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## Occam's Razor Vol. 9 - Full (2019)

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Dearest Reader,

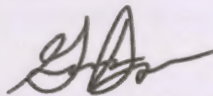
On behalf of the editorial and design team, I am proud to present to you the 9th Volume of Occam's Razor. Each year, the OR staff work diligently to illuminate the diverse voices of Western undergraduates through publication. This year we are pleased to publish academic works of Translation, Literary Analysis, Critical Theory, Political Science, Bio-politics, Bio-logic, Anthropology, and Women's and Gender Studies. As academics, we are often so deeply involved with our own field interest, that we do not engage with the work of students from other departments and faculties. OR has given many of us the opportunity to share work from numerous departments with the greater Western community. The editors have had the privilege of reading work from a variety of disciplines through our submission process, and now they pass on to you the research that they found most compelling.

While the subjects, research methods, and writing styles for the essays that follow are dissimilar, the individual pieces are woven together by common threads of place—whether physical environment, metaphoric, or symbolic—humanity, and calls for socio-political change. All of these themes represent the topics of many discussions that continue to take place, both in and out of the classroom, at WWU. We encourage you to not only read the works within these pages, but to continue the conversation with classmates, friends and family.

It is here that I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all those who made this issue possible, the wonderful editorial team Jordan Herrick, Ally Remy, and Megan Troupe; as well as our Lead Designer, Katie Robinson, and her Assistant Designer Kayley Sonheim for the physical manifestation of Vol. 9. Lastly, I would like to thank our Faculty Advisor, Christopher Patton, for his consistent support throughout this year.

Please enjoy.

On behalf of the *Occam's Razor* staff,



Grace Dunbar-Miller  
Editor-In-Chief



# THE RUIN

## A NEW TRANSLATION

By Margot Lamy

### ORIGINAL TEXT

Wrætlic is þes wealstan,    wyrde gebræcon;  
 burgstede burston,    broснаð enta geweorc.  
 Hrofas sind gehrorene,    hreorge torras,  
 hrungat berofen,    hrim on lime,  
 5    scarda scurbeorge    scorene, gedrorene,  
       ældo undereotone.    Eorðgrap hafað  
       waldend wyrhtan    forweorone, geleorene,  
       heardgripe hrusan,    oþ hund cnea  
       werþeoda gewitan.    Oft þæs wag gebad  
 10    ræghar ond readfah    rice æfter oþrum,  
       ofstonden under stormum;    steap gear gedreas.  
       Wonað giet se [.....] num geheapen,  
       fel on [.....]  
       grimme gegrunnen [.....]  
 15    .....] scan    heo [.....]  
       .....] g orþonc    ærscaft [.....]  
       .....] g [...] lamrindum beag  
       mod mo [.....] yne swiftne gebrægd  
       hwætred in hringas,    hygerof gebond

### THE TRANSLATION

Wondrous is this wall-stone<sup>1</sup>, fractured by fate;  
 the city has crumbled<sup>2</sup>, the work of giants withers.  
 Rooftops in ruin<sup>3</sup>, watch-towers wasted,  
 the spoke-gate<sup>4</sup> despoiled, hoarfrost on mortar,  
 a shelter from storms<sup>5</sup> cleft and cracked<sup>6</sup>,  
 eroded<sup>7</sup> with age. Earth's embrace envelops<sup>8</sup>  
 the master-crafters<sup>9</sup> forgotten<sup>10</sup>, lost to  
 the grave<sup>11</sup> grip of the soil, until a hundred generations  
 of people have passed. Much<sup>12</sup> its<sup>13</sup> wall weathered,  
 lichen-grey and red-stained<sup>14</sup>, reign after reign,<sup>15</sup>  
 stood steadfast through storms; lofty and high,  
 yet it fell<sup>18</sup>. Still this remains:<sup>19</sup>  
 age-old creation, bowed in the earth.<sup>20</sup>  
 Swift<sup>21</sup> the stout-hearted bound firmly in fetters,

20 weallwalan wirum wundrum togædre.  
 Beorht wæron burgræced, burnsele monige,  
 heah horngestreon, heresweg micel,  
 meodoheall monig ƿ dreama full,  
 oppæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swiþe.  
 25 Crungon walo wide, cwoman woldagas,  
 swylt eall fornorn secgrofra wera;  
 wurdon hyra wigsteal westen staþolas,  
 brosnade burgsteall. Betend crungon  
 hergas to hrusan. Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,  
 30 ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð  
 hrostbeages hrof. Hryre wong gecong  
 gebrocen to beorgum, þær iu beorn monig  
 glædmood ond goldbeorht gleoma gefrætweð,  
 wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;  
 35 seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,  
 on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,  
 on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.  
 Stanhofu stodan, stream hate wearp  
 widan wylme; weal eall befeng  
 40 beorhtan bosme, þær þa baþu wæron,  
 hat on hrepre. Þæt wæs hyðelic.  
 Leton þonne geotan [.....]  
 ofer harne stan hate streamas  
 un [.....]  
 45 ...] þþæt hringmere hate [.....]  
 .....] þær þa baþu wæron.  
 þonne is [.....]  
 .....] re; þæt is cynelic þing,  
 huse [.....] burg [.....]

foundations in wire, weaved wondrously together.<sup>22</sup>  
 Bright was that citadel with bath-halls abundant,<sup>23</sup>  
 tall gilded gables<sup>24</sup> and the great road of hosts,  
 many mead-halls in days<sup>25</sup> filled with mirth,  
 until the forces of fate finished it<sup>26</sup>. Far and wide  
 men fought and fell<sup>27</sup>, days of death came  
 and destroyed every valiant man;<sup>29</sup>  
 their rampart's foundations are ravaged,  
 their fortress is fallen<sup>30</sup>. The stewards perished;<sup>31</sup>  
 temples sank<sup>32</sup> into soil. So these halls grew dreary  
 their scarlet tiles<sup>33</sup> shattered, shed<sup>34</sup> from the arches  
 of the wood-ringed<sup>35</sup> dome.<sup>36</sup> That realm fell into ruin,  
 reduced to rubble<sup>37</sup>, where once many men  
 joyous and gold-bright, adorned in splendor,  
 wondrous and wine-flushed in war-gems shone;  
 seen<sup>38</sup> in silver and gold<sup>39</sup> and in curious jewels,  
 in fortune and wealth<sup>40</sup> and in precious stones,  
 in that far-reaching realm's radiant city.  
 Where<sup>41</sup> stone-halls stood, a stream hotly gushed  
 in a wide welling<sup>42</sup>, the wall enfolding all  
 in its bright bosom, where those baths were,  
 heated in the heart<sup>43</sup>. That was befitting.  
 Then let it pour forth,  
 hot streams over hoary stone.

That is a kingly thing.<sup>44</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> *wrætlíc is þes wealstan*: comparative translations have an overwhelming tendency to render the subject into a plural ("these wall-stones"); an understandable notion, considering wall-stones are seldom found alone. However, the original composition clearly indicates a singular subject.
- <sup>2</sup> *burgstede burston*: literally "(the) city crumbled"; I have inserted "has" for rhythmic purposes.
- <sup>3</sup> *brofas sind gehrorene*: literally "roofs are ruined"; this small aesthetic amendment preserves the original sense of the passage.
- <sup>4</sup> *hrungear*: *Hrung* may refer to a spoke, bar, or rung. This compound has been divisive among scholars, in part because of erroneous early transcriptions. Newton has "fortress-gate" and Hostetter has "barred-gate", while Williamson opts for "gate-locks". Kershaw amazingly avoids translating it altogether. Based on its frequent appearance in other compounds, Klinck speculates that *hrung* might actually read *bring* ("ring").
- <sup>5</sup> *scurbeorge*: a hapax that appears only once in the Old English corpus, it literally means "storm-protection" or "storm-shelter". Other translations have interpreted this compound as a figurative expression for roof or a metonym for building. I have opted for a translation that hews closer to the original sense, effectively reversing the original compound and adding a preposition to maintain flow.
- <sup>6</sup> I have omitted *scarde* ("hewn, broken, notched") from this translation, as two other phrases in the passage convey a similar meaning: *scorene* ("hewn, cleft, split") and to a lesser extent *gedrorene* ("cracked, crumbled, weakened, fallen"), which I interpret as further description of the storm-shelter in line 5a.
- <sup>7</sup> *undereotone*: literally "eaten underneath", a metaphorical expression for earth's natural erosion processes.
- <sup>8</sup> *eorþgræp hafað*: literally "earth's grip holds". I have extended the more figurative expression "earth's embrace", suggested by J.R. Clark Hall's Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, with the verb "envelop".
- <sup>9</sup> *waldend wyrhtan*: Leslie and Klinck both suggest this is a compound, which is echoed in the translations of Newton ("master-masons"), Williamson ("master-builders") and Hostetter ("master-crafters").
- <sup>10</sup> *forweorone*: literally "faded" or "withered", suggesting "forgotten", a descriptor more suitable for flesh-and-blood humans.
- <sup>11</sup> *beardgripe*: I have chosen the evocative synonym "grave" for heard (meaning "stern, severe, cruel"), conveying a double meaning fitting for the poem's subject matter.
- <sup>12</sup> *oft*: the original adverb denotes frequency, while the sequence of words suggests conditions or events, making "much" a more fitting choice than the literal "often" for this segment.
- <sup>13</sup> *þæs wag gebað*: the genitive singular pronoun (*þæs*) in this line refers to the city; that is, the ruin itself.
- <sup>14</sup> *readfab*: the referent for this compound, which refers to a staining or mottling of red, has been debated among scholars. The interpretation that this refers to iron oxide, as reflected in the translation of Hostetter, is met with disagreement by Kershaw, who believes it to be the red plaster lining the bath's inner walls. Leslie refutes Kershaw's theory on the grounds that the poet is describing the outer walls in this section, and that *fab* does not evoke the uniformity of polished plaster. Instead, Leslie explicitly links *readfab* with *rægbar*, proposing that it refers to orange-tinted lichens. I have purposely left the translation ambiguous for this reason.
- <sup>15</sup> *rice after oprum*: literally "reign after others".
- <sup>16</sup> *ofstonden under*: literally "persisted" or "endured", here rendered "stood steadfast", wherein the modifying adverb preserves the intensity of meaning.
- <sup>17</sup> *under*: "through" better reflects modern usage.
- <sup>18</sup> The addition of "yet" emphasizes the contrasting states between the previous descriptions (lofty, high, steadfast) and the ultimate fate (fallen). Likewise, I have added "it" to give the segment a clear subject.
- <sup>19</sup> *wonað*: I have taken this verb to be an unusual form of *wunian*, "to remain", based on the Dobbie-Krapp transcription. The expected form would be *wunað*. As Klinck notes, the middle consonant is unclear in the original manuscript, causing some to transcribe the verb as *worað* (from *worian*), meaning "to moulder, decay." The *wunian* transliteration, and thus the "remain" translation, is supported by the analysis of Klinck, based on the context of the section. Additionally, she notes a similar confusion between *wonað* and *wunað* that occurs in reverse in "The Phoenix."
- <sup>20</sup> *lamrindum*: literally "in the earth's crust". I have opted to pass over lines 12b through 16a, as they are too fragmented to draw meaning from with any accuracy. I have joined the fragmentary lines 16b (*ærsceaft*) and 17b (*lamrindum beag*) into a phrase; while these segments are not connected directly, they provide a suitable transition to the next part of the poem.

<sup>21</sup> "Swift" here is used as an adverb.

<sup>22</sup> The organization of lines 18-20 have been significantly altered from the original for both clarity and composition while maintaining the sense of the original. As the subjects of the passage, the stout-hearted are introduced earlier than in the manuscript, and have been rendered as a plural based on inference (as the construction of a wall would take more than a single person). The act of weaving (*gebrægd*) first mentioned in 18b has been relocated, now functioning as a past participle in parallel with "weaved wonderously together."

<sup>23</sup> *burnsele monige*: literally "many bath-halls".

<sup>24</sup> *heab horngestron*: literally "tall pinnacle-treasure" (pinnacle meaning a projection from a roof). A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary gives "wealth of the pinnacles" as a translation; the compound seems to refer to fancy roofs, perhaps bedecked with jewels (as many things are in Anglo-Saxon poetry) or intricately carved. Although *streon* is singular, I have opted to render it as a plural, reflecting the broad description of the cityscape in the description.

<sup>25</sup> The rune for "day" appears in the transliteration of the poem. While other translations seem to ignore it altogether, I have integrated it into the composition.

<sup>26</sup> *wyrd seo swiþe*: in this context, *seo swiþe* is an epithet or descriptive title for *wyrd*. The meaning of *swiþ* is twofold; it denotes power and might, but also severity or violence. I have rendered this phrase "forces of fate", which clearly captures the duality of the word, as "force" implies both a show of strength and irresistible violence against its target.

<sup>27</sup> *crungon walo wide*: literally "fell/died (in) battle widely"; following other translations, I integrated a subject (many men), revising the structure of the passage while maintaining the meaning of falling in battle.

<sup>28</sup> *woldagas*: literally "days of pestilence" or "days of mortality".

<sup>29</sup> *segroftra wera*: literally "sword-brave men". There is no mention of how many, but a lot—if not all—is implied. This sense is preserved with "but every valiant man".

<sup>30</sup> *brosnade burgsteall*: literally "the fortress fell".

<sup>31</sup> *betend*: this word, derived from the verb *betan*, refers to one who could rebuild, restore, or reclaim the past splendor of the city; I have chosen the word steward to describe these lost care-takers.

<sup>32</sup> I have added "sank" to this phrase, as no verb is present in the original poem and it appeared disparate from the previous segment.

<sup>33</sup> *teaforgeapa*: there is some debate as to whether this compound is a noun or an adjective; I have chosen to interpret it as a noun.

<sup>34</sup> *sceadeþ*: this word holds the meanings of both "shed" and "scattered"; in restructuring this troublesome passage, I was able to include both senses of the word, which aptly describe the fate of the tiles.

<sup>35</sup> *hrostbeages*: the compound *hrostbeag* literally translates to "wooden-roost-ring". Bosworth-Toller provides the gloss "the woodwork of a circular roof."

<sup>36</sup> Lines 29-31a proved to be a difficult section, requiring similar restructuring similar to lines 18-20. Literally, it may be parsed as "its red arch of tiles shed/wood-rings' roof". In my translation I have taken *hrostbeages hrof* as the nominative, understanding that the domed (circular) roof is from where the red tiles (of the red arch) fall. In such a reading, the referent of *þæs* in line 30 would naturally be the dome.

<sup>37</sup> *gebrocen to beorgum*: literally "broke into mounds, pieces".

<sup>38</sup> *seab*: I have interpreted this word as referring to the men and their treasures, who could be looked upon in the glory days of the city.

<sup>39</sup> *on sinc, on sylfor*: the order of these two words have been reversed for the sake of rhythm; conjunctions have been added.

<sup>40</sup> *on ead, on æht*: I have omitted the second *on* ("in") in the first section of this line as well as the parallel phrase in the previous line (*on sinc, on sylfor*) for rhythmic purposes. The second noun is simply integrated into the first prepositional phrase, and no meaning is lost.

<sup>41</sup> I have added "where" at the beginning of this segment to indicate a shift in location.

<sup>42</sup> Punctuation has been added to this line to more clearly delineate the phrase.

<sup>43</sup> *bat on breþre*: literally "hot in the heart". I have taken a cue from Hostetter's translation by referencing the source of the heat for the baths.

<sup>44</sup> As in the previous damaged section of the manuscript, I have chosen to omit lines 44-47 and 49, for they are too fragmented to draw a meaningful translation from. Although comprehensible, the fragmentary line 46 is identical to 40 and adds nothing new to the poem without the missing context. The last discernable phrase in the poem is a suitable conclusion to the elegy for the ruin: "that is a kingly thing."

## ANALYSIS

Scholars often remark that “The Ruin” is, itself, a ruin. The last of the elegies in the Exeter Book, the poem suffers from a burn that penetrates the manuscript pages. The damage, apparently caused by a fallen brand, destroyed fourteen of the poem’s forty-nine lines, rendering them unreadable. Michael Swanton takes the stance that “the ruined state of the poem, far from obstructing our appreciation of it, only corroborates the truth it imports.” However, the poem’s antiquity and missing lines leave scholars to guess at the writer’s intended message, as well as the inspiration for the work.

**THE LAST OF THE ELEGIES IN THE  
EXETER BOOK, THE POEM SUFFERS  
FROM A BURN THAT PENETRATES THE  
MANUSCRIPT PAGES. THE DAMAGE,  
APPARENTLY CAUSED BY A FALLEN  
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THE POEM’S FORTY-NINE LINES,  
RENDERING THEM UNREADABLE.**

Speculation on the location of the eponymous ruin has long been the dominant theme in scholarly analysis. Countless tracts and essays have been written arguing that the ruin represents Bath, Chester, Hadrian’s Wall, an allegorical Babylon vanquished by the Christian God, or a fictional location existing only in the poet’s imagination. Although a consensus will likely never be reached, the city of Bath enjoys the widest support among scholars as the site described in the poem. “There are [...] three features which, taken in conjunction, fit Bath but no other site in Britain,” writes R.F. Leslie, a proponent of the theory. He names three key identifiers that point toward Bath: the thermal spring rising

into a walled reservoir, the extent of the baths (*burn-sele monige*), and the circular pool (*bringmere*). The theory is further supported by the fact that Bath is the only place in Great Britain boasting natural hot springs; other proposed sites artificially heated water using hypocausts. The Bath hypothesis also addresses the matter of time. By the eighth century, when the poem was likely written, Roman Bath had long fallen into a state of decay, having probably been derelict by the fifth century.

Other scholars, most notably Hugh T. Keenan, have proposed allegorical readings that envision the subject as a symbolic Babylon. Pointing to Cynewulf’s account of the apocalypse in *Christ II*, Keenan sees the poem as an “ironic and scornful allegory” that portrays a sinful pagan city, rightfully levelled by the Christian God in an act of punishment. While a Christian reading of “The Ruin” may not be entirely unwarranted considering the Exeter Book’s religious content, this interpretation has been criticized for imposing ham-fisted moralism onto the text. James Doubleday faults Keenan for forcing a connection between Babylon and the poem while ignoring the poet’s celebratory tone and genuine admiration for the city and its people. Most damningly, the poem lacks the references to a protective personal God that would be expected of a Christian text.

