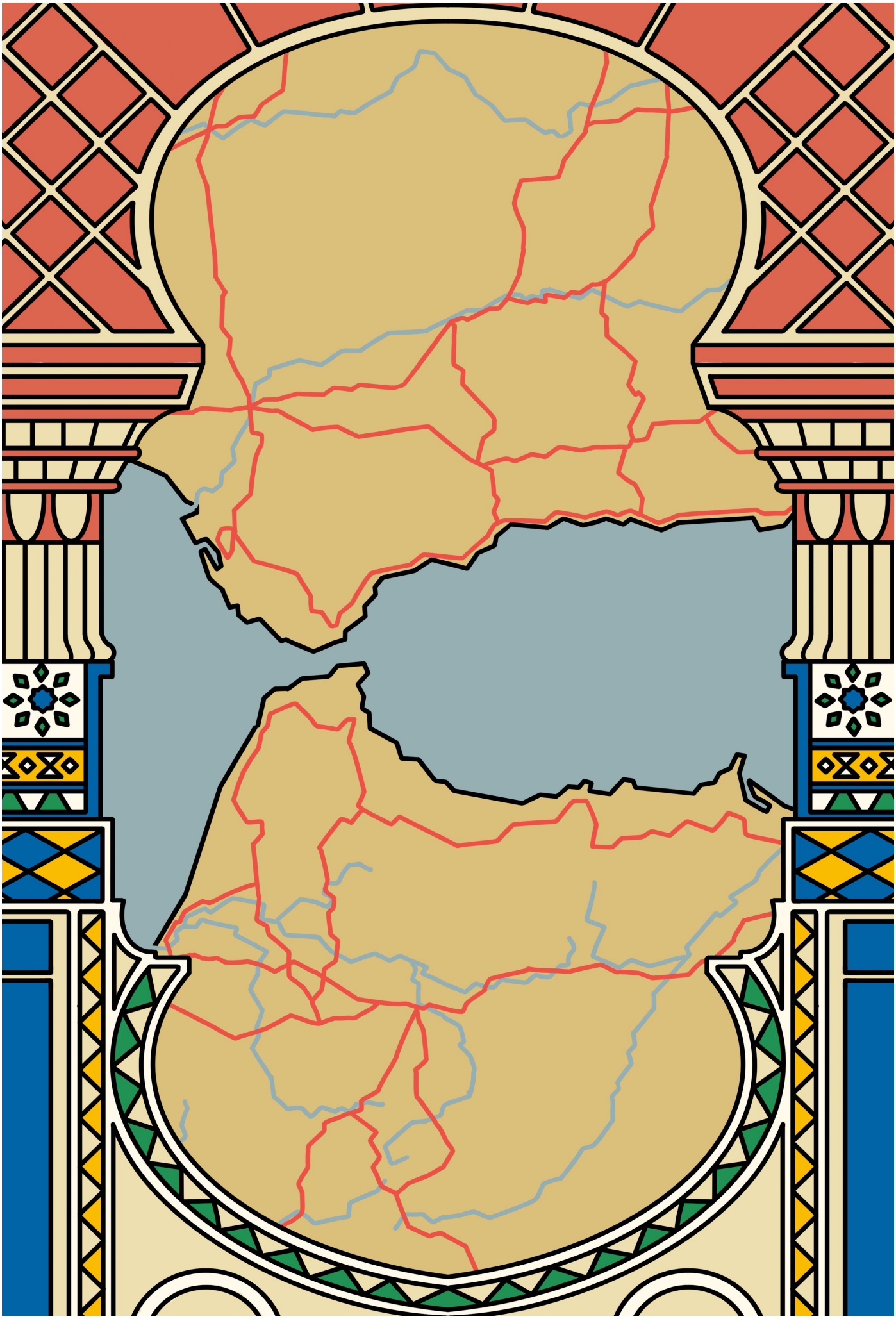

Artwork by James Wake

The Social Construction of Borders: An Examination of their Symbolic Significance and Flexible Function with Regard to the Spanish-Moroccan Border

Johanna Nesselhauf

The creation of categories, such as states in the case of global society, is essential to the ordering and organization of society (Newman 2006, 143). 'States' are defined by their territory and inseparably linked to the central power and sovereignty in exercising territorial activities (Cox 2002, 2–3). The territory of a state is marked by borders, which have previously been considered fixed spatial dividers (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1199). However, during the 1980s, a new field of 'border theory' emerged with focus on the Postmodern concept of social construction (Diener and Hagen 2009,1199-1200). This has called into question the long-presumed passive and fixed nature of borders and has generated investigations about the social constructivist nature of borders. This article will analyse the concept of borders using a social constructivist approach. The analysis will begin by explaining the theory of the social construction of borders by examining their symbolic importance and their flexible function as bridges or barriers. Subsequently, the article will present the case study of the Morocco–Spain land border and how it displays the symbolic significance of borders and their flexibility, determined by its political, cultural and economic context.

Symbolic Significance of Borders

The construction of borders is the social process referred to as 'bordering'; 'the interplay between (social) ordering and border-making' (Yuval-Davies 2018, 229).'Bordering' is not simply related to cartography or creating a physical wall but generates a process of social ordering of society (Newman 2006, 148). Through inclusionary or exclusionary activities, such as granting citizenship, differences are established between those 'inside' and 'outside' of the border (Newman 2006, 148). Therefore, borders are linked to the development of identity and the politics of belonging (Yural-Davies 2018, 230). There are various political projects that aim to create this idea of 'belonging' to a certain community, which itself is assembled by these political projects within a particular bordered space (Yural-Davies 2018, 230). Citizenship is the most common political project, with ethnicity and religion also contributing to this (Yural-Davies 2018, 230). These political projects are social forces that creates a division between those that are included and those that are excluded (Nail 2016, 3-4). According to Thomas Nail (2016, 2-6), a professor of Philosophy at the University of Denver, all borders are essentially processes of social division rather than physical 'lines'. Given that borders are social processes and not static divides they are experienced differently (Nail 2016, 2-4). Nail gives that example of how:

> For some people, such as affluent Western travelers, a border may function as a relatively seamless continuity between two areas. For others, such as undocumented migrants, the border may appear as a discontinuous division across which they are forbidden to pass and from which they are redirected (2016, 3).

This can be linked to the political project of belonging; citizenship. Citizenship is a mechanism by which society, or those in power in society, reproduce borders and enforce their function allowing certain people enhanced mobility while restricting the mobility of others. 'The border is both constitutive of and constituted by society' (Nail 2016, 4). This gives borders a symbolic significance as they are not simply spatial divides but the result of constant processes of social division.

Geo-economic and Geopolitical Significance of Borders

Furthermore, borders can be seen as social institutions as they create a system where control over movement can be exercised by those in positions of power (Newman 2006, 148). Borders are enforced or opened up in terms of the state's interests, which in a capitalist society manifests itself in the form of profits, wages, trade, and property values (Cox 2002, 11). Therefore, borders can change according to the political and economic international climate rather than being fixed. Nowadays, the changing nature of borders is characterised by the ongoing global conflict between increasing security threats and the geo-economic situation of accelerating globalisation (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1202). Regarding this modern global conflict, Diener and Hagen (2009, 1201) refer to the terms 'barrier-borders' and 'bridge-borders'. 'Barrier-borders' are closed off to avert threat, and bridge-borders are permeable, allowing international cooperation and trade. The latter is derivative of globalisation and the questionable dominance of territorial sovereignty. 'Strong globalisation' approaches argue that globalisation will increase international cooperation to the extent that deterritorialization will occur and borders will lose their meaning (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1201). While this is extreme and deemed unrealistic, it still demonstrates how globalisation generally leads to borders becoming more permeable and open to cooperation (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1201). One can observe how the globalisation trend has led to many borderlands developing into sub-cultural buffer zones which has eased movement (Newman 2006, 150). For instance, the EU borderland has created an area where social, economic, and cultural activities have come together with a focus on cooperation and participation (Newman 2006, 151). Free movement, free trade, and a single currency are gradually diminishing the primacy of borders.

This stands in contrast to the development of 'barrier-borders' in response to increasing global threats (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1202). As the world has become increasingly interconnected, transnational threats such as terrorism have emerged (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1202). Particularly, since the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), security measures all around the world have been tightened (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1202). "The global security landscape was altered dramatically" and created a grave change, which is reflected today as states balance the interest to participate in globalisation as well as the need for security (Diener and Hagen 2009, 1202). James Anderson (2001, 220), an emeritus professor at Queen's University Belfast, describes borders as having 'selective permeability' and a 'filtering' effect. Borders, influenced by the global economic and political context, are lowered only to certain people and goods, and in turn 'filter' out goods and people that are not in the state's interest to enter (Anderson 2001, 220). Therefore, borders can act as either bridges or barriers, displaying selective permeability, which undermines the traditionally assumed fixed nature of borders.

"Therefore, borders can act as either bridges or barriers, displaying selective permeability, which undermines the traditionally assumed fixed nature of borders."

The Case Study of Spain and the Symbolic Significance of Borders

The case study of the Spanish–Moroccan border is a fitting example of how a border can act as a symbol of identity, a bridge, and a barrier. The Morocco–Spain border symbolises many identity divides between the two countries: Spain/Morocco, Europe/Africa, Christianity/Islam, former colonizer/formerly colonized, wealthy North/developing South and EU territory/non-EU territory (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 314). These are linked to the previously mentioned political projects of belonging: citizenship, religion, and ethnicity (Yuval-Davies et al. 2018, 230). Citizenship in the context of Spain as an EU country is a political project of belonging as well as a technology of exclusion, as movement from Morocco to Spain or any other EU country is only permitted with a visa (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 310). Beatriz Gallego-Noche et al. (2023, 1) explains how technologies of selective inclusion and exclusion classify and filter people within bordered spaces which defines and delimits belonging. In the case of Spanish and Moroccan identity, the EU cit-

izenship, or the lack thereof, limits the Moroccans' 'belonging' to outside of EU territory. However, the Spanish 'belong' to EU territory, and they can enjoy free movement without a visa inside of the EU. This links back to Nail's (2016, 2-5) border theory, which argues that borders are processes of social division. The border becomes socially constructed by the social division of EU citizen and non-EU citizen, which is facilitated by citizenship. Borders are therefore socially constructed and furthermore constantly socially reconstructed by the social impact they have (2016, 2-5). In this case, the enhanced mobility for EU citizen and the restricted mobility for non-EU citizen is the social impact that reproduces the border. This demonstrates that borders are not static but socially constructed via political projects.

