

# THE UNDERGROUND

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# Skiing's Climate Paradox: How Ski Resorts are Adapting to Climate Change

by CAMERON KENNEDY

This research paper examines the struggles of the ski industry in our changing climate, the methods used to limit the effects of climate change so far, and how those practices affect and damage local ecosystems. The ski industry in North America is divided up into three regions, New England and the Northeast, the Rocky Mountains, and the Sierra Nevada and Northwest. Each region has its own geography, average ski resort size, popularity and, most importantly, unique climate trends and predictions, with each region facing differing challenges. Limited examples will also be drawn from the Alps and research done in Europe. Ski resorts rely on the winter season to operate and maintain profitability, and they employ several methods to limit the unpredictability and volatility of our changing winters, mainly with snowmaking, which is a highly water and energy intensive process. Snowmaking is essential to the operation of ski mountains in the modern era. Ski resorts, while relying on the winter climate, are damaging to their local ecosystems, including pollution from chemicals and sediment, impacts on plant and animal life, and damage to watersheds. However, there are modern technologies and strategies that can limit the effects of these mountain resorts, as ski mountains are increasingly aware of their own environmental footprint. Ultimately, if the ski industry is going to continue to grow in popularity and profitability, excluding efforts such as corporate consolidation and diversification, the local ecosystems surrounding these resorts are going to continue to suffer.

**Keywords:** skiing, climate change, snowmaking, hydrology, pollution, local ecosystems

Humans have been skiing for longer than we have been writing. It is believed, based on cave paintings, that humans have been skiing since the last ice age. Parts of ski like artifacts have been found in Siberia and Northern Russia, dating back to 8000-7000 BCE. Skiing was again popularized out of its military potential, with Norwegian soldiers being trained to fight in hit and run ski tactics. This evolved into some of the first ski races in the 1860s. Nordic skiing was added to the Olympics in 1924, and with a growth in popularity Alpine skiing was added in 1936. The 1960s saw a massive increase in the popularity of skiing with new advancements in lifts, ski resort expansion, and the invention of plastic boots and more modern skis with metal edges. Skiing today is more popular than it has ever been, and it represents a large part of the economy of many mountainous areas.

However, skiing and all winter sports are at risk. As our climate warms from the effects of climate change, our winters also change. Depending on the region, winters are becoming dryer, warmer, colder, or rainier. Some places, like the Canadian Rockies, and New England may see more storms,

bringing more snow and rain, but also warmer temperatures and more temperature fluctuations. Other regions, like Colorado and the Alps are becoming dryer and warmer. Overall, most alpine areas will become significantly warmer over the next 50 years, putting winter sports in jeopardy.

Snowmaking is a technology that has become essential for maintaining reliable conditions at ski resorts and has allowed ski areas to greatly extend their operational season. It also, importantly, allows ski areas to mitigate some damages of climate change. The first is snowmaking, developed in the 1950s and 1960s, and is now used by about 95 percent of the world's ski resorts. Most snowmaking systems work by combining highly pressurized air with water at the right temperatures, usually below 28°F. This atomizes the water, freezing it into crystals which are sprayed from the nozzle above the target area. Snowmaking infrastructure and operations are typically very expensive, and require large amounts of electricity and water, although more modern systems, such as fan guns, are becoming increasingly efficient, by using less water, electricity and allowing for operations in



greater temperature ranges. Snowmaking systems allow ski areas to cover slopes in the early season, maintain a greater base in the mid and late season, and improve operations in low snow winters.

Snowmaking is not without its challenges, and adds several unique stresses to local ecosystems, mainly due to pollution and the high-water use, straining local resources. This can affect local fish, animals, and other wildlife, and may even result in larger scale damage to some sensitive ecosystems. Snowmaking is becoming essential to the ski industry in North America, which is faced with certain perils from climate change. Snowmaking protects a massively popular industry from the regional and global effects of climate change, while also damaging local wildlife and ecosystems. However, environmental damage from snowmaking operations is very small when compared to the ski industry in total or other human development.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change is the most pressing issue of the 21st century, and its effects on skiing and the winter sports industry have already started to be felt. The Fourth Assessment Report (2007) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, an international group studying global climate change reported that the global average temperature has increased by 1.4°F since the 19th century. By 2100 the global average temperature is expected to be between 3.2°F and 7.2°F higher than today. However, warming in the North American west, one of the largest and busiest ski regions in the world, is expected to increase by 3.8°F to over 10°F, with much of that change being felt in the winter. The American ski industry has reached \$50 billion dollars and is a massive employer and part of many mountain communities' economies. The industry and ski community are becoming increasingly aware of climate change and the threat to their sport, but also the damage and pollution that skiing in its current state represents.

The specific effects of climate change will vary by region. The Northeast is consistently the second largest ski market in the country, with its proximity to major east coast cities. The region saw 12.5 million skier visits in 2018-2019, although it has regularly recorded millions more, according to the National Ski Areas Association. Here, average winter temperatures are expected to increase steadily. This has already started, with

the period with snow on the ground already decreasing by 7 days in the last 50 years. Additionally, an over 10 percent increase in winter season precipitation in the next 30 years. This will bring more snow to the region, but as temperatures rise, also more rain. By the end of the century New Hampshire snowfall could decrease 20 to 50 percent. This is a dire threat to skiing in New England, especially at the most southern resorts. Most of this warming has occurred in the early season, before Christmas, or in the late season in March. These are essential times for ski areas, as they seek to extend their dates of operation.

The Rocky Mountain region has always been the heart of North American skiing. This region, dominated by Colorado and Utah saw 24.4 million skier visits 2018-2019. This is second to only 2021-2022 and the region has shown constant and considerable growth over the last 20 years. Temperatures in this region are supposed to increase significantly, along with a decrease in precipitation. Over the last 50 years precipitation has increased significantly (up to 50 percent in some areas), although that precipitation is expected to wane, the extent of precipitation change is still up for debate. Models predict a 3.8°F to 4.8°F increase in winter temperatures by just 2030. The high elevation of some resorts will protect them from immediate impact, but those at lower elevations could experience severe impact and shorter seasons. In Aspen Colorado, one of the most premier ski destinations in the world, temperatures have already risen 3°F since the 1980s, resulting in nearly 30 more frost free days. Many long-term residents say they can notice the shift in the climate and are aware and deeply concerned about the rapid growth of skiing as a big business and climate change.

The Pacific Ranges and the Northwest are another major center of skiing in North America. This region has already felt some of the largest temperature shifts of 3°F. This is expected to increase to 4° by 2030. This will raise the snow line, or the altitude at which snow consistently falls from 3000 ft to 4100 ft by 2050. This should not immediately affect ski areas, but is a good indicator of climate trends, as storms get warmer and wetter. However, ski resorts in the Pacific Ranges tend to have much lower elevations than those in the Rockies, making them more vulnerable to temperature changes. This region is dominated by California in terms of ski areas and skier visits,



and it is important to note the long-term drought conditions already present in the state, and the potential worsening with further climate change.

### **Snowmaking and its limits and effects**

Snowmaking is currently the best method of climate change mitigation. Snowmaking has been widespread on the East coast since the 1980s and in the Rockies and Pacific West since the mid 2000s. Snowmaking is a reliable way to guarantee snow coverage on trails with less dependence on mother nature. This allows some resorts to open earlier and more consistently, while also building up snowpack for late season skiing. A mid-2000s study on snowmaking in the Northeast found that snowmaking operations extend the typical operating season by 55-120 days. However, snowmaking can only function under certain conditions. Optimal snowmaking temperatures are between 20-28°F. With climate change these “snowmaking windows” are decreasing. A 2010 study found that, assuming an optimal snowmaking temperature of 23°F, by 1050 the number of snowmaking days for Arizona ski resorts will decrease enough to no longer guarantee late November openings, denying them the busy thanksgiving period. A study on snowmaking temperatures in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. This looked at the period 1-25 of December, the most important time frame for snowmaking in New England, as it builds up to the essential Christmas-holiday period. Little change was reported at high elevations, but at lower elevations and southern slopes temperatures would lead to the loss of 6 snowmaking days in that period, or a 30 percent loss. Snowmaking is becoming increasingly efficient and effective but still ultimately relies on certain temperatures and weather conditions.

A major limiting factor on snowmaking, besides weather conditions, is water availability and capacity. Snowmaking is highly water intensive, drawing from local lakes, streams, and wells to arm the snow guns. Although a reliable source of water could be present, the rapid draw of water when snowmaking conditions are present put strain on the local watershed. Many ski resorts have constructed their own reservoirs, however, with a decrease in good snowmaking days, further demand on already sensitive water resources is expected. When compared to other industries, the water use of ski resorts is minimal. Colorado ski resorts use,

on average, 2.2 billion gallons of water per year. At first glance this seems massive in the drought ridden west. Snowmaking operations in Colorado make up just 0.05 percent of all water for human use. The amount used by agriculture is 85 percent, or 4.1 trillion gallons. Water used by snowmaking is in large part returned with melting in the spring, with over 80 percent returning to the water shed. This puts the water in “cold storage” ahead of the summer when water demand peaks. Water use for snowmaking, if enough water is available, is not the largest concern, with the practice being actually quite neutral when compared to agriculture.

The concern with snowmaking is often not the amount of water taken from a source, but the timing and location. Environmentalists argue that it is the timing and location of the water withdrawal that has an acute impact on local ecosystems. Snowmaking can require up to 150,000 gallons just to cover one acre with a foot of snow. That water is largely returned to the water shed in the spring. It is the timing of the water use that is of concern. November is often the peak snowmaking season, and is also a critical time for many fish, including Brown trout which is their spawning season. A study in Durango, Colorado has found that snowmaking operations and other development from nearby Purgatory Ski Resort have decreased fish spawning habitat by 30 percent. January and February when snowmaking operations continue, mountain streams are at their lowest, potentially exposing eggs. Removing water from streams can also cause ice buildup and dams, freezing trout eggs and other aquatic life. Ice dams can also affect the flow of the water, potentially limiting the amount of oxygen eggs and aquatic life receive. Moving ahead into April, when snowmaking is wrapped up, the lower water level of the streams is still felt, as many species of insect require a strong and steady stream flow to hatch. This can have a trickledown effect on local birds and mammals, degrading an already sensitive mountain ecosystem.

### **Hydrology and watersheds**

These alpine ecosystems tend to be incredibly sensitive and are often already under considerable stress from existing ski resort development, including roads, slope grading, and lift operations. A study on Colorado ski resorts has found that they have an impact on the local water sheds and stream morphology. Tree clearing has the largest

effect on streams, and their peak flows. This leads to up to 5 times sediment increase in the drainage, but only if the basin has significant clear-cut areas, or 20-30 percent. Tree clearing also allows more moisture to be stored in soil, allowing for a different time of peak discharge than other similar forested basins. A study in Deadhorse, Colorado found that removing 50 percent of tree cover led to a 23 percent increase in peak water discharge. Most ski runs are deforested, and are crossed with access roads, lift infrastructure, snowmaking pipes, and summer mowing operations.

Snowmaking also has varied effects of the peak flow of streams. The majority of snowmaking operations take place on cleared slopes, which are more exposed to the sun, leading to earlier snowmelt and earlier peak flows for streams. However, this does not apply to all trails, as man-made snow has a much higher density than natural snow, making it more resistant to melting. This density is increased by grooming operations, which compact the snowpack. These changes can leave artificial snow on slopes much longer than natural snow, creating later peak flows. Snowmaking has varied effects on peak melting and flow timing for streams, and the related factors can make predicting melting and the effect on streams very difficult and variable. A change in the timing or amount of peak flow of streams can affect all forms of wildlife. With snow remaining on slopes longer, the growth of plants may be delayed, leading to a shorter growing season.

Another impact of ski resorts on their local environment is pollution. Pollution comes with almost all human activity and skiing is no exception. Despite efforts to clean up winter sports, snowmaking and the ski industry is still a considerable polluter. A University of Vermont study compared two neighboring basins on Mount Mansfield in Vermont, one void of human development and the other with the major ski resort of Stowe, containing ski lifts, snowmaking and lift infrastructure, lodges and condos, and parking lots. The west basin, containing Stowe, had similar flow times but more flow in summer storms and less in winter and spring. Total water yield was also 40 percent higher, the effect of snowmaking and other developments. Water quality was also worse in the west basin, with much more debris and solids being found in runoff, an effect mountain development and trail cutting, loosening soil. The most

significant water pollutant however was chloride, from the salts applied to parking lots. This spiked in the spring but remained elevated year-round. Ski resort development has a significant impact on water quality, but snowmaking makes up a very small part of that. A study at Stratton Mountain in southern Vermont found surrounding streams to be “impaired by sedimentation, nutrients, and increased temperature from loss of streamside vegetation,” according to Jeffrey Cueto, a hydrologist at the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Stratton does monitor the water quality of its watershed, as does the state, and the Resort is now limited by the state in how it can expand until water quality standards are met.

### **Other snowmaking practices**

One particularly controversial snowmaking practice is the use of ice nucleation activity, or INA bacteria. This is legal and a popular practice in many countries, including France and both the US and Canada. This is when certain strains of bacteria are added to snowmaking water and used to stimulate freezing and the nucleation of ice crystals. More research on these bacteria and their survivability in snowpack is required but given proper conditions it would be possible for these bacteria to enter snowmelt and runoff where they would have an impact on local plants and animals. INA bacteria have been shown to have a detrimental effect on rats and many species of plants but are yet to be tested in real conditions with alpine species. INA is one of the ski industry’s best kept secrets, and there is little research into the practice.

Another lesser known snowmaking practice is salting. This is where, most commonly, ammonium nitrate or ammonium chloride are applied in the tons to ski racecourses. This is used to prepare slopes that are too cold, icy or sticky. Nearly 500,000 kg of salts are applied to just one snowfield in Oregon May to September, in an effort preserve snowpack throughout the summer. This is also a common practice in Canada and on racecourses in the Alps. These salts are intense fertilizers and have a pronounced effect on the surrounding ecosystem, with some effects of fertilization lasting over 50 years since the last application. This intense fertilization can make some species more vulnerable to infestation and frost. It also changes which plants grow near these slopes, changing that ecosystem’s biodiversity. Many more effects of salting are yet to be investigated.



Snowmaking can be a pollutant when the source water is polluted. A study on water quality at Białka Tatrzańska, the highest-rated ski resort in Poland confirmed this. Water for the production of artificial snow was not drawn from mountain streams but from the nearby Białka river. This river was found to be heavily polluted from other human development, containing an alkaline PH 10 times higher than other nearby sources, and a large presence of bacteria like e. coli. A mountain stream was tested before and after the construction of a nearby ski run. Snowmaking operations significantly increased the PH and mineralization of the mountain stream. Artificial snow was also found to contain more ions than natural snow, which has an acute effect on flora. A study on a ski resort in Switzerland found ions from artificial snowmaking has led to a shift from the low nutrient demanding grasses and shrubs to more nutrient demanding species. The chemical composition of artificial snow differs from natural snow. Much of the water for snowmaking operations comes from nearby ponds, streams and rivers, and this water has a different chemical structure than snowmelt. This can affect plant growth.

### Colclusion

The winter sports industry is in peril. Climate change is expected to have significant and far-reaching effects on the ski industry in North America, devastating in some places. Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and increasingly unpredictable weather conditions are likely to lead to shorter ski seasons, less reliable snow cover, and eventually, the end of operations for some ski areas. These effects are already being felt in many parts of North America, with ski resorts struggling to maintain profitability and communities dependent on winter tourism facing economic and social challenges. Communities such as impoverished Northern New Hampshire rely on the winter season, where winter sports brought some 500 million dollars and thousands of jobs in 2017-2018. The loss of skiing would be devastating for not just skiers, workers, resort owners, and surrounding communities, but for everyone. The industry that may bring people closest to nature is being destroyed by it.

Snowmaking is the saving grace for ski resorts, at least for now. Investment into snowmaking infrastructure in the last 30 years has been tremen-

dous, and it has been a large reason for our long seasons and reliable snowpack, even if mother nature doesn't necessarily cooperate. Snowmaking in its current form can be a damaging process, having a negative effect on the surrounding watershed and ecosystem. Snowmaking can affect everything from plants, aquatic insects, and fish, as well as water quality and quantity. Yes, more sustainable snowmaking exists. Resorts are slowly moving towards advanced fan guns, which require much less water and electricity. In much of the US and Canada, snowmaking is increasingly requiring increased monitoring of surrounding watersheds. But this is a small portion of the industry. Governments and ski resorts, aware of the localized damages of snowmaking see the practice as a necessary evil to protect a slowly melting industry. Ski resorts must damage their local environment to ward of the accelerating change in our global environment.

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Image Credit: Alden Timm '25



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# Sex, Gender, and Stanley Kubrick: An Analysis of the Sexual Imagery in the Filmography of Stanley Kubrick

by MAYA MACKEY

Stanley Kubrick is considered one of the most revered filmmakers of our time. Kubrick is famous for his scrupulous composition, cinematography, and editing techniques. Additionally, all of Kubrick's films from *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) onward are united in that they contain both explicit and implicit depictions of sexuality. The sexual imagery present in Kubrick's filmography accomplishes several purposes: Firstly, it asserts the male gaze—or the camera perceiving and therefore portraying narrative events from the masculine perspective and as pertaining to male issues. Secondly, it represents Kubrick's ideas on sexuality and gender roles, and as Kubrick often displays sexuality in conjunction with violence, he intrinsically associates the two. Thirdly, this imagery establishes destructive and toxic masculinity as Kubrick's ideal performance of the male gender, and this representation may subsequently foster the social acceptance of misogyny, contributing to (and unconsciously condoning) its effects on society (such as domestic violence, assault, male chauvinism, etc.)