Finally, there are those who argue that “The Ruin” might not represent a specific location at all, but rather a generalized imagining of a great civilization fallen into decay. Anne Thompson Lee argues that “the actual location of the poem is at best peripheral to our understanding of it.” Lee criticizes popular approaches to the poem for treating it as an archeological riddle while neglecting its more literary aspects.

"The Ruin" has been described as a poem of contrasts: between past and present, between humanity and its works, between the ephemeral and the enduring, between the living city and the ruin. The juxtaposition of these key ideas is built into the very structure of the poem, a non-linear journey that moves between an implied present gaze and the poet's imaginative reconstruction of the city in its prime. Observations of the present are brought into contrast with the past, a rapidly alternating pattern established within the first lines of the poem. This irregular approach results in a contemplative yet animated experience, produced by a narrative that circulates through both time and space.

"The Ruin" reverses structural expectations from the start with atypically abrupt changes in tense and mood: "*Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon; / burgstede burston, brosnad enta geweorc.*" This pattern of temporal-emotional contrasts continues throughout the poem. "Each contrasting scene builds upon the initial paradigm, so that the concepts found there are transformed into vivid realities, which in turn add to the impact of these concepts," explains Alain Renoir. The contrasting images direct the reader's attention between the ruin in its present state and its past as a living settlement, contrasting scenes of life and decay, of sorrow and of joy.

The poet's chief concern lies not with buildings alone, but also with the people who made them. As the poet admires the structures, they also draw attention to those who raised their roofs and walked their halls. The reader is invited to appreciate the ingenuity of the master builders (6b-7), reflect on the passage of generations (8b-9a), and imagine a celebration at the mead-hall (23), drawing attention to the human joy that once filled the ruined city. By closely identifying men with their creations, the people become an aspect of the ruin itself.

Alain Renoir identifies a deliberate contrast between the language of destruction and that of the ruin's former opulence. Destructive action is almost always conveyed with single words, while descriptions of grandeur and majesty are expressed using elaborate phrases or compounds. This distinction, says Renoir, conveys negative action with a more immediate, forceful impact, while depictions of splendor are experienced less hurriedly, offering a more reflective mood. Daniel Calder has likewise observed the impact of downward motion in the poem, which animates the force behind its most potent images. Through varying syntax and selective use of active and passive words, the poet animates the setting and offers a more dynamic experience.

**"THE RUIN" HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A POEM OF CONTRASTS: BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT, BETWEEN HUMANITY AND ITS WORKS, BETWEEN THE EPHEMERAL AND THE ENDURING, BETWEEN THE LIVING CITY AND THE RUIN.**

The sense of irreversible loss that permeates "The Ruin" has prompted critics to assess it as a reflection on transience, a metaphor for the fleetingness of humanity, creation, and the world itself. The poem has been cited as an exemplary illustration of *sic transit gloria mundi*, or "thus passes the glory of the world," a Latin phrase signifying the mutability of earthly things. The poet's use of *wyrd*, fate or destiny, implies the ruin's destruction is no accident, but rather the inevitable outcome of all human endeavors. The interpretation of "The Ruin" as a reflection on the ephemeral nature of man and his works remains an enduring critical assessment of the poem. Dailey, for instance, calls "The Ruin" "a poetic meditation on the patterning and effects of time on materiality," as does Renoir, who writes that the poem's language reflects "the fateful fragility of human accomplishments at their peak."

While this interpretation is well-supported by the text, others have taken an alternative approach to the poem's reflection on time and decay. Lawrence Beaston identifies resilience, rather than transience, as the poem's chief theme, writing that "The Ruin" "insists not so much on the mutability of the earthly world," but rather the brevity of human life in contrast to their works. The city may have crumbled and fallen to the forces of fate, yet still it remains; its people may be long gone, but a monument to their memory still stands. The speaker's encounter itself is testament to the lastingness of human works and their ability to transcend the lifespan of their makers.

The poem reflects a philosophical idea deeply ingrained in the worldview of the Anglo-Saxons, says Beaston: that the legacy left by one's deeds could be used to escape the inevitable oblivion of death. Material works such as the baths of "The Ruin" leave the most enduring mark upon the physical world, but words too have the power to prolong the memory of those who came before. "Even the intangible stories and songs of the *scops* have more staying power than the human beings whose lives they recall," explains Beaston, noting that "the best way that an individual person can escape *wyrd*'s brutal hand is to achieve some fleeting moments of glory, as Beowulf did, that will be commemorated in story and song."

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# WEIRD DECENTERING

## THE UNNATURAL IN H.P. LOVECRAFT'S AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

By Braden Timms

The 'weird fiction' of H.P. Lovecraft has frustrated any attempt to place the author safely in the canons of genre fiction. Writing in the brief period of 1917 – 1937 with a keen mind towards the era's scientific discoveries, Lovecraft's stories about cosmic horror, insanity, and inhumanity cultivated the author no fame during his lifetime. The weirdness of his 'weird fiction' derives from a unique combination of science, supernatural, metaphysics, and speculation all in service of the decentering and reduction of mankind on a cosmic scale. The mythology maintained across Lovecraft's numerous short stories depicts a world that is determined to undermine the ideals and arrogant assumptions of twentieth-century rationality, a nightmarish undoing of everything that could have been called human or humanity. "The most merciful thing in the world..." Lovecraft wrote, "is the inability of man to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far" (*The Call of Cthulhu* 381).

**THE MYTHOLOGY MAINTAINED ACROSS LOVECRAFT'S NUMEROUS SHORT STORIES DEPICTS A WORLD THAT IS DETERMINED TO UNDERMINE THE IDEALS AND ARROGANT ASSUMPTIONS OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY RATIONALITY, A NIGHTMARISH UNDOING OF EVERYTHING THAT COULD HAVE BEEN CALLED HUMAN OR HUMANITY.**

In the century since his death, however, he has become one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, impacting not just writers of genre fiction, but contemporary philosophers and theoreticians as well. Indeed, the twentieth century has brought with it a significant reconsideration of the writer's oeuvre, with large considerations towards his concepts of nature, human history, and time. Upon closer examination of the unique logic and phenome-

na at work in Lovecraft's weird fiction, new audiences are discovering, what philosopher Fabian Ludueña describes as, "[a rare writer] who gives supreme expression to the *universe* in which any philosophical aspiration must be situated" (Ludueña 12). In this tradition of reconsidering Lovecraft—and the challenge that his hostile universe poses—I believe there is a practical good in reading his works through an ecocritical lens. Rearticulating Lovecraft from the position of ecocriticism reveals various applications, demonstrations, and formulations of contemporary ecocritical theory that gives expression to the environment and humanity's relationship with it. Lovecraft's fiction contains a type of nature which divests humanity of the advantages bestowed by anthropocentric, humanity-above-and-before-all philosophy and mythologizing; this weird nature de-aestheticizes what ecocritic and philosopher Timothy Morton marks as capital-n Nature, a "damaged and damaging [concept], almost useless for developing ecological culture" (Morton 1). An ecocritical reading of Lovecraft can aid in the construction of de-Naturalized conceptions of nature, a useful idea for life during a progressive decentering of humanity by global ecological change in the twenty-first century.

For my ecocritical exploration of H.P. Lovecraft's writings I selected his classic twentieth-century Antarctic expedition novella, *At the Mountains of Madness*. This is a significant work by the author that depicts the first proper attempt at exploring the last unconquered continent on Earth, a story of rationality's attempt to demystify the world. The Antarctic setting is noteworthy for its significance in the imagination of Western civilization, heightening Lovecraft's cosmic drama and connecting the land mass to human identity as a prominent cultural relationship with nature that is worth ecocritical consideration. As the author of *At the End of the Earth: How Polar Ice and Imagination Shape the World*, G.L. Brackett, asserts, "the poles ... have been touchstones for our sense of place in the world. Their mys-

tery was a driving force behind their discovery and exploration and that mystery ... continues to be essential to our relationship with them today" (20). This justifies the Antarctic, as a real place and an imaginary space, for ecological consideration, and it also provides a legendary stage for the decentering of man that is underway in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

A brief preamble about the plot, and my formatting: *At the Mountains of Madness* is a first-person narration warning the world against future explorations of the Antarctic after confronting disturbing ancient histories in the icy landscape. The story's narrator, William Dyer, relates the discovery of a vegetable-like alien race and their doomed civilization, and a terrible encounter with what doomed it. The aliens, called the Elder Things, were an advanced pre-human species that are responsible for much of Earth's life, including, it is suggested, humans. It is a horror and science fiction story about mankind discovering its cosmic insignificance at the peak of realizing the century's long project of global exploration.

My analysis proceeds via three independent theses and conclusions. Revealing a multitude of themes and issues at work within this 101-page novella was an effort of bringing the multidisciplinary field of second-wave ecocriticism to bare upon a singular text. This is my model for a hopeful future where ecocritics of all disciplines can take to this preeminent twentieth-century writer's weird body of writing. Drawing from the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Timothy Morton, and Kate Soper, I examine history, biology, and ecomimesis within Lovecraft's story.

## 1. TERROR FROM THE ANTHROPOCENE: HUMAN, NATURAL, OR HISTORY OF ANOTHER KIND?

Mere dinosaurs were new and almost brainless objects—but the builders of the city were wise and old, and had left certain traces in rocks even then laid down well-nigh a thousand million years ...

rocks laid down before the true life of earth had advanced beyond plastic groups of cells... They were the makers and enslavers of that life ... beings whose substance an alien evolution had shaped, and whose powers were such as this planet had never bred. (Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* 56-57)

The twentieth-century explorers in *At the Mountains of Madness* are confronted with many terrors, but none perhaps as utterly horrific as the true narrative of Earth's history, revealed in the ancient friezes of an advanced pre-human civilization. Lovecraft's assault on human and geologic history in this story problematizes the real project of human civilization in several ways that comprise horrors of the imagination in the twentieth century, but are real ecological concerns in the twenty-first. Linking *At the Mountains of Madness* to ecological issues of historicity is achieved with consideration of Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses*, where the terror felt by the fictional explorers can be related to real twentieth-century conceptions of natural and human history by questioning the certitude of their exclusivity. The exploration of Antarctica in the real twentieth century was the object of national pride in the case of the Norwegians and the British, but for mankind it can be recognized as a project of globalization. Arguing that "globalization and global warming are born of overlapping processes" (200), Chakrabarty legitimizes the grounds to perform an ecological reading of Lovecraft's horror exploration story. I will proceed by revealing

how the Elder Things disinherit humanity of the claim to history and the achievements of civilization, and conclude by arguing that the terror in *At the Mountains of Madness* is ecological responsibility in the twenty-first century.

By suggesting that there are pre-human histories, Lovecraft demolishes what Chakrabarty refers to as the Viconian-Hobbesian idea that natural history is distinct from human history (203). I argue this because Chakrabarty is contending with the twentieth-century concept of history wherein nature cannot make history, or can only make natural history, because it is not an agent like man. It seems safe, then, to reason that the history of the ancient Elder Thing race encountered by William Dyer in Lovecraft's story is indeed a history within the conception of a *human* history. In other words, the Elder Things are humanized as they are endowed with a history authored by beings with a human-like agency. This is a stunning realization for Lovecraft's characters, but it also puts forward a thought experiment for critical consideration by Lovecraft's readers. If history can be inhuman while simultaneously unnatural, it spurs reconsideration not only of the content of history, but the conceptual forms of history as well.

Further, civilization itself, mankind's pride, monument to twentieth-century rationality, is disinherited. Upon discovering the dead city beyond the mountains, Dyer narrates:

...this place could be no ordinary city. It must have formed the primary nucleus and centre of some archaic and unbelievable chapter of earth's history ... long before any human race we know had shambled out of apedom. (Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* 45)

This discovery implies that civilization is ancient, pre-human, and, it follows, a borrowed achievement that mankind has unwittingly adopted as the basis of its claim to significance over other Earth life. The disinheriting of civilization from humanity by the non-human, Elder Thing race is a strike at anthropocentric phi-

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losophy, a common Lovecraftian gesture, yet never delivered with more precision than in *At the Mountains of Madness*. As Luduena summarizes, “from the point of view of the Lovecraftian [mythology], a society is the most profoundly inhuman form that humans have found to organize their life together” (Ludena 33). What follows from these disinheritances is a spooky line of questioning: has humanity become less human, or was humanity always more alien than was previously realized?

I contend that reframing both history and civilization as concepts which belong to an advanced race of ancient, pre-human aliens opens the possibility, in the twentieth-century imaginary, of a species capable of bridging natural and human histories and becoming an agent on a geologic scale. As Chakrabarty asserts, “to call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human ... [to reach] numbers and [invent] technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself” (207). Becoming geological is to transition from the pre-globalization scale of human effects on the planet to the twenty-first-century scale, where our histories are scribed in the change we inflict upon the landscape. Just as ancient Earth was propagated by Elder Things “allowing [life] to develop into other forms of animal and vegetable life for sundry purposes” (Lovecraft 60), human civilization amid globalization is, inversely, capable of reducing the population volume of many species by sixty percent in just forty years (WWF).

The terror in *At the Mountains of Madness* is in the suggestion that biological agents, like twentieth-century humanity, could possibly become geological forces, as we have become in the twenty-first century (Chakrabarty 207). The explorers of the story are confronted with a question provoked by their arrogant claims to history, civilization, and the dream of a globalized world: will you be able to accept the responsibility of the Anthropocene—the epoch of human history wrought on a geologic scale—once

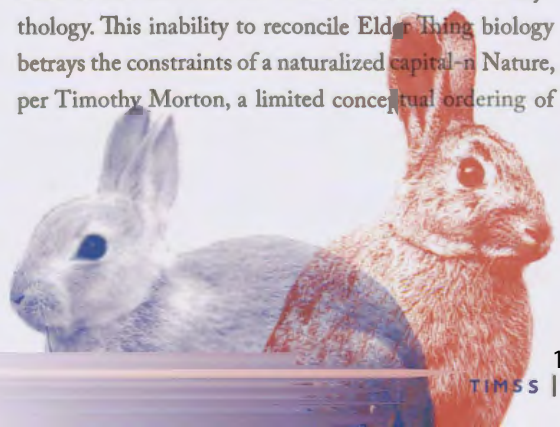
## HAS HUMANITY BECOME LESS HUMAN, OR WAS HUMANITY ALWAYS MORE ALIEN THAN WAS PREVIOUSLY REALIZED?

you arrive? Considering that the story is framed as a warning against further Antarctic expeditions, this is a question posed to all of humanity.

## 2. YOU JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A RABBIT COULD BE: DISSECTING THE ELDER THING

10:15 P.M. Important discovery. Orrendorf and Watkins, working underground at 9:45 with light, found monstrous barrel-shaped fossil of wholly unknown nature; probably vegetable unless overgrown specimen of unknown marine radiata ... Like a barrel ... Objects ... baffles all conjecture as to origin. (Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* 19-21)

When the remains of the ancient Elder Things are discovered remarkably preserved in the ice, the expedition's primary impetus shifts from geology to biology. Initial impressions of the strange alien life invigorate the imagination of the explorers, but upon closer inspection, through dissection, their anatomy replaces curiosity with abject disgust. “Existing biology would have to be wholly revised,” Dyer relays, “specimens have such uncanny resemblance to certain creatures of primal myth” (21-23); the closer these men of science look, the more the taxonomy of the Elder Things seems to confer them to the non-scientific realm of monsters and mythology. This inability to reconcile Elder Thing biology betrays the constraints of a naturalized capital-n Nature, per Timothy Morton, a limited conceptual ordering of





things that projects neat divisions onto a nature that is often more confounding and ambiguous than convenient. The rational eye of the biologist, in Lovecraft's story, is not able (or perhaps, not willing) to place the strange Elder Things into a categorization that would relate their biological substance with the good Nature that composes all life, and human life especially.

Morton's 'extended phenotype' concept of biology uses writing, machine-code, and fractals to relate structured systems to biology and ecology. Morton argues that all life is derived, like words from an alphabet, by the DNA expressions that a biosphere contains. Morton's assertion that biology is textual, possessing its own grammar, promises to reshape humanist models of ecological and biological thought. By reconsidering the validity of the boundaries that Nature draws between organisms,

Morton advocates for a process by which Nature is de-aestheticized from being an environmental ecology [of] bounded things nestled within their bounded niches" (Morton 8). Understanding biology as comprised of and porous to the environment we exist in, Morton maintains, would "drastically [expand] what environmentalism—qua protecting 'habits'—must think and do, because there is no niche opposed to organism; there is only the genome and the biosphere" (Morton 8). In the case of Lovecraft's story, for the scientists to accommodate these monsters—these *things*—would be to abandon Nature in favor of nature, recognizing a common biological origin derived from a textual conception of ecology.

The initial disorientation over the assignment of the Elder Things as either vegetable or animal relates to a general disrespect for things, like objects or life that does not look human. Transgressing against 'rational' human conceptions of biology is one aspect of Lovecraft's attack on human exceptionalism. Morton speaks about vegetables with consideration of his extended phenotype concept: "That is the disturbing thing about 'animals'—they are vegetables... Our prejudice about vegetables is that they're beings that only do one thing—grow" (Morton 4). Since the enlightenment, man has always rationalized itself as being superior to, among other things, vegetables and animals. However, discovering this *thing* that looks like a vegetable, but in all actuality is much more advanced than mankind, is a great blow to man's ego, and to neat-and-tidy conceptions of biology.

**THE OTHER SIDE OF ADOPTING A PERSPECTIVE CAPABLE OF APPREHENDING LIFE IN ITS LEAST HUMAN FORM IS THE NECESSARY BRAVERY TO CONFRONT A NATURE THAT IS DISTINCTLY INHUMAN.**

Morton's reconsideration of what can constitute an environment and ecology, simply, extends respect to things that do not look or behave like ourselves. In a larger sense, this relates to Morton's ideas about hyperobjects—actual beings of a nature and scale so large, like radiation, that our general inability to perceive them prefigures our inclination to respect them. Arguing that biology only expresses mild differentiations of the ecology within a biosphere suggests “a rabbit is not *really* a rabbit” (Morton 5), as an Elder Thing is not *really* an Elder Thing, and, ultimately, that a human is not *really* a human. Ecological respect entails recognizing the agency of an other, however abstract, be it global weather patterns or the base proteins that comprise any DNA sequence. A new ecological culture with the intellectual faculty to extend respect in this way entails never underestimating natural forces or, subsequently, failing to recognize their potential to be a threat. Philosopher and horror-fiction writer Nick Land offered an apt rearticulation of the importance of Morton's extended phenotype in an example pulled from the Lovecraft-inspired film *The Thing* (1982). Commenting on what the thing is in *The Thing*, Land explains how the graphic horror that unfurls from the body of a dog in the film's first hour is horrific “not [because] it was a fake dog, but [because] you didn't know what a dog could be” (Land 00:27:30–00:27:50). The other side of adopting a perspective capable of apprehending life in its least human form is the necessary bravery to confront a nature that is distinctly inhuman. Lovecraft's fiction depicts the horror inherent to the decentering of humanity and Morton's proposed ecological culture accelerates this decentering, thus compelling reassessment of humanist models of ecology that do not sufficiently accommodate the horrors of the non-anthropocentric.