Another key political project for this case study is religion. The Christianity and Islam divide is particularly significant considering the trend of global securitisation inspired by the tragic events of 9/11 (Pinos 2009, 76). Jaume Castan Pinos (2009, 75–76), an associate Professor at the University of Southern Denmark, argues the Muslim faith of Morocco leads to Moroccans being seen as a dangerous enemy by the Spanish, who perceive Islam as a threat. This local phenomenon can be linked back to the increased global Islamophobia after 9/11. Vaughan-Williams (2015, 2-3) describes the EU as being caught in a Border Crisis characterized by the discourse of securitization and humanitarianism. The EU borders are built for the purposes of protecting the life of EU citizen but also to protect any life (Vaughan-Williams 2015). Therefore, migrants are, one the one hand, viewed a life that needs to be saved but, on the other hand, they are political subjects that could potentially pose a threat (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 2-3). Particularly with increasing Islamophobia the religious divide starts to play a significant role in socially constructing the border as the protective function of the border becomes salient and the border becomes enforced and reproduced. Furthermore, the wealthy North/developing South divide is particularly salient at the Spanish Moroccan border (Pinos 2009, 69). The economic imbalance between Spain and Morocco is one of the most extreme globally (Pinos 2009, 69). In 2022 Spain's GDP per capita was 29,674.5 US$ and Morocco's GDP per capita was 3,442.0 US$ (The World Bank 2022). Therefore, this enhances the divide between the two countries. These various identity poles give borders a symbolic significance as they create differences between the two communities and are not simply spatial dividers.

The case study of Spain and bridge and barrier borders

In addition to its symbolic significance, the Morocco–Spain border is also characterised by its functional flexibility. The accession of Spain to the EU made the border particularly complex. The accession of Spain into the EU led to a 'functional reconfiguration' of the border as it takes on the role of 'regulator of flows' (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 309). The EU aspires to economic partnership and the strengthening of institutional links on the Euro-Mediterranean shore; within the context of globalisation and the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area, the border is more open to flows of goods and services (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 308–9). This permeability of the border is a case of Anderson's (2001, 220) proposed idea of selective permeability. While the economic function of the border is generally loosened, and market integration is promoted the border is only selectively open to the flow of people and goods (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 309). With regards to 'Fortress Europe', Spain became a country of immigration instead of emigration and this ultimately called for a reconfiguration of its border controls (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 309). The accession of Spain into the EU led to the reinforcement of its external borders (Pinos 2009, 67). Stricter immigration and asylum policies were implemented, which simply increased illegal immigration (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 311). This newly perceived threat of illegal immigration caused securitization measures to be increased with financial support of the EU institutions and heightened policing of borders as well as the establishment of highly technical surveillance measures, such as SIVE (Integrated System of External Surveillance) (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 310). Essentially, this shows that while Spain aims to maximise the benefits it can reap from globalisation, it also protects itself against the 'threat' of immigration. Therefore, the Spanish–Moroccan border selectively poses as a bridge and a barrier border.

Particularly representative of selective permeability of borders are the rules that are enforced in the Spanish enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla, that lie within northern Morocco. The two cities rely on cross-border flows of people from the neighbouring Moroccan provinces, Tétouan and Nador (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 309). Therefore, the two cities are exempt from the Schengen Agreement, a treaty to remove internal border controls within Europe's Schengen Area creating

a common external border, and daily import of labour and consumers from Morocco is possible despite being outside of Europe's Schengen area (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008, 309). Those from Tétouan or Nador do not need a visa to cross the border (Pinos 2009, 70). The Schengen Agreement becomes flexible to ensure economic sustainability of the two cities (Pinos 2009, 70). Here, the flexibility of the barrier and bridge function of borders perfectly portrays the socially constructed nature of borders.

Conclusion

Ultimately, borders are socially constructed and constantly reproduced rather than being historically fixed spatial dividers. This can be observed regarding the symbolic importance of borders. Political projects such as citizenship socially construct borders by leading to the division of people who in turn experience borders differently. The social impact of borders, caused by these different experiences, constantly reproduces the borders. In the case of the Moroccan–Spanish border political projects and identity markers, such as Islam and Christianity, create a symbolic divide between two different groups that has real social impact, which then constructs and reproduces the border between the two countries. In addition to the symbolic nature of borders, they are flexible and can pose as bridges or barriers that have fluctuating and selective levels of permeability. Borders act as bridges or barriers due to the clash of the global geopolitical and geo-economic conflict. Whilst globalisation is inspiring countries to open their borders to the flow of goods and services. Nevertheless, a trend of global securitisation can be observed, and borders are closing for the sake of the state's safety. Essentially, borders enact selective permeability and allow the flow of certain goods and services. Regarding the Spain–Morocco border, this can be observed as the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area stands in contrast to the closing of borders in the face of the perceived threat of immigration. The two Spanish enclaves pose a particularly interesting example of such selective permeability.

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Artwork by Chiara Watt

Affirmative Action and Elite Education: A successful path to belonging? Now that it's been banned, where do we go from here?

William Fieni-Thies

Following centuries of structural racism leading to disproportionately poor economic outcomes for minorities, universities throughout the United States (US) introduced affirmative action programmes which favoured admissions for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Affirmative action sought to enrol historically disadvantaged groups, specifically into elite universities, which had long been a key driver of the underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in positions of power. 60 years after the start of its adoption, the Supreme Court ruled affirmative action in university admissions unconstitutional (US Supreme Court 2022, 194).

This essay will evaluate the successes and failures of affirmative action as an inclusionary programme whilst providing policy proposals to help low-income and minority students going forward. These policies include restructuring revenue for schools, re-introducing standardised testing (and making the test mandatory for all students) as an important part of the admissions process and striking down ALDC (Athletes, Legacy, Dean's List and Children of faculty) admits.

The Importance of College

Despite rising college fees in the US, college degrees remain one of the strongest investments that individuals can make in their future. Workers with college degrees earn an average of $1.2 million dollars more than their non-college-educated peers over their respective lifetimes (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2013, 3). Income differences are even more dramatic for students attending elite universities, where the median incomes of graduates ten years after graduation are more than double those of the median worker at the same age (Chett, Deming, and Friedman 2023, 44). A college education, whether at an elite institution or not, is correlated with a myriad of positive outcomes in addition to higher earnings. College graduates have lower incarceration rates, far higher employment rates, better credit scores and are more likely to establish new intergenerational economic patterns, as children of college graduates are far more likely to go to college themselves (Cataldi, Bennett, and Chen 2018, 2). In short, a college education is key to a successful financial future and can break cycles of poverty.

Why Does Affirmative Action Exist?

Despite the value of a college education, few low-income minority students attend universities. The largest factor in low-income minority students' low rate of college enrolment is their substandard formative education. As opposed to many European and Asian countries, where schools are funded by central governments, schools in the United States are funded by their local counties (Chingos and Blagg 2017, 3). These counties' derive their revenue primarily from property taxes, which are far higher in wealthier counties than in poorer counties (Chingos and Blagg 2017, 4). The inequality is stark. The wealthiest ten percent of US districts spend ten times more than

the poorest ten percent. It is common to see wealthy counties spend as much as three times more than the poorer counties in the same state (Hammond 1998, 17). These differences in revenue have substantial effects on the quality of the teachers, the curriculum and class sizes (both individual classes and school years) (Morgan and Amerikaner 2018, 10).

Inequalities in these aforementioned factors lead to highly variable formative educational outcomes across the country (Hammond 1998, 19). Students at wealthier schools score significantly higher in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, students from these schools attend more prestigious universities (Education Week 2023). The inequalities are far higher than in comparable countries where, as mentioned previously, schools are entirely centrally funded (Heckman and Landersø 2020). As a result of this policy, poorer areas, which are often primarily made up of minorities, perform worse than whiter and wealthier areas. The cycle is often self-perpetuating. Low-income schools produce under-achieving students. The most qualified teachers, who could significantly improve educational outcomes, are recruited to wealthier schools with wider outreach programs leaving high-poverty schools with weaker teachers (Allen and McInerney 2019, 8). High-quality teachers often switch from poorer counties to wealthier counties resulting from discouragement by underperforming students (Heckman and Landersø 2020). Thus, weaker teachers also tend to be paired with weaker students in underfunded, overcrowded schools with limited equipment for teaching.

"The inequality is stark. The wealthiest ten percent of US districts spend ten times more than the poorest ten percent."

A lack of college counsellors in low-income schools also contributes to a lack of knowledge surrounding the admissions process for poor students. As will be explored later in this article, a lack of knowledge surrounding the admissions process is a key barrier to low-income minority students attending college. Traditionally, this role would be taken by college counsellors, though the percentage of college counsellors in low-income schools is extremely low. A recent survey found that sixty-seven percent of public schools do not have college counsellors, the majority of which were low-income schools (NACAC 2023). The same survey found that sixty-eight percent of private schools did have college counsellors. Key perceived barriers to college application, like cost, the amount of financial aid a student may have access to, or the prestige of a college can also be mitigated by college counsellors. Research from the National Association for College Admission Counselling found that after meeting with a college counsellor, students are seven times more likely to complete an application for Federal Student Aid and over three times as likely to attend college (NACAC 2023). In short, a variety of structural factors affecting low-income minority students' academic success are compensated through preference in the college admissions process.

Solutions to Unequal Opportunity

Fixing Funding

The US's unique approach to funding its school systems, notably the influence of highly variable property taxes, has led to drastic differences in the quality of public education throughout the country (Hammond 1998, 16) A move away from local property taxes and towards a centrally funded public school system would be a significant step towards more equitable outcomes amongst students. Key drivers of subpar education, notably overpopulated schools with too-large class sizes, would almost immediately be improved following the implementation of a centrally funded school system with subsequent increases in teaching hiring. With smaller class sizes, teaching quality would also naturally improve as teachers can better focus on individual students (EEF 2023). In short, funding reform would create a larger pool of high-performing low-income students. While minority students would still be at a disadvantage, their most significant barrier to higher education, poor primary and secondary education, would significantly improve.

While an effective potential solution, the feasibility of school funding reform is uncertain. Property taxes have long been the primary driver of education and a policy shift would require vast funding restructuring (Walker 1984, 285). Since their inception, public school systems in other countries like Norway have been funded through central revenue and have not necessarily faced this issue (European Commission 2023). It is reasonable to assume that a shift away from local property taxes would be hugely unpopular amongst high-income earners. High earners might object to having their taxes fund schools outside their district, especially in areas where their children would not benefit from their taxes. In addition, funding reform would require vast changes to existing schools' budgets and structures. As men-

tioned previously, there is significant inequality in school funding. Schools in wealthier neighbourhoods would experience large cutbacks, affecting the quality of schooling. With wealthier schools dipping in quality, wealthier parents may be incentivised to put their children in private institutions. Research has shown that wealthier parents send their children to private schools when faced with lower-quality public institutions (Talancé 2020, 117). This could create an increasingly two-tiered education system, where students at elite universities come increasingly from private schools, a problem seen in countries like the UK (HESA 2022). Given proper implementation and a long enough timescale, a paced transition towards more equitable school funding could allow both high-tax payers and schools to adjust to the new policy environment, leading to significantly improved educational outcomes for low-income students. Due to the long-term nature of central school funding, there are several interim policies which would improve outcomes for low-income minority students.