**Keywords:** Stanley Kubrick, sexuality, gender, male gaze, toxic masculinity, misogyny, phallic imagery, domestic violence

Stanley Kubrick, often considered one of the most iconic filmmakers of our generation and renowned for his meticulous camerawork and perfectionism in the editing room, was the embodiment of an auteur. Most of his productions, despite varying wildly in terms of genre, narrative focus and formal technique, have at least one thing in common: they all demonstrate Freudian (or otherwise) depictions of sexuality. Freudian imagery, in this case, refers to imagery (often in the form of material objects) which represents sexual organs and the subsequent subconscious assertion of sexuality within a context that is not necessarily inherently sexual, often to illustrate power dynamics and relationships between individuals or to normalize certain gender expectations (Orrells, Freud's Phallic Symbol, 2). All of Kubrick's films—from *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) onward—contain sexual imagery, the inclusion of which accomplishes several purposes: Firstly, it asserts the male gaze, or the camera perceiving and thus portraying events from the male perspective and as pertaining to male issues. Secondly, it represents Kubrick's ideas on sexuality and gender roles—and as Kubrick often displays sexuality in conjunction with violence, he intrinsically associates the two. This establishes destructive and toxic masculinity as

Kubrick's ideal performance of the male gender, and this representation may foster the social acceptance of misogyny, subsequently contributing to (and unconsciously condoning) its effects on society (such as domestic violence, assault, male chauvinism, etc.)

## **Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb**

*Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* is one of Kubrick's first films found to contain both explicit as well as implicit visual expressions of sexuality. The film opens with a sequence of two planes refueling in mid-air—the planes are connected by an elongated device, which is captured from an overhead shot while it is inserted into the fuel tank. This sequence is meant to emulate sexual intercourse, and establishes an association between means of reproduction and technology, a theme which appears with some regularity in Kubrick's following production, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Further, there are many cylindrically-shaped items (i.e., missiles, bombs, and guns), which act as dual agents of destruction, as well as substitute phalluses. One example of this is the scene in which General Jack D. Ripper is using a large machine gun to defend his position within the base camp, while it is



under attack by U.S. military siege. Ripper is holding the gun at crotch level, and the effect is that the gun (which is large enough that Ripper must hold it lower in order to use it properly) is meant to emulate Ripper's penis, thus creating an association between masculinity and weapons of destruction. This relationship is shown once more towards the end of the film, when Major Kong literally rides an atomic bomb after it is released from his plane until it hits the ground and detonates, consequently resulting in his death. The bomb's detonation symbolizes ejaculation—given that the bomb is shaped like a phallus and that Kong is physically riding it immediately preceding its explosion—and reinforces the concept of the “deathgasm,” or a visual manifestation of the pre-established affiliation between sexuality (specifically male climax) with weapons of mass death and destruction. The imagery in *Dr. Strangelove* therefore effectively associates masculinity with destruction, and simultaneously asserts that men should have control in situations that impact whole countries and decide the fates of millions of people—whether or not the end result of their deliberation is effective.

### **2001: A Space Odyssey**

In Kubrick's next film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, he diverges from his usual trend of juxtaposing images of violence and sexuality. Instead, Kubrick employs sexual imagery to establish a connection between masculinity and reproduction, defying cultural norms surrounding birth and child-rearing. Kubrick first nods towards the societal association between masculinity and technology, as well as femininity and nature (i.e., reproduction) in the initial space sequence, during which one of the ships is docking on the large circular space station. From one perspective, the physical process of docking may be representative of sexual intercourse, as the ship itself is shaped like a phallus. From another, the space station itself symbolizes an egg, to be fertilized by the spaceship upon its entrance, signifying procreation. Other reproductive imagery may be found later on in the film—for instance, the ship carrying protagonist Dr. Dave Bowman (the *Discovery*) resembles a sperm. The head of the ship is large and circular, and its protruding back half is long and narrow, resembling a tail. The fact that the *Discovery* so closely approximates the appearance of a sperm not only correlates masculinity and reproduction, but it also identifies male sexuality (and thus the male gender) as the primary force and initiator involved in the process of procreation, as opposed to female

sexuality. This is reinforced by the ending of the film, which features what appears to be a sizable fetus and/or baby floating in space, referring to cosmic conception and rebirth sparked by the *Discovery's* travels. Kubrick's utilization of said imagery, whether conscious or subconscious, does not have as negative an impact as his consistent juxtaposition of sexual and violent images. Rather, it hints at a societal gender discrepancy in attribution of responsibility for reproduction, as women are disproportionately associated with, and therefore more frequently charged with, the responsibilities that are intrinsic to both childbirth and child rearing. In this way, the sexual imagery in *2001*, and how it works in the film representationally, differs from that of Kubrick's other films.

### **A Clockwork Orange**

Conversely, Kubrick's eighth film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) is arguably his most disturbing work. *Clockwork* has perhaps the most explicit sexual imagery of all Kubrick's films, and draws the most comparisons between violence and sexuality, particularly male sexuality. The set design alone contains countless references to genitalia and or sexualized parts of the body (i.e., the clear plastic models of female bodies at the milk bar that Alex and the droogs visit, with the milk suggestively excreting from the nipples of each model.) Many of the props that Alex and the droogs interact with exist as phallic substitutes or symbols: for example, the large stick that Alex uses to beat dim and the other droogs with at the waterside (harkening back to *Dr. Strangelove*, this scene visually likens male sex organs with weaponry) or the hefty ceramic phallic statue that Alex uses to kill the cat lady earlier on in the film. Aside from *mise-en-scene*, the remaining visuals are more straightforward—there are three intensely brutal rape scenes, all of which obviously reassert the relationship between male sexuality and violence.

Additionally—in that incidents like assault and rape often indicate a perpetrator's need for sexual and mental-emotional control—the rape scenes in *Clockwork* establish that masculine sexuality requires some degree of power or dominance in order to be valid. Until Alex receives the Ludovico treatment, he is an utterly dominant figure, reinforcing Kubrick's idea of masculinity as necessitating a sense of inherent authority.

What's more, Alex does not receive the ultimate punishment (i.e., death), at the end of *Clockwork*—in fact, it's quite the opposite. After Alex's suicide attempt cures him of the effects of the Ludovico technique, a

government representative approaches him (under the guise of an apology) and offers financial compensation and legal pardoning if Alex is to continue behaving as he did before his imprisonment, in an effort to conceal the illegal testing from the concerned public. This ending then validates Alex's atrocities, thus also legitimizing the connections between acts of male sexuality, violence, and control. Shortly after the film's release, it was reported that various groups of teenagers had been cavorting around London and emulating Alex and the droogs. As described by John Baxter in *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*, Kubrick initially staunchly defended his film, even going so far as to ask Warner Bros. to remove his film from release in certain parts of Florida, where several newspapers publicly refused to advertise X-rated films like *Clockwork* (Baxter 269). Eventually, Kubrick acknowledged that the representation of masculinity in *Clockwork* was dangerous, and he withdrew *A Clockwork Orange* from release in the U.K. in 1974 (*A Clockwork Orange* handout, 4). Further, although Kubrick likely did not intend for the imagery within *Clockwork* to assert said associations between sex and violence, it cannot be denied that the representation itself did not (or could not) have specific negative impacts.

### **Barry Lyndon**

When considering Kubrick's filmography chronologically, the intensity of *Clockwork* is somewhat dampened by his next film, the elaborate period piece *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Although *Barry Lyndon* is arguably the least inherently sexual of Kubrick's films after *Dr. Strangelove*, there is still some (certifiably more implicit) sexual imagery present within. The most obvious example is at the beginning of the film, when Redmond Barry's cousin and lover Nora Brady agrees to marry Captain Quin. In a fit of rage, Barry returns Nora's ribbon to her in front of Quin, in an attempt to slight the captain and spoil their burgeoning relationship. The ribbon itself exists as a symbol of Nora's sexuality, which is likened to an object that may be traded and commodified by the men around her. Immediately following this interaction, when Nora explains to Barry that she is, essentially, choosing Captain Quin over him, he reacts by challenging Quin to a duel, the result of which causes him to flee Ireland. The majority of Barry's actions after Nora slights him are reactionary—once gaining footing in England, he attempts to garner wealth and influence in an effort to prove to himself (and subconsciously to Nora) that he is worthy of the company of aristocracy, and if not

honorable in personal character, honorable because of his achievements. For much of the film, Barry is insecure in his masculinity, and this is reflected in his constant desire to engage in male conquest, which he believes will repair and overshadow his fragile and fractured ego. In actuality, Barry is less than fit for a life of nobility, and this further contributes to his eventual fall from grace. As Kubrick himself explains: "With respect to Barry Lyndon, after his successful struggle to achieve wealth and social position, Barry proves to be badly unsuited to this role. He has clawed his way into a gilded cage, and once inside, his life goes really bad"—Michel Ciment, *Kubrick*. Holt Rinehart, Winston, 1980, 171. (*Barry Lyndon* handout, 8.) Admittedly, *Barry Lyndon* is less focused on direct comparisons between male sexuality and destruction, and more so on representation of issues which commonly affect the male population, primarily masculine insecurity and how that translates to our cultural norms surrounding male gender roles.

### **The Shining**

Themes of masculine insecurity bleed over into Kubrick's tenth film, *The Shining* (1980), wherein Kubrick provides one of the first portrayals of the "incel" archetype in mass media. The sexual imagery within *The Shining* places distinct emphasis on misogyny, and its connection to sexual violence—in fact, the *Overlook* appeals to Jack's misogyny in order to manipulate him into doing its bidding. Professionally, Jack is a failure. He's been prohibited from teaching after brutally physically assaulting a student, and he is trying his hand at being a playwright, to no avail. Jack consistently wrestles with the pressure to have a fruitful career—which men are traditionally socialized to believe they need in order to be considered successful and validated in their masculinity. This stress is later augmented by Jack's alcohol addiction, making him vulnerable to the *Overlook's* manipulation. As Kubrick himself stated in a rare interview: "Jack comes to the hotel psychologically prepared to do its bidding. He doesn't have very much further to go for his anger and rage to become completely uncontrollable. He is bitter about his failure as a writer. He is married to a woman for whom he only has contempt. He hates his son. In the hotel, at the mercy of its powerful evil, he is quickly ready to fulfill his dark role" —"Stanley Kubrick: Interview by Michael Ciment" in *Stanley Kubrick's The Shining: Studies in the Horror Film* (*The Shining* handout, 6-7).

The hotel provides Jack with hallucinations, such



as Lloyd the bartender and Delbert Grady the butler, both of which urge him to take control of his wife and essentially affirm his masculinity. Another example of an illusion provided by the Overlook is the scene in which Jack enters room 237 to find a beautiful naked woman bathing in the ornately decorated bathroom. The woman exits the tub to embrace Jack, and while he kisses her, her body morphs into a mottled corpse. Although Jack is disturbed by this transformation, he still feels he has a right to kiss the woman, in spite of his existing marriage. Jack's motivation to engage with the woman sexually is rooted in an attempt to reclaim his masculinity, as he unconsciously perceives himself as a disappointment for being unable to sufficiently provide for his family. If Jack may engage with the sexual aspect of his masculinity, he feels empowered within it—this gives him a much-desired sense of dominance and control, and Jack quickly begins to feel entitled to his subjugation of Wendy, thus Jack's evolution from disempowered insecurity to being an incel.

Additionally, just as with Kubrick's other films, there are several prominent phallic substitutes—for instance, the ax that Jack uses while chasing Wendy and Danny throughout the Overlook hotel. The bat that Wendy utilizes to defend herself from Jack may also represent a phallus, or rather her reclamation of the vicious masculinity Jack consistently presents her with. This imagery, just as in *Dr. Strangelove* and *A Clockwork Orange*, acts to reinforce the sex and violence dichotomy discussed previously, and demonstrates how media representations of misogyny may normalize it, and any subsequent domestic violence it causes.

### **Full Metal Jacket**

Kubrick delves even further into his ideas surrounding gender roles in his eleventh film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The imagery present within this film is slightly more specific to sexual orientation, and it suggests that Kubrick's "ideal man" is heteronormative. In the first half of the film, Sergeant Hartman spends a great deal of time acquainting the men with their weaponry, and later instructs Joker and his comrades to sleep with their rifles. Hartman identifies the weapon of each recruit as their romantic (and decidedly female) partner. In doing this, Hartman is prescribing a specific gender identity to the rifles, setting a heteronormative precedent for the soldiers, and fostering homophobia—which the men surely internalize. Additionally, Hartman forcing the soldiers to sleep with their guns signifies his dis-

couraging Joker and the others from openly communicating their emotions, and in turn, stifling them. Hartman is instilling within the soldiers (among other things) that femininity may be objectified and dehumanized (each rifle as a "woman"), and that any expression of emotion (or homosexuality, which Hartman equates with femininity) may be interpreted as a sign of weakness—or rather the antithesis of the "cold-blooded killer" that Hartman is trying to mold each man into. As Hartman tells the men: "The deadliest weapon in the world is a marine and his rifle. It is your killer instinct that must be harnessed if you expect to survive combat. Your rifle is only a tool. It is a hard heart that kills"—*Full Metal Jacket: The Screenplay*, 42. (*Full Metal Jacket* handout, 3.)

Hartman also uses more direct tactics to cultivate subconscious homophobia amongst the recruits (even aside from the frequent and blatant use of homophobic slurs.) At the very beginning of the film, Hartman enacts disciplinary action on Gomer Pyle by commanding him to get on his knees and allow Hartman to choke him. This image, although not entirely sexual, is inherently homoerotic—Hartman isn't consensually choking Pyle, of course—he is making an example out of Pyle, and this is meant to humiliate him in front of his peers. What's more, Hartman is using negative reinforcement to teach the other recruits to associate the homoerotic imagery (as a stand-in for homosexual orientation) with punishment and failure, both of which the soldiers have been socialized to believe will not contribute to their success in the military. In essence, although the sexual imagery in *Full Metal Jacket* is less intentional than some of Kubrick's other films and it exists primarily as a device used to illustrate how the U.S. military conditions its soldiers, the imagery itself has a representational effect in that it reinforces heteronormativity, most notably in conjunction with masculinity.

### **Eyes Wide Shut**

Finally, the sexual imagery within Kubrick's final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) is rather explicit, albeit in a different manner. Similarly to *The Shining* and *Barry Lyndon*, *Eyes Wide Shut* hints at, and places emphasis on, sources of masculine insecurity. In the case of *Eyes Wide Shut*, the insecurity in question is related to sexual performance—or rather, that men are socialized to believe that they must exhibit a sense of sexual prowess and ability in order to feel validated in their masculinity. Alice first instigates this self-doubt within Bill when she describes her desire

to engage in infidelity. After this point, the camera periodically cuts to shots of Alice having sexual intercourse with the attractive naval officer she describes to Bill, acting as a visual manifestation of his uncertainty. Following Alice's giggling fit, Bill begins to search for opportunities to reassert his masculinity sexually, and he is presented with many chances to do so. The opportunity containing the most sexual imagery is the masked orgy that he attends. Initially, the only fully naked people there are women (another example of the objectification and commodification of female bodies in Kubrick's films) and the masks reflect the lack of identity amongst all of the participants in the mansion. The orgy itself reflects the male fantasy—naked women without any identity or recourse, and mindless sex without consequences. Ironically, Bill doesn't end up touching a single one of his own accord (partly due to narrative circumstance, partly because of his own mental baggage.) In fact, Bill doesn't end up having sex with anyone other than his wife throughout the entirety of the film, indicating his sexual frustration and his lack of sexual agency (that which men are socialized to believe they must have in order to be validated in their masculinity.) In other words, the sexual imagery in *Eyes Wide Shut*, in conjunction with the narrative, establishes that Kubrick's ideal of masculinity necessitates constantly asserting one's sexual agency.

### Conclusion

The sexual imagery within all of Kubrick's films (*Dr. Strangelove* and onward) achieves several significant representational effects. Firstly, in that each film focuses on one or more definitively male issues (i.e., male professional, sexual and performance-related insecurity) and highlights the male perspective from the camera's point of view, it asserts the male gaze. Secondly, it establishes Kubrick's ideas on gender roles, specifically the male gender—Kubrick's "ideal man" is heavily associated with procreation (it is primarily responsible for the process, in fact), violently sexual, dominant, heterosexual and emotionless. Lastly, it forms a connection between masculine sexuality and violence, upholding that the two are inextricably linked, the representation (in mass media) of which may normalize masculine sexuality as inherently savage and abusive. Although this representation of male sexuality is dangerous in that it may contribute to domestic violence or assault and rape, it's important to acknowledge that Kubrick's employment of imagery

to focus on male perspectives and issues (whether conscious or unconscious) is not inherently negative. In many ways, the depiction of aforementioned relationships and gender norms makes more obvious the clear faults in our social and cultural understandings of masculinity, and even femininity.

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Image Credit: Alden Timm '25



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# Global Drama: How Noh and Kabuki Troupes Transformed Theater in the West and Japan

by KAYLEE WHITE

Noh and Kabuki are ancient forms of Japanese theater that are highly symbolic and stylized, especially when compared to the realistic nature of Western theater in the early 1900s. Around that time, theatrical troupes from Japan began to perform Noh and Kabuki shows overseas in the United States and Europe but modified the content and style to be more appealing to Western audiences. Most people had never experienced theater with fantastical elements or non-colloquial language, but nevertheless, the shows were immensely popular. The modification of Noh and Kabuki shows for Western audiences made them more accessible and entertaining, resulting in increased interest and acceptance of the theater forms. Western playwrights began to apply Japanese theatrical techniques in their own work, and Japanese troupes brought home aspects of Western theater that influenced drama in Japan. Without the modification to overseas Noh and Kabuki shows, such cultural exchange may not have taken place.