Biological horror in Lovecraft's story reflects a twentieth-century attitude of biological determinism, exclusionism, purity, and miscegenation anxieties. It is the same rhetoric that supports ideologies of purity that often underlie how we articulate the interrelations of humanity and ecology, as well as human and other humans, bridging ecocriticism with social criticism in what is called the discourse of environmental justice. As has brought Lovecraft much deserved criticism (Emrys), the horror of the *other* or *thing* in Lovecraftian horror is commonly a source of a transgression against biological normativity and the fear of its corruption by ‘alien’ or ‘inbred’ sources. Lovecraft's writing reflects these anxieties because they express the author's real social prejudices. Any analysis or synthesis of Lovecraft must inevitably contend with his bigotry, or, in failing to do so, resign to the shallow mediocrity that undermines any reified pop-culture appropriation of Lovecraft's aesthetic. As for my analysis, I seek to provide models with which Lovecraft can be critiqued or used as critique, and the scope necessary to apply these to Lovecraft's racism, misogyny, and queer-antagonism is an article the proportions of a dissertation<sup>1</sup>. The ability to see *At the Mountains of Madness* as a text in conversation with the ecocritical theories of Morton as well as issues of environmental justice elevates the critical work already done, while legitimizing grounds for further creative expeditions of Lovecraft and his writing.

### **3. THE SHOGGOTH AND THE DISCOURSE OF NATURE**

The star-headed Elder Things interred within the Antarctic ice, discovered, at first, in pieces and then later in a perplexing, yet intuitable whole are still only the penultimate unNatural life that *At the Mountains of Madness* contains. The rock murals of the dead city reveal the existence of a grotesque beast of burden which the Elder Things, at their civilization's peak, synthesized from inorganic material and utilized to construct their civilizations. Over millions of years, however, these beasts were naturalized as their inorganic origins

were forgotten by a society succumbing to the ecological pressures of a warming and cooling ancient Earth. Mistaking these monsters as something natural like themselves, the distinctly Natural social creations overwhelmed and eradicated the race of the Elder Things that could not see them as ideology given corporeal form. These monsters, the 'shoggoth,' defy human visual or linguistic representation because of their abstract formlessness, as Lovecraft writes:

They were normally shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles ... a constantly shifting shape and volume ... rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile ... the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist's 'thing that should not be.' (Lovecraft 64 & 91)

The shoggoth of *At the Mountains of Madness* manifest as the story's most intimidating force precisely because it is a social invention out of control. By this interpretation, I suggest a reading that could lend itself, as a metaphor, to social constructionist, feminist, and environmental justice critiques. Examining what I perceive to be a mimetic shift in the relationship of the monster to its creators, I will link Lovecraft's "thing that should not be" to a process by which nature is Naturalized as ideology by societies. However, before accepting the shoggoth as a Natural concept, I must demonstrate that Lovecraft's text supports this interpretation by showing

a division between man and Nature as it is drawn by Dyer, with the shoggoth itself as the background to man's activity.

After much foreshadowing, the terrible shoggoth appears to the human explorers and its unnaturalness is immediately evident. As Dyer relates to the reader, "its nearest comprehensible analogue is a vast, onrushing subway train as one sees it from a station platform" (Lovecraft 92). Indeed, the thing is so at odds with anything possibly human that it forces Dyer to sympathize with the Elder Things as "radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star-spawn—whatever they had been, they were men!" (92). This moment and the use of 'men' is of note because Dyer, up to this point, has considered the Elder Things only as ambiguous beings, creatures, or monsters. Only against the sliding background of a subway-train-like shoggoth can Dyer see something approximating personhood in the Elder Things. The distance Dyer holds the Elder Things apart from humanity is such the case that even upon discovering the ancient and dead city of this pre-human race of 'man,' Dyer distinguishes their architecture as "[unknown] to man or to human" (29). Prior to the encounter with the shoggoth, the Elder Things are neither man *nor* human. Relating the Elder Things to man is rare respect extended to an othered thing, yet it does not convey the respect inherent to humanity. I contend this is the socialized abstracting of the Elder Things by way of a confrontation with the ecological concept of nature in contrast to civilization, or "what is very obviously and

recognizably a product of human cultivation and transformation in the realist sense" (Soper 325). The Elder Things become 'men' and the shoggoths are visible aspects of their terrible Natural surroundings, just as deforested landscapes and oil-coated seas illustrate the boundary between human civilization and the Nature beyond it. On its way to becoming ideology, the Natural is used to conceptualize the social man.

"Nature had played a hellish jest on them" (Lovecraft 93), Dyer is able to conclude from his human perspective. However, the history of the shoggoths in Elder Thing society reveals they—the unnatural social creations—had been perceived differently by their creators, and this had led to social collapse. A significant characteristic of the shoggoth is its inherent formlessness and adaptability; the many needs of a civilization required abstract tools "capable of moulding their tissues into all sorts of temporary organs under hypnotic influence [by the Elder Things] and thereby forming ideal slaves to perform the heavy work of the community" (60). The shoggoth is more akin to the social itself in the Elder Thing imagination, I argue, than it is like the Nature which Dyer requires to recognize Elder Things as social men. The implication of this being that the Elder Things, initially, would have held their essential 'humanity' in distinction of their existence as social beings. This perceived dichotomy was weakened, however, as "newly bred shoggoths grew to enormous size and singular intelligence ... [became able] to converse with the [Elder Things] by mimicking their voices" (72). This is the political danger of ecomimesis—the struggle to capture nature in representations—as ecocritic Dana Phillips warns, whereby the social is granted motivation, where "[trees in literature become] something more vital than textual functions" (Phillips 10), and the real of nature is confused with the ideology of Nature. What was es-

entially Elder Thing was reflected by the social, and as the knowledge of how to create shoggoths was forgot so too was the distinction which defined their humanity, and they were destroyed by the violence of a Naturalized ideology.

To read the shoggoth as ideology, and perhaps specifically a type of nature rhetoric, lends itself to ecocritical thought and Lovecraft's project of decentering man; it reveals the arbitrariness of how we distinguish—make exceptions—of ourselves in the world. Here I have demonstrated two ways that the natural might draw out the human. Dyer's identification of the shoggoth as an effect of the Elder Thing's society delineated the boundary between man and nature, conceptualizing social man in contrast to its surrounding environment. Inversely, I examined how the Elder Things considered society as separate from their essential nature, suggesting their extinction is akin to mistaking a social and ideological identity as humanity. Mistaking the social as real is the downfall of the Elder Things, a mistake which Dyer readily repeats by basing his sympathy on a shared social realness. That even the most advanced race humanity has ever encountered was arrogant enough to mistake their society as themselves should inspire terror in the twenty-first century. Do we need to know what nature is in order to know ourselves, and further, does the distinction benefit us at all?

## IN THE END

The 'punch' of a truly weird tale is simply some violation or transcending of fixed cosmic law—an imaginative escape from palling reality—hence *phenomena* rather than *persons* are the logical 'heroes.' (Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Nonentity" 207-211)

Future weird studies into H.P. Lovecraft's 'weird stories' may one day include the scholars and theories that comprise the vast and amorphous body of ecocrit-



**WE MUST PROBE THE UNCOMFORTABLE POSSIBILITY THAT IF THERE EVEN IS A POSSIBILITY FOR A HERO FIGURE IN NATURE, THE HERO IS LIKELY NOT HUMAN.**

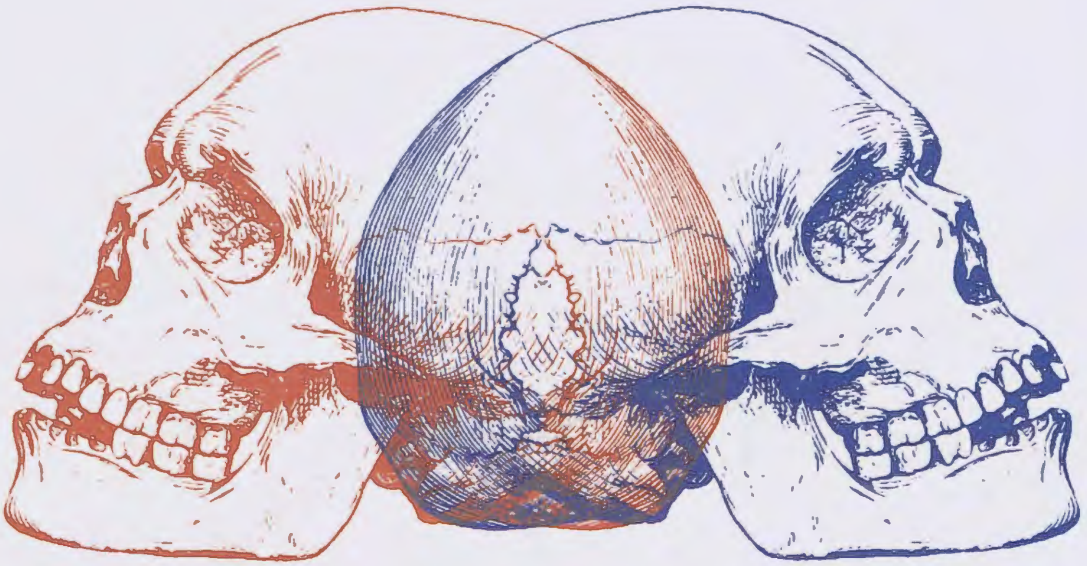
icism in the twenty-first century. The text is there just waiting to be discovered and poured over. Central themes of humankind's decentering and disinheriting of its identity, make Lovecraft's horror especially suitable to second-wave ecocritical thought. By creating a mythology out of a world that frustrates human arrogance, Lovecraft gives agency to nature in ways that oppose enlightenment and modernist assumptions about humankind's place in the universe, the world, and the immediately local. The weird nature alive in *At the Mountains of Madness* is unnatural, and humankind's folly is to have ever thought it could be naturalized. Lovecraft provokes consideration of what exactly about our conception of the world constitutes a true understanding of its nature, and how much of that understanding is mediated by an anthropocentric perspective. Considered as such, Lovecraft's universe constitutes a fictional space where the ideas and concerns of ecocritics might be given expression or find their undoing. For example, what does Morton's concept of hyperobjects entail for humanity when made real in this fictional world? How might Lovecraft's hostile universe of weird nature legitimize, problematize, enhance, or invalidate ecocritical thought are the questions I mean to provoke. By taking to task humankind's anthropocentric notions of nature, we must probe the uncomfortable possibility that if there even is a possibility for a hero figure in nature, the hero is likely not human.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to point directly to some works that thrum with the vitality of criticism and the volatility of Lovecraft's unique twentieth-century horror: Matt Ruff's horror novel and critique of Lovecraft's racism, *Lovecraft Country*; *She Walks in Shadows*, a short-story collection written by women of color that reclaims Lovecraft's mythology; and Alan Moore and Jacen Burrows' comic series, *Providence*, which confronts Lovecraft and his works with a politics of authorship and sexuality,

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# PARADIGMATIC BIO-LOGIC

## AGAINST BIOLOGY AND TOWARDS *TRANSLIFE*

By Chris Coles

### ABSTRACT

**T**his project seeks to indicate that the dominant conception for which the definition of life catalyzes into existence is that of biology. I seek to indicate that the semiotic imperialism for which biologization<sup>1</sup> enacts on life operates as part and parcel to the colonial-cisheteronormative project of Gender. Following the critical work of nila nokizaru, Gender's project eradicates not only indigenous peoples and trans folks but becomes, in fact, a war on life itself. What this results in is the framing of life as determinate, and thus kinships as always already hurtling towards a predetermined end point: an end point that creates the self-fulfilling prophecy of ontology. An ontology as a violent sexing of the body that seeks to produce trans folks (and all those

at the periphery of coherency) as worth nothing but death to sustain 'life.' Arguing against this function of the Western death machine, I articulate that we ought to endorse Karen Barad's framing of life as 'indeterminate' as a method for which we formulate radical politics. These radical projects seek not only a freeing of life from the chains of biologization, but for the total abolition of the material realities that produce entire populations as disposable, entropic forces, and death-worlds. In essence this paper hopes to propose a radical reconstruction of kinship, a sort of trans kinship. A trans kinship that both allows for our bodies to flourish and functions as praxis for revolutionary direct action.

The specter of biology is near omnipresent, especially evident in how sex, and consequentially Gender,<sup>2</sup> are theorized within mass culture. Left-wing politics and theory has long forwarded the understanding of systems of power as that which regulates/controls political, and thus social, life. That said, the semiotic imperialism of biology has parasitized itself within the radical left as well, contradicting the foundational beliefs of those expressing them. For example, trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) often endorse 'gender abolition,' even as they vehemently exclude trans women – who true abolition would require centering – from their rigid definition of womanhood. This attempt to eradicate trans women reveals a vicious attachment to womanhood as signified by the vagina (cis-womanhood): a reproduction of the same colonial force of Western biologization which said TERFs have proclaimed to set out to dismantle. The explicitly contradictory nature of these beliefs reveal the way in which biology has penetrated the molecular realm to such a degree that we have been conditioned to desire a folding of all life (specifically understandings of sex and gender) under the taxonomy of biology. Following Oyèrónke Oyewùmi, we ought not understand biology as an independent vector of violence, but rather as one that is necessarily situated within the production of Western modernity, anti-blackness, settler colonialism, and by consequence compulsory heterosexuality (9). In that sense, I hope to indicate that the taxonomization<sup>3</sup> of molecular life under the signifier of biology necessarily sexes the body, and in doing so, deploys the structures through which compulsory heterosexuality gains coherence. Thus, this essay not only impels the necessity of gender abolitionism in revolutionary struggles against compulsory heterosexuality, but also a rearticulation of life as fundamentally virtual<sup>4</sup> (Parisi 14).

**WE OUGHT NOT UNDERSTAND BIOLOGY AS AN INDEPENDENT VECTOR OF VIOLENCE, BUT RATHER AS ONE THAT IS NECESSARILY SITUATED WITHIN THE PRODUCTION OF WESTERN MODERNITY, ANTI-BLACKNESS, SETTLER COLONIALISM, AND BY CONSEQUENCE COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY**

#### **BIOLOGY AND THE MOLECULAR**

Despite what biology would lead you to believe, life is not determinate; life is not transcendently knowable or “determined genetically...by parts of the genes called chromosomes” but rather fundamentally indeterminate, always already in flux (Stryker 8). Following Karen Barad, the very quantum materials of life’s – like protons and electrons – general principle can be understood as existing in such a state (394). Traditionally within the regime of Western metaphysics (of which ‘science’ is a result of), biologization results in a predetermined expression of life, the reproduction of an ontology–life as always having a constitutive being. For example, the species classification system reduces the difference found within particular species down to a singular set of unifying traits. In this sense, it could be said that the ontologization<sup>5</sup> of life is the *raison d’être* for which Western metaphysics departs upon in that it structures “difference...as degeneration” (Oyewùmi 3). Biology serves as one of the fundamental vectors for such collapsing of difference in that it manifests a claim to positivism, and forwards such positivism as the retroactive justification of biology’s dictums (Oyewùmi 9). Through this project of Western world-building, bio-logic becomes sutured onto understandings of physics as well. Indicating this

process, traditional physics<sup>6</sup> has sought to explain waves and particles as necessarily determinate, reinforcing determinacy as the overarching principle through which the structure of life expresses itself (Sheldon 4). This generally takes the form of constructing waves and particles as having universal principles that always already determine their expression (Sheldon 4). This results in a construction of particles and waves as always already determined in their expression; this is, particles are treated as discrete, locatable “bits or points of matter” while waves are thought of as “radiations whose ambit is the totality of the space through which they flow” (Sheldon 8).

Yet, once again invoking Barad, this interpretation of life misunderstands the foundation of its claim to determinacy. Pivoting to quantum mechanics, there are circumstances in which particles become indistinguishable from waves. Rather, particles and waves are indeterminate due to the fact that their expression is always dependent on the materialities for which they are situated within; they are virtual. Virtual in the sense that their trajectory is not teleological<sup>7</sup> but instead open to the infinite possibilities made possible by particular material realities; or in other words, “the virtual is reality in terms of strength or potential that tends towards actualization or emergence” (Parisi 14). To elaborate, the classic way in which particles and waves are recorded is through what is called the ‘double-slit’ experiment. In this experiment,

particles and waves travel through two open slits in a plate and then strike a screen which records their pattern/location (Sheldon 9). Classical physics would say that particles passing through a double slit would produce a scattershot pattern as each particle “passing through on slit strikes on mark” of the screen (Sheldon 9). That said, when particles do pass through such an apparatus they do not actually express themselves as theorized, instead presenting the undulating ‘interference’ pattern associated with waves (Sheldon 4). Compounded with this, if a detector is added to determine which of the two slits the particles actually passed through their formation reverts back to a scattershot (Sheldon 5). This indicates that the foundational principle for the very building blocks of life is not determinacy, but rather indeterminacy, virtual particles that are constantly opening themselves towards the possibilities constituted by the material relations they both create and are situated within (Barad 395-396). In this sense, life should not be understood as a stabilized bio-logic force. In opposition to this, life should be understood as an interplay between molecular relations that constantly produce mutations within all fields of life (Parisi 53-54). To reiterate the old Deleuzoguattarian<sup>8</sup> adage, life is a minoritarian process of becoming as opposed to having an essential ‘being’; any attempt to compress becoming into being (as biology does) is a reactive force of violence (Deleuze and Guattari 106).