Extracurriculars

As the correlation between race, poverty, and standardised test results grew in the 2000s, universities turned towards a more 'holistic' view of students when considering applications. While intending to help low-income minority students, the shift away from standardised testing has only widened inequalities in college admissions (Alvero et al 2021, 6). The more holistic view of college admissions primarily manifested itself in the increasing adoption of test optionality (colleges submitting test scores as part of their applications optional), which became particularly prevalent following COVID-19 (FairTest 2023). The rationale for a less test-based admissions process is as follows: as income increase, so do standardised test scores, widening class inequalities (Chetty, Deming, and Friedman 2023, 16). Thus, the proposed solution was to recentre the admissions process away from test scores and towards other factors, such as extracurriculars. While standardised test scores do increase with class, furhter emphasis on extracurriculars may only exacerbate the issue.

Past research has highlighted vast inequalities between race and class regarding the number of activities, activities with top-level leadership roles and activities with distinguished accomplishments, all of which are key to university admission (Park et al. 2023, 21). This results from the cost of many extracurricular activities, which are often prohibitive for low-income minority groups, persistent racial exclusion, and social expectation in advantaged groups to participate in activities that often do not exist in disadvantaged communities (Lareau 2011, 73). This support is seen particularly in athletics, which are hugely influential for college recruitment. Means of support include providing transportation, accessing better training facilities, and seeking out the best (and most expensive) coaches (Jayakumar and Page 2021, 1112), leading to disproportionate recruitment of white students at many institutions. In short, while the move towards a more holistic view of college admissions sought to reduce inequalities, there is evidence to suggest that emphasising non-academic credentials can exacerbate inequalities.

Universal Standardised Testing

While standardised testing has been critiqued for exacerbating inequality, evidence suggests that implementing universal standardised testing could uplift minority students. For students from low incomes, the barrier to joining an elite university is not competence or cognitive ability, but insufficient awareness of their ability and potential (VerBruggen 2022). Oftentimes, low-income students will elect not to take any standardised testing because of the fee (even if states have provisions to provide the tests for free to low income) (Dynarski 2018). For example, before implementing mandatory standardised testing, only thirty-five percent of Michigan's low-income students took any standardised test. After implementing mandatory testing, an additional fifty percent of students who would not have taken the SAT get scores strong enough to compete with applicants at elite schools (Dynarski 2018). Comparable results were found in several states including Maine, Illinois, and Colorado. In addition, the policy would be easy to implement and cost effective. A dozen states have already implemented the policy (Dynarski 2018).

ALDC Admits

Among current preferences that most favour historically advantaged groups to the detriment of disadvantaged groups are biased towards athletes, legacies, those on the dean's interest list, and children of faculty and staff (ALDCs). At Harvard, ALDC students make up forty-three percent of white students admitted, compared to less than sixteen percent for African American, Asian American, and Hispanic students (Arcidiacono, Kinsler, and Ransom 2019, 34). Seventy percent of Harvard legacies are white (Arcidiacono, Kinsler, and Ransom 2019, 4). Beyond be-

ing unfair to non-ALDC white students, other racial groups also suffer from preferences towards ALDC; they are disproportionately unrepresented by these advantages. A statistical model found that only seventy-five percent of these ALDC students would not have been admitted were it not for their special status (Arcidiacono, Kinsler, and Ransom 2019, 29). While admissions data at other schools is not as easily accessible (Arcidiacono et al. were able to access Harvard's admissions data following the Supreme Court case), Legacy admissions alone make up anywhere from twelve percent to seventeen percent of Ivy League admissions (Statista 2023). Reducing ALDC preferences in the admissions process (or at least significantly reducing them) would be a significant step towards a more equitable college admissions process.

Conclusion

The debate over affirmative action in university admissions has been a long and contentious one. Affirmative action has undeniably served as a critical step towards addressing the historical disadvantages faced by minority and low-income students in their pursuit of higher education. It has offered a means of compensating for the inequalities in formative education and the systemic disparities in resources and opportunities. The importance of college as a path to social mobility cannot be overstated (Cataldi, Bennett, and Chen 2018, 2), and the need for policies that promote equal access to higher education remains pressing. To address the challenges posed by the recent ruling on affirmative action, there is a need to consider a range of policy proposals. Introducing universal standardised testing, ensuring greater transparency in the college admission process, and eliminating advantages to ALDC admits are all crucial steps. Moreover, reforming the funding structure of public schools to reduce disparities between low-income and affluent districts should be a top priority, though as mentioned, significant challenges remain. The pursuit to close the inequality gap requires several short-term solutions and in the long term, reforming how we structure funding our education system. Ensuring that all children, regardless of background, are afforded an equitable opportunity to pursue a college education is a pillar of any country that claims to offer its citizens equal opportunity.

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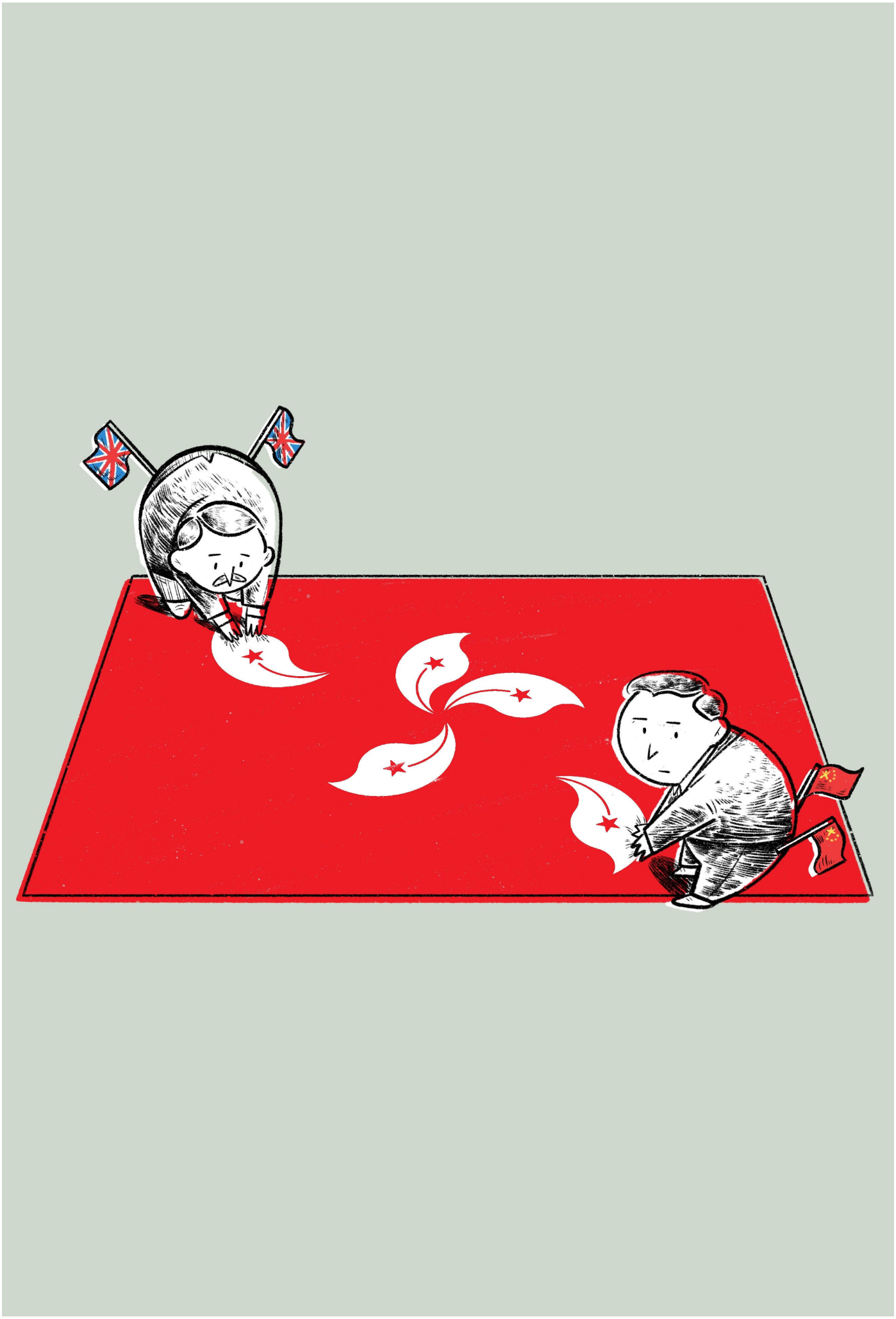

Artwork by James Wake

Postcolonial Liminality: Hong Kong's Struggle for Identity

Adeline Cheung

Introduction

A liminal society is in a state of ambiguity, undefined by its adjacent boundaries. It is not one of harmony but of both conflict and construction. The concept of liminality highlights the post-colonial predicament of Hong Kong. It finds itself on the periphery of two domineering forces. Firstly, the British colonial legacy; and secondly, the authoritarian state of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This paper argues that rather than an amalgamation of these two forces – reflected in the portrayal of Hong Kong as an 'East-meets-West' melting pot – the concept of liminality illustrates how the two outside influences moulded the Hong Kong identity as its unique entity (Law 2017, 26). However, democratic movements often express aspirations that fail to address how both forces have undermined local agencies. Dissonance results from positioning Hong Kong in a moral binary of Western liberalism and Chinese authoritarianism. The PRC's trite critiques of Hong Kong's colonial history justify Chinese nationalism; and in response is an overtly uncritical understanding of the socio-economic implications of British colonialism and capitalism, with Western democracy being posited as a panacea. Hong Kong's democratic struggle ought not be brought under the binaristic paternalism of the West and China, but recognises its liminal condition to forge a path that rejects different forms of oppression (Chien 2022, 195–197).

This paper will first offer a historical overview of modern Hong Kong. A postcolonial lens will be adopted to elucidate Western and Chinese contributions to Hong Kong's identity and blind spots in democratic movements. Then, through analysing recent democratic movements, a more organic manifestation of democracy can be observed – the practice of egalitarianism and solidarity. Yet the political rhetoric of the movements fails to express this vision due to the dissonance within the West–PRC binary. By recognising the socio-cultural liminality of Hong Kong as a refusal to submit to either external power, this essay maintains that the construction of identity and democratisation requires a departure from the existing veneration of Western colonialism.