**Keywords:** Japan, West, theater, Noh, Kabuki, realism, symbolism

Noh and Kabuki are irreplicable forms of Japanese theater steeped in history, culture, and otherworldly essence. Both types of theater combine music, singing, dancing, and spoken lines to create a unique rhythmic and highly stylized drama. Researchers have attempted to understand and share this extraordinary theater with the world, explore how Noh and Kabuki have shaped drama in the West, and investigate how Western theater sparked new styles of drama in Japan. Theater critic Earle Ernst and author Toshio Kawatake have both analyzed how overseas Noh and Kabuki troupes altered their shows to suit Western audiences—changes that were encouraged by some and condemned by others. Additionally, Earle notes how Western playwrights have taken inspiration from Noh and Kabuki and that many in Japan have learned from Western theater as well. Adaptations made by overseas troupes were a result of cultural barriers as well as differing theatrical styles, which Noh performer and scholar Noboru Yasuda asserts was Western-style realism versus Japanese-style symbolism.

Modifications of Noh and Kabuki performances by overseas troupes were necessary in order to appeal to Western audiences and,

in turn, inspire new genres of theater in Japan and the West. Critics of the non-traditional shows believed that Japan was being misrepresented on the world stage. However, modifications helped Westerners understand the basics of Japanese theater as well as popularize its symbolic style, which was refreshing in a time where realism was stifling the advancement of Western productions.

The beginning of this essay contains background information about Noh and Kabuki theater and compares the naturalistic theatrical style in the West to the symbolic style of Noh and Kabuki. Following that comparison, I will analyze the introduction of Noh and Kabuki to the West, including the first troupes and the intent behind the alterations they made to suit Western perspectives. Part of my main argument is that these adaptations, though they were inaccurate, were essential in order to share Japanese theater with non-Japanese people. Hence, the third section will expand on the impact of the altered shows by exploring Western reactions to Noh and Kabuki (specifically highlighting reactions from French critics) and several Western playwrights who took inspiration from Japanese performances.





Hideta Kitazawa's masks on exhibition.

**Image Credit:** Sohta Kitazawa

Furthermore, I will examine the Japanese perspective about the adaptations made in Noh and Kabuki shows, and analyze how Japan was impacted by Western theater (with an emphasis on French theater), focusing on the Shimpa theater movement in Japan. Finally, I will illustrate how Japan and the West drew from each other's styles to create new forms of theater, and prove that the adaptations made by Japanese theatrical troupes might have been necessary for this cultural exchange to take place.

### **Basic History and Differing Theatrical Style**

In Noh and Kabuki theater, there is power in silence, meaning in subtle allusions, and whispers of indescribable emotions in Noh masks. Noh has been performed in Japan for roughly 650 years, enduring periods of radical change and yet remaining an immutable aspect of the theatrical culture—so deeply rooted that when translating ancient Noh works into modern Japanese vernacular, allusions and details may become lost. Noh is performed by all male actors and originally for a small, elite audience who would be able to understand certain historical and cultural references. One trademark of Noh are special masks worn by actors that allow them to portray mortals, gods, or other creatures, and to help make feminine roles more realistic. Noh masks also provide a different kind of expression than an uncovered face can, due to their anatomically incorrect features. Rounding out what can be a serious or intense theatrical experience, between acts in

a Noh show, short, comedic pieces called *Kyōgen* are performed by a few actors. In his book, *Noh as Living Art*, Yasuda mentions the great Meiji author, Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), who describes the heart of Noh as not derived from “any skill at presenting the raw human feelings of the everyday world but from the clothing feeling ‘as it is’ in layer upon layer of art, and in a kind of slow serenity of deportment not to be found in the real world.” Sōseki eloquently describes Noh's unique ability to transport its audience to new realms through fantastical scenes and emotions. Contrary to Noh, Kabuki is catered toward the general population and uses intricate makeup to enhance actors' faces as opposed to masks. Going to a Kabuki show may be a daylong endeavor, including multiple shows and breaks for meals. Overall, this style concentrates more on dance and music, rather than the spirituality and slow movement in Noh.

As Yasuda has explored, a key difference between Western and Japanese theater is their differing degrees of realism. In Japanese theater, plays are not bounded by time and space. Without needing to create scenes and dialogue that correspond to reality, Japanese theater can skip around in time, create scenes with no resemblance to the world we live in, and immerse the audience in a truly magical experience. Due to the design of the main stage in Noh, which juts out into the crowd, actors are more a part of the audience than they are a separate group. The rhythmic, unnatural movements of the actors are another deviation from the real-world

norm, and their perfect intonation and expressions complete this unnatural style. The concept of manipulating reality was essentially nonexistent in Western theater in the early 1900s, where instead plays mirrored the real world. Perhaps this was so audience members could relate to characters and fully understand certain scenarios, allowing them to slip into someone else's life during a few hours of entertainment. Although, efforts to be realistic stunted the extent to which Western theater could expand in style. In the early 1900s, several Japanese people recognized the market for Noh and Kabuki shows in the West, as there was nothing similar being performed at the time, but knew they would need to make changes to serve Western perspectives and norms. Troupes adjusted the amount of realism in their performances, and along with a few other alterations, the resulting Westernized shows carried changed messages, traditions, structure, and more.

#### **First Troupes & Noh and Kabuki Adaptations**

Kawakami Otojiro (1864-1911) became an important Japanese actor in the West along with his wife Sada Yakko, who was compared to some of the greatest actresses of the time. The pair took a troupe to the United States in 1899 to observe Western techniques of theater, and ended up performing in several plays. They went on to do a second tour eight years later where they performed more adapted Kabuki shows in the U.S. and around Europe, and were met with high appraisals. One of their changes included casting females for the feminine roles—rare for traditional Kabuki shows—and it upset critics such as Gordon Craig, who argued that these choices were misrepresenting Japanese theater. And he was correct, to some extent. Craig felt that these changes distorted the art of the East, but they were the reason that Western audiences had a generally positive reaction, since the changes reduced the foreignness of Kabuki. Had these troupes performed as they did in Japan, it is likely that their reception in the West would have been one of confusion and dislike. But there is a fine line between appearing too modern or too traditional. In 1930, a new troupe made their debut in America, but faced unfor-

tunate timing when their shows were compared to a Chinese opera star who was touring at the time. Tsutsui Tokujirō, the leader of the troupe, and the director, Ito Michio, received criticism from Brooks Atkinson, who wrote: “Unlike Mei Lang-fang’s Chinese troupe, the Japanese actors from Kyoto are not steeped in ceremony, which makes them at once more modern and less interesting.” Performers continued to seek a balance between tradition and modernity in order to attract and maintain Western interest.

In order to do this, troupes studied theatrical trends in the West. Interestingly, even after the alterations, the spirit of Noh and Kabuki remained the opposite of stereotypical Western style, but they were able to fascinate Western audiences nonetheless. Ernst argues that “The Noh has attracted the West because it is an exquisitely precise theatre based on the artistic principle of reduction to essential forms, the Kabuki because it expands into and explores a variety of styles. But both seem the antithesis of Western theatre generally.” Audiences became intrigued because the shows were “exotic,” but had some familiar, grounding elements that made interacting with something foreign feel more comfortable. Based on his research and experience, Toshio believes that drama is another important factor that Western audiences can relate to. More specifically, this is a melodramatic style, wherein characters go through exaggerated emotions and conflicts centered on family or relationships, and the play concludes when this drama is resolved. Toshio describes his experience at a Kabuki show in the U.S., called *Chūshingura*, where directors were concerned about a scene involving *seppuku*. The directors went ahead with the scene anyway, and the show was met with high acclaim for its incredible intensity and deep emotion. Toshio asserts, “It is my firm belief that precisely because the dramatic development here is on the same wavelength as Western drama, the next scene, ‘Hagan’s *Seppuku*,’ and the one that follows, ‘The Forfeit of the Castle,’ were able to surmount all cultural barriers and elicit such an intense theatrical response from Western audiences.” Similar to how troupes incorporated realism, mimicking Western style drama is



another adaptation that made Japanese theater, especially Kabuki, more inviting for Westerners.

### **Western Reactions to Japanese Theater**

If troupes were able to strike a balance between modernity and tradition, and utilize aspects of Western melodrama, audiences in Europe and the U.S. were usually enthralled. Other times, plays fell flat because they lacked familiar character development or clear storylines. After observing a Kabuki performance, Toshio realized that the upbringing of a person affects their reaction to certain scenes. He witnessed Japanese people raised in a Western style and Westerners share a similar reaction to a Kabuki show, different to his own as a Japanese person raised traditionally. This small interaction supports the idea that the way someone is brought up influences how they may interpret Kabuki theater and it solidifies the theory that alterations were necessary to appeal to Western audiences, because cultures and norms around the world vary.

Noh and Kabuki's expansive style made a refreshing and somewhat jarring impact in the West as playwrights began to incorporate more symbolism and similar theatrical techniques in their work. One of these playwrights was Paul Claudel, a French poet, who was greatly impacted by Noh. Inspired by Noh's combination of structure, rhythmic movement, singing, dancing, and dialogue, Claudel attempted to create Noh works of his own, writing a play called *Jeanne d'Arc*. This endeavor is everything that Ernst argued against, maintaining that "The Western theatre will gain nothing by imitating them [Noh and Kabuki]; it will gain a great deal by studying the technique by which this fusion is accomplished." Granted, an imitation of Noh may not be as wonderful as an original show, but there is still value in that imitation because it spreads Noh's influence as an ancient art form. It is natural for art to branch out and morph from its roots in order to stay alive and flourish in an ever-changing world.

Also influenced by Noh was William Butler Yeats, who wrote a Noh-inspired play, *At the Hawk's Well*, in 1917. Several French critics were disapproving of Yeats' plays, stemming from their adherence to realism. They "repeatedly

pointed out, and objected to, the ritualistic style of the actors, their unnatural and monotonous voices, their moving about as though they were hypnotized." Arguably, these aspects are what makes Noh unique, but these French critics may have had an internalized distaste for anything other than realism. As Noh productions progressed, this initial dislike, whether from French critics or otherwise, lessened. In fact, "As knowledge of Japan became increasingly popular in the West, the aesthetics of Noh that were initially ridiculed began stimulating the interest of theatre practitioners who found in Noh a way to salvage their own drama from the decadence of bourgeois culture." Once Noh became more accessible, it stimulated the interest of many in the West, and was ultimately viewed as an asset to refresh melodrama that had long grown stale.

### **Japanese Perspectives on Modified Noh**

A Japan emerged from seclusion in the mid 1800s, there were efforts to establish Japan as a powerful and culturally important country, and to do this, Japan looked to the West. As part of an initiative by the government, diplomat Iwakura Tomomi led an almost two-year journey to study the ins and outs of Western countries. While in Paris, the group went to an opera house, which was considered "the official entertainment offered to foreign guests in Europe," and this experience made Iwakura believe Japan should have something similar. There was a strong sense that whatever was chosen to represent Japan had to be thoroughly and traditionally Japanese. Iwakura's secretary Kume Kunio expressed that "If we were to make a wrong decision, from the perspective of national entertainment, Japan would suffer an extreme calamity. This was how we came to realize the artistic value of *nō* theatre." Noh was the obvious choice to represent Japan to the world, as it is entrenched in centuries of Japanese tradition. Hence, as the country went through the Meiji Restoration and modernization efforts, Noh became viewed as an anchor of Japanese culture during an influx of Western influence. It appears that modified Noh shows, especially those performed in Japan, were likely crafted to present a positive depiction of

the country in order to advertise and establish Japan as a significant and worldly power.

### **Western Theater's Impact in Japan**

During the introduction of Noh and Kabuki to the West, Japanese people were studying art and entertainment overseas, either firsthand or from afar, and these observations culminated in the Shimpa ("new school") theater movement in Japan. The theater movement infused parts of Western theatrical techniques into a new school of theater that contained "Contemporary life, using colloquial language and eschewing the dance and music of Kabuki in the interests of 'realism.'" Ernst makes it clear that this was not realism in a Western sense, but rather, in a Japanese one—meaning it would appear as hardly realistic from a Western point of view. The new plays, made mostly by amateurs, depicted "crimes of passion" in "gruesome detail" and it was targeted toward the "lower and uneducated classes." Other changes included casting women for some roles and creating storylines around current events. The Shimpa theater movement happened strictly between 1888 and 1905, and thereafter morphed into a type of theater called Shingeki, which was essentially another form of combined Western and Japanese theater.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of modifications to Noh and Kabuki performances, Westerners engaged with and enjoyed Japanese theater, something that would have been less probable without alterations. Using techniques like realism and melodrama, shows like Chūshingura captivated audiences and inspired Western playwrights to use aspects of Noh and Kabuki in their own work. Japanese also studied Western theater and created a new fusion of style in the Shimpa theater movement which broke down long-standing traditions as Japan was swept toward modernization.

One cultural exchange that took place around this time involved Sada Yakko, who wanted to bring Parisian-style opera to Japan. Once again, Gordon Craig had something to say about Sada: "She is doing both the country and its theatre a grievous wrong." Craig held a firm belief that art was best when created traditionally and in

its original environment. Sometimes that may be true, but it is improbable to think—especially in an increasingly globalized world—that cultures should not influence each other. When foreign traditions inspire others, beautiful progress can be made; like how Sada helped advance Japanese theater by mixing up what had always been done, and how modifications of Noh and Kabuki inspired new creations in the West

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Image Credit: Alden Timm '25



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# Peeling Back the Layers: A Cultural Analysis of Greek Life on Campus

by SOPHIA SULKIN

This research paper conducts a cultural analysis of sororities and fraternities (S/Fs) using Schein's Onion Model. Sororities and fraternities are institutional structures shrouded in mystery and intrigue that over many years have managed to play a significant role in the social and professional lives of thousands of college students. Greek life strives to instill academic excellence and produce model students through its emphasis on philanthropic events, wholesome values, and overall exposure to the past and present network of successful, usually upper-class members, also known as social capital. This paper uses Schein's Onion Model, a cultural approach that compares what an organization says about itself versus what an organization actually does, finding discrepancies between the two, that can cause conflict and complications for the organization and its members. When applied to S/Fs, Schein's Onion Model reveals that the perception of Greek life by society significantly deviates from the reality of Greek life, showing that S/Fs are complex cultural systems with multiple layers of values, norms, and assumptions that shape their identity and influence the behavior of their members.

**Keywords:** Greek life, sororities, fraternities, cultural approach, Schein's Onion Model, artifacts, cultural markers, values, assumptions

Sororities/Fraternities (S/Fs) are fascinating institutional structures that millions of people have taken part in during their time at college. The rich, enticing traditions, history, and people of Greek life has made them a pillar of social and professional existence for young men and women during college and long after they have graduated. So, what is it about these S/Fs that makes them so impactful on the social scene and the "essential step" for most young people to take when they enter college? I believe it is the allure of Greek life's many values along with the secrets and mystery that surrounds these values. Many people perceive S/Fs to encourage societal norms or values on their members such as binge drinking, social cliques, lack of diversity, and sexual misconduct between young people. On the other hand, Greek life has other values that may be overshadowed by their negative counterparts that are the very reason S/Fs were created in the first place. Greek life strives to instill academic excellence and produce model human beings/students through their emphasis on philanthropic events, wholesome values, and overall exposure to the past and present

network of successful, usually upper-class members also known as social capital (Kappa Kappa Gamma). I think it would be incredibly interesting to analyze S/Fs from the cultural approach of Schein's Onion Model; what an organization says about itself versus what an organization actually does. The values/social norms I highlighted above are all a part of S/Fs, but some of the norms/values are what Greek life is portrayed to the outside world as having, while others such as harsh gossip, and social cliques stray far away from Greek life's "perfect" image and Schein's Onion Model could be a great way to show that.

## Schein's Onion Model

Schein's Onion Model is a metaphor derived from the organizational communications model of cultural approach. Cultural Approach looks at what makes an organization an organization, not by just looking at the literal aspects of an institution like its systems of organization, but by analyzing the artifacts, rituals, values, and traditions that create the glue or "webs of significance" that hold an organization together, making up its recog-



nizable, unique characteristics (Miller, 2015). Examples of these cultural factors are an organization's norms; inexplicit ways of behaving, its established ceremonies or group activities, and even an organization's mission statement can pave the way for its specific culture. In the 7th edition of *Organizational Communications*, chapter four states that Schein's Onion Model uses all these different aspects of an organization's culture to compare what an organization says about itself with what an organization does (Miller, 2015). The Onion Model has three different layers; the outermost layer being Artifacts/Cultural Markers, made up of very tangible, material representations of an organization's culture such as norms, rituals, and stories. The middle layer is comprised of Values which are the invisible key principles or attitudes organizational members hold that heavily influence their behaviors and decisions. The last and innermost layer is Assumptions which are also invisible and are so engrained or obvious to the organizational members that they don't need to be openly discussed, everyone just knows them and accepts them as the way things are (Miller, 2015). The outermost layer (Artifacts/Cultural Markers) is what an organization promotes to the world, it's how people that aren't in the organization would describe it. The other two layers represent what is below the surface, what actually goes on within the organization. The interesting part of this model is that what goes on below the surface usually doesn't match what is shown on the surface, causing conflict, unrest, and complications for an organization and its members. Greek life is a great example of how Schein's Onion Model can be applied with the attractive outer layer of S/Fs, promoting leadership skills, finding friends for life, and academic achievement. While the lower layers promote gossip and social cliques, values that don't seem to line up with the shiny outer layer.

### **Greek Life**

Different values and traditions of Greek life both implicit and explicit represent different layers within Schein's Onion Model.

Conflicts and issues arise when the outer layer values don't match up with the inner layer values and S/Fs are great examples of the sometimes flawed values within many organizations. One of the widely accepted and established outer layer norms of Greek life that fits into the Artifacts/Cultural Markers part of Schein's Onion Model is the social capital gained through S/Fs. According to a literature review from the *Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, "the most important positive effect of fraternity/sorority membership [is] social capital" (Perkins, 2011, p. 66). This means that one of the main selling points and appealing factors of joining a sorority during a student's time at college is the networking/connections of national or local alumni. This aligns with the outer layer of Schein's Onion model, Artifacts/Cultural Markers, because social capital is in a sense a material representation of Greek life, it's an attractive way of life or culture that people want and think they will gain by joining Greek life. S/Fs are sold as a way to be a part of high society, a way to open doors for young students that want to surround themselves with high achieving and typically wealthy individuals. Elliot Georgiadis, the author of "Organizational Culture Theory and Fraternal Organizations" said that "half of the top ten of Fortune 500 CEOs...and 44% of American Presidents... have been Greek" (2019, p. 15). This just goes to show that joining Greek life is widely seen as a way to be successful socially and academically both during and after college.