## SEXING THE BODY AND THE PROJECT OF GENDER

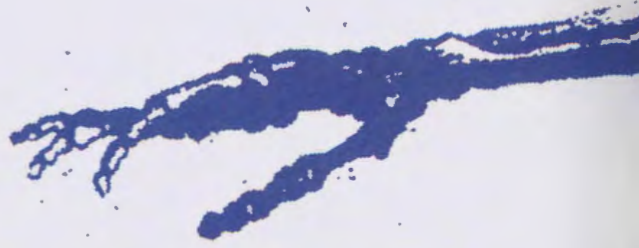
Biology engages in this reactionary violence of stabilization in that it seeks to create a determinate principle, or being, for which life is organized. For example, biology categorizes bodies as constitutive wholes, or organisms, instead of machines that necessarily interplay and are contaminated by their ecologies. Summarizing Merleau-Ponty, Judith Butler articulates that one of the primary ways in which biology engages in this process is through not only the invention of the body as a naturalized product, but specifically the sexed body (463). I want to stress the importance of this argument; Butler's claim is not merely that taxonomies of biology create a specific conception of the body that is sexed, but rather that the Western bio-logic through which the body comes to be known as a 'body' is necessarily sexed. To be clear, this is not to say that the impact for which these conceptions of the body have are not 'real' in their impact/violence, because they certainly are, but rather serves to indicate that the claim to naturalism that these conceptions deploy is part and parcel to that violence, rather than an indication of some 'truth.' (Butler 464). This specific biological project, the compression of the body to be strictly organized around sex, is a process of collapsing the virtual potentialities of the molecular to a sexed ontology—a violent attack on life itself. Luciana Parisi brilliantly articulates this process:

[This] model of representation does not entail the exact reflection of reality or truth, but is more crucially used to refer to a system of organization of signs where structures of meaning arrange...through the hierarchies of the signifier. The model of representation reduces all differences...to the universal order of linguistic signification constituted by binary oppositions where on term negates the existence of the other (9).

In this sense, it is clear that the process for which biology embarks upon, the inducing of the body into the semiotic realm vis-a-vis a sexing, is one that is fundamentally violent; the question then becomes: what does this conception of sex look like?

While Susan Stryker's seminal "Transgender History" is incredibly important for a variety of reasons, it does reinvest within the biologization of bodies and, in doing so, inadvertently reveals the particular conception of sex deployed by biology. This reinvestment on the part of Stryker's when talking about the division between gender and sex, which as Parisi reminds us, are not two distinct entities but rather co-constitutive forces utilized to forward a signified

(and thus violent) conception of the body (50). As an example of this, Stryker says "Sex is not the same as gender...the words 'male' and 'female' refer to sex. Sex refers to reproductive capacity or potential...Sperm producers are said to be that of the male sex, and egg producers are said to be of the female sex" (8). This reveals explicitly the conception of sex biology deploys as generative of the body which is predicated on the idea of static genital expression (penis and vagina), sexual dimorphism, and reproduction. In short, this construction of sex seeks to justify its reduction of genital life to the signifiers of penis and vagina, and the consequential construction of those two signifiers as dimorphic under the banner that sex has solely do to with 'species' reproduction. This a-priori association between sex and reproduction is independently violent in that not only does it constitute the body as a stabilized organism, thereby creating the subject to be disciplined by biopower<sup>9</sup>, but explicitly works towards the complete elimination of intersex folks (Parisi 35). To elaborate, given the way in which intersex bodies are ones that exist outside of the signifiers of penis and vagina, and the association between sex and reproduction seeks to position said signifiers as the only way in which bodies can materialize, meaning that intersex people<sup>10</sup> are rendered existentially unintelligible. To return to the earlier Parisi quote, this semiotic refrain seeks to negate the existence of the other by creating a regime of meaning (in this case what genitals 'are') that always already frames them out (9). This is a violence that can once again be seen in Stryker in that she positions sex as the two dialectical positions of male and female 'sex organs' that "cannot be changed" (8).



The sexing of the body, through a process of life's capture within the referent of biology, is not only violent in this sense, but also due to the fact that it is the logic used to gender bodies. Logics that gender bodies in such a way that necessitate colonialist, transphobic, and through its production of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormative violence. Briefly stepping away from the question of biological sexing, it is important to understand just what Gender is and thus how said sexing paves the way for it to deploy itself. To be clear, when I say that Gender is inherently a violent structure I do not mean to say that gender identity in the abstract is bad. Rather, I mean to articulate the way in which a dominant conception of Gender has been created, deployed, and enforced in such a way that it demands people fit into specific gender identities that they did not determine. Thus when we critique and call for the abolishment of capital-G Gender, that does not mean the eradication of gender identities that exist outside of said paradigm like the Hijra, Two-Spirit, Fa'afafine, etc. but rather for the destruction of the system that makes said identities unintelligible. In this sense then, Gender refers to the structure of gender that has been semiotized as the be-all-end-all of what gender could mean, and because of that, the a-priori script for which bodies can exist (nokizaru 6).

The project of Gender is one that was/is explicitly deployed as a tool of the settler colonial project on the land mass we know as the 'Americas' including 'Canada,' forcibly deployed onto indigenous nations in an attempt to eradicate indigeneity (nokizaru 4-5). This was done due to the fact that a vast majority of indigenous nations not only structured their socialites in non-patriarchal makeups, but specifically had conceptions of gender that did not at all correlate with the European model (Lugones 25). Examples of indigenous gendering that were rendered unintelligible by Gender include Hawaiian mahu, Māori fa'afafine, Ojibwe nizzh manitoag, and many more (Young 102; Feu'u; Pyle 577)<sup>11</sup>. Thus, Gender functions through the production of two gendered subjectivities (men and women). The hegemonic correlation of those subjectivities to particular genitalia. In doing so, Gender constitutes the ontology of those who possess said genitalia. In this sense, Gender could be thought of as operating through what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called

the 'faciality machine.' The faciality machine refers to a particular construction of how subjectivity comes about, or subjectification, in which subjectivity becomes exclusively defined by static characteristics (168)<sup>12</sup>. In this sense then, "faciality...ends up excavating a binarist figure-ground referent as the support of the universal...statements. All flows and objects must be related to a subjective totalization" and thus works in service as a weapon of reactionary violence (Guattari 76). In the context of Gender, the faciality machine works in service of signifying penises as men, vaginas as woman. Through this, Gender injects these gendered-subjectivities into said genitalia, and consequentially, produces them as constitutive of the body that Gender is signifying. In this sense, Gender will always already be not only transphobic, because of its coercively assigning bodies at birth and obliteration of non-binary trans folks, but also exclusively utilized to eradicate indigenous populations all over the globe.

The sexing of the body becomes the precursor to this process of Gender because it constitutes the stage, i.e. the compression of genital life into a static expression, for which the subjectification of Gender necessitates. To elaborate, the idea that bodies are born with either male or female sex organs is the necessary first step for gendered subjectification. Due to the fact that this subjectification is premised off of the injection of a gendered subjectivity (man or woman) into specific genitals, and then facializing that as a body's white wall<sup>13</sup>, that becomes

incoherent if there is not first a static construction of what genitals are (i.e. either penises or vaginas) for which the sexing of the body is able to provide. In this sense then, the sexing of the body provides the necessary first step for the internal logics of Gender to deploy themselves—a logic that forms the basis for all transphobic violence to dispense itself, coercively assigning bodies genders at birth. Since Gender claims a 'natural' a-priori operation, bodies are retroactively gendered as fetuses, once they are born, and as they move throughout life. Told that their body, through the prescription of gendered-subjectivity, is nothing but cis womanhood or manhood. This is not merely a discursive process though, but through the aid of a multitude of different apparatuses, most chiefly the medical industrial complex and the police, Gender makes this quite a material one. This process is necessarily coercive because bodies have no choice in whether they are gendered or not; they simply are forcibly shoved into a subjectivity of man or woman by virtue of existing and/or not existing with a particular genital makeup. A process such as this means that Gender is always already violent. Forwarding this, nila nokizaru articulates "Gender benefits those who want to control, socialize, and manage us and offers us nothing in return. Every time a person is scrutinized and gendered, society has attacked them, waged war on them" (4). Beyond this, Gender is also the primary logic for which transphobia is able to manifest. This process of Gender is what is able to frame trans folks as abominations in the face of biology, because we refuse said process of coercive assignment, and through this trans people become bodies that are justified in violence being taken against them. A process such as this becomes incoherent if there is no sexing of the body that concretizes the genital signifiers that Gender requires.

### COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

I ultimately contend that not only is this process of biologizing life violent, but also that through its justification for Gender, creates the conditions for what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality.' It does this because, if Rich is right that compulsory heterosexuality is a regime that is first and foremost structured through the gendered relations of man and women, which I think she is, then the creation of the system of Gender that provides coherence for said gendered relations is necessary (633). To elaborate, if we understand 'sexuality'<sup>14</sup> to describe a specific taxonomy of desire that orients bodies towards politically constructed

forms of relations, then sexuality requires an object for which it is oriented towards (Puar 30). It requires such a complete object because, like Rich articulates, the primary way in which sexuality comes to be understood is through the psychoanalytic frame of Oedipalization<sup>15</sup> (especially compulsory heterosexuality) (638). It requires this because the Oedipal understanding of desire articulates that the direction of desire is always attached to a complete, or determinate, object, which in the context of desire being trapped within the sexuality referent of compulsory heterosexuality looks like desire being oriented towards gendered bodies (Nigianni 170).

### COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY OPERATES AS A PROJECT OF MALE DOMINATION BECAUSE... ITS PRIMARY OPERATION IS NOT MERELY TO MARGINALIZE QUEERNESS BUT LESBIANISM

If compulsory heterosexuality functions as not only a force of heteronormativity, but more specifically a re-justification of male dominance it means that Gender is an integral part of compulsory heterosexuality's formation (Rich 640). Compulsory heterosexuality operates as a project of male domination because, as Rich indicates, its primary operation is not merely to marginalize queerness but lesbianism (Rich 640). It targets those disciplined into womanhood, specifically those who refuse to be tethered to maleness (lesbians), because these forms of insurgent womanhood upend the structure compulsory heterosexuality is indebted to.



To elaborate, absent the biologization of life that paves the way for which the project of Gender is able to gain coherence, compulsory heterosexuality is not able to dispense its violence because it does not have any desiring orientation for its sexual taxonomy, and more importantly, does not have a class for which its violence is directed at (womanhood). Additionally, compulsory heterosexuality is first and foremost concerned about reproduction, i.e. due to the fact that women are semiotized as only ever having vaginas, the fact that lesbian sex under this paradigm cannot 'give birth' is one of the justifications used to forward cis lesbian's marginalization (Rich 637). In this sense compulsory heterosexuality should not only be thought of as a system that dispenses solely heteronormative, misogynistic, or lesbophobic violence but transphobic violence as well. Compulsory heterosexuality, in its predication on the project of Gender, forwards the sex-reproduction association and thus the constitution of womanhood and manhood based on imagined dimorphic genitalia. This is important not only because it reveals a dimension of compulsory heterosexuality's violence that is often ignored, but also because it reveals the necessity of the sexed body in the figuration and production of the multitude of structures that dispense compulsory heterosexuality. Not only does compulsory heterosexuality require some configuration of gender, to become the object of its structured desiring orientation, but it specifically requires the Gender that is produced by the sexed body because of its interpolation of bodies as having an intrinsic sex-reproduction connection.

## CONCLUSION

"Gender is a war against all of us, and for those who desire freedom, nothing short of the total eradication of gender will suffice" (nokizaru 7). In short, the central point I want to communicate is that if there is any hope for trans liberation (and the liberation of all life) we must turn against Gender. We must turn against Gender not only because of its foundational violence(s), but also because Rich's theories are once again gaining prominence. To be clear I think this recovery is important; Rich was right to identify compulsory heterosexuality as a central vector of violence, but we can never dismantle said violence if we do not recognize that Gender is part and parcel to said vector. If we do not orient our revolutionary politics against compulsory heterosexuality to also be Gender abolitionist it means we will always fail to truly deconstruct the violence of compulsory heterosexuality, and specifically, a re-deployment of violence against trans people (specifically trans women) under the guise of feminism. This move is not only violent in the anti-feminist sense, in that it is inherently transmisogynistic, but is also a reinvestment within the logics of compulsory heterosexuality by way of a reformation of Gender and the sexed body. Moves like this are dangerous because they wear the veneer of revolutionary action as aesthetic while still forwarding the violent material conditions of the status quo, merely allowing for despotic assemblages to rearrange themselves. This could look like Rich forwarding the necessity of deconstructing compulsory heterosexuality while still supporting transmisogynists like Mary Daly,<sup>16</sup> or properly identifying the violence of biologization yet still doubling down on the existence of 'male' and 'female' reproductive systems (644).

To avoid this, yet still necessarily combating the violence of compulsory heterosexuality, our politics must aim to abolish the structure of Gender entirely. This is a revolutionary politic, or more trenchantly an anti-politic, that seeks not inclusion within and/or a positive orientation towards the apparatuses of Gender (Doyle 4). Rather, this is a Gender abolitionism

that recognizes the necessity of insurrection at all fronts, against Gender and Modernity itself (“An Insurrectional Practice Against Gender” 4). This is a revolutionary practice that not only recognizes the necessity of centering trans women, our girl dicks, and our affects within feminist organizing, but in fact participates in the sort of collective negativity that is needed to resolve the condition of our brokenness—an active negativity. A negativity that realizes that the only hope for liberation is not through optimistic engagement with the political, the political itself is a regime of Modernity’s violence (uncivilized, exotic, dangerous 17). In opposition to this, a Gender abolitionism couched within negativity grounds liberation within a thoroughly pessimistic engagement with the world. To be clear, the very grammars for which the world becomes perpetually birthed are ones premised on gratuitous violence (Gillespie 8). Such grammars allow for the nation state and chattel slavery to become the backdrop for which all of life unfolds. If this is the case, it means that the constitutive purpose for which the political deploys itself is as a vector of such violence (Gillespie 7). This semiotic process transforms any agitation from within the political itself into merely new rearticulations of those central grammars. Rejecting this neoliberal impulse, we must refuse the reproduction of the world at every turn. We must seek its complete destruction (Gillespie 10). Framed in such a way, Gender abolitionism would not endorse any sort of organizing within the political as libratory in anyway, instead, the project I am sketching out here forefronts the necessity of launching guerilla war(s) against sociality itself (think Mao’s PPW<sup>17</sup>) (uncivilized, exotic, dangerous 19). The world, and thus our phenomenological<sup>18</sup> engagement with it, has become captured by the vigorous semi-otization of Gender (and thus settler colonialism and antiblackness), of which biology is a part of. As revolutionaries, we must refuse this cruel impulse to reinvest within such a reality, and pessimistically turn towards Gender abolition.

**THIS IS A REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICE THAT NOT ONLY RECOGNIZES THE NECESSITY OF CENTERING TRANS WOMEN, OUR GIRLDICKS, AND OUR AFFECTS WITHIN FEMINIST ORGANIZING, BUT IN FACT PARTICIPATES IN THE SORT OF COLLECTIVE NEGATIVITY THAT IS NEEDED TO RESOLVE THE CONDITION OF OUR BROKENNESS.**

Understood in such a way, Gender abolitionism seeks not only to destroy the systems, apparatuses, and enforcers that make Gender a reality, but also necessitates the release of life from its sublimation under biology. An uncompromising affirmation of the relational form of life that has long been forwarded by communities of radical trans women, trans women of color especially (think the STAR house) (Jung). What is at stake here is not only the illumination of radical trans kinships that Gender has attempted to eradicate, but in fact *translife* itself, a trans form of life. Instead of materially, semi-otically, and ontologically reproducing the capture of life through bio-logic, we must make an active move towards life as, what my comrade Jessica Jung theorizes as, the ‘ontological closet’ (Jung). Through this, life is not merely one index under the larger taxonomy of biology, and thus as always already a subject of Gender (Jung). Understood as an ontological closet, life becomes realized as a navigational tool that is constantly mutating to fit the realities it becomes situated within (Jung). A form of life, of *translife*, that Marquis Bey has indicated deconstructs the very notion of ontology itself (276-277). A real endorsement of such a conception of life requires not only the material insurrectionary practice described above, but also the total freeing of life from its fascist constraints under biology. In other words, life understood as “the material wanderings/wanderings of nothingness...the ongoing thought experiment that the world performs with itself...an endless exploration of all possible couplings of virtual particles, a ‘scene of wild activities’” (Barad 396).