Historical Overview and Coloniality

Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon peninsula and the New Territories came under British rule after the two Opium Wars between Britain and imperial China in the nineteenth century. Following the Communist takeover of the Mainland in 1949, Hong Kong saw an influx of immigrants from the North and thus labour and capital. The economy transformed from an entrepôt to a manufacturing industry, and Hong Kong was recognised as an emergent "Asian Tiger" economy in the 1970s (Cooper 2017, 101). With China's Reforming and Opening Up Initiative in the 1980s, Hong Kong transitioned into a financial service centre as industry moved to the Mainland, encouraging significant foreign direct investment. In the background of this period was the question of the impending ex-

piration of the New Territories lease in 1997. Subsequently, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed in 1984 to agree that the whole of Hong Kong would return to Chinese sovereignty. The constitutional Basic Law was drafted, which dictated that Hong Kong was to become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC. Importantly, "the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years," ensuring high levels of autonomy, rule of law, and civil liberties (Article 5, Hong Kong Basic Law; Flowerdew 2017, 458). Dubbed "One Country, Two Systems," this very construction of Hong Kong indicates the postcolonial social, economic and political tensions and ambiguities that contribute to its liminal condition (Department of Justice 2024).

Because of these ambiguities, the bridging of power in 1997 was not decolonisation. Negotiations mainly occurred between China and Britain, only absorbing a few local representatives. The emphasis on a "smooth transition" facilitated the burial of any decolonial concerns (Law 2017, 14). Postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon's critique on "national consciousness" could be adapted here – he writes of different circumstances, yet he articulates: "nationalisation quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (Fanon [1961] 2001, 122). Hong Kong has been hailed as the utopia of laissez-faire economics and minimal state governance — which remained constant from colonial to SAR eras — evidencing the transfer of advantages.

"Interrogating this liminal dissonance is necessary for a genuine reimagining of a free and democratic Hong Kong, rather than invoking a romanticised colonial ghost of the past."

After the handover, the PRC's displacement of local culture, political autonomy and civil rights represent a new colonial force. Hong Kong cultural scholar Stephen Chan (2022) highlights the PRC's attitude: Retain "only the city, not the people" — it indicates a monopoly over the "definition" of Chineseness (176). This contributed to the urgent need to cultivate and preserve a distinct Hong Konger identity. It is therefore liminality rather than hybridity that articulates Hong Kong's postcolonial predicament. Democratic movements such as the Anti Article 23 demonstration of 2003, the Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the Anti Extradition Bill Movement of 2019 indicate significant fractures in public approval (Wong 2022, 4–6). Meanwhile, localist preservation movements against the demolition of heritage sites such as Queen's Pier and Lei Tung Street cultivated local cultural consciousness (Veg 2017, 328). Simultaneously, cultural theorist Rey Chow (1992, 157) asserts that the "colonial" must still carry weight in postcolonial analysis, and in dissecting native culture.

Colonial Memory and Capitalism

Although Hong Kong was economically aligned with the Western free world, its political and social structures did not reflect this under British imperial rule. Interrogating this liminal dissonance is necessary for a genuine reimagining of a free and democratic Hong Kong, rather than invoking a romanticised colonial ghost of the past. This imperative is two-fold. Firstly, the selective memory of a neutral or even benign colonial government prevents a critical assessment of the continuum of political subjugation. Secondly, the positive view of the British promotion of laissez-faire economics fails to identify its connection to Hong Kong's present-day economic problems and persistent pro-business governance.

Liminality in Late-Stage Capitalism

Hong Kongers have been constructed as an "economically successful yet politically apathetic animal" by the prior colonial and present SAR government alike (Law 2017, 22). Imposed capitalistic culture as the defining character of Hong Kong society is an indicator of this collaboration between the "colonialist bourgeoisie" at the expense of local autonomy (Fanon [1961] 2001, 34; Law 2009; Carroll 2005). Chow (1992, 157) criticises the framing of "postmodern hybridity," which lauds postcolonial conditions as "hybrid" and "international". In the modern context, this view dismisses British colonialism as merely historical — thus "ignor[ing] the experiences of poverty, dependency, and subalternity that persist[ed] well beyond the achievement of national independence [or return in the case of Hong Kong]" (Chow 1992, 157). Therefore, liminality more aptly illustrates Hong Kong's economic predicament as subject to, rather than a part of Western and Chinese interests.

The romanticisation of the colonial past disenables a realisation of the liminality of Hong Kong in the context of late-stage capitalism; "singular focus on that contest as a binarism that encapsulates our present reality distracts from a larger problem" (Chien 2022, 196). The roots of economic grievances can be located in the economic model the British encouraged

which persists to this day to serve Chinese capitalist purposes. Despite sustaining a high GDP per capita (fifteenth in 2022), this is notably coupled with the highest housing prices in the world, resulting in squalid living conditions such as cage homes (Global Property Guide; Wong 2022). Hong Kong-based economist Leo Goodstadt (2018, 5–15) accurately attributes this to the failings and mismanagement of the SAR government, who relentlessly prioritise economic growth and market freedom, including at the cost of public spending and social welfare. This is reflected in the manifestos and policies of successive Chief Executives, like Donald Tsang: "civil servants should not see their role merely as regulators but more as supporters and partners for business" (Leo Goodstadt 2018, 5-15). The binaristic narrative, which disregards the systematic, multifarious nature of capitalism, has been taken advantage of beyond British colonialism. In the late twentieth century, Hong Kong "contain[ed and conceal[ed] the contradictions of post-socialist PRC and its collaboration with the US," benefitting the capitalism of the West and China at the expense of Hong Kong's welfare (Chien 2022, 202).

Democratic Movements

Given the context of political-economic liminality, this section will examine the democratic struggles and aspirations within Hong Kong and illuminate a sense of dissonance between its egalitarian desires and anti-PRC rhetoric. It will focus mainly on the 2019 protests. Hong Kong's conception of freedom and democracy remain inherited from its colonial experiences. In the failure to accept the liminal position of Hong Kong, the movement has articulated political stances that fall into the gravitational pull of chauvinism and historical romanticisation; betraying the underlying process of egalitarian decolonisation.

Nature of Social Movements

A few key strands can be highlighted about the nature of Hong Kong's democratic movements: the collective experience of violence, a cultivation of solidarity, and open expressions of egalitarianism. The protests of 2019 were reacted to with police brutality, as well as gang violence that indiscriminately targeted demonstrators (Kuo 2019). Chan (2022, 185) argues that this is symbolic of the disintegration of state accountability: a "paradigm shift in the Hong Kong crisis." The collective trauma experienced amidst this oppression contributed to a sense of mutual belonging. This mutual belonging became manifest through networks of solidarity: from support for "yellow" (pro-democratic) businesses, human chains across secondary schools, and "Lennon Walls" that shrouded tunnels and footbridges with post-it notes (Shen 2020; Hale and Graham-Harrison 2019; Hou 2020). Lastly, a sense of egalitarianism can be traced in all contemporary democratic movements in Hong Kong. The 2000s preservation campaigns' "left-wing localism" was critical of "real-estate hegemony," elite collusion between Hong Kong and Chinese tycoons, and "crony capitalism" (quangui zibenzhuyi 權貴資本主義)' (Veg 2017, 328). During the 2019 protests, there was a consciousness of socioeconomic constraints on individuals. Working professionals raised funds for working-class student protestors, while some teachers offered to tutor students who had missed school and could not afford private tutors (Chan 2022, 82). One can identify the fundamentally egalitarian projection of protest culture.

Binaristic Political Rhetoric

Hong Kong's democratic movement has been consistently repudiated by the PRC's anti-imperialist discourse, which frames protesters as the accomplices of an insidious foreign influence. As postcolonial scholar S. Y. Chan (2022, 74) points out: the "Chinese Communist Party's version of anti-imperialism severely distorts anti-colonial aspirations and is better understood as a "crude anti-imperialism"." This has inadvertently cemented the conditions for an emphasis on Western liberal democracy as a panacea. By strictly adhering to an antithetical stance to China, it disregards the inequalities and qualms generated by colonialism and capitalism. This tunnel, binaristic vision espouses exclusion and populist hatred. These sentiments are at odds with the ideal society manifested in ground movements, early demonstrations, and left-wing localism.

The romanticisation of the colonial era can be located in the protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times" (Wong 2022, 6). However, "liberate" (guong fok) is more accurately translated as "recover," implying a past to be revived and an attachment to an ideal Hong Kong in the past. This could be evidenced in the appearance of the colonial as well as the British flag in demonstrations. Hong Kongers have an increasingly distant sense of identification with China. "Recover" reveals an attempt at ridding the Hong Kong identity's purported belonging to the Mainland, yet simultaneously embraces an alternative state of existence in its colonial past. This

is a consequence of positioning Hong Kong within the binary of past British rule and current Chinese rule.

The idea of "liberation" partially merged with a newer strand of independence which has taken on chauvinistic, right-wing characteristics. This could be exemplified in Hong Kong localist scholar Chin Wan's (2011) "city-state self-rule" thesis. He adopted vocabulary such as "locust invasion" in asserting political resistance against an influx of mainland Chinese immigrants and tourists/consumers, which catalysed supply shortages such as that of baby formula. In the discussion of the "uncivilisation" of the PRC, he argued for the preservation of "authentic" Chinese culture in Hong Kong (Veg 2017, 329). The language is reminiscent of colonial superiority and has been popularised by localist groups. Furthermore, an online culture emerged which adopts anti-Chinese sentiments inherited from American right-wing politics. It further branched into exclusion and hostility towards "racial, feminist, and environmental issues" in popular vocabulary the equivalent of "feminazi" (女權撚) or "leftard" (左膠) (Wong 2022, 11). Thus, the recognition of a separate path and identity for Hong Kong is hijacked by xenophobic attitudes by submitting to the binaristic lens rather than its liminal character.

Conclusion

The 2019 protests have catalysed a resurgence in binarism with strong moral justifications, but it is necessary to move beyond this to construct a democratic vision that engages in the wide range of grievances of Hong Kong society. Liminality is a more authentic representation of Hong Kong's historical experiences and identity — it allows for the construction of an identity that can critically react to colonial forces which have shaped the political, but notably, the socioeconomic landscape of Hong Kong. The systems of oppression lie not only in political authoritarianism but collaboration of capitalist powers, which transcends the West-PRC binary. The construction of freedom and democracy need not be limited to Western liberalism – by internalising the liminal position of Hong Kong, democratic discourse could become more imaginative and productive. The evolution of Chinese nationalism and Hong Kong's reaction to it is space for further elaboration of the concept of liminality. Self-identification appears constantly ambiguous and multifaceted, shaping Hong Kong's development as independent of but tethered to the wider question of "Chineseness."