While the social capital aspect of Greek life is very attractive and can hold true for many members, just how Schein's Onion Model tends to predict, the innermost layers of Greek life don't perfectly match up with the shiny outer layer. The inner layers of Schein's Model, Values and Assumptions, represent the invisible inner workings of an organization, an organization's true colors. Greek life is seen as a way to be a high achiever, obtain social capital, as mentioned above, but is that truly the case once a student joins the system? Social capital is something that can be gained

through S/Fs, but it isn't necessarily easy to come by or equally available to everyone. A certain stereotype needs to be fulfilled in order to make the most of S/F opportunities. Typically, upper middle class/wealthy, outgoing, and conventionally pretty or handsome boys/girls gain that social capital. It isn't enough to just join a S/F, a student has to fit into the invisible values and assumptions of the organization. This can result in the creation of social cliques within the S/F, causing all the students that fit the organization's invisible value/assumptions to group together and typically be the face of the S/F, living up to that outermost layer of Schein's Onion Model. But what the inner layers reveal is those outside the stereotypes experience social segregation, drama, and gossip that tends to create a gap in those who gain the S/F benefits of social capital and those who don't (Georgiadis, 2019, p. 44). The journal article "Organizational Culture Theory and Fraternal Organizations" builds on this issue by highlighting that fact that "though sisterhood and the development of close, social relationships was seen by many as a positive it became clear that negative outcomes could result from these social interactions" (Georgiadis, 2019, p. 44). Not everyone can have the same "perfect" S/F experience, students think they will succeed in this social context just based upon what they see as Greek life's attractive outer layer, but in reality, the inner layers are a more accurate representation of the trials and tribulations that come with Greek life.

### **Conclusions**

The organizational communications method of Cultural Approach using Schein's Onion Model is great way to analyze the many aspects of Greek life. Schein's Onion Model splits an organization into three distinct layers that represent different cultural aspects, with the outer most layer not always matching up with the inner layer. This is where many conflicts can occur within an organization such as Greek life. The outer layer of S/F's promotes an amazing social experience that is available to all and will garner one great so-

cial capital in life. In reality, the inner layers of S/Fs reveal that there are cliques, gossip, and specific stereotypes that if not fulfilled will isolate students within the organization preventing them from gaining things such as the promised social capital. Schein's Onion Model proves that the "perfect" image of Greek life on college campuses doesn't always match up with what goes on under the surface.

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# Landscape of the Apocalypse: Human Nature in Lars von Trier's Melancholia

by SAM VOTER

This article looks to understand the relationship between landscape and character development in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*. It explains how von Trier manipulates the landscape to create specific psychological and emotional effects through different film making techniques and argues that this use of landscape develops the film's two central characters, Justine and Claire, in the backdrop of an impending apocalypse. This article contends that, through her relationship to landscape, Justine is established as a fatalist who holds no connection to the material world and rather seeks nature as a spiritual outlet. It continues in arguing that Claire's relationship to landscape establishes her attachment to the material world and value system orientated around societal constructs. It points out that by establishing these two characters as opposing sides of human nature, von Trier generates discourse through an accessible medium that promotes self-reflection and allows for the critical examination of one's values.

**Keywords:** Lars von Trier, *Melancholia*, landscape, human nature, materialism, apocalypse

The impressive landscape that dominates Lars von Trier's 2011 film, *Melancholia*, is both mesmerizing and terrifying. This film is broken into two parts: part one follows the story of a woman, Justine, during her wedding ceremony which she eventually abandons given her declining mental health, while part two focuses on Justine's affluent sister, Claire, in the days before *Melancholia*, a rogue planet hurling itself towards Earth, destroys life as we know it. The cosmic scale of this film is daunting, as if some untamable force with the power to wipe out humanity at any moment hangs over our heads. In this sense, *Melancholia* does what our imaginations dare not to in playing out the total annihilation of human life. While it forces us to reckon with the terrifying idea of "the end," the cosmic scale of von Trier's apocalypse also welcomes a cleansing of humanity and the transcendence of life, gripped by the beauty of destruction. Von Trier plays with both thoughts in order to present an apocalyptic scenario that is familiar and foreign to us, but also to examine the fundamental values of human nature and societal constructs.

Justine and Claire epitomize these thoughts towards the apocalypse and the value systems that are established. Lars von Trier draws a distinction between Justine and Claire (in terms of values and philosophies) through his manipulation of landscape. Given its intimate connection to the characters and the plot, space and the cosmos will be considered a part of the film's landscape. How the two central characters in *Melancholia* interact with the film's landscape reflect

their value systems, establishing Justine as a fatalist who embraces the cleansing of the apocalypse and values spiritual connections with nature that transcends death, rather than adhering to the material, human constructs of society which Claire finds more comfort.

Scholars have written extensively on *Melancholia* since its release, touching on a wide number of subjects. Christopher Peterson in his article: "The Magic Cave of Allegory: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*" discusses the prominent allegorical nature of the film as representative of the "incapacitating effects of psychological depression" through a psychoanalytic lens.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, David Lakin looks to examine in his paper "Indulging in Romance with Wagner: Tristan in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011)" how music is used to establish a romantic setting in an apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> Though a justifiable interpretation, this paper will instead focus on how von Trier manipulates landscape throughout the film. I recognize that he does so by using other elements of cinema in tandem, so these other elements will be mentioned and explained, if need be, however my primary focus will be on landscape.

## Societal Constructs and Soundtrack

The film almost immediately establishes Claire and Justine as different regarding their philosophical values. In an early scene, Justine and her fiancé, Michael, arrive two hours late to their lavish wedding at Claire's estate. Getting out of their limousine they are immediately greeted by Claire and her husband, John, who

are upset over the two being so late. Claire confronts Justine about the consequences of her late arrival on the wedding's itinerary, while Justine responds with an uninterested gaze (12:16-12:38). This gaze is in stark contrast to Claire's stern demeanor, indicating that Justine cares little about the consequences of her actions and thus the wedding. Claire's concern indicates the opposite, and the landscape of the scene reflects this. Later in this scene, Claire has to tug the arm of Justine to get her to walk inside and join the ceremony. As Justine is walking, she stops, turns back, and stares at the evening stars above her. Everyone else stops with her for a moment, but Claire must once again pull her attention away and towards the wedding (12:38-13:10).

Justine clearly favors the landscape outdoors and in the sky; she essentially must be dragged from the stars and into mansion. She sees no purpose for societal constructs such as rituals and finds no comfort in them. Claire, however, cares deeply about this ceremony and that it unfolds smoothly. She finds no comfort under the stars as she hastily tries to get Justine inside. Justine's lack of concern establishes the foundation of how her character will develop throughout the film as she finds comfort in nature, away from fabricated human concepts like ceremony and tradition. Claire's fixation on the wedding establishes the basis of just the opposite, that she values a material life and the human constructs that Justine rejects. The shaky handheld camera used throughout the film adds to the confusion of these clashing value systems, further differentiating the two.

Justine looks to establish a spiritual connection with nature that gives her relief from the human world. While eating dinner later in the wedding, Justine is given a promotion to become art director of her boss's advertising company, and she is given the task of coming up with a tagline for their next project. Later into the dinner, Justine's mother gives an impassioned speech on how she disapproves of marriage. As a result, Claire sees Justine becoming increasingly upset and pulls her to another room where she is scolded for making a scene. Upon returning, Justine is visually uncomfortable having all the attention on her and decides to get up and exit the mansion through the front doors where she enters a golf cart and rides to the golf course. She passes a telescope pointed towards the sky and then arrives at a putting green where she urinates. While urinating, Justine stares into the cosmos above her as the non-diegetic music begins (17:17-25:10).

In the first half of this scene, Justine is surrounded by human concepts which she finds distressing: the promotion coupled with the pressure to make a tagline

represent the forces of capitalism reigning over her, the wedding as a restricting form of tradition, and the ego of Claire which cannot sympathize with her sister's mental illness. These pressures reach a tipping point for Justine, and she must find relief in nature. Knowing the world will end, she recognizes that human constructs are meaningless and rejects them as a result. Upon reaching the golf course, Justine is surrounded by the landscape of nature and the cosmos. As she gazes into the stars, it is as if a great weight has been lifted from her shoulders, and that weight is societal constructs.

When Justine looks to the sky in this scene, *Melancholia's* beautiful, non-diegetic soundtrack, composed by Mikkel Maltha, floods our ears. Many scholars have touched on von Trier's use of music, and in particular Danielle Kollig argues that, among other things, the soundtrack contributes to a "filmic excess" that is characteristic of *Melancholia*. The grandiose scale of the film's landscape contributes to this excess, and together with the soundtrack creates a "numbing effect on the audience, which in turn is potentially led to perceive the apocalypse as a sublime event that is passively consumed and even enjoyed."<sup>3</sup> I agree with this interpretation, but it can be expanded upon to reflect Justine's attitude towards life. Justine knows that an apocalypse is imminent. The telescope that she passes in the golf cart is used exclusively to observe *Melancholia*, thus we can assume that when she looks towards the sky, she is thinking of the planet and her doom. Therefore, the soundtrack is a subconscious representation of Justine's psyche as she ponders the apocalypse, representative of the same excess that numbs the audience to such. With this numbing effect, Justine enjoys the apocalypse just as the audience does. She recognizes the world is going to end, leading her to detach from material possessions and social constructs in favor of a transcendental connection with nature.

### **Mood and Eroticism Through Landscape**

Perhaps the most telling scene regarding character interaction with the landscape occurs midway through the second part of the film. In this scene, Claire is outside at night watching the planet *Melancholia* when Justine enters the space. The Moon and *Melancholia* are framed together in the sky. Without noticing Claire, Justine walks into the backyard (in the direction of *Melancholia*) and into the surrounding forest. Claire follows, only to discover Justine lying nude next to a stream, basking in the light that radiates from *Melancholia*. A shot of *Melancholia* is then followed by a close-up shot of Justine's face as



she gazes back at the planet. The scene ends with a close-up of Claire's concerned face (1:25:00-1:27:43).

At this point in the film, Claire worries deeply about a collision of Melancholia and Earth, and her fixation is seen while she stares at the planet before Justine arrives. A wide-angle shot of Claire is presented as she stands on the back porch, showing the huge landscape in front of her as well as the Moon to her left and Melancholia to her right. Melancholia being on the right gives it intrinsic weight, therefore we can assume that is where her gaze is going. Following this shot is a close-up side profile of Claire, indicating her closed off demeanor that is not welcoming of the planet as Justine is. This is in direct contrast to later in the scene when we see a close-up, full face shot of Justine staring at Melancholia. Though the film has yet to say, we know that Justine's clairvoyant abilities tell her of the collision. Nude beside a stream, she is exposing herself to the planet and fully embracing the coming apocalypse.

This is the first scene in the film where we see Justine fully embrace the coming planet. She is at peace, staring the end of the world in the face. Rosin O'Kelly writes in her article: "the Eroticism of Landscape in Contemporary Contemplative Cinema" about Justine's erotic connection towards nature and the film's landscape. She argues that "Justine is constantly looking for a bodily and sensory contact with nature." Her erotic connection "isolates her from surrounding people" with whom she has great difficulty connecting and empathizing.<sup>4</sup> I agree that her desire for a bodily connection is apparent throughout the film, and that she does so in order to escape society and connect with nature, however, O'Kelly fails to draw attention to the juxtaposition of Claire entering the space and her relationship to the landscape. The close-up in the final shot draws attention to her concern towards both Justine's actions and the planet looming overhead. This concern arises from her fear of losing the material, human-made world that she prefers. Claire cannot grapple with even the possibility of an apocalypse, and her entering this space reveals how distant she is from Justine and her values. Furthermore, Justine's fatalistic attitude towards life is established as she has accepted and is welcoming the end of life. Her spiritual connection to nature as shown in this scene indicates her detachment from the material world. With her connection to nature, she transcends death, welcoming it with open arms. In her article O'Kelly argues that eroticism and ego are at odds with each other, and that the former will replace the latter. Being a social construct, Justine rejects the ego as she forms her connection

with nature, thus contributing to the fact that her relationship to the landscape reflects her personal values.

As established, Claire has a less welcoming relationship with the film's landscape compared to Justine, and this reflects her different value systems. In part two of the film, Claire has become aware of Melancholia and is gripped by paranoia about the impending apocalypse. Susanne Schmetkamp argues that, in Melancholia, "moods are expressions of such perspectives,"<sup>5</sup> therefore, the mood of Claire's interactions with the environment reflect her values of materialism. As Claire (who we see as a silhouette) looks off into the distance from the upper floor of her mansion, the windowpanes create a grid-like pattern in front of her. Slowly, the distance comes into focus, and a cold, gray-blue, desolate landscape scattered with sharp, rocky islands looks back at Claire. Melancholia is seen lurking in the top right of the frame. The camera cuts to a close-up profile shot of Claire's face as she looks down into the yard to find her husband John and son Leo posing for a picture with the planet. The camera then shows Justine sitting at the end of the lawn looking out into the ocean, cuts back to Claire, and ends with a shot of Melancholia (1:23:29-1:24:12).

This scene establishes a cold, somber mood from the beginning when Claire's silhouette is framed within the grids of the windowpanes. These grids entrap Claire, signifying that her mind is fixated on the uncertain future of life. The color of the landscape that looks back at her is a hostile and provides no warmth or security. Given Schmetkamp's argument on mood and perspective, the depressing mood created by the landscape is an expression of Claire's perspective towards life and her values. With her attention on Melancholia given the framing of the windows and the closing shot of the scene, Claire fears and apocalypse and losing everything she loves.

Justine and Claire's position is juxtaposed in this scene, further differentiating them regarding philosophies and explaining their relationship to the environment. Claire is inside, in an upper level of her mansion, looking down on the landscape and her family. Within the walls of the mansion and elevated far from the ground, she is spatially separated from the environment; She tries to distance herself from the landscape by taking shelter indoors, surrounded by the material world. Claire's closed-off and somber relationship to the environment reflects her desire for the human world and fear of losing it. In contrast, Justine is outside on the lawn experiencing the landscape firsthand. She does not value human constructs and welcomes the inevitable apocalypse. Justine is humbled by the dominating landscape in front to of her, rendering her insignificant and eliminating the ego. In the environment, she continues to find peace in the landscape that detaches her from the society.

### Perspectives on the Final Seconds

No discussion on the philosophical differences between Justine and Claire would be complete without the examining the final scene in the film. Justine, Claire, and Claire's son, Leo, are sitting on the golf course under a recently made wooden stick structure that Justine and Leo refer to as the "magic cave" in the moments before *Melancholia* finally collides with earth. Throughout the scene, the camera cuts between close ups of each character to capture their emotional response to inevitable death. The scene, and film, close with a long shot of *Melancholia* crashing into earth behind the three of them sitting on the golf course. The contents of the film preceding the apocalypse provide valuable information on each character's hypothetical reaction to an apocalypse and what that says about their values, however, the ending solidifies what we have learned about Claire and Justine. The close ups of Claire show her distressed state. Her mental state deteriorates from no emotion, to tears, and to hysteria as *Melancholia* strikes; she is not ready to let go of her world and material possessions. In comparison, Justine remains calm. She does not fight death, but welcomes it peacefully, thus confirming what we have previously learned about her.

In Vesna Dinic's article; "Narrating the Invisible-Affective Spaces of Lars von Trier," she argues that the music in this scene, which continues past the fade-out at the end of the film, creates a "practical manifestation, as the effective memory of space proves to be capable of replacing its physical absence."<sup>6</sup> Dinic writes about this effect on the audience, but I argue it can also apply to Justine and transcendence of life past death. Throughout the film, Justine looks to nature not only for relief, but for a spiritual, erotic connection. The continuation of music at the end of the film not only substitutes physical absence for memory amongst viewers, but it also shows how Justine's connection to nature transcends death, explaining her detachment from the material world that no longer exists. It must be noted that Justine shows sympathy towards Claire before the collision. Despite Justine's detachment from society, she can still understand that Claire, though drastically different from her, holds a set of values that give her life meaning. The final scene of *Melancholia* is crucial in confirming Claire and Justine's different philosophies.

### Conclusion

Lars von Trier ventures into uncharted territory with *Melancholia*. Life as we know it ceases to exist before our eyes, but much good comes out of this representa-

tion. Claire and Justine represent opposite ends of the same spectrum. A caring mother with attachment to the material world, tradition, and other human concepts is juxtaposed to a fatalist sister who values a spiritual connection to nature that has no physical manifestation.

Creating these two characters through their relationship to landscape gives the film meaning and makes that meaning accessible to the audience. Justine is abstract; her philosophies are difficult to comprehend, but she provides us with the ingredients to escape societal constructs and lead a life past death. Claire represents the average human with attachments to human things. This is accessible, showing the audience pieces of themselves that can be critically examined. Highlighting characteristic of general human thought towards life create a path for critical examination of oneself, and Justine provides the raw material for change after such reexamination. On the surface, *Melancholia* is an eerie sci-fi movie about the end of life, but beyond that it is a critical examination of human nature that paves a path for self-reflection.

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**Image Credit:** Alden Timm '25



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# Decolonizing the MCU?