- <sup>1</sup>Bioization refers to the extension of biology's logic, or 'bio-logic,' as the singular way for which life, relations, and thus existence can manifest. In this context, 'bio-logic' could be understood as the formal organization of the world along a metaphysical project of logos wherein logic becomes that which is outlined by the paradigmatics of biology.
- <sup>2</sup>This will be explained in depth later in the essay, but for those unfamiliar with revolutionary trans readings of Gender, Gender refers to an external structure that becomes violently imposed upon everybody that is situated under it. A structure that proposes, and enforces, life as only ever existing within two static gendered-subjectivities; cis man and womanhood.
- <sup>3</sup>A taxonomy refers to a scheme, or coherent category, of classification. In this sense then, 'taxonomization' refers to the process by which [x], in this case life, can only ever be understood if it is first indexed within an overarching system of classification. For example, under the paradigm of biology an individual 'human' becomes incoherent if not for the overarching category of the homo sapien.
- <sup>4</sup>For this essay I am working with Félix Guattari's re-conceptualization of the virtual. The virtual as understood specifically through his conception of abstract machines as the organizing principle for 'reality' rather than logos. Guattari's argument is that the specific material conditions that come to generate the semiotization, or generation of meaning, for which we come to understand as 'reality' create a multiplicity of possibilities that can catalyze as a result of said material conditions. These possibilities are dictated by abstract machines, or those linkages that are made possible by shifting assemblages of enunciation, instead of a universal grammar (logos) for which has been traditionally projected onto existence. For Guattari, those rhizomatic possibilities represent the virtual and the specific material conditions that inform such possible is the actual (To read more about this I would recommend Guattari's book *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*).
- <sup>5</sup>If we understand 'ontology' to refer to the creation, or unification, or 'being,' then 'ontologization' refers to the enveloping of life under the domination of ontology. That life can only be understood has having some sort of integral 'being.'
- <sup>6</sup>While it is true that quantum physics, and specifically quantum field theory (QFT), was developed as a troubling of the determinacy principle, the dominance of determinacy has spilled into developments of quantum physics as well (particularly Heisenbergian QFT). I don't have time to develop this within this paper, but to find incredibly good work on this subject I would recommend Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*.
- <sup>7</sup>Teleological refers to a conception of trajectory, typically time, in which something is always traveling towards a pre-determined end point. Here I am saying that due to the indeterminacy principle, particles and waves cannot be understood as teleological. There are a multitude of criticisms as to why teleological understandings of trajectory are bad, but from a decolonial perspective I would recommend Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.
- <sup>8</sup>Deleuzoguattarian refers to the theoretical interventions produced by the collective work of philosophers/militants Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.
- <sup>9</sup>Originally theorized by Michel Foucault, 'biopolitics' refers to a regime of politics what seeks to manipulate or control life. Think of the way in which access to affirming medical technological is gate-kept from particular trans bodies. In this sense, 'biopower' refers to the specific power that animates, and further is deployed by, instances of biopolitics. For a good explanation, and application of this theory to a field that Foucault ignored, I would recommend Scott Lauria Morgensen's *The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now*.
- <sup>10</sup>Intersex folks refer to those who are born with genital arrangements that do not fit within the stable signifiers of 'penis' or 'vagina.'
- <sup>11</sup>To be clear, and following the important work of nokizaru and others, I do not mention indigenous forms of gendering as a way to trace a 'history' of transness or to incorporate said genderings within the cis/trans structural positions (although some indigenous peoples may identify as trans, it is not my position as a settler to make prescriptions). Both of these moves are decidedly colonial, rather I do so in order to reveal the way in which Gender renders such indigenous genderings as incoherent, and thus engages in gratuitous violence against those bodies who have been gendered as such.
- <sup>12</sup>Apart from Gender, a manifestation of the faciality machine could be elaborated through the way in which capital has hijacked the production of subjectivity. Under capitalism, more specifically neoliberalism, the body becomes assembled as nothing but its possibility to be productive within apparatuses of capital. Particular body parts, facets, and capacities are imbued with productive energy which then builds the body within the semiotic realm as nothing but 'productive'—the faciality machine.
- <sup>13</sup>Without reiterating the entirety of A Thousand Plateau's chapter on faciality, the white wall refers to the space of semiotics whereby abstraction is able to take form. To elaborate, Deleuze and Guattari articulate that the mechanism by which faciality is able to establish itself is through the creation of semiotic black holes, this is only possible if there is a system of semiotics imposed to produce abstraction; a white wall. In this sense, the white wall could be thought of as the product of semiotic deterritorialization.
- <sup>14</sup>Sexuality refers to a paradigm for organizing desire, i.e. that we can only understand the orientation of desire in the direction of coherent 'sexual orientations.'
- <sup>15</sup>The Oedipus complex refers to a psychoanalytic concept that was originally theorized by Sigmund Freud, which referred to the fact that the primary driving force of psychological development was the want to kill the father and have sex with the mother. This was reorganized by Jacques Lacan around the question of the 'castration,' in which the figure of the 'father' becomes less about one's actual father and more so an authority figure. Lacan says that the loss of the father, or 'castration,' is the primary driving force for which the unconscious is able to catalyze. This psychoanalytical precept, and psychoanalysis writ large, is something that Deleuze and Guattari problematize in *Anti-Oedipus* and forwarding that criticism, 'oedipalization' refers to the capture of life as only being explained by the familialism of the Oedipus complex (in its various forms).
- <sup>16</sup>Mary Daly is considered to be one of the central authors that inaugurated trans-exclusionary radical feminism into a coherent political diagrammatic. She is known for her most famous work "Gyn/Ecology."
- <sup>17</sup>'PPW' refers to 'Protracted People's War,' which is the central revolutionary methodological process that was developed out of the Maoist tradition. For an incredibly detailed account of what this looks like, I would recommend reading Mao Tse-tung's "On Protracted War."
- <sup>18</sup>As I am deploying it here, 'phenomenology' refers to the process by which experience and apprehended that which has become marked as 'reality.' In other words, the ways in which life navigates the various semiotic environments for which it becomes situated within. In this context, what I am attempting to articulate here is that due to the way in which semiotics have been entirely sublimated under Modernity (and thus Gender), we come to apprehend the world in such a way that seemingly justifies such semiotic framework.

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# THE LINGUISTIC CAPITAL OF AMAZON'S THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL: SEASON 1

## SEASON 1

By Holly Lund

**T**he standup comedian serves two apparently universal functions: as a licensed spokesperson he is permitted to say things about our society that we want and need to have uttered publicly, but which would be too dangerous and too volatile if done without the mediation of humor; and as a comic character he can represent, through caricature, those negative traits which we wish to hold up to ridicule, to feel superior to, and to renounce through laughter” (Mintz 1977). So states an article published in *American Humor* in 1977. While not explicitly discussed, Mintz’s implications are clear: women are not funny. This sentiment echoes Robin Lakoff’s groundbreaking work *Language and Woman’s Place*, which introduced the linguistic world to the idea of gendered language only two years prior. In this book, Lakoff asserted that women’s speech followed nine specific, universal rules. Thus, if “he” was responsible

for bridging the gap between thought and speech, speaking out and saying things that the general public could not, obviously “he” occupied a special position, an exclusive position, a gendered position not included in the rules of women’s language. “Women don’t tell jokes,” stated Lakoff in 1975, “they are bound to ruin the punchline.” We must then conclude that “he” is the only capable comedian.

One of Amazon’s newest original series, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, takes aim at this gross stereotype. Winner of eight Emmy Awards, the show takes place in 1958, a year in which a woman standup comedian was confined to the realm of myth and exaggeration. Those who did find success on stage, such as Jane Lynch’s character Sophie Lennon, did so through gimmicks and characters. This reliance on constructing personas mirrors real comediennees of

the time, such as Jackie “Moms” Mabley, who adopted the persona of an old toothless woman in a frumpy house dress and delivered both sexual innuendo and political satire. Others, such as Lucille Ball, found success in physical comedy. The show’s protagonist, Miriam “Midge” Maisel, forges her path in a different direction. She sets her sights, quite accidentally, on the patriarchal world of stand-up comedy, and she is good at it. This essay will examine the three most pertinent of Lakoff’s original nine assertions and analyze how each contributes to Midge’s power in the form of linguistic capital onstage in Amazon’s fictitious 1958.

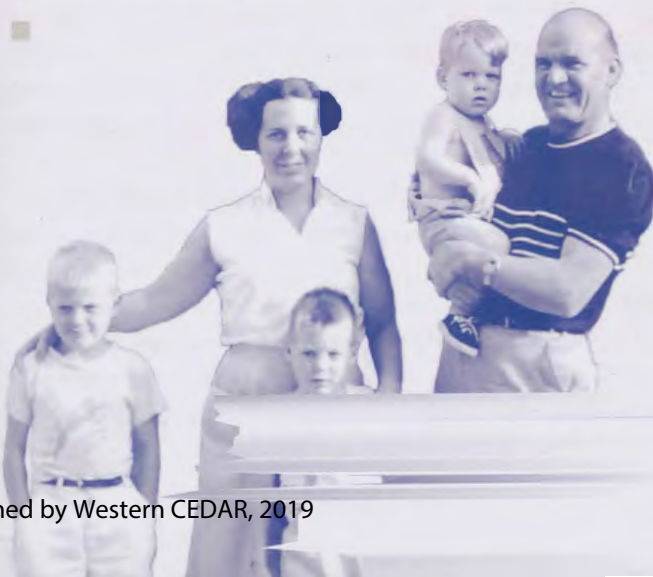
### METHODOLOGY

In many ways power is not a tangible quantity, easily measured and categorized in liters or Hertz. Instead, it is a cultural force, invisible like gravity and just as prevalent. For the purpose of this paper, power will be measured through Bourdieu’s concept of linguistic capital, which is the manifestation of cultural capital on the level of the individual. Linguistic capital is achieved by using the correct linguistic style for an environment, or market. The more correctly one speaks based on their market, the more value, or capital, they will have and the more successful their participation within the speech event will be. Identity also contributes to the success and capital of a speech act. In one of Bourdieu’s

**MIDGE’S GENDER AND CAPITAL ARE ALWAYS CONNECTED WHEN SHE SPEAKS, BECAUSE SOCIETY’S PERCEPTION OF HER IS BASED ON HER ADHERENCE TO CULTURAL NORMS AND THE RULES OF WOMEN’S LANGUAGE.**

examples, a politician speaking a local dialect will have more capital than an uneducated local woman because of the prestige associated with the politician’s identity (Bourdieu 1977). Midge’s gender and capital are always connected when she speaks, because society’s perception of her is based on her adherence to cultural norms and the rules of women’s language. Linguistic capital relates to the anthropological concept of agency, defined broadly as the capacity for individuals to act independently and with free will (Barker 2005). While performing onstage as a comedian, Midge both claims and endangers much of her agency by putting herself before a crowd. Failure risks ridicule and defamation. Success earns her fame, possible advancement, and, most importantly, personal empowerment and confidence.

It is also worth noting that Lakoff’s original assertions have been thoroughly dissected in the decades following publication of *Language and Woman’s Place*. Lakoff’s conclusions have proven to only hold for women of a white middle-class American background, rather than women universally (Bucholtz 2004, Wetzel 2011). However, the setting of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* presents an interesting parallel to the background of Robin Lakoff. Midge is a white middle-class American housewife living at the end of the 1950s. Due to a shared historical and socioeconomic context, Lakoff’s introspective assumptions should also apply to Miriam Maisel. Thus, to explore whether or not Midge





gained linguistic capital by foregoing or utilizing women's features on stage, I reviewed Lakoff's nine parameters to discover which were present and which were absent in each of Midge's stand-up routines depicted in the show. The three rules pertinent to this analysis are summarized as follows:

1. **Superpolite forms:** Women are expected to speak more politely than men, which relates to hypercorrect grammar. Women are also experts at euphemisms and never carelessly blurt out what they are thinking. Women are especially expected to avoid profanity and taboo language.
2. **Hypercorrect grammar:** Women are expected to be preservers of culture and literacy in white middle-class American society, while, Lakoff states, "literacy and culture are viewed as somewhat suspect in a male." Thus, women are much more likely to adhere to "proper" prescriptive grammar rules than men who may be in the same context.

3. **Men's Humor:** Women do not tell jokes. As the main focus of this essay, I will quote Lakoff directly: "... this point is just an elaboration on the two immediately preceding. But it is axiomatic in middle-class American society that, first, women can't tell jokes – they are bound to ruin the punchline, they mix up the order of things, and so on. Moreover, they don't 'get' jokes. In short, women have no sense of humor" (Lakoff 2004, 80-81). Lakoff later goes on to explain that women are not expected to do impressions or tell simplistic jokes rather than anecdotes. These forms of comedy are instead confined to the realm of men.

For the remainder of this paper, these points shall be referred to as hypercorrect grammar, the superpolite, and men's humor (Lakoff 2004, 78-81).

Each of Midge's performances<sup>1</sup> were analyzed to determine which of Lakoff's features were present and which were absent. Within the performances where she received a positive pragmatic response (such as laughter, clapping, cheering, and overall success), the features she used carried linguistic capital. In the performances where Midge did not receive a positive pragmatic response (she flopped: she doesn't receive laughs, hecklers attempt to undermine her performance and steal the spotlight, and the viewer experiences a hefty dose of secondhand embarrassment), the features used did not carry linguistic capital. I am not

claiming that violating these rules constituted “men’s language,” rather that when she did not use them and found success, it was because she recognized that the features lacked capital in the situation and that by breaking them she gained capital.<sup>2</sup>

### “FUCK PENNY PAN”

The most obvious violation of women’s language in the series is the destruction of the superpolite. As Lakoff states, “women are supposed to speak more politely than men...they are experts of the euphemism; more positively, women are the repertoires of tact and know the right thing to say to other people, while men carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking” (Lakoff 2004, 80). Midge completely shatters this expectation from the first moment she steps onstage, not only because she uses profanity without fear, but in many cases also completely skips the euphemism, “I loved him. And I showed him I loved him. All that shit they say about Jewish girls in the bedroom? Not true. There are French whores standing around the Marais District saying [French accent] did you hear what Midge did to Joel’s balls the other night?” (*Episode 1: Pilot* 2017).

Two of Midge’s first three appearances onstage occur while she is under some sort of influence; however, she consistently breaks the superpolite in every performance throughout the series, removing alcohol or drugs as the possible cause of her profanity and choice of subject matter. Below are two examples from Midge’s second act in *Episode 2: Ya Shivu v Bolshom Dome Na Kholme*, and her final act in *Episode 8: Thank You and Goodnight*, both of which were not affected by alcohol or marijuana:

### ONSTAGE, VIOLATING THE EXPECTED IDEAL OF BEING A “GUARDIAN OF CULTURE AND PRESERVER OF GRAMMAR” GIVES MIDGE A LARGE STOCK OF LINGUISTIC CAPITAL WITHIN HER MARKET.

1. “I need a drink. I need a stiff drink. I need a drink so stiff I could blow it. Sorry, that’s un-ladylike... That’s the end of my show folks. Tune in next week, when my grandmother steals my pearls and fucks my boyfriend.”
2. “This girl put a lot of work into luring him away. I mean she had to [pause] have a vagina. Pretty low bar. But pretty high vagina. She’s tall... Anyhow yesterday she drags her giant vagina into my work and starts yelling at me.”

Midge’s abandonment of the superpolite seems consistent with other definitions of stand-up comedy, including Mintz’s statement that “as a licensed spokesperson [the comedian] is permitted to say things about our society that we want and need to have uttered publicly, but which would be too dangerous and too volatile if done without the mediation of humor” (Mintz 1977, 1). Onstage, violating the expected ideal of being a “guardian of culture and preserver of grammar” gives Midge a large stock of linguistic capital within her market. The comedy club where Midge performs, The Gaslight, and the stage are her environment, affecting what will and will not have value. Had Midge walked down Madison Avenue discussing how “It comes with the tits” or rode the subway and asking about “who gets first ‘fucking’ rights?” she would never have received a positive response. Her words would have possessed no



power. In the sense of linguistic capital, the power of her words stems from correct usage of illocutionary (achieving the desired outcome of the speech act) and perlocutionary (producing the desired emotional effect in the listener) force. In Midge's case, she wants the crowd to laugh (illocutionary) and she wants them to think she and the jokes are funny (perlocutionary). By utilizing profanity and discussing subjects which would be inappropriate in any other social context, she achieves this desired effect, partially by breaking free of the mold of the "superpolite woman" and partially by utilizing the mediation of humor. Even during performances where Midge utterly flops and hecklers begin to interfere, she continues to receive laughter and a positive response when employing strategies which violate social and pragmatic expectations.

Thus onstage, it can be concluded that the superpolite language lacks capital in the market of comedy. To consolidate power, Midge must instead break this feature of women's language in favor of the impolite. By doing so, she is heard and the audience believes that she is funny, meaning she has capital within her market and environment. Oftentimes, vulgarity can be used to enforce a specific cultural response. For example, Kira Hall's work at a non-governmental organization in India shows that choice of language medium can greatly affect the perlocutionary force of a speech act or event. In her analysis, several speakers chose to employ Hindi over English when discussing matters of sexuality or simply during arguments to call upon both the ideas of vulgarity and nationalism associated with using traditional Indian

languages for the topic (Hall 2011). Midge's actions are quite similar, in that she invokes the cultural taboo of vulgarity surrounding topics such as sex, marriage, and gender to exploit the culture of the white American middle-class and receive a positive response.

### "MEANWHILE, I WENT TO COLLEGE TO LEARN RUSSIAN"

The only constant besides the dismantling of the superpolite is the eternal prevalence of hypercorrect grammar. Midge consistently, through success and failure, inebriation and sobriety, sticks to the "proper" prescriptive rules of her white middle-class American dialect. Despite her profanity and subject matter, she never "talks rough" as Lakoff states, utilizing "non-standard" forms such as "y'all" or "ain't." Her articulation is crisp and clear, and she never uses double negatives or split infinitives, as abhorred by prescriptive grammarians. Lakoff posits that young boys are more prone to "drop the g" at the end of the present progressive morpheme -ing on verbs, pronouncing the morpheme as [ɪn] rather than [ɪŋ]. However, young girls are quickly trained out of this habit, and this



never occurs in her speech. Thus, Midge falls into the role she has been socialized to carry out, a “preserver of literacy and culture, at least in Middle America” (Lakoff 2004, 80).

Midge also does not use slang outside of one possible instance, though the status of “whackadoodle” as slang is debatable. Her avoidance of slang is noticeable when compared to the men who perform throughout the show. One of which, Lenny Bruce, consistently uses the term “cat” in favor of “man,” “guy,” “gentleman,” or, in some regions today, “dude.” One could argue that her extensive use of profanity classifies as slang, however following Lakoff’s methodology, I found that the two fall under separate categories. Midge’s profanity is part of the white middle-class American prescriptive English lexicon, and, as far as grammar is concerned, Midge never utilizes these items incorrectly. Take her mastery of “fuck” for example, in all its forms:

As a noun: “However, the other night he came home, for some clean underwear and a fuck. Actually just for the underwear. I threw in the fuck for free.” (*Episode 8: Thank You and Goodnight* 2017)

As a derived noun: “Anyone know this fucker?” (*Episode 3: Because You Left* 2017)

As a verb: “Tune in next week, when my grandmother steals my pearls and fucks my boyfriend!” (*Episode 2: Ya Shivou v Bolshom Dome Na Kholme* 2017)

As an adjective: “Well guess what: it’s a fucking fat suit.” (*Episode 7: Put That on Your Plate* 2017)

As an adverb: “And one of the things he says is, ‘trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.’ Are you fucking kidding me?” (*Episode 3: Because You Left* 2017)

“Fuck” is clearly a versatile word in white middle-class American English, often falling into the categories of noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Above, Midge employs “fuck” correctly given the syntactic and semantic rules of her English variety, meaning that



while profanity could be qualified as slang along with “y’all,” “ain’t,” and “-in,” it is still used in acceptable forms conforming to the rules of distinct lexical categories and thus does not violate hypercorrect grammar.

The only other woman to appear onstage in the show is the comedian Sophie Lennon, played by Jane Lynch. Lennon is a famous comedian, “Queen of vaudeville, conquered radio,” whose onstage persona is that of a large, coarse housewife from Queens, dressed in a shabby floral dress with her stringy red hair pulled back into a bandana. It is revealed later in Episode 7 that the real Sophie Lennon lives in an enormous townhouse with hired help, priceless antique furniture, and a closet full of fur coats, all of which is completely at odds with her comedian persona. Her frumpy appearance is the product of a fat suit and wig, and when she and Midge eat together, all Sophie does is suck a lemon down to the rind, laughing when Midge has the audacity to take a bite out of a macaron.