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Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Genocide: Identity through Diaspora, Historical Memory and Generational Trauma

Julia Bahadrian

Armenian Diaspora Identity and Historical Memory

The Armenian diaspora is the seventh largest globally and is defined as an ethno-religious-cultural community of 10 million Armenians living outside Armenia (Bolsajian 2018, 30). The historical prevalence of this diaspora can be understood through Armenian's historical oppression as an ethnically and religiously distinct people in the majority Islamic Arab region (Bolsajian 2018, 30). Under successive pogroms and the 1915 Armenian Genocide, wherein 1.2 million people were systematically deported and murdered through death marches and militia murders, many were forcefully displaced into the surrounding Levant and Western countries. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2024; Akçam 2012, 259) The material and systematic erasure of Armenian homes, schools, churches, communities, and family units destroyed cultural memory institutions, and consequently, key transmission routes of cultural and collective memorialisation and Armenian identity were decentralised. This drastically disrupted the Armenian group identity's "social, territorial, and cultural reproduction" abroad (Aprahamain 1999, 2). To adapt past this, the Armenian diaspora's construction of collective identity has centred on the importance of historical memory to their cultural survival. Through establishing shared "memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" and building a canon of core Armenian identity, the diaspora can cultivate a strong sense of belonging to the Armenian diasporic nation despite global dispersal. (Stuart 1990, 226; Ziemer 2010, 292). Furthermore, the fundamental development of an Armenian "diaspora consciousness" necessitates an intense concern with the "mneme-history" of the past, specifically focusing in on how the community conceptualises the act of remembering in later generations. (Ziemer 2010, 291). This is because the creation of a collective diaspora identity hinges on the communal re-creation and navigation of shared historical and cultural narratives around the legacy of mass violence, established through shared imagination and collective memory (Ziemer 2010, 291). Through communicative diaspora propagation of cultural Armenian traditions, religious attendance, food, music, and names abroad, modern communities can establish a shared continuity with past generations. (Dakessian 2018). Displaced diasporas, therefore, create a trail of collective memory relating to "another place or time" and build shared "imagined resources" that construct a new homeland out of cultural traditions and practices formed in the past (Appadurai 1989, 25; Ziemer 2010, 292). Through this, Armenian diaspora culture becomes "the land of a landless people" (Tchilingrian 2018, 5). This characterisation creates a shared, and therefore collective, belonging to a metaphysical notion of "homeland" outside the typical conception of a physical territorial entity, surpassing national borders.

"The Other"– Collective Genocide Narratives

A focal diasporic narrative is the communal recol-

lection and recreation of the shared, traumatic, and historical experience of genocide, instilling it as a collective Armenian experience (Chernobrov 2019, 917; Ziemer 2010, 294). In order to retain the "post memory" of the Genocide, family and community units in the Armenian diaspora intergenerationally transmit the collective trauma memory of 1915, "retelling" the tale of Genocide. (Chernobrov 2019, 916). This "past presencing" breaks down spatial and temporal distance between the events, and makes current and 'present' the historical 'past' mass violence, embedding it everyday self-understanding, behaviours, and therefore collective memory (Chernobrov 2019, 916).

"The retelling of genocide experiences, political memory, and generational trauma is therefore an overarching and historical cultural narrative in the Armenian collective consciousness..."

Çevik-Ersaydı further theorises the transmission of anti-Turk political values within these victimhood narratives and memory, which consequently defines Armenians as a "martyred" people relegated to an "unsettled nomadic existence" (Cevik-Ersaydı 2014, 1; Aprahamian 1999, 3; Ziemer 2010, 295). Explicitly contrasted against an exteriorised and "othered" historical enemy, this shared mentality evokes in-group diaspora opposition, identification, resistance, and solidarity. Accentuated by modern genocide denial in Turkey and their Gag rule in the US, the collective psyche's identification with "historically unresolved grief" is exacerbated and made current (Bolsajian 2018, 36). The retelling of genocide experiences, political memory, and generational trauma is therefore an overarching and historical cultural narrative in the Armenian collective consciousness that constitutes a seminal part of Armenian "shared imagination" and collective diaspora identity by facilitating in-group cohesion, recreation, integration, and belonging (Cevik-Ersaydı 2014, 11; Ziemer 2010, 291).

Territorialisation and Collective Diaspora Structures

Armenian diasporas underwent cultural detachment and depersonalisation due to physical and cultural isolation from shared communities (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). This made it hard for transnational communities to sustain familial, social, economic, and cultural links across national borders and diaspora groups (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). Armenian communities attempted to mitigate this and navigate new geographic borders by making the community a geopolitical reality by adopting symbolic territorialisation and constructing a "territorial and cultural reproduction of (Armenian) group identity" abroad (Aprahamian 1999, 2). They did this by creating a collective diaspora reimagining and historical narrative of the homeland, constructing a cohesive diaspora via new shared collective structures and cultural institutions (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). The spatial and symbolic constructions would propagate and institutionalise cultural transmission by implementing Armenian language schools, community centres, businesses, and Orthodox Armenian parishes. This was intended to preserve religious and national rituals and maintain cultural, linguistic, and historical links with other Armenians, thereby creating shared narratives, memories, and identities (Chernobrov 2019, 923; Hall 1990, 236). Through this, Armenian communities organised local and transnational social spaces, and new cultural institutions could culturally transmit diasporic Armenian identity and create a "New Armenia" abroad (Chernobrov 2019, 926; Mamigonian 2017).

Many of these community initiatives are developed through grassroots and non-profit community-run organisations; Hayashen, Centre for Armenian Information, exemplifies this small-scale functioning, running community and cultural events and supporting diaspora access to their rights in the UK (CAIA 2023). Other larger diasporic institutions, such as the Armenian National Committee of America, the Armenian Assembly of America, and the Ministry of the Armenian diaspora, constitute a "diasporic civil society" abroad as they allow for cultural production and Armenian networking on a larger scale (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). Through this, Chernobrov (2019, 916) posits, that Armenian Diasporic identity was "constructed, reproduced and transmitted across generations and space." These local, regional, and national diaspora communities and networks created "new maps of desire of attachment," bridging the gap between local and global diasporas through a constructed and shared recreation of a collectively reimagined homeland abroad (Appadurai 1989, 38; Cohen 1996, 516). Through their new communities, expertise, education, and economic power, Armenians started to foster self-identity through long-distance nationalism by directly financially supporting and rebuilding their homeland (Ziemer 2010, 292). Armenians could now express ancestral identitarian belonging, locally and abroad, through political activism and participation in these institutions and communities. They lobbied their governments for pro-Armenian policy

and legislation, to recognise the Genocide, to raise philanthropic funding and aid, and transfer remittances home (which formulated eighteen percent of Armenian GDP in 2007), developing the Armenian nation and economy (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014; Bolsajian 2018, 33). These collectivised actions embedded long-distance nationalism into the diaspora transnational network, stimulating a Pan-Armenian sense of belonging (Ziemer 2010, 291). In addition to diplomatic cooperation with the Armenian government, this entrenched the diaspora as a social and political reality, capable of transnationally politically organising.

Globalised Armenian identity

As diaspora groups integrated, there followed a pathological "fear of assimilation" and "deculturation" into settled countries (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). Many communities perpetuated latent anxieties from the cultural erasure aims of Turkification and Ottomanization programmes. They therefore felt a need to "guard" Armenian identity, language, and culture from inadvertent dilution through intermarriage and assimilation (Chernobrov 2019, 923). However, it is argued that globalisation has advanced a new identarian phenomenon within the diaspora – the mixed Armenian (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). He theorises that these new mixed and third-generation Armenians as composite "transnationals" that occupy a "third space" between the country of origin and settlement (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). In these increasingly heterogeneous and young diaspora groups, new generations reject collective, filially inherited identity and communal norms (Tölölyan and Papazian 2014). Alternatively, they build individual conceptions of "Armenianness" and diaspora through self-associating and agentic voluntary relationships and political activism (Tchilingirian 2018, 4). This is demonstrated through the adoption of hybridised "regional" and intrastate identities, often a merger between "home culture" and the food, music, customs, and values of multiple settler cultures, such as Iranian-Armenian, Armenian-Lebanese, and Egyptian-Armenian (Tchilingirian 2018, 2; Sarkissian and Sharkey 2021, 4) Transnational Armenian people are, therefore, a "mosaic" of Armenian identity and reflect how modern Armenians are forced to view their identities through multiple subjectivities (Rosenburg 2021, 80; Tölölyan and Papazian 2014, 10). This further indicates how the Armenian diaspora no longer views their identities as exclusively ethnically constructed, adopting a new "dynamic conceptualisation" of identity that values symbolism and emotions over genetic origins as contributing to Armenian self-hood (Aprahamian 1999, 4; Tchilingirian 2018, 4). Moreover, this also signifies an evolution of the diaspora collective identity away from traditional "authorities," elites, and the conception of a "physical" homeland. Sheffer posits that "complex triadic relations" between the homeland, diaspora, and host societies have changed instead of transnational frameworks and interconnectedness (Ziemer 2010, 291). Therefore, transnational digital technology transmits collective identity differently via new cultural transmission. Modern technology allows instantaneous connection with the homeland or other physically disparate communities; there is no longer a need for exclusively familial or official transmission of Armenian history, cultural knowledge, and community interconnection (Chernobrov 2019, 916).

Therefore, through an amalgamation of these factors; a strong historical memory passed through territorialised diaspora communities, new independent interpretations of Armenian identity, and globalisation, allowing for digital cultural transmission, the Armenian community is no longer exclusively defined by being stuck in a "temporary and transitory condition" (Tchilingirian 2018, 4) It has overcome its umbilical attachment and dependence on the Armenian nation-state for cultural identity, becoming a self-propagating and compartmentalised transnational community in and of itself (Chernobrov 2019, 927).