## Representation of Indigeneity in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*

by JULIET TAVERNIER

This paper aims to analyze the portrayal of Indigenous People in the Marvel film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Analysis of films in popular media is crucial in determining whether these movies benefit Indigenous People or further exacerbate misconceptions of their identity. Techniques of decolonization are discussed including use of indigenous names over those created by colonizers to give power to those who have been oppressed. The film also includes alternative portrayals which challenge well-established stereotypes about the motivation of Indigenous Groups and the roles played by people within the Indigenous Community. Additionally, the harmful effects of colonialism and capitalism are explored as they have eliminated the power of Indigenous People in the past and continue to do so in the present. The portrayal of Indigenous People in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* does not completely summarize or speak to the issues faced by Indigenous Communities but encourages viewers to challenge and explore the ideas they hold around Indigenous Identity and Indigenous peoples.

**Keywords:** Black Panther, Wakanda Forever, indigenous peoples, capitalocene, colonialism, conservation, indigenous stereotypes

The indigenous population worldwide is estimated to be over 426 million (United Nations). Given the number of Indigenous People, it is essential to consider their representation in popular media which is consumed by many people internationally. The film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, which debuted in 2022, has garnered over 859.1 million dollars from the box office (D'Alessandro "Most Valuable Blockbuster") and was the most watched Marvel global premiere on Disney Plus with an estimated 2.1 million U.S. households who tuned in during the first five days of its release (D'Alessandro "Most Watched Marvel Global Premiere"). With so many viewers of this media, harmful stereotypes can be perpetuated, casting indigenous as simple, which takes away their agency to represent themselves. Western outlets need to give voice to the indigenous and present the opportunity for them to decolonize on the global stage. It is crucial to analyze the portrayal of Indigenous People from Latin America in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* because of the worldwide audience it reaches and to see if the depiction is accurate. Within the film, themes emerge

around the importance of agency in names, preserving land and culture, and refuting colonialism and its harmful stereotypes.

### Colonization and Naming as a Tactic of Decolonization

Since the 1500s in Central and South America, there has been a long history of colonization. Spain and other nations have sought to make the indigenous their subjects while acculturating and converting them to Catholicism (Ginzberg 3). There were attacks on the people in all facets of life, from economically to spiritually, and many were enslaved literally or forced to rely on the conquistadors (Ginzberg 133). Burman states that colonialism is a process that affects individuals in the social, political, and economic aspects but also in mind, body, and spirit (73). The process of colonization can be anything from eliminating a native language in favor of a colonizing one or religious conversion.

There are also two distinct types of colonialism, one of which is extractive colonialism, where the members of a region are forced into work so that a nation can benefit from



harvesting resources from afar. In contrast, there is settler colonialism, where colonizers moved to an area and set out to eliminate the presence of the indigenous through acculturation or displacement. Both types are present in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* as the indigenous leader K'uk'ulkan tells Shuri about how his people ended up in the water following centuries of conquest and enslavement by surface nations because of their resources (1:18:45-1:18:55). This type of settler colonialism is what led to the development of Talokan and now they are dealing with extractive colonialism as countries like France and the United States seek to encroach on Wakanda and Talokan for the attainment of vibranium.

Due to colonial influence that continues to this day Indigenous Peoples and other groups that have been colonized must have the opportunity to assert their agency in the international sector. One way this agency can be reinforced is by using names created for and used by the Indigenous Groups. This idea occurs at two different points during the film and is essential in asserting Indigenous Groups' identity and cultural preservation. When we are first introduced to K'uk'ulkan, he says that Namor is the name he is called by his enemies (*Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* 27:43-27:55). Later, we discover that this was given to him by a Spanish priest who called him the son of Satan and called him the child without love (*Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* 1:09:44-1:10:09). K'uk'ulkan keeps this colonizing name as a reminder of his hate for the surface world, but his people use his original name. These two names cast K'uk'ulkan as two different people, with the real him somewhere in between. On the one hand, he is Namor, unafraid to wage war on nations that threaten him and his people. Conversely, K'uk'ulkan seeks to protect himself and his people, wanting to maintain their traditions and power while remaining in the home they have made. Those who do not know K'uk'ulkan and neglect the history of colonization paint him as a villain without love when he holds the greatest love for his nation.

The significance of names has given Indigenous People the agency to represent themselves

as they wish. Emil Keme introduces a new term for Latin America. Abiyala, derived from an Indigenous Group, refers to the diverse Indigenous Groups subjected to colonization (Keme 43). This name was created and advocated for by Indigenous People. Abiyala is an important term as it recognizes the different cultural and linguistic groups in South America but also unites them in their history of oppression and the current battle to be recognized legally and socially. These indigenous terms are how these people define their culture and assert autonomy over colonial and neo-colonial influences in their everyday life. The use and understanding of these terms are crucial not just to the indigenous but the global population in giving power and voice to those who have been targeted in the past. Abiyala and K'uk'ulkan recognize the shadowed history of how the Indigenous People came to be in the present and allows them to share their complex and unique identities.

### **Environmentalism, Colonialism, and the Capitalocene**

Previous paragraphs have spoken to the destructivity of Western powers on the culture and identity of Indigenous People due to their thirst for resources and control. However, the need for profit has also harmed the environment and land many Indigenous Groups call home. As Treadwell (54) describes our current age, we are in a time distinctly marked by the harmful activities of humans driven by capitalism; we are in the Capitalocene. Colonialism and capitalism are not the same but have similarities with a power dynamic in which one party seeks to control another politically, economically, or through other means. Both ideas spread the idea that competition is necessary, that one group must dominate over another by any means necessary. In *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, the Indigenous Groups reject both ideas as they work to protect their land and keep it from being overtaken by other powers.

The indigenous can be seen as environmental conservationists, looking to keep their water pristine and prevent destructive activities like drilling and mining. In the present, one Indigenous Group in Peru claims their right

to the land and opposes both mining practices and the national government's establishment of a Regional Conservation Area (Merino 103). The creation of this area negates the ancestral claims of the indigenous to the land, and thus we can see the conservation area as a point of neocolonialism. The indigenous claim that the government had no legitimate power to ban all activities from being conducted in that region and say it casts them as intruders on their territory. Additionally, the indigenous point out that the land's biodiversity exists because they have protected the forest and are the best conservationists of the land (Merino 104). Thus, we see how the right to protect and claim the land is both an issue of capitalism and colonialism; it is an issue of the Capitalocene. Capitalists need to delegate this land as necessary for oil companies to drill and compete in the global market. However, creating a regional conservation area is a neo-colonial issue as it denies the sovereignty of the indigenous and their claims to the land. In both Peru and the film, we see powers outside of the Indigenous Community try to delegitimize the sovereignty of the indigenous by limiting their claims to land with excuses of conservation or economic gain.

Due to the history of these indigenous lands, we can see how the area or region of one's ancestors can shape one's Indigenous Identity. When groups claim rights to their land, they are not only working as environment conservationists but as cultural conservationists as well. These lands are where their ancestral activities occur; this is their culture's birthplace. Being forced from one's home disrupts the identity of individuals. This idea is represented in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* as K'uk'ulkan calls Wakanda a beautiful, protected land where the people had not had to move or change who they are (27:26-27:34). With the history of how Talokan came to be, we see the connection between land and one's identity. Talokan is marked by its development in the water and the flourishing city built after escaping the Spanish conquistadors. In this, too, we see the importance of language as they escaped a hateful language and how their Indigenous Language is not a disad-

vantage but a strength against colonization.

The protection of vibranium is also the protection of their culture. As the plant that sprouted from vibranium gave them the ability to live in the water, this is essential to their identity as the nation of Talokan. Protection of this plant has created an entire city and weapons that make them comparable to any force on land. The attacks against other nations are not about protecting a profitable source but saving Indigenous Knowledge and the history and traditions that come with the plant. Within *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, we can see the connections between capitalism and colonialism as the attempt to subvert the Indigenous People's autonomy and the indigenous efforts to protect their culture and environment, which are closely intertwined with one another.

#### **Analysis of Indigenous Characteristics in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever***

Within the film, the indigenous are portrayed as a complex group of people, challenging the idea that there is only one correct interpretation of the motivation of Indigenous Communities. This representation is essential because many films in the past have created images that are harmful and represent the indigenous in a way that is not accurate or holistic (Pearson and Knabe 3). A typical portrayal of the indigenous is simply as the victims of colonization. Once the Spanish and other powers invaded Abiyala, people were eliminated and defeated, left to bend to the will of their colonizers. However, this does not give power to the Indigenous People and neglects the efforts of the indigenous to defend their homes and culture. Many places across the continent managed to fight off colonization for a long time or altogether.

Conversely, films have cast Indigenous People as violent, using cruel tactics to defeat their enemies and driven by their need for vengeance against the powers that invaded their homes. These narratives are not entirely false, yet they are not entirely true. The history of Indigenous People is much more complex and individual to the group in question.

This analysis will focus on the film's char-



acters and the portrayal of Indigenous Identity. In *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, both Talokan and Wakanda are not shown as nations stuck in the past (Pearson and Knabe 4) only adhering to the customs of their ancestors. Instead, we see Talokan as choosing technology and tradition. We see how the indigenous use technology to benefit them. They are in a new age where they are neither disappearing into the past nor emerging as a group diverging from their indigeneity. This film shows the Indigenous People navigating contemporary issues of neo-colonialism while addressing their past.

We see a fantastical element to K'uk'ulkan and Talokan, which takes a Post-Indian stance. Postindian is an idea introduced by Gerald Vizenor and is a parody of the Indian as it refutes colonial ideology in an innovative manner (Carlson 22). The portrayal of K'uk'ulkan is ironic as we see his supernatural abilities and his dominating power over any colonizer. However, this literary figure sets out to show the perspective of those motivated by their oppression and asserts their sovereignty to control themselves and the way they are portrayed. This challenges the idea of indigenous as victims in a new format and reverses how the audience thinks about the fight between these non-colonial nations and the Western powers seeking to control their resources.

We also see women as leaders and the driving forces of change in the film. Both Queen Ramanda and Shuri are potent women, shown to be capable of saving their people and their home. In discussions over the effect of colonialism on the role of women, there has been debate on whether women are cast under men due to colonial ideology or whether it is the product of the patriarchal aspect of certain Indigenous Cultures (Burman 67). Nonetheless, the presentation of two female leaders of the nation of Wakanda, disputes the idea that Indigenous Women will always play a subordinate role. K'uk'ulkan is defeated by Shuri, which is significant because she stands for a new indigenous stance that promotes technology, tradition, and coexistence. The moment when Shuri shows

mercy to K'uk'ulkan is monumental. The violence Talokan's leader sought to wage makes him no better than the colonial powers, seeking to destroy another nation for his gain. However, in the end, Shuri advocates for decolonizing the struggle and creating a new legacy where the nations can both exist, respect, and recognize their individual cultures.

## Conclusion

With a company as profitable and popular as Marvel, it is important to look at the portrayals they bring to life. In California, the National Hispanic Media Coalition arranged the film showing at a local indigenous school because members had wished for representation as a child. They believed in the benefits of the children seeing someone they can relate to on the screen (Walker). One reviewer, who is of Nawa descent, says the movie is a chance for children to see that they are not ignorant, stupid, or anything else that society places on Indigenous People (Blanck).

The film brings a new dimension to the Indigenous People in Latin America as the struggle for autonomy is depicted in the renewal of indigenous names, the conservation of land and culture, and the recognition of land rights. Moreover, we see the rejection of stereotypes as new ideas around the power and ideology of the indigenous are brought to life on the global stage.

*Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* is not perfect in its portrayal of Indigenous People, but it is a step in the right direction as it creates a different representation that breaks from the past and places agency in the hands of those who have longed to make their voices heard.

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# When Historians Fall Short: The Janissaries and the Ottoman Decline Thesis

by ALEXANDER KETTERSON

This article examines the historiography of the Janissaries, a longstanding Ottoman military organization. It critiques the decline thesis, a narrative about the Ottoman Empire which was dominant for decades. The decline thesis suggests that the Ottoman central state began to weaken after the 16th century. It holds that all aspects of the Ottoman Empire thus atrophied until the state was dissolved in 1923. This article focuses on how the decline thesis led to the simplistic perception of the Janissaries of the late Ottoman Empire as weak and corrupt. Recent research into their economic and social activities has revealed that by the 19th century the Janissaries had transformed and become interwoven with Ottoman society. This renewed research has underscored the detrimental effects of the decline thesis' dominance. Although a new generation of Ottoman historians have rejected the decline thesis, it remains prevalent in lieu of a compelling alternative.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, Janissaries, decline thesis, critical historiography, Middle East, Europe

Present-day Ottoman historians are grappling with the legacy of their predecessors. In the last half-century, they have attempted to dispel longstanding narratives about the late Ottoman Empire. Scholars have discarded the “decline thesis,” which previously dominated the historiography, and begun to search for new ways to conceptualize the end of the empire. These renewed investigations are transforming perceptions of Ottoman organizations such as the Janissaries.

As its name suggests, the decline thesis asserts that the power and ability of the Ottoman state peaked by the 16th century and then waned until its dissolution in 1923. This narrative is compelling and straightforward, and early Ottoman historians used it to place their focused studies of the empire into a broader context of decline. The decline thesis portrays the late Janissaries as a military group that, like the rest of the empire, had lost its luster and become feeble and corrupt. It was not until the late 20th century that Ottoman historians broadly rebuked the idea of decline. For the preceding century, students of the empire had been discouraged from reexamining that which already had a clear place in the story of decline. The decline thesis' historical pedigree made it especially difficult for historians to dispel.

Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, European perspectives dominated political discourse,

causing Ottoman intellectuals to become some of the first progenitors of the decline thesis. Europeans saw the Ottomans as a backward and distinctly un-modern society. The leadership of the late Ottoman Empire internalized this perspective, which juxtaposed every aspect of the empire against European ideals of modernization and progress. These Ottoman intellectuals wrote letters, which were essentially policy memos intended for the Sultan and other high-level bureaucrats, that spoke of the empire as being in decline and suggested courses of action to arrest or reverse the process. These writers called for a losing battle, however. They condemned the Ottomans to compete in a game that Europe had invented and forced them to commit to reshaping the empire in the image of European states.

The decline thesis was compelling and intuitive, and after taking hold its dominance of Ottoman historiography precluded alternative narratives from taking hold for decades. It took until the 1970s for historians to begin to question the narrative's utility. These critical historians found its origins problematic and believed that its influence limited the scholarly debate on the empire. They began to search for alternative ways to conceptualize the end of the empire. This academic pivot spurred renewed investigations of organizations such as the Janissaries, understanding of whom had previously been limited.

### **Declinist Perceptions of the Janissaries**

The decline thesis fostered a perception of the Janissaries as a hopelessly lost institution that embodied deep problems festering within the empire. Historians saw the late Janissaries as an embodiment of the corrupted institutions which had brought the Ottoman Empire to its knees. The heritage of the Janissaries, which can be traced to the early days of the empire, allowed for a clear pre- and post-decline comparison. The decline thesis historiography read selectively from this institutional transformation to paint a deceptive picture of the Janissaries' contribution to the end of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Janissaries of the early empire were hardly comparable to the institution of the same name that existed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Historians knew the early Janissaries as a strictly regimented military group that was successful in battle and fiercely loyal to the Sultan. The Sultan first introduced the organization as his personal bodyguard around the middle of the 14th century. New Janissary recruits were young, male, and Christian: they were initially prisoners taken from the spoils of territorial conquest, but later were taken from Ottoman subjects in Anatolia and the Balkans. These became the property of the Sultan, and were educated and converted to Islam. They could then be assigned various positions in his service, one of which was as a Janissary: the elite standing infantry corps in the empire. Bound to a common owner, forced to live and work together, and paid a good wage, the early Janissaries were "outstandingly good fighters." As slaves of the Sultan, they were not allowed to marry, have children, or pass their titles on to any heirs. These rules ensured their dependence on the patronage of the Sultan and prevented their interests from diverging from his. In this clearly defined capacity during the early empire, the Janissaries became known for their discipline as bodyguards and success in battle.

The early Janissaries cultivated an image among Westerners as fearsome and disciplined, striking an imposing figure as the Sultan's bodyguards in meetings with visiting Europeans. Europeans accepted the idiosyncrasies of the Janissary organization because of their skill and professional appearance. Through a Eurocentric lens of decline, this early permutation of the Janissaries, only a few thousand strong, is viewed as "pure." The decline thesis uses this reference point of

"purity" to demonstrate their precipitous decline.

Under the decline thesis, it wasn't until the late 16th century that the Janissaries became impure. The changing needs of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries led to changes to the organization intended to allow them to keep pace with developments in warfare. The Janissaries' expanding duties sent them to towns and outposts far from Istanbul, where they served as lookouts and guards at the empire's borders. The number of Janissaries skyrocketed from a few thousand to as many as 400,000 by the 18th century. With each Janissary drawing a salary from the empire's treasury, they became an intolerable financial burden. To resolve the problem of high wage bills, the Sultan did away with prohibitions on moneymaking activities in a Janissary's free time, allowing them to supplement their income.

Decline thesis historians viewed the Sultan's decision to allow the Janissaries more autonomy as a sign of weakness and attributed it to the empire's broader descent from power. They frequently referenced this reform as a key moment in the decline of the Janissaries; it was the moment that the Sultan's inability to control the burgeoning ranks of his personal army forced him to release them from his short leash. Historians saw additional reforms, such as the Sultan allowing Janissaries to marry and pass their titles on to children, as further markers of decline. These alterations, which allowed Janissaries to take on roles in local economies as merchants, artisans, and traders, were believed to be broadly detrimental to the organization and, consequently, the empire. However, these moments may not have been as pivotal as historians have previously thought.

### **The Critical Historiography**

Renewed research into the Janissaries has called into question the 'purity' ascribed to the early Janissaries. This criticism was spurred by historians who chose to revisit areas of study previously considered settled under the decline thesis. Historians such as Cemal Kafadar have suggested that Janissaries may have been involved in business ventures as early as the mid-15th century. This revision contradicts the notion that the Janissaries were permitted to slip into corruption because the central state which had long kept them in line became too weak to do so. This declinist focus on the central state draws attention to the power which



semi-autonomous groups such as the Janissaries jealously guarded against the Sultan's desire for authority.