Sophie's onstage persona does not utilize hypercorrect grammar. First and most noticeably, she speaks with a fake accent meant to make her seem lower class. Like the young boys described by Lakoff, she "drops the g" pronouncing the progressive verb morpheme /ii/ as [in]. In her act, which is featured in *Episode 7: Put That on Your Plate*, she also utilizes many lexical constructions that white middle-class Americans have been conditioned to avoid:

1. "Oh, my first husband and me, we didn't get along too good."
2. "In Queens, we got a neighborhood called Flushing..."

However Sophie, in the shows mythology, remains an absolute legend. Susie notes how she pulled many Americans through The Great Depression, and Midge comments on how even her father, who is not easily pleased by anything, found her funny on the radio. Therefore, it is evident that Sophie's persona gains a large amount of linguistic capital onstage by violating expected hypercorrect grammar. If she were to follow the ideal of hypercorrect grammar, her character would no longer be a caricature of the working class in Queens and she would likely not have received such a strong pragmatic reaction (defined by her laughs and the status which allows her to play huge venues, as seen in Episode 7) in the market of comedy.

**THUS, THE CAPITAL OF HYPERCORRECT GRAMMAR SEEMS TO DEPEND ON THE MORE SUBTLE ENVIRONMENT BELOW THE OVERARCHING COMEDIC MARKET.**

However, evidence from Sophie's performances does not imply that Midge loses agency and capital by using hypercorrect grammar. While the two women are distinctly different in style and performance, both are incredibly successful in the same market. Thus, the capital of hypercorrect grammar seems to depend on the more subtle environment below the overarching comedic market. In order for this practice to have capital, one must first take into account the expectations of the audience. The character of Sophie Lennon is beloved and well-known, with a history of fame dating back twenty-five to thirty years by Susie's comment. The Great Depression was a time before many women began to gain more agency during the Second World War by leaving the home and joining the working world. It was also a time before Second Wave Feminism, which promoted sexual and employment rights (for white heterosexual women). Because of the time period, Sophie likely did not have the opportunity to take the stage as herself and expect people to take her seriously, resulting in the birth of her "whackadoodle character." Thirty years later, the audience who attends her shows expects her to be the lower-class vaudeville queen from Queens, not a well-kept, well-spoken graduate of Bryn Mawr College. Midge's audience, on the other hand, does not hold these vaudeville expectations. They are simply patrons at a nightclub, which showcases everything from slam poetry about Spokane and Wichita to jazzy musical acts.

Rusty Barrett's work concerning a "white-woman" style used by African American drag queens addresses this idea of audience expectation. Barrett defines drag as subverting traditional gender roles for a queer audience, while female impersonators mock women for the entertainment of a heterosexual audience (Barrett 2011, 414). The difference between imitating women to subvert gender roles and mocking women purely for entertainment value demonstrates how performers tailor their act to fit certain markets where alternative performances may lack value. Sophie and Midge's performances follow the same principle. In order for hypercorrect grammar to carry capital, one must consider the audience expectations as an important factor in the market. Other

rules, such as subversion of the superpolite, would have similar results in both women's shows because they are expected parts of comedy and holding the stage. Grammar and grammatical style, on the other hand, create a character, a persona, and not all personas hold capital universally. To conclude, hypercorrect grammar does have capital when Midge is performing because she presents herself as a white middle-class American housewife and that is the style in which the audience expects her to speak. Hypercorrect grammar does not have capital when Sophie is performing because it is not the speech style of her character and would be inappropriate for the market of her audience.

### **"BUT I THOUGHT JOEL WANTED MORE THAN STUPID"**

Once I finished my analysis of Midge's performances, I returned to earlier episodes to look at a different category of performers: the men. The most dramatic difference between Midge and the men is the emergence of men's humor. Men's humor, Lakoff's eighth rule, is the basis of this paper. In *Language and Woman's Place*, she states, "Women don't tell jokes... they are bound to ruin the punchline, they mix up the order of things, and so on. Moreover, they don't 'get' jokes. In short, women have no sense of humor" (Lakoff 2004, 80-81). As she addresses in her original work, this is a stereotype, not a fact, though it holds sway over Middle America. By Lakoff's analysis, this is directly related to the idea that women are believed to be less assertive and straightforward than men, since they prefer the use of the anecdote over a simple knock-knock joke.

It is true that Midge never gets up in front of her audience and tells a straight joke. She relies solely on the humor of timing and storytelling. There is one instance when a man in the audience begins to heckle her. Midge responds by calling him out and challenging him to do better. He stands up and tells the following joke:

1. "A Spanish magician tells the audience he'll disappear on the count of three. He says '*uno, dos.*' Poof. He disappeared without a tres." (*Episode 5: Doink* 2017)

This is a fascinating instance, because to outdo the woman on-stage, the man in the audience does exactly what women are not supposed to do. Furthermore, he receives a positive pragmatic response to the joke.<sup>3</sup>

Each man in the show also does impressions. For the sake of this analysis, we can consider impressions a form of joke because men repeatedly receive positive pragmatic responses<sup>4</sup> when this tactic is utilized. Midge attempts several, the majority during her disastrous fourth performance, while the men each accomplish them successfully in all their performances. Lenny impersonates George Macready and then later changes his voice (which typically has a heavy New York accent) to that of a radio announcer when imitating a cigarette advertisement. Bob Newhart's performance revolves around the imitation of Abraham Lincoln's press secretary. Howard Fawn imitates a soldier during the war of 1812 in his brief appearance. Even Red Skelton, who is barely shown, includes an impersonation of a screaming fan during his limited screen time.

**GRAMMAR AND GRAMMATICAL STYLE, ON THE OTHER HAND, CREATE A CHARACTER, A PERSONA, AND NOT ALL PERSONAS HOLD CAPITAL UNIVERSALLY.**



Thus, men's humor does have linguistic capital onstage during the men's performances. Conversely, according to my methodology, Midge's use of impression, which does not receive a positive pragmatic response, does not have linguistic capital. Again, this could be contributed to audience expectation, just like the violation of hypercorrect grammar and the superpolite. It does not fit with Midge's persona as a middle-class housewife because a middle-class housewife is not expected to do impressions. Similarly, impressions also contain less overall shock value than profanity. It could be argued that because Midge's attempt at impersonation occurred after her performance had already begun to flop, the expectations of the audience were not important because they had already disconnected with her. Either way, the explicit use of men's humor seems to benefit the men while simultaneously not serving as a valuable or viable tool for Midge.

## CONCLUSION

The primary focus in this essay has been concerned with identifying features of Lakoff's women's speech which have capital on the fictional stage of 1950s stand-up comedy. Originally, I expected Midge to break all the rules set forward by Lakoff in a subconscious effort to loosen the restrictive shackles of women's speech in 1958. Rather, it appears she uses a carefully crafted combination of rules to gain both agency and capital.

While not a direct representation of women's speech and onstage capital in 1958, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* attempts to present the audience with a snapshot of a woman's linguistic position in the world of comedy sixty years ago. Many will find similarities between Midge's fictional performances and comedians of today. One modern woman who has stormed the world of comedy, Eliza Schlessinger, does not hold back when it comes to the use of profanity or the lack of euphemism. Eliza does

not hide her preference towards anecdotal punchlines rather than simple jokes. However, Eliza is also notable for the wide breadth of impersonations in her comedic routines. These include characters such as "The Party Goblin" and the "She-Dragon." Each of these routines are met with a noticeably positive pragmatic response, just like the performances of the men depicted in the show (*Eliza: Elder Millennial* 2018). Perhaps this possible evolution is merely a coincidental conclusion caused by the plot of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, or perhaps it depicts real evidence of a change in cultural attitudes regarding women's language.

Today, we also see comedians who break through the mold of binary gender identity taking the stage. DeAnne Smith, in a performance on Netflix, speaks about taboo subjects, including being non-binary, lesbian, and the unwitting participant in a very interesting waxing session. Urzila Carlson, a South African comedian, also discusses her homosexuality onstage (*Comedians of the World* 2018). While Midge was not afraid to break the taboos associated with women's speech and discuss her own sex life, broaching topics outside heteronormative sexuality and binary gender may have seemed far too risky or even untouchable in her time period.<sup>5</sup>

This evolution in both the range of topics available to modern women onstage—reflected by the superpolite—and the growing positive response from the audience—reflected by men's humor—shows a shift in the status of women's linguistic capital. One might claim that the gender biases presented in Lakoff's original work have lost their potency; however, I would argue that they have not disappeared completely from the American psyche. Women in the public sphere are still expected to speak with some



semblance of hypercorrect grammar and are still met with strong resistance when this rule is forgone or misinterpreted. A contemporary example of this can be seen in the 2015 controversy surrounding NPR, in which listeners complained about women broadcasters' use of vocal fry (the tendency to draw out the end of a sentence with a creaky voice). However, as linguist Penelope Eckert later explained in an interview, men use vocal fry quite often as a stylistic device. Eckert went on to discuss the difference in her reactions and those of her students following the broadcast. To Eckert, the style of vocal fry was something hyper-masculine and something inaccessible to professional women; to her students, it was something positive and authoritative (NPR 2015). This generational difference reflects the prevalence of linguistic pressure on women in the public sphere. However, it also reflects the changing attitudes of younger generations, which will likely morph the landscape of expectation surrounding gendered speech in the coming decades.

**HOWEVER, IT ALSO REFLECTS THE CHANGING ATTITUDES OF YOUNGER GENERATIONS, WHICH WILL LIKELY MORPH THE LANDSCAPE OF EXPECTATION SURROUNDING GENDERED SPEECH IN THE COMING DECADES.**

In *Language and Woman's Place* and *The Marvelous of Mrs. Maisel*, many aspects of comedy are typically associated with one gender, such as the use of impressions and ability to discuss explicit content. By seeing the evolution and increased freedom utilized by women and people of non-binary identities onstage today, we see the beginning of a redistribution in linguistic capital. Practices and styles no longer belong to one gender of performer. Rather, they are becoming more freely traded within an increasingly diverse comedic marketplace.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> While Midge often “performs” in social settings throughout the show, these instances do not reflect the same market for linguistic capital; therefore I will only focus my analysis on her onstage performances.

<sup>2</sup> As *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* is a product of the twenty-first century, not a primary source from the 1950s, I must acknowledge the cultural bias of myself and the filmmakers. I must also note that I am operating within an ideology that gives less capital to women’s language.

<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that Jane Lynch’s character, Sophie Lennon, does tell some non-anecdotal jokes. However this usage harkens back to the discussion of audience expectation. While these instances do receive a positive pragmatic response, it is unclear whether this due to her persona of the capital of men’s humor overall. I would hypothesize that Midge would not receive the same response due to her persona as a white middle-class American housewife, as opposed to Sophie, who has a different speech style and character.

<sup>4</sup> Characterized by laughter and applause from the audience. This is the same response triggered by jokes and anecdotes.

<sup>5</sup> Although the second season was not yet released when I performed my initial analysis, it is worth noting here that when Midge attempts to speak about pregnancy onstage in the season 2 finale *All Alone*, she is immediately pulled off by the club manager, who claims the subject is “foul.” When Susie retaliates, noting how the man who performed before her discussed sexually transmitted infections, the club manager claims that was funny. In contrast, pregnancy is “female stuff.” It is not allowed on his stage. It is not “funny.” (Episode 10: *All Alone* 2018). Today, it is possible for a woman comedian to perform pregnant, namely Ally Wong, who does so in not one, but two, comedic specials.

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# EXTREMISM AS A RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION

## CASE STUDY: NIGERIA

By Quinn Johnson

### INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, relationships between institutions, organizations, and individuals have achieved unprecedented connectivity worldwide. While producing both positive and negative outcomes, the vast majority of these interactions are nonviolent in nature. In some cases, however, the impacts of globalization colliding with traditional cultures and their values have resulted in violent extremism. While such extremism can be observed in many different states worldwide, Nigeria presents a particularly interesting case.

Though vastly different in character, two ongoing conflicts in Nigeria, the Boko Haram Insurgency and the Niger Delta Conflict, can both be considered responses to certain aspects of globalization. Using the Method of Agreement to find commonalities which may contribute to understanding broader trends, this paper will examine extremism as a backlash against globalization, a framework developed by Australian military strategist and counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen in his book *The Accidental Guerilla*.<sup>1</sup>

As explained by Kilcullen, negative response to the cultural, economic, and political dominance of Western ideals and values is a unifying thread between many disparate extremist groups and conflicts worldwide and, indeed, is

an organizing principle for many of them.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the wildly uneven economic effects of globalization have created international classes of haves and have-nots. The have-nots are disenfranchised and are, thanks to globalized news media, fully aware of the luxurious lives that the emerging class of global elites enjoy at their expense. As a result, there is a strong tendency to blame this condition—often not incorrectly—on the economic forces of globalization which are inextricably linked to the West.<sup>3</sup> While Kilcullen's model is certainly not a comprehensive theory for analyzing every extremist group, it does provide a useful framework for evaluating whether an actor's behavior can be explained by the economic and cultural impacts of Western-led globalization on their immediate environment.

## BOKO HARAM

The most infamous extremism associated with Nigeria is the terrorist group Boko Haram. Their name roughly translates to “Western Education is Forbidden” as their ideology objects to the influence of Western secular values on Nigeria which the extremist group seeks to replace with radical Islamic theocracy under Sharia law. Founded in 2002 as a nonviolent religious movement, Boko Haram evolved into a violent insurgency after an initial clash with state security forces in 2009, a conflict which resulted in their founder, Mohammed Yusuf, being arrested and publicly executed by the Nigerian Police. The group rose to international attention in 2014 following their kidnapping of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls from the village of Chibok, with the resulting viral “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign making Boko Haram a household name in the West.<sup>3</sup>

The motivations and goals of Boko Haram are best understood by examining the impact of globalization on Nigerian demographics. In Nigeria, there is a rough parity between the Christian (49.3%) and Muslim (48.8%) populations, although the presence of syncretism with indigenous religions creates a significant margin of error.<sup>5</sup> Since 1953, the country’s religious factions have experienced sporadic violence, with religious identities being a significant factor in the infamous Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) over Biafran secession.<sup>6</sup> The predominantly Christian south contains the most economically prosperous regions, including the megacity Lagos (the city with the highest GDP in Africa) and the oil-rich Niger Delta. Conversely, the primarily Muslim north, where Boko Haram is based, has not benefited nearly as much from the economic development brought about by globalization.<sup>7</sup> Despite Nigeria’s status as Africa’s largest economy, around 44% of its 198 million inhabitants live in extreme poverty, leading it to surpass India for the dubious distinction of country with the most extremely poor people.<sup>8</sup> This unequal development

## GLOBALIZATION:

Globalization refers to the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information (Peterson Institute for International Economics).

## METHOD OF AGREEMENT:

A method of scientific induction devised by J. S. Mill according to which if two or more instances of a phenomenon under investigation have only a single circumstance in common the circumstance in which all the instances agree is the cause or effect of the phenomenon (Miriam-Webster).

## SHARIA LAW:

The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God’s command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief (Encyclopedia Britannica).

## THE WEST:

The West refers to Euro-America, including Mexico and Canada.

## NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR:

Fleeing religious persecution, the Christian Igbo ethnic group established the secessionist Republic of Biafra, consisting of 9 southeast Nigerian States, in 1967. The subsequent 3-year war led to a famine that killed one million Biafrans before Nigeria claimed victory and reunited the country in 1970 (History).

## GDP:

GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country’s borders in a specific time period (Investopedia).

has created deep resentment within the country, especially to the extent that it reinforces and inflames existing religious tensions within the population.

Boko Haram believe that the unequal economic development has empowered the country's Christians at the expense of the Muslims, who were historically the more powerful faction. As a result of this shifting power balance, the Christians have been able to implement conditions such as Western-style co-ed education which Boko Haram, because of their extremist interpretation of Islamic ideology, see as intolerable. It is perhaps not coincidental that Boko Haram's most powerful years (2010–2015) coincided with the presidential term of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south.<sup>9</sup>

Here, it is important to note that efforts to implement Western-style education in northern Nigeria have continued under both Muslim and Christian regimes. Boko Haram does not accurately represent the views of an entire religious community or geographic region; the fact that the infamous schoolgirl kidnapping happened in Chibok, a village deep within their power base in northeast Nigeria, clearly illustrates this. Still, Boko Haram's hatred of Western education, providing both their name and organizing principle, has exponentially intensified Nigeria's continuing cycle of religious violence.

Uneven economic development and ongoing religious tension do not explain why the Nigerian government continues pushing for girls' education

in remote areas which are both highly opposed to the idea and difficult to govern. Why will the government not simply concede the point and grant the region greater autonomy in order to end the violence? An answer may lie in the funding that has financed Nigeria's economic development. As of 2018, the Nigerian government owes \$18.9 billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) alone.<sup>10</sup> The IMF lists quality education and gender equality as two of its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, adopted from the UN.<sup>11</sup> The amount of financial leverage the IMF holds over Nigeria doubtlessly allows them a voice in how that money is spent domestically, in addition to any loan conditionalities.

Regardless of domestic support for women's education, to some people the mere existence of this relationship means any progress in the field of education will be irreparably tainted by Western influence. Combined with an extremist view of Islam which denies women many rights, this has proven to be a persuasive ideology. If Boko Haram want to gain support, they have two equally viable paths: religious and economic. To the millions of poor Muslims living in northern Nigeria, seeing the Christians in the south gaining wealth and imposing heavy-handed policies from afar can create significant resentment and anger. Such resentment results in a huge pool of candidates for potential radicalization and recruitment. Indeed, the success of Boko Haram's ten-year insurgency, still showing no sign of

abating, is testament to how powerfully their message resonates within an environment of longstanding religious tensions, unequal wealth distribution, and international-led development.

### CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA

The ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, variable in intensity but fairly constant since the late 1990s, revolves around control of the region's extensive oil deposits. As Africa's largest oil producer, Nigeria's economy is dominated by petrodollars: 92% of their foreign exchange earnings come from oil, for a total of \$340 billion annually.<sup>12</sup> 90% of this oil is extracted from the Niger Delta, making it the center of an incredibly lucrative industry.<sup>13</sup> However, widespread inequality is present even within the generally more affluent regions of the Delta, with 70% of the population living on less than a dollar a day.<sup>14</sup> In addition, this densely populated region (265 people/km<sup>2</sup>) is home to roughly 30 million people from over 40 different ethnic groups speaking more than 100 languages.<sup>15</sup>

When oil giants, Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron, began investing extensively in oil extraction in the Niger Delta during the 1970s and 80s, they relied on their government partners to acquire land for them to operate on, usually without residents' consent or adequate compensation. In response, the Ogoni ethnic group started the nonviolent Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 to protest the appropriation and

exploitation of their land. In spite of violent suppression by Nigeria's security forces, MOSOP remained peaceful until 1995 when, with the cooperation of Shell, the then-current military *junta* regime framed and executed its top leadership. MOSOP leader Ken Saro-Wiwa's last words before he was hanged were "You can kill the messenger, but you cannot kill the message," a warning that time has since proven prophetic.<sup>16</sup>

While the Ogoni were by far the most prominent ethnic group speaking out against the oil industry's oppression, they were not the only ones: the Ijaws, Itserikis, Urhobos, Isikos, Liages, Ikwerres, Ekpeyes, and Ogulaghas all objected to the ongoing status quo of oil production.<sup>17</sup> The Niger Delta wetlands, their ancestral home as well as a vibrant ecosystem with incredible biodiversity, had been devastated by the negative environmental externalities of oil drilling. Polluted water, damaged habitat, and reduced fish stocks were common symptoms of this degradation.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, despite the massive profits reaped by the oil companies and the Nigerian government, very little wealth had entered local communities. After the initial government crackdown, armed militias began to form in the Delta, often along tribal lines. These militias funded themselves by stealing oil from pipelines to sell on the open market, kidnapping oil industry workers for ransom, and committing piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. They fought not only government security forces but other militias as well, usually over control of oil profits. However, as oil companies are well versed in operating under hostile conditions, this situation was considered neither unusual nor unacceptable and the conflict remained low-intensity.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in 2006 represented a radical break from these trends. Operating more like a traditional terrorist network, MEND utilized numerous independent cells and sophisticated tactics along with equipment like speedboats, body armor, and RPGs. Rather than simply raiding the oil industry for money or trying to get them off of tribal lands, MEND wanted to completely eliminate foreign presence in the industry by any means necessary. Any target related to the oil industry was considered fair game.

MEND began attacking offshore platforms and facilities and killing, instead of ransoming, kidnapped workers. These terror tactics made a significant impact, costing the government billions of dollars in lost oil revenue and forcing them to come to the negotiating table after a military solution to the problem proved to be impossible. MEND eventually ceased operations in 2009, after the government agreed to pay them millions of dollars, grant them amnesty, and release their leader and founder, Henry Okah, from prison.<sup>10</sup>

The 2010 election of Goodluck Jonathan, the Christian president despised by Boko Haram, signaled a *detente* in the conflict. Hailing from the Niger Delta, Jonathan was considered more sympathetic to the Delta residents than previous administrations. However, the subsequent 2015 election of northern Muslim Muhammadu Buhari, a former *junta* leader, signaled a worsening of relations, in part due to rumors that he planned to scrap the amnesty agreement with MEND. This led to the most recent phase of the conflict in 2016, when the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a new player, emerged. With the same goals and tactics as MEND, NDA was extremely successful; Nigeria's oil exports hit a 25-year low in 2016, primarily due to infrastructure damage to the industry. Recently, more insurgent groups have emerged with goals that include the restoration of Biafra, the former secessionist state which encompasses most of the Niger Delta region. The current insurgency, much like Boko Haram, shows no sign of abating.<sup>21</sup>

#### WHAT ROLE DOES GLOBALIZATION PLAY?

Both of these ongoing conflicts are united by their status as ideological backlashes to the impacts of globalization. Boko Haram is associated with both cultural globalization and economic globalization, while the Niger Delta Conflict is primarily associated with economic globalization.

Boko Haram is strictly defined, both within their own ideology and within popular consciousness, by one thing only: Western education is forbidden. It is revealing that they chose *Western* education and not *Women's* education. Although Boko Haram's tactics certainly involve denying women access to education, their overall strategy is concerned with the influence of the West who they see as the

enablers for the imposition of such intolerable conditions. Perhaps the Nigerian government would have chosen to fight for women's education of its own accord, but, due to the pervasive influence of foreign benefactors, it is impossible to ascertain who did or did not have a role in making specific policies.

This ambiguity lends itself well to Boko Haram's ideology and propaganda. The imposition of modern cultural norms such as women's right to education becomes seen as an intrusion of the hostile West—the same malevolent force which has enriched and empowered the opposite religious faction at the expense of poor Muslims in northern Nigeria. On the other side of the issue, those in the West who see women's education in Nigeria as a moral imperative and condemn attempts to halt its spread are guilty of moral universalism. Moral universalism occurs when individuals or groups assume their specific moral beliefs or societal norms are the "right" ones and are widely shared.

The Niger Delta Conflict is also defined by a single issue: oil. The extraction of Nigeria's oil by foreign firms for sale in international markets is an excellent example of economic globalization, as it involves transnational movement of personnel, currency, and raw materials; foreign direct investment; and governmental cooperation with multinational corporations. The Niger Delta residents feel that the influence of Nigeria's oil industry and its foreign actors has marginalized their own voices and concerns. Westerners

are making decisions in distant boardrooms about what happens on Nigerian soil, expecting the Nigerian government to enforce whatever policies they decide will be most advantageous to their shareholders. This chips away at the government's sovereignty, even if they are a willing partner.

Indeed, since Nigeria's economy depends on oil profits, the government has taken a very proactive role in promoting interests of the oil industry. The violent suppression of the nonviolent movements in the 1990s, as opposed to the peace talks employed once the insurgency became effective at creating significant financial losses, indicates that the revenue streams of the oil industry are a more powerful motivating factor for policy than the rights and opinions of their own citizens.

The emergence of MEND and the move from a greed-based to grievance-based model of fighting clearly reflected a shift in the primary goal of the conflict following the events of the previous decade. What started as a peaceful movement for greater localized control of oil extraction had become a violent and well-organized insurgency that would settle for nothing less than the complete removal of exploitative foreign firms from the oil industry. By allowing the demands of foreign actors to guide domestic policy, the Nigerian government has created generations of bitter enemies, destabilized their already tenuous security situation, inflicted incalculable environmental damage, and suffered significant loss of autonomy. The ongoing

insurgency and revived idea of Biafran independence now present a threat to Nigeria's territorial sovereignty; a threat which could have been avoided through better governance and inclusive institutions.

## CONCLUSION

One by-product of Nigeria's economic growth in recent decades has been a backlash to the unequal development deepening divisions within the country. Extremist movements like Boko Haram and the NDA, despite their violent and abhorrent methods, are attempting to address legitimate grievances brought about by the complex and asymmetric interactions between Western-led economic development and Nigeria's socioeconomic environment. Given the patterns seen in the past several decades, it may be impossible for the processes of globalization to occur without a certain amount of violent pushback.

However, this pushback does not mean that nothing can be done to mitigate such conflicts. Boko Haram is a vexing problem to solve; they have a very narrow ideological goal which is not supported by public opinion, and they are unlikely to negotiate on it. Effective counterinsurgency is the most likely path to improving the situation, paired with inclusive economic initiatives to reduce the income disparity between Nigerian Muslims and Christians and thereby defuse religious tensions. However, in the case of the Niger Delta conflict, it is entirely conceivable that multilateral negotiations between

**MNCs:**

Multi-National Corporation

**DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:**

Developing countries is a technical term in political science denoting a country in which a large share of the population cannot meet or experiences great difficulties in meeting basic material needs such as housing, food, water, health care, education, electricity, transport, communications, and physical security (Shaping the Developing World by Andy Baker).

**IOs:**

International Organization

**NGOs:**

Non-Governmental Organization

the oil companies, the government, and the residents could produce some positive results. The emergence of more hardline groups like MEND and NDA is relatively recent; for decades, all the citizens of the Niger Delta wanted was to have a voice in how the natural resources of their homeland were extracted and how the profits were distributed.

Four key trends and recommendations stand out from analyzing these two conflicts using the Method of Agreement. First, states should be willing to peacefully negotiate on domestic issues caused by globalization *before* violence breaks out, not afterwards. Second, MNCs must be more aware of and more responsive to how their actions impact domestic politics in **developing countries**. Third, IOs and NGOs must acknowledge that progressive development policies will often be met with pushback, and some

of this pushback will inevitably be violent. Finally, and most importantly, improving economic prospects for the Nigerians at risk of being radicalized will improve security prospects immensely. While there will always be a minority of insurgents who fight for ideological reasons, the majority of people (specifically, unemployed young men) who join insurgencies do so because they have no job prospects and therefore no chances for acquiring wealth and a better life. Better economic conditions will reduce the pool of people available for radicalization while giving the state additional tax revenue to combat the reduced insurgents that remain.

While well-entrenched, well-motivated insurgencies may seem like they will never be defeated, recent history has shown this is not the case. ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) lost their Caliphate. FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia) disarmed and became a legitimate political party. As more people find their traditional lifestyles and livelihoods threatened by globalization, there will doubtlessly be more extremist groups seeking to exploit these conditions for their own purposes. In order to successfully address this threat, it is imperative for actors at every level of the economy to take steps to reduce the appeal of extremist ideology. Governments of developing countries need to establish strong and fair institutions to address the many legitimate grievances globalization and economic development cause. Citizens must continue to organize, make their voices heard peacefully, and reject any ideology, no matter how righteous, that includes violence. Finally, MNCs must understand that sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development will create long-term benefits for all actors involved. How many more barrels of oil would Shell be exporting from Nigeria right now if they had worked with the Ogoni People, instead of against them, in developing the Niger Delta oil fields? How many more Shell employees and Delta residents would still be alive? While there is no universal solution to the manifold challenges that globalization presents, switching from a short-term to a long-term view of economic development, and including all stakeholders in negotiations as fully empowered parties, will help insure that growth becomes more equitable, sustainable, and reduces the appeal of extremist ideology.

## FOOTNOTES

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# EMBODIED CONTROL

## BIOPOLITICS IN THE WATER CRISIS OF FLINT, MI AND APPALACHIAN COAL

By Sarah Wheeler

**F**lint, Michigan still doesn't have clean water or safe pipes. On the border between West Virginia and Pennsylvania, a coal ash pond called Little Blue Run has been leaking toxic metals into nearby streams for four decades (Patterson, 2018). While these two regions differ in their location and history, similarities can be contextualized and understood based on class, race, state sanctioned water contamination, the exploitation of natural resources, and environmental crimes. Given the factors at work when water crises occur, it is crucial to recognize the United States' practice of knowingly poisoning their citizens, to draw parallels between the practice of state powers explicitly prioritizing industries and profit over the health of citizens under their jurisdiction, and to recognize it as a piece of how racialized biopolitics are put into practice. The locations where this abuse of state control generally occurs, in an increasingly militarized and authoritarian manner, are the regions

populated with higher percentages of people of color. In addition to the direct negative health effects of toxic water contaminants, these cases are indicators of how biopolitical control can be traced back to larger constructions of structural violence against state subjects. Not only do contaminants in the water (lead, trilemethanes, selenium, etc.) directly cause health problems, but constant systemic strife increases allostatic stress, as well as an unparalleled spike in what are referred to as "deaths of despair" (Lofton, 2018). All of these harms are facilitated by levels of continuous violence and obfuscation from direct blame, so it is urgent and necessary to name them and draw lines between them as a product of biopolitical control. The construction of the Flint water crisis, as well as the ongoing environmental degradation in the Appalachian region, are both instances of the state enacting a form of biopolitics onto the peo-

ple living in those places. Although environmental justice experts and critical legal theorists have engaged with potential avenues for finding state-based solutions for a state problem (not to dismiss the activist work that has laid the groundwork for understanding the reach of these issues), it could be argued that true justice and reconciliation cannot be fully achieved under the same structure of power that initially caused the harms.

Biopolitics is most simply defined as the power and ability that a state body has to “take life and give death.” Foucault named the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in *History of Sexuality*, but left concrete meanings of them somewhat elusive. However, as the genealogy of biopower is developed in later works and by other theorists, what emerges is “two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations” (Adams, 2018). The first of these poles is discipline, which is implemented on the body. State institutions discipline and punish bodies under their control who do not fit the hegemonic demands of society. Poor people, people of color, and people affected by different disabilities and illnesses are the most vulnerable to state control and discipline. A modern biopolitical state constantly adapts the ways in which it enacts control, not only over the bodies of state subjects, but through the state’s conception of subjectivity and citizenship. The state also seeks to dehumanize and destroy that which does not fit into such a society. Genealogies are then crucial for the application of biopolitics since the technologies the state uses to exert control are constantly in flux over history and location, and those genealogies “will be insufficient unless they critically theorise settler colonialism as a historical and present condition and method of all power” (Morgenson, 2011). Biopower is a useful theoretical tool for describing and understanding the ways in which state apparatuses control populations. However, it would be disingenuous not to contextualize these actions within

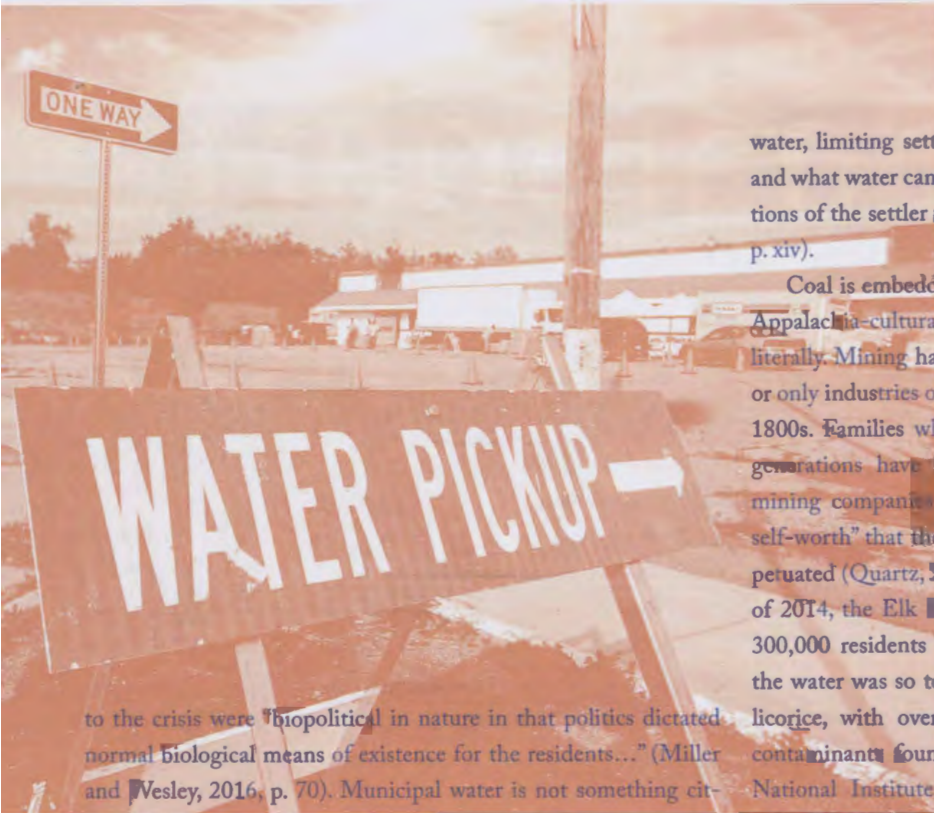
**STATE INSTITUTIONS DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH BODIES UNDER THEIR CONTROL WHO DO NOT FIT THE HEGEMONIC DEMANDS OF SOCIETY. POOR PEOPLE, PEOPLE OF COLOR, AND PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DIFFERENT DISABILITIES AND ILLNESSES ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE TO STATE CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE.**

**CITIZENS OF ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED AREAS STRUGGLE TO FIND THE TIME AND FUNDS TO ENGAGE IN FORMAL STRUCTURES OF RESISTANCE, SUCH AS LEGAL PROCEEDINGS, WHILE STILL SUPPORTING THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

a settler-colonial state project. The municipalities, city plans, state lines, and environments decimated by coal companies and chemicals all exist on stolen land, and biopolitical harm therefor results from the violent exploitation and genocide of indigenous people.

Citizens of economically depressed areas struggle to find the time and funds to engage in formal structures of resistance, such as legal proceedings, while still supporting themselves and their families. Court appeals, public disclosure requests, and public comment periods surrounding state actions like water policy, all have financial and time costs that create more distance between state actions and those who are most impacted and harmed. That disenfranchisement from state institutions compiles into another level of obfuscation for the sources of structural violence.

The next “pole” of biopower is the “species body”, which is the control over the biological processes of “births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy, and longevity” (Adams, 2018). Understanding water sources and contamination as a unique site of biopolitics is key for both the regions of Appalachia and the city of Flint because the decisions leading up



to the crisis were “biopolitical in nature in that politics dictated normal biological means of existence for the residents...” (Miller and Wesley, 2016, p. 70). Municipal water is not something citizens who have minors or children living in their home can opt out of; not paying the water bill, or cutting off running water, is listed as a red flag under Michigan’s Department of Health and Human Services—a potential signifier of neglect of conditions in the home. In Flint, when the water was corrosive and filled with toxic metals such as lead and selenium, there was a fear of increased policing of homes on the basis of water bills and targeting (Hobson, 2018). In addition, McDowell County in West Virginia has been on a boil water advisory since 2010 (Gillespie, 2018), and incidents like the 2015 Charleston chemical spill left 300,000 residents without usable water. Both of these, and countless other incidents, are direct results of coal companies not adhering to environmental policies that have already been defanged by industry lobbyists (Quartz, 2018). Imposition of state power in the context of Appalachia is reflected by the policies that govern coal companies, and allow those companies to degrade water quality through mining, run-off, and the lack of protections for citizens. This state power and control of water can be understood as an extension of “settler subjectifications that perpetuate the enactment of settler colonial constructions of Indigenous waterways, it is also about how these constructions and the forms of subjective identification they give rise to foreclose upon the meaning of settler relations to

water, limiting settler worldviews as well, and what water can mean under the conditions of the settler state” (Stevenson, 2019, p. xiv).

Coal is embedded in the mountains of Appalachia—culturally, ideologically, and literally. Mining has been one of the main or only industries of the state since the late 1800s. Families who have lived there for generations have been impacted by the mining companies and a fervent “cult of self-worth” that the coal industry has perpetuated (Quartz, 2018). At the beginning of 2014, the Elk River chemical spill left 300,000 residents without potable water; the water was so toxic that it smelled like licorice, with over 5,000 different toxic contaminants found in the water by the National Institute of Health (Gillespie, 2018). Mountaintop removal is a type of mining that involves blasting the tops of hills and mountains to fully expose the coal underneath, as opposed to tunneling to the coal. This type of removal has a multitude of environmental and health impacts. Coal ash ponds are dump sites for coal that is crumbled down by the larger blasts. The danger of those ponds is due to their proximity to water, the thousands of different toxins in the dynamite used for blasting, and the other chemicals used in modern mining.