Armenian Borderlands: Modern Nagorno-Karabakh

Nagorno-Karabakh is a majority Armenian enclave in modern Azerbaijan that has been subject to historic border disputes between the Caucasian governments. The region's diaspora has a unique cultural identity as the population voted in 1988 to remain independent of Azerbaijan and retain its own unique diaspora identity as ethnic Armenians in Karabach (Bolsajian 2018, 36). Many Armenian diasporas conceive of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as yet another "existential conflict" for Armenians (Constance 2021). Conflict in the region is perceived as a continuation of the Armenian Sumgait Pogrom of February 1988 and the Armenian Genocide, a narrative further substantiated by Azerbaijan's campaign of Armenian "cultural cleansing" in Nakhichevan, nationalistic Azerbaijani rhetoric, regional military action, and the illegal blockade of the humanitarian Lachin corridor

(Bolsajian 2018, 36). Furthermore, Turkish President Erdogan, a strong political proponent of Azerbaijan, who characterised Armenian genocide survivors as "leftovers of the sword," claimed Turkey would "fulfil this mission which our grandfathers have carried out for centuries in the Caucasus region" within Artsakh- a euphemism with overtly genocidal tones (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, 2020). This historical enmity and existential threat, understood and magnified through the diaspora's collective memory of genocide and victimhood as well as the fear of another genocide, has created an identarian push causing the transnational diaspora to adopt "Artsakh" as a symbol of the enduring Armenian spirit, and resistance (Chernobrov 2019, 927). Utilising Nagorno-Karabakh as a mobilising, patriotic focal point, the diaspora's support of Artsakh's territorial integrity and self-determination has acquired symbolism as a fight for Armenian historical survival, justice, and culture (Chernobrov 2019, 927). The conflict has caused Armenian diasporas to constantly re-define their relationship with homeland and identity, as the collective support of Artsakh across Armenian subcultures and diasporas has fostered a new shared "pan-Armenian" aim and facet of collective identity (Chernobrov 2019, 927; Bolsajian 2018, 34). The recent loss and mass exodus of Armenians from Karabakh, and the future dissolution of its borders and existence as an Autonomous Oblast, have therefore caused much political, social, and cultural crisis in the national and diasporic community (Constance 2021). Karabagh's cultural and demographic de-Armenianisation will contribute to historical narratives of uprooting, as, invigorated by the birth of a new generation of victims and first-hand trauma, it will parallel prior Armenian collective narratives of displacement and victimhood. Contextualising the paramount significance of Artsakh to modern-day Armenian identity, in addition to generational trauma resulting from historical and modern enmity against the othered "Turkic" Azerbaijan, the dilemma of how to approach the territorial conflict intensifies. Recent diaspora disillusionment towards the Armenian government regarding ineffective "unpatriotic" state policy on Artsakh, which has damaged homeland-diaspora triadic relations, is illustrative that political "compromise" would be perceived as defeatist disloyalty towards Artsakh, and the validity of Armenian historical memory and suffering (Chernobrov 2019, 922).

Conclusion

To conclude, we can surmise that Armenian diasporic identity is one of constant "fragmentation, flux and construction" (Aprahamian 1999, 3). To overcome cultural fragmentation, the Armenian diaspora has endeavoured to create a shared diaspora consciousness through collectively shared historical trauma narratives and Genocide memories (Ziemer 2010, 294). The diaspora constructed a territorialised system of cultural institutions, communities, and organisations to consolidate and culturally transmit this identity, as well as underline Armenian identity and diasporic notions of loss, regaining belonging, and homeland. (Chernobrov 2019, 921). The networks established by these settled communities have ushered the growth of new transnational Armenian identities that, promulgated by modern technology, assimilation, and globalisation, have become increasingly characterised by voluntary and communal association. This modern, interconnected diaspora has identified Nagorno-Karabakh as a symbolic narrative of Armenian cultural loss and, thus, developed a diaspora Pan-Armenian sentiment around it, making the conflict one of seminal identitarian importance. Therefore, the influence of the Armenian collective and diaspora identity on the moulding of politics, the motives behind the conflict, and the possibility of a ceasefire within this volatile region cannot be understated. In order to gain a holistic understanding of the geopolitical situation within Nagorno-Karabakh, and potential solutions, it must be contextualised within comprehensive research, study, and reporting on the region.

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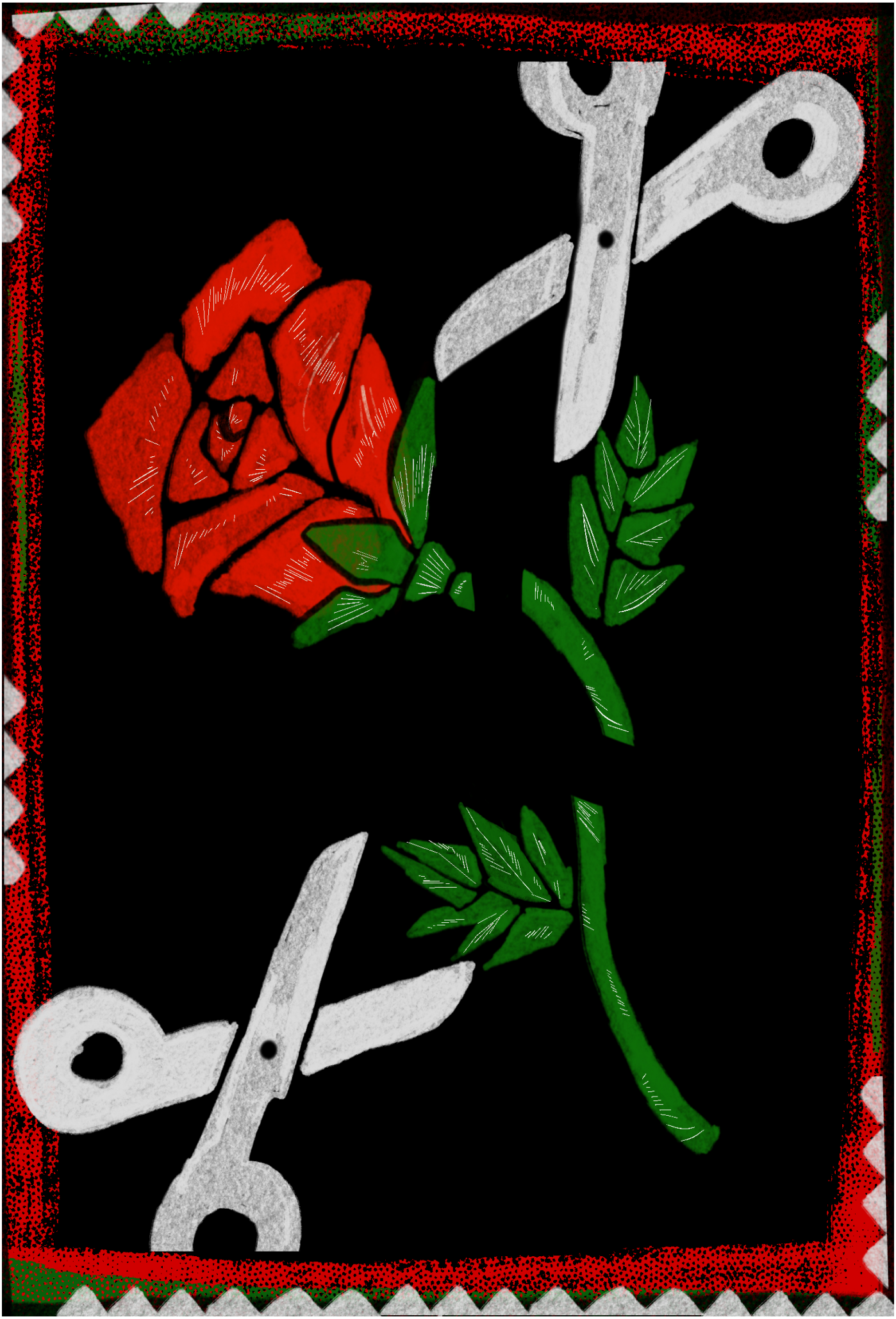

Artwork by Rebeca Sterner

The Neoimperial Origins of the Israel-Palestine Territorial Conflict

Gwynne Capiraso

Now more so than ever, the decades-long Israel-Palestine conflict is permeating international political discourse. Most outsiders view this struggle as a national one, typical of the often war-torn Middle East (Gendzier 2015). In reality, much of the conflict in the region can be explained as a by-product of Western intervention, colonialism, and inherited imperialist norms in Palestine over the past two centuries. To understand Israel's imperialist upbringing under the parentage of the Western powers, we must look back to the first modern settlement of European Jews in Palestine.

Before 1882, there were no major Jewish settlements in Palestine (Aaronsohn 1995, 438). The country's Jewish population of under 25,000 was primarily concentrated in the four holy cities (Aaronsohn 1995, 438). Baron Edmond de Rothschild, Parisian banker and supporter of Zionism (a burgeoning movement that sought to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine), provided funding for struggling Jewish settlements from 1885 to 1900, forcing Jewish beneficiaries to abandon small-scale agriculture for the capitalist agriculture of Western Europe (Nordau 1900). The baron's philanthropy demanded compliance from Jewish settlers, who revolted until Rothschild transferred his stake in the region to the Jewish Colonisation Association in 1900 (Ussishkin 1973, 347).

Australian researcher Rachel Busbridge (2018, 91) describes the adoption of colonial values in Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine to highlight the teaching of settler colonialism from one population to another, a pattern easily recognizable in Britain and its former colonies of Australia, Canada, and the US. In 1917, Britain promised the territory of Palestine to the World Zionist Organization in the Balfour Declaration, months before defeating the Ottoman Army, its previous occupiers, in World War I (Regan 2021). Regan (2021, 101) adds that while British actions were paraded as an "act of concern" for Jews who had fled from cruel pogroms in Eastern Europe, the declaration was based in "profound self-interest." Palestine comprised a major part of Britain's imperial sphere, allowing them to monitor Egypt and the Suez Canal while protecting crucial sea and land routes to India and Africa (Barr 2018). As Busbridge (2018, 94) argues, the pursuit of a Jewish homeland has been historically legitimated by British colonialism in the Middle East, serving as an imperial plant for Western powers in the Arab world.

The famous Balfour Declaration contradicted two other agreements made by the British in years prior, including the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France, which divided the Middle East between their two zones of influence (Rabinovich 2016, 1). The second was the 1915 McMahon-Husayn Correspondence between the British High Commissioner in Egypt and the Sharif of Mecca, respectively, which promised to "recognize and support the independence of the Arabs" within regional territories—presumably including Palestine—

in return for Husayn leading an Arab revolt against Ottoman rule (McMahon 1915). The Great Arab Revolt of 1916 was crucial in the British defeat of Ottoman forces the following year (Ginat 2018). Despite these conflicting wartime promises, a post-war League of Nations mandate in 1922 solidified British administrative control over Palestine. Under British rule, Jewish immigration to Palestine was limited for many years leading up to World War II—even in the face of the Holocaust—due to the belief that it would upset the stability of a region crucial to the war effort (Ginat 2018, 3).

The successive 28 years of British control over Palestine drew to a close on the fourteenth of May 1948—now celebrated as Israeli Independence Day (Shlaim 1987, 50). The long-awaited British retreat was solidified by the United Nations' Partition Plan of 1947, dividing the British territory of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states of comparable size (Center for Preventive Action 2023). While the British government indicated that this handover was in the interest of creating a Jewish state after the atrocities of the Holocaust, Israeli-British historian Avi Shlaim (1987, 53) instead suggests Britain simply wanted to pass on the "costly" task of "maintaining law and order in Palestine," which consisted of brutally suppressing uprisings "just as they had done [in other colonial holdings]" (Regan 2021, 101). There was also the added influx of over 100,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors into Palestine at the request of US President Harry Truman in 1945 (Schiff 2015, 332). Shlaim (1987, 52) dismisses claims that British withdrawal was deliberately pro-Zionist or anti-Arab; he argues, instead, that it was pro-British.