The decline thesis historiography portrays the late Ottoman Janissaries as a cancerous growth that the weakening state could no longer contain. As the corps grew less rigidly organized, the Janissaries became resistant to doing their official jobs as soldiers, making them a strategic liability for the Sultan. The units would frequently desert when the army tried to march, and their poor discipline and training resulted in embarrassing failures against the Russian Empire and the loss of vast amounts of land. During this time, the Janissaries remained close by the Sultan's side, serving as his bodyguards and as a large standing force in Istanbul. This position gave them considerable leverage over the Sultan and, as Ottoman historian Colin Imber has identified, allowed them "the tempting role as kingmakers, with a ready ability to make and unmake rulers." What motivated them to take advantage of this role has been the subject of revision by recent critical historiography.

By virtue of their proximity to him, the Janissaries had always been able to influence the Sultan. However, this power meant little when they were subservient and disciplined. As the organization became economically independent, they showed a willingness to speak up for their newfound interests. Decline thesis historians such as Stanford Shaw thought that this independence turned the Janissaries into a counterproductive and volatile force that constrained the Sultan's ability to act in the empire's best interest. Shaw's writings, which were dominant among students of the empire, made the Janissaries infamous.

For many years, the Janissaries were undoubtedly most well-known for resisting the modernizing reforms of the late Ottoman Empire. The decline thesis frames reformer Sultans and their modernizing policies, such as the Tanzimat, as protagonists. These protagonists tried to bring the empire into the European fold by assimilating European culture, regardless of whether it could fit with existing Ottoman society. The Janissaries' role in derailing these reforms cemented their legacy in the decline historiography as traitors who were willing to go to great lengths to preserve the status quo that had brought them to power. Historians like Bernard Lewis have castigated the Janissaries for what he saw as nearsighted selfishness that cost the empire dearly. The decline

thesis cast the sudden and unwelcome involvement of the Janissaries in the highest levels of palace politics as evidence of how far they had fallen from their earlier, more disciplined selves.

### **The Janissaries of the Second Empire**

Early historians' portrayal of the Janissaries as a monolithic bloc was one factor that constrained their studies into the organization. In the latter days of their existence, the number of Janissaries topped 400,000, a quantity of individuals which defies homogenization. However, decline thesis historians typically singled out only the agha, the leader of all the Janissaries. Historian Ali Yaycioglu explains that there are drawbacks to condensing the motives of the Janissaries in this manner. While this simplification may have sufficed when the Janissaries numbered just a few thousand, it was wholly insufficient to explain the actions of the transformed Janissaries of the later empire.

A limited conception of the Janissaries' function within the empire was another symptom of the decline thesis. Like many Ottoman institutions, the late Janissaries fared unfavorably in this regard because they have no close European counterparts but are nonetheless compared to European expectations. Historian Gülay Diko outlines a Janissary institution that had transformed so drastically by the end of the 19th century that it defied productive comparisons to European analogs, because there were none. The decline thesis neglects that the Janissaries were not performing the same duties they had centuries prior. In fact, in intertwining themselves with local economies, the Janissaries took on new duties of protection to an assortment of interests.

The fall of the decline thesis has caused the economic and social activities of the Janissaries to receive closer scrutiny by historians. These reinvigorated studies have examined the Janissaries' connections to entities other than the Sultan. If the Janissaries became less faithful to the Sultan in their later years, these historians ask, to whom did their loyalties shift? Historians still see the Janissaries as acting in 'selfish,' i.e., rational and self-interested ways, but they are now more closely examining the interests underlying these actions. Historians Virginia Aksan and Gülay Diko have found that frequently, the Janissaries' interests were embedded in the interests of local economies.

New academic works have made essential developments in understanding the Janissary's involvement in the economy, finding that these relationships were complex and often mutually beneficial. Gülay Diko's article "Blurred Boundaries between Soldiers and Civilians" explains the nature of these relationships. Diko explains that the Janissaries and the guilds were inextricably connected. The guilds were coalitions of workers in particular trades, and membership was required for an individual to enter the trade they represented. Janissary membership in guilds swelled as early as the early 17th century as the groups realized the benefits of these symbiotic relationships.

The Janissaries and guilds were drawn towards one another because they could each offer something valuable to the other. Firstly, the Janissaries wanted to join these guilds because they allowed them to chart lucrative careers in skilled trades. The guilds guarded the monopolies they held over their trade, preserving the value of their skills on the market. The Janissaries offered the guilds their status as an "untouchable" class throughout the empire. The Janissaries were exempt from judicial checks and taxation, allowing them to shelter revenue streams and become supremely wealthy. Having a Janissary as a guild member gave them access to these valuable privileges, and the dual advantages of this relationship caused them to become common. The recognition, prestige, and privileges accorded to the Janissary title allowed them to rise through the guilds' ranks quickly, often taking on leadership roles. Janissaries did not limit their entrepreneurship to their membership in the guilds, however.

The Janissaries also took advantage of their privileged status to facilitate long-distance trade within the empire. Janissaries were more physically mobile than most citizens, which allowed them to establish trade relationships. While on campaign in distant locations, the Janissaries contacted purveyors of valuable goods. When they returned from the campaign, they linked these suppliers with purchasers in the empire's core. This dynamic allowed them to become significant merchants in urban centers such as Istanbul, helping to provision these cities with various luxury and staple goods. Janissaries became indispensable in satiating the metropole's appetite for consumption.

One of the most underappreciated services the Janissaries provided to the broader empire was an

ability to advocate for their interests in ways that ordinary citizens could not. Janissaries were known to protest in great numbers against government actions that they perceived as unfair, even going so far as to revolt against their commanders when they saw fit. These Janissaries acted in self-interest, but in doing so, they protected groups that were otherwise vulnerable to government officials' arbitrary exercise of power. Past generations of Ottoman historians stripped these rebellious actions of the economic and social factors which motivated them. They saw revolts by a once-renowned military unit as evidence of how far it had fallen and as damning evidence of a broader decline.

In their role as advocates for local interests, the Janissaries acted as a mechanism of vertical accountability within Ottoman society. They were connected to the top and bottom echelons of the empire. At the top, the Janissaries maintained a close connection with the Sultan and held a seat among his top advisors. At the bottom, as members of the working class, the Janissaries' fortunes were closely tied to that of local economies. This connection forced the Ottoman leadership to pay heed to the desires of those who might otherwise have been swept aside, forming an institutional check on the Sultan's powers. This check, however, was viewed as a weakness under the decline thesis. The Janissaries limited Sultans' ability to act unilaterally and prevented them from enacting Westernizing reforms which would have centralized power. The decline thesis ignores the unique role that the Janissaries played as representatives of the bottom rungs of society, a service that was lost when the Janissaries were dissolved.

### **Conclusion**

Under the decline thesis, historians saw the Janissaries' constant rebukes of the Ottoman state's attempts at reform as quintessential evidence of the paralysis which prevented modernization. This historiography diminishes the importance of the institutions that allowed many smaller groups to coexist within the empire. Institutions such as the Janissaries were critical in this respect. They represent one of the key strengths of the Ottoman Empire which the decline thesis minimized.

However limiting it may have been, the decline thesis stood for so long because it is such a compelling narrative. It purported to take advantage of the clarity of hindsight to reveal the late Ottoman



Empire's dysfunction. When historians looked for evidence of the Ottoman decline, it seemed to exist everywhere. This abundance was a product of confirmation bias which historians' European gaze exacerbated. It took a new generation of historians using new sources and methods to recognize this and reject the thesis.

Despite this paradigm shift in Ottoman historiography, the decline thesis is pernicious. It remains the prevailing narrative in general historical works which cover the empire. Thus, outside of Ottoman academia, the decline thesis seems healthy as ever. Why is this? While Ottoman historians have concluded that the decline thesis is inaccurate and misleading, they have not yet constructed a replacement with the same persuasive power. Until historians put forth a new and satisfying narrative, the idea of decline will likely persist in the layman's historiography.

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# Reclaiming the Image of the Arab Woman: Feminism and Empowerment Through Photography and Art

by BILLIE MCCLOSKEY

Arab women are continuously fighting to break stereotypes and reclaim their own image and perceived virtues and attributes, which have oftentimes been falsely perpetuated as something other than themselves. The works of female-identifying artists, activists, and photographers have brought to light some of the stigmatic practices and visualizations that stem from Orientalist art originally intended for the Western gaze. This continuity in sexualization, suppression, and censorship of the female image and voice through Orientalist art has created a juncture from which female-identifying artists like Lalla Essaydi (Morocco), and Manal Al Dowayan (Saudi Arabia) have leapt to advocate for the reclamation and revision of stereotypes represented in such art. The works by these artists are highlighted and analyzed in this paper to express the intention behind their depictions of Arab women through an artistic and advocative lens, being the empowerment and feminist approach to reconstruct the obscured image of a woman in the Middle East, through both an observative lens and through the use of primary and secondary sources. Formulated from a number of sources pertaining to Contemporary Arab Feminist Art and Orientalist paintings originating in the 19th Century and archived interviews with the artists, the research exemplified in the following discourse discusses that of the inherently feminine and masculine art forms, and how these contemporary artists are working marry ideas of sexuality and blur the lines of what the distinctly gendered things and cultural norms represent and hybridize the radicalization of gender norms to completely represent the female identity sans extreme sexualization and misogyny.

**Keywords:** activism; feminism, Middle East, contemporary art, Orientalism

Since the late 1700s, orientalist art has been established on a basis of feminine suppression and sexualization. Orientalist art, in both literal and cultural studies, has been understood as the imitation and depiction of aspects that stem from the Eastern world, usually engaged with, and completed by inhabitants of the Western world. 19th century Orientalism, originating from the arrival of the French and British in Egypt and North Africa around 1799 CE, was the preliminary organized study of Eastern regions and adopted the title of “Orientalist” to characterize this area within various topics including forms of art, literature, poetry, and the sciences. While European artists and scholars were well versed in their respective art forms, their knowledge of the Middle East was lesser than that in their studies of mastery, and in turn adopted an outsider’s perspective in forming works about people who are superficially and funda-

mentally different from themselves. With the ignorance that comes with European imperialism in the 19th century, the interest in acknowledging cultural differences and regional functionality was not present at the time. This, in turn, created an image of the Middle East region that distorted and exaggerated the cultural, religious, and social diversity of those who resided there, and starkly contrasted it with Western communities. These comparisons created a stigmatic image of a person from the Middle East as being dangerous, uncivilized, exotic, and often backwards in their way of thinking and intellectuality. Such images have been carried forward to perpetuate grossly inaccurate stereotypes that dictate our way of thinking in the present day.

The characteristics of Orientalist art have led to the expansion of the belief and perception that Arab women are exotic and used that as a juncture from which artists could

depict the mysterious and distant women for the purpose of feeding the Western gaze. "At one time, literature and art created by Western Orientalists, was purely for Western audiences." The intention was to create an image to bring to the West, so outsiders could have a glimpse into another culture and lifestyle, without actually having to experience it for themselves. French and British artists (among those who colonized Eastern countries in the early 19th century) like Jean-Léon Gérôme used their education in painting to lift the literal and figurative "veil masking the Orient in the Ottoman and Middle Eastern lands without effort. And instantly, in rich and vibrant colours, the Orient was exposed. To be feasted on and absorbed." The challenge with exposing this region's culture and identity without understanding or explaining it fully is such that works that are thematically centered in exposing its characteristics do not account for the complete disregard for cultural values and ignored responsibilities in representation that come with representing whole groups in such a general manner.

The presence of art that stems from the Islamic faith is extensive yet has invariably steered away from human representation within the work. One would not find portrayals of grand historical and biblical events, nude paintings, or more generally any human representation at all, and most certainly not a look into the domestic interiors of one's home, like one might find in Orientalist art. The Orientalist art form enveloped a general imaginative depiction of the entirety of the Middle East, under one title, being the 'Orient.' Art originating from the Muslim faith was seen as a form of worship for the faithful believer, and in turn had a great difference in intention and purpose for those who took part in artistic works within the faith. These works, vastly different than those of the European styles present in the Western world, were known stylistically as "aniconism," the "opposition to the use of icons or visual images to depict living creatures or religious figures," which has particular reference to Jewish, Byzantine, and Islamic artistic traditions.

Islamic art, specifically, has intentionally avoided the representation of the human

form and focused on alternative styles like arabesque and geometrical patterns in tiling, arabic calligraphy, illuminated art in Quranic manuscripts, and vaulted ceilings and muqarnas present in mosques, as a way to support both the observer and the creator/owner of the art in their acknowledgement of the beauty and vastness of God. Islamic architecture and art was intentionally ambiguous, so as to invoke wonder and curiosity in the viewer, and to contain the art to mostly symbolic and natural representation, rather than explicitly acknowledging the human form, for it would significantly drive its importance and hold it to a similar standard to that of God. The Islamic faith has been resistant to the representation of living beings, as the belief that the formation and creation of living forms is a skill unique to God, regardless of the medium in which the form is being created. With this being said, "the role of images and image makers has been controversial. The strongest statements on the subject of figural depiction are made in the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet), where painters are challenged to 'breathe life' into their creations and threatened with punishment on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an is less specific but condemns idolatry and uses the Arabic term *musawwir* ('maker of forms,' or artist) as an epithet for God. Partially as a result of this religious sentiment, figures in painting were often stylized and, in some cases, the destruction of figurative artworks occurred."<sup>9</sup>

With this, one should keep in mind that art in the Middle East, including Islamic art, was devoid of representations of the human form, let alone the female form, until the West started to take the Eastern art world by storm. Even so, the creation of art was a male-dominated field and left little room for female artists to present and draw attention to their works. What little did break through is still widely unknown and underrepresented, like the works of Amy Nimr and Inji Efflatoun, Egyptian modern artists whose work was done within the mid-20th century. Both women were activists and feminists, among many other female Arab artists from the time, who fought for feminine equality and representation through both their works and their social



activism. Arab women like Nimr and Efflatoun were of many who sparked the resulting works in the 21st century that are forcing people to rethink their image of the Arab world, specifically Arab women and their place in the world of artistic representation. Lalla Essaydi, a Moroccan photographer and calligraphy artist, is one of those women living in the 21st century who is changing the depiction of Arab women in art and taking back the image portrayed in Western Orientalist art that so drastically skewed the vision of femininity and humanity in the East. Her work established a butterfly effect of reclamation and empowerment of the female voice and body in a male-dominated field, including artists depicted in the following analysis through the women's artwork and social activism.

Lalla Essaydi, an artist who helped to foster the surge of modern-day feminist art, is a Moroccan photographer who is focused on reclaiming male dominated art forms and the Orientalist representation of Arabs in them. Essaydi was born in Morocco, and later moved to the United States to pursue an MFA from The School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University in 2003. While she has worked with numerous media, including painting, video, film, and with installation, her photographic efforts are the focus of this section. Her photography is focused on re-iterating and revising the images of Arab women from the former paintings of self-proclaimed Orientalist artists Jean August Dominique Ingres, Eugene Delacroix, and Jean-Léon Gérôme. Essaydi acknowledged the challenge that the perception of gender, identity, and culture has had in skewing Western (and Eastern) views of Arab women, and her works push to rectify that. The art of Orientalism had the tendency to obstruct women and place an image in reference to lifestyles in harems, portraying them as a commodity and hid women behind veils and walls, inevitably silencing them. Essaydi's works, including a particular exhibition eponymously entitled *Revisions*, are about the revising of stereotypes and reclaiming them as their (the women's) own, for their own entity, and in their own truth. The works in Essaydi's collections are numerous and follow a similar theme in such that the primary representation is that of Arab women.

Essaydi's collections can be found on her website and in various galleries around the world. Her artworks are representative of a lengthy and thoughtful artistic process- extensive photographic shoots intended to represent women: many of them (the models) being members of her family and social and professional entourage. The presence of varying portfolios on the site in which Essaydi showcases her work allows one to analyze the different styles of which she works with throughout the photographic process. Lalla Essaydi's collaboration with different artistic styles and media to create her image establishes a strong juxtaposition of the feminine and masculine, through both literal and associative representation. Her images propose the reversal of gender roles originally represented in works from the 19th century, which is now known to be labeled as 'orientalist art,' and push for a revised representation of the originally mysterious, dangerous, and sexualized Arab woman.

In the forefront of the imagery in her photography, one will find Essaydi's models donned in henna, a traditionally feminine art form throughout many Eastern countries, not necessarily a sole identifying characteristic of the Arab world. A henna paste, used for over five thousand years throughout countries like Pakistan, India, Africa, and Middle Eastern countries, originated as a paste or salve used in holistic medicine. This was used to cover open wounds, burns, and to treat ailments such as aches and pains that were more internally sourced, as well as as a calming and cooling substance that was spread over the body in times of extreme heat and discomfort. Now, in understanding the significance of holistic medicine and the place and properties of henna in this setting, one can recognize the parallel between the social and psychological connection found in femininity and care-giving. Without diverging far from the intent of the discourse, the psychological association of femininity in care-giving stems from the image of motherhood and the maternal nature of a female entity. The practice of holistic medicine was led in large waves by women and self-proclaimed witches (those who practice identifiably holistic and earth-based medicine), by communities and supports the

insistence that the existence of maternal instinct connects with the association of being taken care of (and in this case, the use of henna in medicinal practices) and that care and tools used in caretaking are inherently feminine.

While today henna is used in practices of celebration, the perceived connotation remains the same. The use of henna, both as an art form and an integral component in Eastern celebration, is strongly centered around a feminine figure. Henna's decorative use is in the form of a paste applied on a bride's body in preparation for a wedding, or a person celebrating their birthday or other date annually celebrated. The juxtaposed Arabic calligraphy in Lalla Essaydi's photographic works merge the two art forms and create a marriage of the inherently feminine and masculine. Arabic calligraphy has been observed "traditionally [as] a man's art," and in Islam, calligraphy is regarded as one of the highest forms of visual representation of culture. The art form developed and grew in a traditional method of education, with focused instruction towards mastery in a group of students, who typically tended to be of the male sex. One will find biographic entries of the pedigree to which men have been recognized for their "prowess in calligraphy," contrasting with the devastatingly low number of entries for calligraphers who are female. The art form has, simply put, been historically dominated by male-identifying scholars and figures.