“Blowing off a mountaintop releases naturally occurring poisons like arsenic, selenium, lead, and manganese. These poisons then seep into streams and groundwater. Meanwhile, the blasting fogs the air with a toxic cocktail of dust that settles on roofs and windows in the valleys below, and cakes the lining of lungs. The

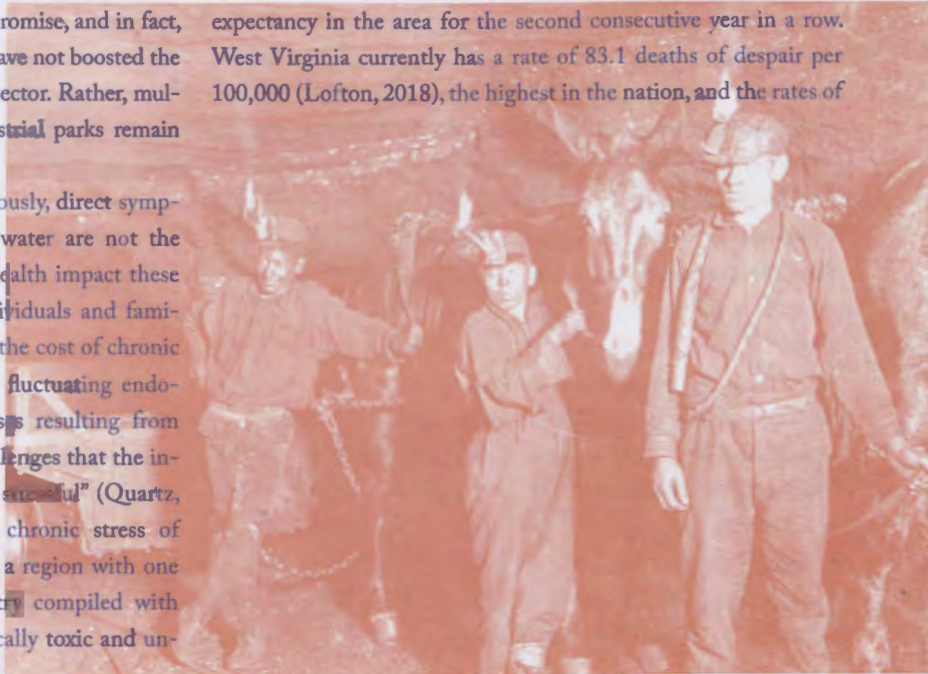
displaced soil and vegetation from mountaintop removal is plowed into valleys, creating enormous detritus piles and choking off waterways” (Quartz, 2018).

The physical detriment to citizens in the area was largely ignored by state and corporate entities, and is another manifestation of biopolitical control. People cannot opt out of being poisoned by the air and water in the area. This practice of mountaintop removal has increased in the wake of certain policies which were intended to control surface mining, such as the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, but had an exploitable loophole allowing coal companies to continue mountaintop removal and avoid restoration costs if the land could be, “put to better use” (Frazier, 2018). The aluded use of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, was that it would create factory and manufacturing jobs meant to replace the mining jobs. However, this proved to be an empty promise, and in fact, these “flat land” spaces have not boosted the region’s manufacturing sector. Rather, multiple factories and industrial parks remain empty (Quartz, 2018).

As mentioned previously, direct symptoms of contaminated water are not the only indicators of the health impact these conditions have on individuals and families. Allostatic stress is “the cost of chronic exposure to elevated or fluctuating endocrine or neural responses resulting from chronic or repeated challenges that the individual experiences as stressful” (Quartz, 2018). Essentially, the chronic stress of not only being stuck in a region with one main, unreliable, industry compiled with wage stress and a physically toxic and un-

safe environment, are apparent both in Flint and in Appalachia. Conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, depression, and other chronic conditions, correlate directly with the allostatic load put on individuals (Quartz, 2018).

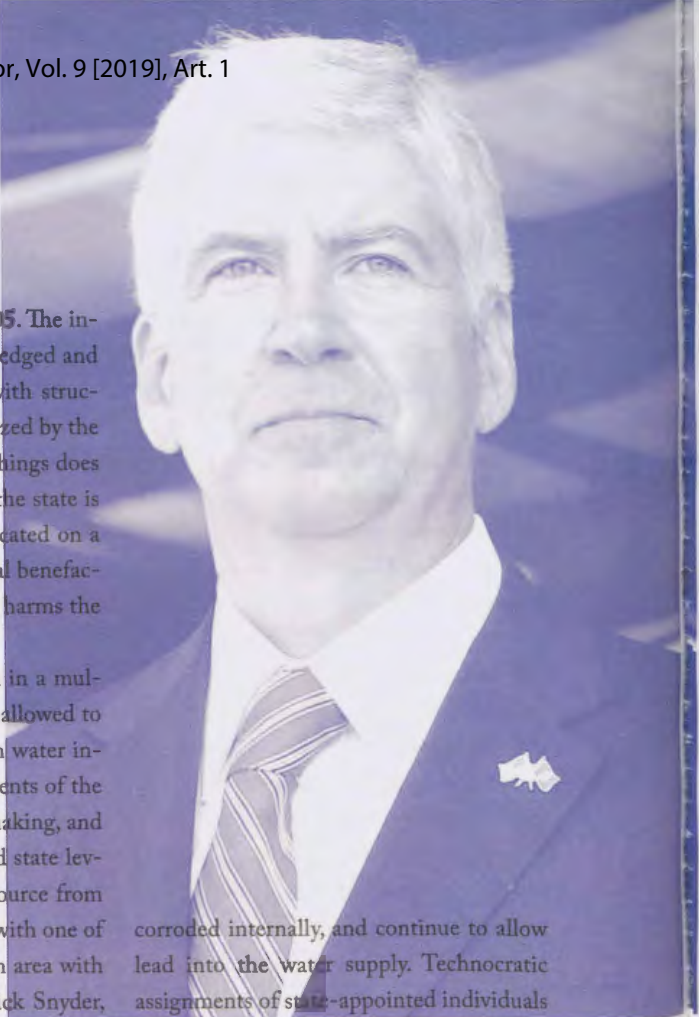
It should be noted, before further analysis of products of biopolitical control, that language matters. These chronic structural conditions and environments of high allostatic stress increase risks and rates of death from accidental, or intent-undetermined, alcohol and drug poisoning, suicides, and diseases associated with alcoholic livers and cirrhosis. The academic term groups these together as “deaths of despair” (Lofton, 2018). While this term will be used in reference to the statistics and research, it’s important to acknowledge the sterilization and disconnect in that usage. Attributing these deaths and outcomes to the individual experiences of “despair” decontextualizes the material sources of that despair and how they are informed by oppressive power structures. The effects of structural violence, and biopolitical control, occur on a micro-level that is not universal despite an end result that can be accounted for in vast numerical studies. That said, West Virginia has had the highest combined death rate since 2016, one of the lowest life expectancies, and the largest increase in overdose deaths since 2005 (Lofton, 2018). The recent national spike of overdose deaths has led to a decrease in the average life expectancy in the area for the second consecutive year in a row. West Virginia currently has a rate of 83.1 deaths of despair per 100,000 (Lofton, 2018), the highest in the nation, and the rates of



deaths of despair in the state have quintupled since 2005. The insidious nature of biopolitics continues to go unacknowledged and internalized. Self-discipline, and methods of coping with structural violence and inequality, are demonized and ostracized by the general public because the acknowledgement of these things does not fit within the larger ideological assumption—that the state is looking out for their citizens. This assumption is predicated on a liberal understanding of the state as a positive or neutral benefactor for citizens, and fails to take into consideration the harms the state creates.

Water as a basis of biopolitical control can happen in a multitude of ways, whether it is how certain industries are allowed to operate in regions, or how municipalities control urban water infrastructure. How the pipes in Flint poisoned the residents of the city was not a mistake; the problem was years in the making, and was proven to be calculated by officials at both city and state level. When the city of Flint got their municipal water source from Lake Huron, it was a good quality water source, albeit with one of the highest billing rates for water in the country for an area with higher than average poverty rates (Hobson, 2018). Rick Snyder, the governor of Michigan, manufactured the crisis in an effort to control costs as well as instigate biopolitical control over Flint's population. Snyder instituted emergency managers in the city that were under the jurisdiction of the state, bypassing the authority of local elected officials. These managers switched the city water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River, and chose not to treat the water with corrosion control (Hobson, 2018). Without the proper treatment of river water, there was bacteria in the water that caused the third largest outbreak of Legionnaires disease in history, with eighty-seven reported cases and twelve deaths (Hobson, 2018). Then, without the corrosion control treatment, Flint's pipe system

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corroded internally, and continue to allow lead into the water supply. Technocratic assignments of state-appointed individuals with more power than normal local officials, allow the state to bypass transparency and institute more authoritarian control over the city. This can be articulated as another method of how biopolitics function in different state apparatuses, since the authority residing water sources became even more alienated from the residents affected by it, without their consent. Co-currently, Flint emergency management allowed the military to practice urban drills without public notice prior (Carmody, 2015). Increasing totalitarian methods of control in areas with proportionately higher populations of color and rates of poverty, created an environment of fear and totalitarianism in the city. In wake of realizing the extent of the harms that had been done, Flint residents began referring to the construction of the water crisis and its impacts as a genocide (Fonger, 2015).

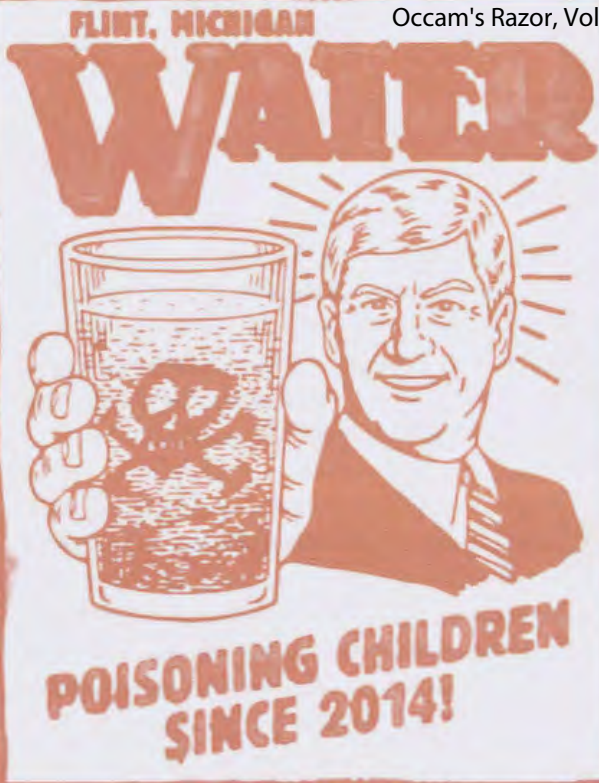
**IN WAKE OF REALIZING THE EXTENT OF THE HARMS THAT HAD BEEN DONE, FLINT RESIDENTS BEGAN REFERRING TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WATER CRISIS AND ITS IMPACTS AS A GENOCIDE.**

Scholars Miller and Wesley use biopolitics to connect the harms between Rick Snyder putting the city of Flint under managerial control, and changing the water source for the residents of Flint. Intersecting state and corporate desire for profit and biopolitical control makes itself apparent not only in the first wave of the shift to managerial control in Flint, but also in the fallout and the fight for acknowledgment of the problem. Bureaucratic control of lead level testing, and the subsequent falsifying of those numbers, is a blatant show of disregard for the health of the citizens of Flint (Miller and Wesley, 2016, p. 73). Not only were the children and citizens with toxic lead poisoning not informed about potential dangers, but there was no move to address the cause of the lead poisoning. It is clear that resident health was not the priority for those in charge of Flint's water during the transition between water sources. The main industry and job-provider in Flint is the General Motors auto-manufacturing plant. This plant was also switched to Flint River water, but successfully lobbied to have the water source switched back to Lake Huron because the river water was corroding the auto parts during assembly (Hobson, 2018). Refusing to address the bodily harm that this water is capable of, while accommodating businesses, is another example of the ways in which officials explicitly practiced biopolitical control. The state acknowledging the property damage untreated water has on the major economic industry, while simultaneously condemning residents to permanent health impacts, make it glaringly obvious that the state regards the population of Flint as disposable, by prioritizing profit over the basic needs of citizens. The

state uses its power to hurt vulnerable populations, and will deny this reality indefinitely if not called to account by the public.

These two regions are tied together by their proximity to poisonous water, but also by the fact that they are some of the poorest in the country, a similarity that heightens vulnerability to state exploitation. When working through the intersections of biopolitics, class interest, and the struggle for the recognition of wide-reaching resident concerns, complexities can aid in understanding how a neoliberal state weighs citizens' health against corporate profits, and prioritizes such profits. These intersections, and material conditions, leave residents alienated and devalued (Sparke, 2009, p. 292). Contending with a state that deems one's body disposable, with the allostatic stress of cyclical poverty and institutionalized racism, is a type of trauma that is difficult to name and give justice to with an academic voice. Because of the specific harms of ongoing chemical poisoning, as well as the health effects of years of grueling manual labor, the impact on populations and their quality of life is drastically affected long after the news crew leaves. Continuous spotlighting of these persisting, state sanctioned harms and realities are key. However, because state institutions have spent so much time and effort denying the direct links between the actions done unto populations, coverage and acknowledgement are uphill battles of their own.

Once we understand how environmental crimes have a direct impact on the health of citizens, we must also articulate some paths toward resistance. When addressing the crossover between environmental crimes and their health impacts, the field of environmental health justice is a useful position to start from. Environmental health justice has three quality framing points: "(1) equity at all jurisdictional levels in the distribution of environmental hazards and amenities, (2) access to information and meaningful participation in decisions that influence the optimal conditions for health and well-being, and (3) recognition of and respect for the diversity of people and their experiences in communities



wake of these crimes. As mentioned previously, legal costs, the schedule flexibility necessary to continue long and drawn out legal proceedings, and the energy and organizing ability to make all of those possible, constitute unacknowledged and intentional barriers. This application of the law in order to limit access reveals “modern biopower as governmentality [...] its extra-legal appearance is a recent adaptation of qualities intrinsic to Western law. [...] It can even be argued that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (Morgenson, 2011, p. 54). Constructions of citizenship and access to the law informs residents’ ability to access the spaces where these discourses occur. While these would be important topics to explore and apply to the proceedings in the wake of environmental health crimes, litigation directly with corporations is usually not accessible to the general public, and the private communication between corporations and the state is another locus of violence and institutional power.

The activists fighting for clean water and a safe environment in both Appalachia and Flint have been incomparable in their vigor and adherence to their values and protection of their communities. When demanding acknowledgement of the harms and realities that the state produces is an uphill battle, accountability for those at fault verges on impossible in terms of its feasibility. This remark is not to discredit the amazing work that has been done to spotlight the failures of government institutions to provide safe access to water and a non-poisonous environment, or the organizations that provide harm reduction in the status quo. Rather, it is

traditionally marginalized from mainstream environmental discourse” (Masuada, in Miller and Wesley, 2016, p. 75). These points are tools for increasing equitable access to policy discourse, decisions, and justice when civic trust has been violated by the state. Inclusive decision making would be a direct rebuke to biopolitical actions by the state, since one of the main functions of biopolitical structures is to take power from citizens in order to more easily control them. While inclusion in these processes is a crucial point of discussion, it should only be one aspect of redressing the intersections of oppression that marginalized groups face in the

important to question what “justice” looks like in practice, and if those ideas can be actualized when the same institutions that created the harms are the ones implementing steps to amend them. A justice system that functions along the letter of the law cannot, and willfully will not, enforce or go beyond the laws, which, as previously mentioned, were massively influenced by lobbyists prior to enactment. Any legislation protecting the land from mining practices will have an exploitable loophole, rendering the rest of the legal word useless. Mike Glasgow, a former city employee of Flint, was charged with a felony for tampering with evidence, and falsifying blood lead levels along with the notices of the poisoning for residents of Flint (Hobson, 2018). Despite being directly complicit in, and contributing to, the health crisis from water poisoning, Glasgow pled guilty to a lesser charge of willful neglect of duty, avoiding the full extent of prosecution for the crimes he committed. This is an example of how different institutions of the state function to protect the status quo, serve their own profit motive, and are thereby complicit in enacting and reinforcing biopower.

The scope and power of the state is daunting, in terms of how easily and flippantly harms can and have occurred. With the insidious nature of state biopolitical control, the underlying methods by which such control is deployed can be obfuscated. Water is a vital resource necessary for survival, as well as a large interconnected ecosystem that has far-reaching impacts not just for humans. Biopower,

**BIOPOWER, AND ITS USE BY THE STATE IS NOT ONLY MEANT TO CONTROL BODIES THROUGH STATE-SANCTIONED POISONING AND THE HARMS OF ALLOSTATIC STRESS, BUT IS ALSO INDICATIVE OF THE LARGER STATE PROJECT OF NATION-BUILDING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP.**

**LEAD NEVER LEAVES THE BODY ONCE IT HAS BEEN INTRODUCED; POISONED WATER FROM COAL ASH PONDS AND MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL IS CYCLED THROUGH ECOSYSTEMS AND PERMEATES THE SURROUNDING GEOGRAPHY. THUS, RAMIFICATIONS OF BIOPOLITICAL POWER HAVE LED TO DEHUMANIZATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ALREADY MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS, ULTIMATELY CREATING A VICIOUS CYCLE OF SELF-PERPETUATING HARMS.**

and its use by the state is not only meant to control bodies through state-sanctioned poisoning and the harms of allostatic stress, but is also indicative of the larger state project of nation-building and the construction of citizenship. Biopolitical control, through the mechanism of water, is situated within a larger project of settler-colonialism that assumes control and ownership of the land and resources that have been poisoned, to the detriment of people living in these places, and to the benefit of the profit margins and state desire to control populations. The government prioritizes a model of private profitability over the well-being and health of the general public, in both the case of managing municipal water sources and oversight of the coal industry's use of water. Lead never leaves the body once it has been introduced; poisoned water from coal ash ponds and mountaintop removal is cycled through ecosystems and permeates the surrounding geography. Thus, ramifications of biopolitical power have led to dehumanization and violence against already marginalized populations, ultimately creating a vicious cycle of self-perpetuating harms.



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