"Shlaim (1987, 52) dismisses claims that British withdrawal was deliberately pro-Zionist or anti-Arab; he argues, instead, that it was pro-British."

British withdrawal from the territory spurred the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli War, with five Arab states invading Israel. Israel emerged victorious, gaining significant territory, which was soon divided into the State of Israel, the West Bank (of the Jordan River), and the Gaza Strip. Over 750,000 Palestinians were displaced in what is called al-nakbah, or "the catastrophe" (Center for Preventative Action 2023). Evidently, the Partition Plan enabled Britain to destroy any semblance of Arab-Israeli cooperation against British rule, pitting these ethno-religious groups against each other (Blass 2015, 142). A similar sentiment was consistently raised by Matzpen ("compass" in Hebrew), a popular publication founded by politicians expelled from the Israeli Communist Party after criticising its lack of free speech (Blass 2015, 134). Matzpen criticised the Israeli government after the 1967 War between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, defining it as a servant of imperialism and condemning it for abandoning cooperation efforts with the neighbouring Arab states in favour of siding with the Western powers (Taut 1966). This internal backlash refers to the 1959 negotiations between Israeli and Egyptian military leaders where both parties defined Britain as a common enemy; there, Israeli General Yigal Allon claimed "the [First Arab-Israeli] war was imposed on us against our will" (Orr and Machover 1961, 20).

In the wake of the British departure from Israel in 1948, another Western power fixed its gaze on the young state. As Cold War tensions between the US and the Soviet Union began to boil over, American diplomat Philip Jessup (1948) suggested it would be advantageous for the US to align with Israel in order to prevent communist influence from the East that could turn it into a "force operating to very great disadvantage to US, UK, and other western powers." He reasoned, "if fairly treated, [Israel] could become a force operating to our own advantage" (Jessup 1948). Britain echoed the American fear of communism spreading in the Middle East, resisting the UN's attempts to part Palestine into two independent states under the belief that a sovereign Israel would put up a better resistance to communism (Shlaim 1987, 41). As US Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin expressed to British diplomat John Troutbeck, both nations aimed to "join" Israel to the "Western group of States opposed to Soviet aggression and infiltration" (quoted in Shalim 1987, 74). They were especially wary of Palestinian uprisings in the new Israeli state, with the US Ambassador to the UK claiming "the Palestine situation is probably as dangerous to our national interests as is Berlin" (Gendzier 2015, 224).

Subsequently, Israel served as a proxy instrument in the West's struggle against expanding Soviet influence in the Middle East. In both the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis and the 1979 Camp David Accords, the US stood behind Israel in its disputes with Soviet-backed Egypt in return for "highly valuable" Israeli intelligence on Soviet nuclear development (Ofek 2018, 4). Matzpen claimed the Western powers used Israel as a whip against Middle Eastern countries refusing to join the 1955 Baghdad Pact against communist encroachment, citing Israel's attack on an Egyptian army base after an Israeli was murdered as an intim-

idation tactic towards a resistant Egypt (Blass 2015, 143). However, Israel's heavy economic dependence on the US repeatedly forced its hand, evident in its reluctant acceptance of the division of water between Israel, Syria, and Jordan laid out in the 1953 Johnston Plan (quoted in Blass 2015, 144); during the Cold War, Israel was both a victim and an accomplice of Western imperialism. Many perceive this period as one of conflict between Jews and Arabs; however, it is better described as a war between the Western powers supporting Israel and the Soviet Union backing Arab states. During these decades, many of Israel's geopolitical gains were made along the path of American eastward expansion. As US Secretary of State George Marshall (1948) emphasised to Israel's representative in Washington, "the United States is the best friend of Israel."

In 1987, amid growing violence and expanding Israeli settlements, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip joined together in protest against the Israeli government in a revolt dubbed The First Intifada; intifada directly translates from Arabic as "shaking off," more literally meaning "civil uprising" (Center for Preventive Action 2023). Soon after, the UN proposed the Oslo Accords, which would, in 1993, permit the newly-established Palestinian Authority to govern the West Bank and Gaza, and, in 1995, call for the withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) from six cities and 450 towns in the West Bank (Center for Preventive Action 2023). Framed as an attempt at peaceful coexistence, these accords led to increased Israeli presence in the territory, with the IDF eventually resuming control of borders within and around the West Bank (Said 1993). Additionally, much of the international aid sent to Palestinian territories—over 27 billion US dollars from 1993 to 2015—was misused on democracy-building efforts instead of civilian relief, leaving Palestine "more dependent on Israel than ever" for employment and welfare support (Farsakh 2016, 48). By 2015, unemployment rose above thirty-seven and seventeen percent in Gaza and the West Bank respectively (Ibid, 48–49).

Today, the state of Israel is the "single largest recipient" of US foreign aid, with American dollars making up twenty percent of Israeli military spending (Wang 2021, 64). A 2018 study revealed that there is no association between human rights progress in Israel and the amount of US aid it receives, concluding that funding is instead dependent on an agenda of US geopolitical interests in the region as opposed to a humanitarian one (Ali 2018, 29). Despite Israel's conspicuous place within a small group of countries who have received multiple condemnations from the UN Commission on Human Rights, the US has continued to allocate an average of 4.5 billion dollars of aid to Israel every year since 1976 (Wang 2021, 667). Meanwhile, in 2018, US President Donald Trump cancelled funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency, which provides support to Palestinian refugees (Center for Preventive Action 2023).

During his presidency, Trump named achieving an Israeli-Palestinian deal a foreign policy priority. In 2020, he released the Peace to Prosperity Plan, expressing support for the Israeli annexation of settlements in the West Bank and future control over an "undivided" Jerusalem (Center for Preventive Action 2023). This plan was rejected by Palestinians, having seen other possible resolutions to the ongoing conflict blocked by the US, which holds veto power in the UN Security Council (Avelar and Ferrari 2018). Trump's successor, President Joe Biden, has shared similar sentiments about Israel's vital role in maintaining American influence in the Middle East, declaring in 2015 that "were there no Israel, America would have to invent one. We'd have to invent one because you [Israel] protect our interests."

It is evident that the US, despite claims of human rights violations or self-determination, has no desire to disrupt the status quo of Israeli military domination in the Middle East (Turner 2003, 524). Consequently, it continues to justify and pass down the age-old imperialist methods American philanthropists and British colonists before them have used in the East and Global South for centuries. Even more interestingly, the shift of Western influence in Israel has been almost synchronous with the transfer of global hegemony from Britain to the US; the reigning superpower needs an ally in the Middle East, and, in the eyes of the West, Israel was born for it. Today, both empirical and historical evidence demonstrate that the partnership between Israel and the US is blatantly 'bidirectional' (Ofek 2018, 1). So, in the midst of growing extremism, economic downturn, and unprecedented levels of destruction in the region, we must ask not only what the Israeli and Palestinian people have to lose, but what the United States has to gain.

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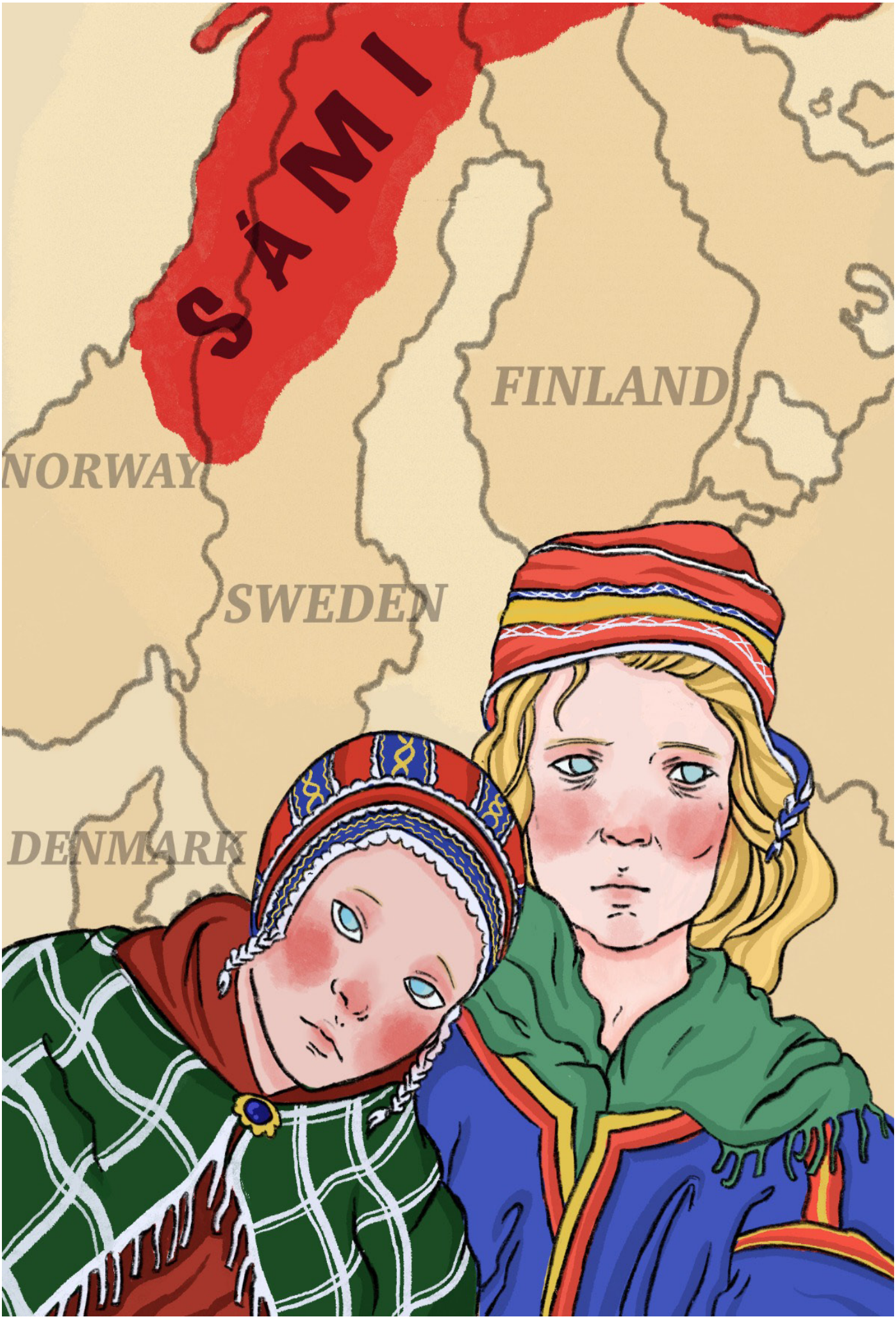

Artwork by Rebeca Sterner

Deconstructing the Myth of Nordic Countries

Emmi Wilkinson

The Nordic region, comprising Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, is often perceived to be a model for the rest of the world to follow regarding social and economic innovation (Andersson and Hilson 2009, 220). This essay will explore how other countries and people view Nordic countries, particularly what connotations the Nordic region holds internationally. Pivoting to a discussion on the Nordic countries' lack of acknowledgment of their colonial past, I question their egalitarian image. Particularly focusing on why this region is viewed with unusual esteem, the essay critiques the narrative that Nordic countries are synchronous with modernity and progressive equality. Ultimately, placing the Nordic countries on a pedestal leads to the harmful continuation of violating indigenous land rights. Rather, we should encourage citizens to continue to fight for change even within these "perfect" nation-states.