With this information, Lalla Essaydi's photography takes a new form and emanates a newfound value in representation of the feminine form. Her work in reclaiming the image created by Orientalist artists like Eugene Delacroix no longer reframes the image at the surface level (the sexualized and mystified depiction of a Middle Eastern woman), but rather calls into question historically gender-segregated practices within academic and cultural settings. Essaydi forms an image with the original statement, furthering it by covering her models in henna, although, it is not in the format that we all recognize (as a decorative and intricately patterned body art), but rather Arabic calligraphy inscribed in the ever-staining plant-based paste. Essaydi's use of two intrinsically feminine

and masculine details together in a marriage of sexuality blur the lines of what the two distinctly gendered things represent and hybridize the radicalization of gender norms.

Essaydi's efforts in the reconfiguration of the original orientalist images don't cease beyond this instance. Her photographs reference specific works of the 1800s in both model posture and poise, like "The Odalisque," an oil painting on canvas done by Eugene Delacroix in 1825. The image is of a lounging Middle Eastern woman who has little clothing covering her body and is represented in a sprawled form of body, and a flippant, outward-looking gaze. "The Odalisque" is one of the styles of Orientalist images that Essaydi works so carefully to revise. Delacroix's image portrayed through oil paint on canvas was that of reference to a mistress or lover, one only intended for the gaze of a more powerful figure. "During the 19th century, odalisques became common fantasy figures in Orientalism and many erotic paintings from that era included them." The connotations that seep from these images about the Middle East support substantial misinformation and categorization of those who reside in and come from the Middle East and suggest ideas about the people that now need to be disproven. Images created like those of Delacroix silenced women and placed an image associated with harems upon them and turned them into a perceived commodity as they hid them behind veils, walls, and an unmet gaze.

Lalla Essaydi works to undo this through her portfolios and collections. As the perception of gender, identity, and culture has skewed Western views of Arab women, Essaydi's image has been to revise these stereotypes in a similar presentation, but while shifting the boundaries in which they are contained. "People come expecting the Orientalist image of women, and get Essaydi's reiteration of it, forcing them to look back at themselves and change their expectation of what the art is doing, and what it is meant to do (in Essaydi's eyes: understand the dynamics of the Orientalist gaze and why it's so dehumanizing and silencing towards women.)" Essaydi explains that she invites viewers to resist stereotypes, and through her works, reevaluate the



previous image in mind of the Middle Eastern woman. The work that Essaydi continues to do falls under the term of “Contemporary Arab Women’s Art,” emerging in the late 1990s as an intervention to challenge the stereotypical media representations of Arab women. Essaydi, along with other artists like Manal Al Dowayan, use their art to overcome misrepresentation, gender inequalities, and “continue to assert their presence and a renewed sense of identity through their diverse art practices.”

The work doesn’t come without its hardships, of course. Although Lalla Essaydi was born into a privileged Moroccan household, her work was barred by numerous adversities that were a strong hindrance to her success in the early stages of her work. Not only was this due to her gender identity, but also due to the fact that the expected image that she would uphold for her family and her society were very different from that of which she wished to pursue. Essaydi “grew up in a predominantly female domestic environment, where a woman’s role was defined as marrying and having children.” Essaydi faced strict gender norms, societal expectations, and historical precedents that perpetuate problematic perspectives towards women. The women represented in the cycle of images Essaydi wanted to break were “women [who] were nameless and faceless objects of male desire; they had no personality.”<sup>24</sup> Essaydi spoke of herself and of other women in the Arab world when expressing that they did not see themselves in such paintings. “Her aim, she said, is to break the stereotype by ‘appropriating the imagery or the style’ of Orientalist painters.” It is exactly within these images that Essaydi pulls her influence for her own work.

Essaydi’s efforts to break away from stereotypes were not fondly looked upon by media outlets throughout the Middle East. Her work wasn’t accepted at first, and her success required patience and careful planning. Essaydi’s photographic efforts were considered to be of high risk, as she was not only placing herself in a position of greater insecurity in safety, but her models were also in need of careful protection from the public eye throughout the beginning stages of the work, as it was not widely accepted by any

means throughout the society in which she lived and worked. The longer she pushed, however, the work began to gain ground and reach beyond herself and her community. “When my work started being known in the Middle East and the media started writing about my work, that validated it,” Ms. Essaydi said. “It’s accepted now in Morocco.”

Lalla Essaydi has a great influence on the surge of Arab Feminist art, but she is not the only one leading the charge. There are women all throughout the Middle East working in similar mannerisms as she, and in various styles that draw attention to the work they are doing, and the messages they wish to relay to the general public. Manal Al Dowayan, a Saudi Arabian artist who specializes in photography, also creates moving installations with great emotional and intellectual value to invoke solidarity among women and call attention to issues faced by women in the Middle East. Dowayan focuses her work on the gender-biased customs that primarily impact women in Saudi Arabia, although that does not defer from the idea that her work is also applicable elsewhere. “Her works spring from lived experiences” and are supported by her positionality on issues regarding gender within the country.

Dowayan’s intentions in her art, align with her personal goals, as she works to pull power back to the women around her and attempt to reclaim things like their names, their independence and their freedom from what society has taken from them for their own. In recognizing personal autonomy and name-sake, Dowayan curated a piece of her own, entitled “Esmi,” meaning “my name,” as a way to highlight the societal attitudes towards women’s names in Saudi Arabian society. On Dowayan’s site, where one can find detailed descriptions encompassing her art and her exhibitions, she explains that “men find it offensive to mention the names of the women in their lives and women also hide their identity so as not to offend the other members of her family. This is a custom occurring solely in Saudi Arabia and has no historical or religious foundation.” Without a reputable foundation for the suppression of the women and their identities, Saudi Arabia strays from the origins of respecting those who are most beloved

to you expressed by both The Prophet and The Quran. “Both mention women’s names and have never associated a woman’s name to shame or something that should be hidden.”

The purpose of “Esmi” is such that Dawayan pushes to question the society that is working to hide women’s names, and to address the social taboo that has become of speaking a woman’s name in public. Her work was developed from large, wooden beads hung from thick rope (all constructed and hand-made by her team, a group of Bedouin women from eastern Saudi Arabia) with the names of various women involved in the work inscribed on the beads for viewers to see and experience. Dawayan’s choices in her work focus the viewers gaze on social issues throughout the Arab world, and through other collections of hers, similar to the background of “Esmi,” as she wants women to be both seen and heard. In photo series entitled “The Choice” and “I Am,” Dawayan depicts portraits of Saudi women in a way that she is questioning cultural traditions that “prevent Saudi women from expanding their roles in society.” Her projects work in collaboration with other women, like the aforementioned Bedouin communities, and engage with them in the defiance of what she considers to be the “intentional erasing” of the female presence in Saudi society. “By removing a woman’s name, obscuring her face, lowering her voice... it becomes easy to dehumanise her,” says Dawayan.

Dawayan’s inclusion of real women in her works stem from an intention of inclusivity and acknowledgement of the social stratification of gender throughout the Middle East. The Bedouin tribes, for example, play a large role in the development of the aforementioned installation, Esmi, in the creation of the woven rope used to suspend the wooden beads from the ceiling of the gallery space. Throughout the generations, the influence of Bedouin women has shifted, but their value in society remains great. Bedouin society lives in a pastoral, nomadic manner and focuses its efforts towards the community in which they reside. Describing the relationship of Bedouin women with the rest of the Middle East comes with difficulty, as the social fabric and status of the women have changed over tertiary generational gaps.

Throughout the passage of time and as urbanization occurred, each generation of women has had to undergo adjustments in lifestyle and growth within the society, according to texts describing the time before 1948, until present day. Bedouin women have extensive descriptions of their existence, depicted in a strong and unified image of the past that holds their ancestry in their present. The past paints images of spirituality and connection to the land on which they lived, and the strength of the connection that brought them strength and control within their community. The stories of past generations of Bedouin women represent strengths in control over their lives and autonomy of self, which is what is represented in the works of Dawayan when including Bedouin women in the installation of Esmi. Dawayan is shedding light on an incredibly obstructed female group: one that has been worked against for numerous decades, filled with women who had to choose between personal ambition, individualism, and collectivism. The once highly respected community of Bedouin women, praised for their strength and intelligence, was now being criticized for their personal advancement and desire to continue their education, pushback against a patriarchal system, and develop personal autonomy outside of the community. The rest of the world was not nearly as supportive of these endeavors, and Dawayan used this adversity to represent the importance of these women within her art.

The disempowerment of the community of women Dawayan is attempting to represent through Esmi is due to the isolation of these women from their traditional crafts; the works of the Bedouin women used to support the family, until present day in which they have been overtaken by a patriarchal society, of which they are almost completely dependent upon due to the urbanization of the community and its surrounding societies. Dawayan’s art encourages the representation of these female groups, among others within Arab society, ensuring that their names are heard, and their presence is known and understood, without compromising their tradition and culture. Esmi is only one wall of many in the insurance of the female voice and identity.



In the development of the extensive collections and installations created by both Dawayan and Essaydi, conversations have been initiated throughout social groups, scholars, and institutions under the study of social and gender norms in place within Arab society. The common thread between the two artists, and others working to draw attention to concurrent works, is the commentary on social construction and the role of women in the Middle East. The artists discuss hopes of breaking down stereotypes and exposing others to new perspectives, and reclaiming the names, the identities, and the bodies that belong to each woman, and the autonomy that they require in attaining and retaining those personal rights. The artists turn away from the sexualization of women and paint them (whether that be literally or figuratively) in a different light, insofar that the art is no longer for someone else, but for the personal representation of women, by women. By breaking beyond the veil-imposed, *per se*, the emergence of representation in name, and humanistic portrayal of Arab women by modern artists reframe the origins of stereotypes initialized in Orientalist art in the 19th century. The materialization of the mystique and dramaticism of an Arab woman in Orientalist works by Jean-Leon Gerome, Ingres, Delacroix, and others are pushed back by the renewed dedication to changing the image, and creating a space for realistic and representative artworks are present in modern society, taking back the idea of what it means to be an Arab woman, autonomous in her own body, image, and namesake, under her terms.

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# Media as Storytellers: The Central Park Jogger

by EMMA KAHLE

Different forms of media played a key role in telling the story of a jogger that was attacked in Central Park in April 1989. Through examination of early coverage to later depictions, the public can better understand the role that media played in the initial conviction of the five innocent boys, as well as the later exoneration. Newspaper stories used animalistic vocabulary and a presumption of guilt to sway public opinion toward the perceived guilt of the five young boys that were convicted of the crime. *The Central Park Five* and *When They See Us* are more recent film depictions of the crime. Through strategies of documentary filmmaking and dramatization of the events, these later drafts of history transition to proving the innocence of these boys to the public. To fully comprehend the nature of the case, the reader must examine each media form as a piece of a greater puzzle.

**Keywords:** Central Park Jogger, Tabloid Journalism, Wilding, Ken Burns, Ava DuVernay

When a privileged, White jogger was attacked in Central Park on April 19, 1989, news organizations jumped to cover it. The stakeout story had journalists crowded outside the hospital room of the jogger, Trisha Meili, begging for any updates on her condition. The result was highly biased newspaper articles focused mainly on praising Meili and dehumanizing the suspects. Using animalistic vocabulary and sensational headlines, these articles affirmed the guilt of the five young teenagers accused of committing the crime. In *The Central Park Five*, Ken Burns tells the story through a documentary, which uses a fact-based approach to shed light on the media's role in the wrongful conviction of the boys. In *When They See Us*, Ava DuVernay directs a dramatization of the case. Her approach strives to evoke an emotional response from viewers. Philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message" in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). According to McLuhan, the medium, or platform used to communicate a message, is often more important than the content of the message itself. Tabloid journalism, documentary, and dramatization have very different strategies for how to depict this case to the public. A prominent shift in cultural power is reflected in the media's portrayal of the Central Park case. This shift is demonstrated by

the changing content of media messages, as well as the use of techniques within a given medium to help criminalize or vindicate the five boys.

## Newspaper Coverage

Traditional journalistic coverage of the Central Park Jogger case was largely sensational. The stories were mainly produced by White reporters and focused on praising the white jogger while criminalizing the black boys. In an article published just days after the attack, all the suspects are named: "The four are Kevin Richardson, 14, Steve Lopez, 15, Clarence Thomas, 14, and Raymond Santana, 14... The others accused of participating in the rape are Atron McCray, 15, Yusef Salaam, 15, and Kharey Wise, 16" (McKinley, "2 More Youths..."). This newspaper article from *The New York Times* provided the first and last names of the boys before they were indicted. Researchers in the Criminal Justice Department at Rutgers University also found that these tabloid articles routinely provided photographs, street addresses, apartment complexes, and schools of the boys (Welch et al. 40). Newspaper articles defied the presumption of innocence, a key part of the United States Criminal Justice System, by criminalizing the boys before they had a chance to defend themselves. This legal principle states that a person is innocent unless their guilt is proven beyond a reasonable doubt, commonly

referred to as “innocent before proven guilty.” An article published by the Duke School of Law finds that pretrial journalism “tends generally to treat the presumption of innocence as a formality, largely limited to using the word *allege*” (Entman and Gross 95). The news reporting of crime exhibits a pro-prosecution bias, as demonstrated by the journalistic tendency to dismiss the possibility of an error on the side of the court system and police. In the case of the Central Park Jogger attack, these biased newspaper articles played a key role in shaping how the crime, and especially the suspects, were perceived by the public.

### **Sensational Reporting: Wilding and Infotainment**

Sensational terminology dominated headlines and news articles. This form of journalism, also known as infotainment, involves, “Blurring the conventional lines of so-called factual news reporting and entertainment... whereby news coverage is presented with a greater sense of style intended to not only inform but also entertain viewers” (Welch et al. 38). The most prominent example of sensationalism vocabulary in the coverage of this case was the word “wilding.” The term first came into fruition on the front page of *The New York Times*, with an article line, “Chief of Detectives Robert Colangelo... said that some of the 20 youths brought in for questioning had told investigators that the crime spree was the product of a pastime called “wilding” (Pitt 1). In reality, the boys were actually misheard by Colangelo. In the *African American Review*, researcher Stephen Mexal reveals they were innocently rapping the lyrics to “Wild Thing” by Tone Lóc. (106). With different journalists vying for public attention for their publications, they needed to find ways to get people to choose to read their version of the story. Henceforth, “wilding” caught on among media sources to hook readers into their depictions of the Central Park Jogger case (Welch et al. 38).

Natalie Byfield is a professor of sociology at St. Johns University, who was also a journalist for the *Daily News* at the time of the Central Park attack. In her reporting of the crime, Byfield observed her editors limit the reporters

to just writing about the extent of the jogger’s injuries and the guilt of the boys (60). Byfield reflects, “Media producers did not mind sensationalizing the case and exploiting everyone within reach to make this point” (Byfield 60). Her experience as a journalist reveals the manipulation and framing of the case by the press, a trend that prioritized grabbing the attention of the reader over the implications that the sensational coverage could have on these young boys.

Rapes occurred frequently in New York City in the late 1980s. In fact, police revealed there were 28 reported rapes in the same week that the jogger was attacked (Terry). The prevalence of this form of sexual assault resulted in the word losing much of its power and lure to the press. Wilding, however, was “new, unknown, and menacing” (Welch et al. 38). Countless news organizations integrated the word into their own articles, making it standard practice in the reporting of this particular crime. Using neologisms like “wilding,” as well as other eye-catching vocabularies, demonstrated the newspapers’ prioritization of circulation over the legitimacy of the content they produced.

The prevalence of infotainment in the reporting of the attack helped instill guilt in the boys when realistically very little evidence existed to support the egregious claims in the press. Newspapers were one of the dominant forms of news distribution, hence the public had limited ways to be informed on the true nature of the crime. Lynn Chancer is a Professor of Sociology at Hunter College in NYC. In an issue published by the American Sociological Association, she writes that “the inflammatory animal imagery, Darwinesque in its associations, had the effect of linking a particular group of defendants - the young men who had confessed - to the crime long before they were tried, when they were still supposed to be presumed innocent” (Chancer 39). Chancer affirms the media’s counterproductive role in news coverage, noting that the newspaper articles secured the boys’ convictions before they attended trial to defend themselves. Many local activists, around the area where many of the boys lived, questioned how they could receive a fair trial with all the negative media coverage about the crime (Chancer 39).



Wilding is also rooted in the racist tendencies of the media. Mexal emphasizes the importance of race: “Nonwhite boys had gone wild and maimed a white woman... wilding seemed to radically reimagine the logic of crime, implying an irrational, fundamentally savage eruption of violence without motive” (102). Using this word allowed news organizations to portray black youths as savage, inhumane predators who posed a threat to the community at large. Infotainment drove the coverage of the Central Park Jogger case, and, the literary elements of the story increased popular public beliefs surrounding violence, victimization, and criminal stereotypes (Welch et al. 39). The unfamiliarity and savage nature of wilding also, “served to further distance the crime and the accused from the standards of white ‘civilization’” (Mexal 102).

### **Underlying Motives of Newspapers**

The underlying agenda that this coverage served was supported by increased public concern about violent crime around 1989. Violent crime statistics had risen each year since 1985 which, alongside the city’s failure to hire more police officers, caused public doubt about the cops being able to keep people safe (McKinley, “Killings in ‘89...”). Chancer points out that this growing fear set the stage for a “tough-on-crime” political environment (39). In her dissertation on true crime at Michigan Technological University, Rebecca Frost wrote that crime narratives “work to reassure citizens of their safety and restore order to threatened communities” (Frost 2). In the Central Park case, the newspaper coverage of the crime reassured the public, showing that the criminal had been caught and the police had quickly and flawlessly performed their job. The public trusts newspaper articles, assuming objectivity. Henceforth, inaccurate, agenda-driven news was misinterpreted as true. Frost suggests that public reassurance is rooted in words from an authoritative community member, such as a reporter, regarding the crime and the consequences that the criminal will face (7-8). Additionally, the case acted as a restoration ritual regarding society’s trust in the government’s response to urban violence (Frost 7). Donald Trump, at the time a wealthy New

York City resident, also used the attention on the case to push his own racist agenda surrounding minorities in the U.S. Trump published multiple full-page advertisements titled “Bring Back the Death Penalty,” as well as saying, “You better believe that I hate the people who took this girl and raped her brutally” in a news conference in 1989 (Dwyer). Realistically, authorities and political figures were less interested in finding the true perpetrator of the crime, but rather in making an arrest to restore the city’s faith in them.

Television news coverage of this case followed similar trends as print newspapers. In *Political Society*, Michael Milburn and Anne McGrail discuss the collective shift from objective, factual TV newscasts to a more entertaining, melodramatic form (614). They discuss that the use of drama in television news serves two purposes: “generation of emotional arousal and the use of underlying myths” (Milburn and McGrail 615). TV news frequently utilizes melodramatic forms, or forms of drama that rely on emotional arousal and simplification of characters and plot. (Milburn and McGrail 617). Milburn and McGrail refer to *The Moro Morality Play*, a book authored by Erica Wagner-Pacifi that discusses melodramatic narrative form. The resolution of these stories is when the clearly defined force of good takes over the clear evil (Milburn and McGrail 617). Everything is black and white, as the gray area breeds uncertainty and is disconcerting for the audience. In melodramatic narratives, “The audience has only one option: to applaud the hero and condemn the villain” (Milburn and McGrail 617). Additionally, news stories normally appeal to a societal myth that the culture can understand and relate to (Milburn and McGrail 617). In the case of the Central Park attack, the media centered around the myth that black men are dangerous criminals. While this is a grossly inaccurate depiction of black males, it was widely believed to be true at the time due to the prominence of racially driven media coverage. Henceforth, the story that a black man had viciously attacked a White woman seemed believable and expected, providing credence to the melodramatic theme that good prevails over evil. Furthermore, this ties into Frost’s point that true crime serves the function of reassuring the public. By reporting

on the suspects, TV news assured the public that they were now safe from the threat, while also restoring faith in police and authorities to keep their communities safe. Raising concerns about the boys' guilt would disrupt the certainty of a melodrama, henceforth news programs had to remain close-minded on their culpability.

### **Danger Narratives**

The racist reporting of crimes is an enduring pattern throughout history, especially through danger narratives. Lindsey Webb, an Associate Professor at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law, defines danger narratives as a genre of crime focused on violence with the intent to purport the danger and criminality of people of color (134). By showcasing people of color, especially black Americans, in this light, dominant White power structures strive "to justify and promote racist practices and institutions" (Webb 134). The media, a largely White field at the time of the Central Park Jogger attack, portrayed the boys as vicious savages. In displaying the boys in such a violent way, journalists likely aimed to justify the racist reporting they were doing on the case. Black men are stereotyped in our society as inherently dangerous and criminal. These misconceptions are fueled by media bias toward framing them in this light. Additionally, this is intensified by the combined gender and race component that, "Violent crimes involving white female victims and black male perpetrators are portrayed as particularly tragic, prompting an outpouring of emotion and outrage" (Welch et al. 38). In the Central Park case, ratings overpowered the ethics of the crime. While news organizations and journalists could fight for the boys' innocence, and some did, articles praising the jogger were inevitably more profitable and popular. Although the news is meant to be objective and show both sides of a story, the media disregarded the perspectives of the boys in order to boost their profits and push the narrative of white innocence versus Black danger.

### **Agenda Setting and New York Times Effect**

Another relevant phenomenon at this time was The New York Times Effect. In the documentary Page One: Inside The New York Times, James

McQuivey, an analyst at Forrester Research, describes this effect as, "if on day one the New York Times ran a piece on a particular story, a political or business issue, on day two the tier two newspapers would all essentially imitate the story" (Braun). At the time of the attack in Central Park, newspapers were the key outlet for reading news. Henceforth, the Times held immense power in its ability to set the agenda and frame stories in a particular light. As a result of this influence, the content they chose to publish about the Central Park Jogger directly influenced the stories that would be reported in the following days by other newspapers. In the week following the attack, the New York Times placed the case on the front page five times, clearly outlining its perceived importance and newsworthiness. Additionally, these articles were largely biased accounts of the case, focused on criminalizing the suspects. The coverage of the Central Park Jogger case undoubtedly followed the New York Times Effect trend, with the media prioritizing the coverage of the crime and unanimously reporting on the guilt of the accused boys.

### **Documentary Portrayal: The Central Park Five**

The Central Park Five was directed by famous documentarian Ken Burns, alongside his daughter Sarah Burns, and her husband David McMahon. The piece, created in 2012, showcases a shift toward displaying the innocence of the five boys, rather than how the media had previously vilified them. Although Burns' piece is very progressive in its portrayal of the case, his work is inevitably coming from the perspective of a privileged White male. Burns' documentary fails to elicit the same emotional response and motivation to cause change that DuVernay's dramatization does, however, this makes sense given Burns, being White, is not directly affected by the daily burdens of racial injustice. The content of the documentary is largely focused on the media coverage at the time of the attack, and Burns appears more interested in what White people did wrong, rather than focusing on the effect the conviction had on the boys. Burns showcases a sense of White liberal guilt in how he tries to be woke and



justice-oriented, yet comes across as blaming the media for how they failed to report on the true nature of the crime. The underlying message that Burns conveys touches on the ethical challenges behind the documentary genre and the perceived truth of it. What is a documentary, and what creative liberty does Burns have to implement his own opinion and viewpoints into his piece?

### **Documentary as a Medium**

The documentary label presents Central Park Five as entirely true and objective, but realistically Burns' personal biases will seep into any film he produces. Jill Godmilow, the producer of multiple documentary films, utilizes her expertise in filmmaking to unpack the true meaning of documentaries. Godmilow thinks the term "documentary" is misleading, as the viewpoint of the producer will inherently be highlighted in what they choose to include. She finds "non-fiction" to be a more accurate label, but not right because it is "built on a concept of something not being something else, implying that because it's not fiction, it's true" (Godmilow and Shapiro 80). Henceforth, Godmilow chooses to refer to documentaries as "films of edification," illuminating the producer's bias and intention to persuade the viewer's opinion (Godmilow and Shapiro 81). The attack is a true event, but this method of distributing facts subjects the content to creative liberties that might be taken by Burns.

Author and professor of Film and Media Studies Carl Plantinga discusses the forms and uses of documentaries. He argues that this medium "invariably further interprets the event and involves intentionality," such as adding music, titles, or voice-over narration (107). Stylistic choices work to assist the audience's interpretation of the content in the way the director intends them to. Burns utilizes the tools within the medium to assist in his telling of the story. For example, sad music plays in the background while Kevin Richardson cries while recalling being coerced into confessing. The choice to add this music cues emotional sympathy from the audience while watching Richardson's interview (Burns 17:56-18:32). Although Burns does not include voice-over, the intentionality of his captions is very clear. At the end of the

documentary, Burns includes closing remarks. One of the captions reads, "In 2003, a year after their convictions were vacated, THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE filed a civil rights lawsuit against THE CITY OF NEW YORK" (Burns 1:55:53). The words in all-caps are also displayed in a bright white color, whereas the other words are in a less noticeable gray. By making "THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE" and "THE CITY OF NEW YORK" stand out, Burns is likely pointing out the ongoing conflict between both groups. An inability to own one's mistakes is a theme throughout the documentary, and this caption highlights the tension created by the city official's reluctance to apologize for their role in the suffering of the boys. The end scene has an upbeat, more positive song in the background. Choosing to end his film in this manner reflects Burns' hope and optimism for the future of the case.

### **NYC Officials Try to Sue Burns**

New York City officials believed the Central Park Five was a biased depiction of the controversial event, produced to influence the \$250 million settlement for the lawsuit filed by the five men, according to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. NYC's Law Department subpoenaed the project's production company, Florentine Films, in the fall of 2012, requesting raw video and audio tapes collected throughout the reporting and production process ("Central Park Five Subpoena Quashed..."). The motion to quash the subpoena was granted by Ronald L. Ellis, the United States Magistrate Judge, on the basis that the research behind the film was protected by reporter's privilege, or a journalist's limited First Amendment right against being forced to reveal their sources in court ("Central Park Five Subpoena Quashed..."). The ruling for this case was based on an earlier case, *Chevron Corp. v. Berlinger*, where true-crime filmmaker Joe Berlinger was forced to disclose over 600 hours of footage in 2011 ("Central Park Five Subpoena Quashed..."). However, reporter's privilege requires reporters to act independently from the subjects of their journalism. The court revealed that Berlinger collaborated with Stephen Donziger, a legal advisor on the oil case his film *Crude* was based on, henceforth

he was not protected under the reporter's privilege ("Central Park Five Subpoena Quashed..."). Florentine Films, however, established independence in its journalistic process, protecting The Central Park Five under the reporter's privilege. Additionally, Sarah Burns is a journalist, and she employed many of her skills from that profession in researching the story of the Central Park case. The defendants also failed to show that the information Burns gathered pertained to a significant issue and was unavailable from alternate sources ("Central Park Five Subpoena Quashed..."). Actions taken by New York City officials were attempts at prior restraint, or censorship used to prevent the publication of Burns' documentary. Despite the charges Burns was accused of, the First Amendment prevailed, with the subpoena squashed and the film released to the public.

### **Dramatization/Non-Fiction Film: When They See Us**

Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us* utilizes a dramatization structure to tell the story of the Central Park Five case. This narrative form employs a largely pathos-driven approach to evoke the viewer's emotions, intending to make them connect more deeply to the content being displayed. The Central Park Jogger attack is a historical event, but having a movie based on a true story does not necessarily constitute its authenticity. Noel Carroll, a leading figure in the philosophy of film and distinguished professor at CUNY Graduate Center, writes, "The film and the writing come labeled, or, as I say, indexed, one way or another, ahead of time" (Carroll, *Postmodernist Skepticism* 169). The non-fiction genre implies an objective, fully true depiction for DuVernay's film. However, objectivity is impossible to achieve when a producer is crafting the film through their own set of beliefs and ideas.

### **Objectivity in Non-Fiction Films**

Carroll delves further into the process of non-fiction events being produced into films. Intentional or not, he acknowledges that personal interests, viewpoints, and biases will inherently enmesh themselves within a director's work. Carroll points out, "Objectivity is impossible if only because of the medium itself due to framing, focusing, ed-

iting" (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 5). However, Carroll does not believe these shortcomings discredit the authenticity and worthiness of non-fiction films, so long as the producers are open to criticism and evaluation of their work based on the set of objectivity standards (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 16-17). Filmmakers are also normally transparent about how their point of view might impact the content they produce, presenting non-fiction films as their subjective reality, or their vision of reality (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 7).

Okaka Opio Dokotum, associate professor of literature and film at Lira University in Uganda, points out the role that Hollywood has in fictionalizing elements of movies labeled as "based on a true story" (148). The production techniques of staging films in contemporary contexts often interfere with a true historical recount. Dokotum synthesizes, "Films about the past become in many ways films about the present" (152). *When They See Us* highlights Dokotum's theory, with DuVernay combating social issues in 2019 through the story of the Central Park boys. By connecting this case to current injustices in America, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement, DuVernay is able to shed light on the traumas and injustices that were endured by these boys at a time when black voices were largely suppressed by the media. For too long, the boys were not seen, their voices suppressed by dominant White figures who used the case to push racist agendas. However, the present-day movement to highlight racial inequality in our society provided a platform for DuVernay to finally make them seen, as referenced in the title *When They See Us*. Through her Netflix series, DuVernay was able to pursue a new agenda: one centered on freeing the boys, not criminalizing them. Alissa Wilkinson, a film critic who writes for *Vox*, discusses DuVernay's success at using the case to highlight the presence of racism in the present day. She notes that what DuVernay's series does is, "try to snatch the image collectively created by a country's fevered imagination back from history and recreate it as a story about five men and their families" (Wilkinson).

### **Dramatization as a Medium**

Through dramatizing this case, DuVernay humanizes the boys and illustrates the ways in which



the flawed institutions in the United States led to their wrongful convictions. Although she focuses on a single case, her depiction of the police and the public's analogous responses illuminates the bigger-picture issue: the media's racist portrayals of black people shape public opinion over time. This ideology is supported by cultivation theory, a term coined by George Gerbner, a professor in the field of communications. The theory states that repeated exposure to ideas on media platforms can shape the attitudes of the viewer over an extended period of time. The authorities and public blindly assuming the boys were guilty due to their race showcases the deeply rooted racial prejudices in our country. DuVernay's decision to focus on this one case is effective in how the audience feels emotionally connected to the characters being hurt, while her depiction of the way this case was handled demonstrates the role that stereotypes play in the biased assumption of guilt and wrongful convictions of Black Americans.

Although some might argue that DuVernay's series is a biased representation of the case, rather, her piece is defying historical trends to provide a new lens through which to understand the case. While non-fiction films inherently contain bias, Carroll discerns that the telling of history itself is subjective, with dominant perspectives constantly being emphasized in the recollection of events. Winston Churchill famously said, "History is written by the victors." Churchill was referencing the interpretation and biases of dominant societal forces dictating how history is told. Similarly to the personal perspectives of film directors, history is also told through the lens of a human with a unique set of beliefs. A skewed version of history was told until the boys were exonerated, henceforth DuVernay's one-sided depiction is more so laying out facts that were missed during the first media cycle in 1989. Carroll encapsulates the debate over the validity of nonfiction productions, stating that "commentators who conclude that the nonfiction film is subjective intend their remarks as a mere gloss on the notion that everything is subjective" (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 9). Everything is tainted by subjectivity; films are no exception. Discrediting a film for including a director's point of view is similar to shunning a histori-

cal account for containing biases of the author.

In terms of creative liberty, Carroll believes that producers are allowed to incorporate their own stylistic components into the piece. He writes that "a nonfiction filmmaker may be as artistic as he or she chooses as long as the processes of aesthetic elaboration do not interfere with the genre's commitment to the appropriate standards of research, exposition and argument" (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 17). A director has the license to use cinematography to enhance the telling of the story, but the events can not be falsified or reinvented for the sole purpose of enhanced aesthetic effect. In historical fiction, the director has free range of the plot and storyline. The nonfiction genre differs in the rigidity that is placed on the facts and accuracy of the real-life events being portrayed (Carroll, *From Real to Reel* 17). The complex task in *When They See Us* is determining if DuVernay's creative choices in the production of her film interfere with telling the true story of the Central Park case. A loophole for dissecting the truth is the lack of concrete evidence around more minor, minuscule details surrounding this story. For example, at the beginning of episode three, Raymond Santana's grandmother is shown at her birthday party, seemingly too distraught from her grandson's conviction to celebrate or experience joy. Although this scene is heart-wrenching, is it historically accurate? And if DuVernay included the scene as a theoretical depiction, does that detract from the true nature of the story?

In a piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, Linda Fairstein, the district attorney who covered this case, combats her portrayal in DuVernay's series. She defends her actions, saying she was not "unethically engineering the police investigation and making racist remarks," nor did she run the investigation and arrive before dawn on April 20 (Fairstein). Fairstein also points out other discrepancies between her actions and what was portrayed in the film. In response to her role in *When They See Us*, Fairstein states, "Ms. DuVernay ignored so much of the truth ... and that her film includes so many falsehoods is nonetheless an outrage" (Fairstein). Fairstein's pushback raises important questions surrounding the truth of the film. Deanna Paul, a journalist at

the Washington Post, points out the tremendous success that *When They See Us* has had, but also expresses concern with how parts of the case are missing in DuVernay's portrayal (Paul). She mentions an "unspoken tension" between depicting a story artfully versus accurately, as well as how DuVernay took numerous liberties in her retelling of the events that took place in Central Park that night (Paul). Sarah Burns spoke about DuVernay's film during an interview with AM New York. She admitted that there are "little points where things diverge from the timeline, but I understand you take some artistic license when telling a story" (Paul). Burns mentions conversations between law enforcement officers and muddled verdicts as two falsities in DuVernay's piece. Cathy Young, a writer at *The Bulwark*, elaborates on these potential problems surrounding DuVernay's portrayal of the case. Young points out the minimization of the crime spree that took place in Central Park on April 19. She also suggests the influence of gender on the public's opinion. People who suspected the innocence of the boys were afraid to come across as "anti-woman," as defending the accused rapist was seen as opposing the feminist movement of the time (Young). The movements against sexism and racism clashed, forcing people to pick a side. In rape cases, especially, the public tends to side with the victim.

To fully understand the dynamics surrounding the Central Park case, the public must engage with each of the media's portrayals of it. To grasp the shortcomings and racist roots of the early coverage, viewers must analyze the initial newspaper and broadcast coverage of the attack. Considered the first draft of history, these sensational stories used animalistic vocabulary and a presumption of guilt to convince the public of the boys' guilt. The more recent interpretations see things differently. In *The Central Park Five*, Burns creates a meaningful, fact-based transition from the earlier paintings of the case to the newfound innocence of the boys. The most recent depiction, *When They See Us*, strives to evoke an empathetic response from viewers by recreating the events surrounding the wrongful conviction, imprisonment, and exoneration of the five boys. To fully comprehend the nature of the case, without being influenced by any single bias, the reader must digest each media form as a piece of a greater puzzle. The varying perspectives and messages build upon one another to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of its many complexities. To properly gauge the relevance of hearing suppressed voices, the public must also understand the historical context that alienated those voices in the first place.

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