The Nordic region is often held in high regard by the international community as the region has seemingly been at the forefront of social, political, and economic success. The image of "ultra-modernity" was first ascribed to Denmark in the 1920s, which Polish social scientist Kazimierz Musical noted was due to the country's novel ideas about agriculture (Andersson and Hilson 2009, 220). Sørensen et al. (1998, 20-21) suggest that Nordic countries could be seen as a "specific egalitarian community of destiny" compared to the rest of Europe. More recently, Finland has been deemed the happiest nation in the world for four years running, according to a United Nations (UN) report (Helliwell et al. 2023). In fact, since the World Happiness Report's first publication in 2013, all the Nordic countries have ranked within the top ten every year (Helliwell et al. 2023). Furthermore, Finland is the only EU country where homelessness is falling through the implementation of a Housing First approach which has seen homeless people were unconditionally given housing (Juhila et al. 2022, 497-499). A report published by The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland found that this policy saw the country's homeless population decrease steadily between 2008 and 2019, and in November 2020, 4,341 homeless people lived alone, 259 less than the previous year (Homelessness in Finland 2020, 4). Meanwhile, Iceland recently saw women strike once again over the failure to close the gender pay gap; despite this, however, the country has been a frontrunner in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for the ninth year in a row (Marinósdóttir and Erlingsdóttir 2017). Denmark is also reported to be the least corrupt country in the world (Eriksson 2021). However, it is not just that these countries perform well; it is also the additional perception that they carry and how they are traditionally represented in the media that helps them to curate this image of a utopian society. For instance, Rwanda also ranks highly in the same Global Gender Gap Index yet fails to hold the same connotation regarding gender equality, illustrating the purpose with which the image of the Nordic region has been constructed (Marinósdóttir and Erlingsdóttir 2017, 23).

While all these accomplishments are commendable progressions to achieving an egalitarian society, a consequence is the need to uphold this image, resulting in a glossy veil being laid atop this region and an unwillingness to discuss societal inequalities that are still perpetuated. For decades Sámi leaders and activists have known that this facade hides a violent colonial history and have long been calling for change. The next section will discuss how, through upholding this image of utopia, the Nordic countries fail to address their treatment of indigenous rights and land claims, resulting in the perpetuation of colonial policies that contradict the region's connotation of seeming social equality.

The Sámi are the only recognized Indigenous Peoples in the EU (European Economic and Social Committee, 2015). They are an ethnic group who span across the northern area of Lapland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Archaeological evidence suggests that Sámi have occupied the northern region of Europe, specifically the Kola peninsula, since the Bronze Age (Lamnidis et al. 2018, 2). However, their arrival in the region was likely earlier (Lamnidis et al. 2018, 2). Traditionally, the Sámi have pursued livelihoods ranging from fishing and fur-trapping to semi-nomadic reindeer herding. The Sámi territory was previously much further south than their current territory. However, due to assimilation policies and territorial encroaching by Nordic governments, the Sámi now largely reside in northern Lapland (Sarivaara, 2016, 200). It was not until 1973 that the Finnish Sámi Parliament was formed, 1989 in Norway, 1993 in Sweden, and Russia has yet to recognize the Kole Sámi Assembly (Henrikson 2008, 33). With the cooperation of the three Sámi parliaments, in 1998, the Sámi Parliamentary Council was formed, with Russian Sámi granted observer status as they lack their own parliament (Henrikson 2008, 29). Regarding self-determination, the principal position, as Henrikson (2008, 29) puts it, is that just like any other people group, "they have the right to freely determine their own political status, freely pursue their own economic, social and cultural development, and freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources for their own ends". Sámi leaders see self-determination as crucial, not because is unique to Indigenous People, but because it is a universal human right for all (Henrikson 2008, 37).

The Sámi live on territory divided by borders; while these are included in the Schengen region, which allows for the Sámi to travel between Norway, Sweden, and Finland, however these borders still deny the Sámi of a completely unified Sámi nation and any political representation at the regional level by the nature of their existence. Sámi living in the former USSR were relocated to larger cities or townships for state collectivization programs, forcing individuals to abandon their traditional villages, which often were destroyed upon their return, leading to the destruction of traditional ways of life in a social, cultural, and economic sense (Henrikson 2008, 28). Nordic Sámi also dealt with land encroachments, state-sponsored settlement programmes, discrimination, political and cultural oppression and assimilation policies' (Henrikson 2008, 28). Due to the Sámi being ruled by different national governments, their right to be educated in Sámi languages varies considerably across the region. After heavy assimilation policies, many Sámi languages are under threat of linguistic shift to the majority language of the respective region, despite heavy revitalization projects (Scheller 2011, 83). Due to a lost cultural connection through colonization and assimilation, many Sámi people have diverse conceptions of self-identity of belonging to the Sámi community, and there is a common feeling of not being "Sámi enough" as, due to colonization, the traditional ways of life are diminishing (Sarivaara 2016, 210). Sámi in Russia particularly struggle with any attempts to build Sámi cultural consciousness as it is seen as a separatist movement, thus heavily penalized by the Russian government (Henrikson 2008, 31). The various Sámi experiences of assimilation threaten the preservation of Sámi culture highlighting the importance of self-rule, self-determination, and political representation. Ultimately, the impact of the various borders that intersect Sámi results in political fragmentation of Sámi identity and leads to cultural assimilation and the potential loss of indigenous knowledge. This directly contradicts Norway's and the rest of the Nordic region's image of modernity.

"...these borders still deny the Sámi of a completely unified Sámi nation and any political representation at the regional level by the nature of their existence."

In 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled that wind farms constructed on Sámi land were illegal and violated their human rights (Buli 2023). Additionally, in the UN's 1996 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights article 27 states that in states where there is an ethnic minority, shall not be denied their right to be, "in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own lan-

guage" (ICCPR 1966, 14). The wind turbines clearly violate the right for the Sámi to enjoy their own culture as reindeer-herding is a part of Sámi culture, and the turbines prevent this cultural practice. However, the wind turbines have yet to be taken down, illustrating the slow responsiveness of the Norwegian government to acknowledge indigenous land rights. As a result, in October 2022, hundreds of environmental and Indigenous activists blocked the main thoroughfare in Oslo using several Sámi tents or lavvu (Kassam and Niranjan 2023). In attendance, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen, a Sámi activist, stated that "it feels like the government is really strategically removing the reindeer rearing culture," thus illustrating a continuation of Norway's disregard for the indigenous human right to self-determination (Kassam and Niranjan 2023). Furthermore, this highlights the limited self-determination enjoyed by the Sámi people. Yet, this does not seem to undermine the international community's perception of Norway, as the country has maintained its image of social utopia. It is important to acknowledge that this connotation is often perpetuated by Nordic countries and others outside the region. The lack of acknowledgement of Norway's wrongdoing illustrates how the country is benefitting from a general apathy toward discussing indigenous peoples and their land rights. As the country maintains its position of high acclaim, leading to continued slow action on the part of the Norwegian government, those in power will continually fail to change the country's reputation in acknowledging Sámi land rights, and self-determination and land rights will remain outside of the Sámi's grasp. Additionally, with ignoring the importance of Sámi self-determination fosters a disregard for their religious, ethnic and linguistic rights (ICCPR 1966, 14).

As well as the ongoing situation in Norway and the government's slow action to recognise Sámi land rights and the impact of living on the intersections of various borders, Denmark's continued rule over Greenland further undermines the Nordic region's supposed image of social progression. A 2019 poll suggested that 67.7 percent of Greenlanders supported independence from Denmark with most respondents choosing "the year 2034 as most suitable for such radical change" (Bruem 2019). Greenland has expanded their self-governing rights in recent years; in 2008, the seventy-six percent approval of the Greenlandic self-government referendum shifted the responsibility of law enforcement and legal systems onto Greenland's semi-autonomous government (Associated Press 2008). Greenlandic also became the official language, changing from the former Danish, resulting in increased access to learning the language of the Indigenous people (Associated Press 2008). On the day the referendum was approved, the then-Prime Minister spoke to the symbolic step taken to self-determination, stating, "we have said yes to the right of self-determination, and with this we have accepted a great responsibility," (Associated Press 2008). The referendum also included a proposal to set new rules on how future oil revenue from Greenlandic sources would be split with Denmark, allowing the region more control over their natural resources (Associated Press 2008). However, the approach to independence has been controversial, as half of Greenland's gross domestic product originates from an annual grant given by the Danish government, which would cease if independence was granted (Peter 2019). Therefore, to ensure an effective move towards independence, the Danish government should instead offer to gradually withdraw the grant rather than instantaneously remove it, as this will minimize instability and maximize Greenland's potential for autonomy. Generally, Greenlandic independence is not an option with which the Danish government is willing to aid the country, thus demonstrating the failure of the government to live up to its seemingly high standards of societal progression and equality.

"The lack of acknowledgement of Norway's wrongdoing illustrates how the country is benefitting from a general apathy toward discussing indigenous peoples and their land rights."

Even though Nordic governments have a long history of harmful practices and policies with regard to indigenous land rights, particularly regarding the Sámi and Greenlanders, ultimately, Nordic countries hold a connotation of being "advanced" and representing a model towards which the rest of the world should strive. Due to the borders that divide Sámi, the community cannot make unified decisions on what happens on their land. Along with having implications on potential language shift and risking losing indigenous knowledge systems and culture, Sami's inability to make independent regional decisions leads to harmful practices that impact indigenous ways of living, illustrated by the current case concerning wind turbines in Norway. For Greenlanders, while Denmark has granted the region greater freedom, they are at the mercy of Denmark and the Danish government's intentions; they cannot make decisions based on their own cultural values and societal needs. Overall, the lack of self-governance for the Sámi and Greenlanders highlights the important

ways in which borders shape culture and sometimes inhibit the freedom of choice to be governed how one wants. By ignoring indigenous land rights and continuing to hold colonial territories, the Nordic countries fail to fully follow through on their image as a model for the world to follow. It is harmful for the Nordic countries to be continually held as a model for modernity. This connotation also makes calls for justice seem unfounded to outsiders unaware of the deep wrongdoings being committed and the risks of justice not being successfully realised. This illustrates the need to continuously demand change, even within supposedly progressive and innovative nations.

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