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Language, Discourse & Society

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**Language & Society
Research Committee 25 of the
International Sociological Association**

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The five articles of this issue presents various areas regarding language, which is quite illustrative of the broad spectrum covered by the Research Committee “Language and Society” of the International Sociological Association, which publishes *LD&S*. Chin-Hui Chen focuses on TV advertising dedicated to Taiwanese people from 50 years old in the ongoing silver economy through the case of Taiwan. While the aging of the population carries on, understanding what discourses support underlines main elements of new installed rhetoric. Tiffany A. Dykstra analyses U.S. and U.K. media productions about refugees in order to shed light on the reinforced representations. This is particularly relevant as asylum-seekers become more and more numerous, and stigmatized. Tomoaki Miyazaki focuses on anecdotes analysis on the basis of online material dedicated to political discussion. Doly Eliyahu-Levi and Michal Ganz-Meishar shed light both on the Israeli context and migrants’ children representations about their circles of belonging, including the Israeli society. Finally, Essya M. Nabbali leads introspection as a researcher about her own positionality. The fieldwork awarenesses inform previously unsaid framework of her works and the modifications implemented in consequence.

I would like once more to thank RC25 executive board for their confidence in offering me the editor position of *LD&S*. I wish to be up to the task, following the wonderful job done by Federico Farini, who created the journal and edited all issues for three years. My warm thanks also to the contributors of this issue for their patience and confidence; They experienced extended peer review process because I was in the process of becoming more familiar with these new responsibilities. Thank you.

Stéphanie Cassilde, Editor in Chief
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Call for editors for e- journal *Language, Discourse and Society*

Language, Discourse & Society is an international peer reviewed journal published twice annually (June and December) in electronic form. The journal publishes articles dedicated to all aspects of sociological analyses of language, discourse, and representation.

All interested editors are invited to submit a proposal (a call for papers) in order to edit a thematic issue. The editor in chief will consider proposed call for papers based on clear commitment to studies of language. *Language, Discourse & Society* cannot publish proceedings. Editors are free to choose the thematic of their issue proposal. *Language, Discourse & Society* accepts electronic submissions year round. Please send your proposals to: [journal@language- and-society.org](mailto:journal@language-and-society.org)

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The position of (co-)editor is unpaid.

Marketing discourses of aging: Critical discourse analysis of TV advertising for over-50s life insurance in Taiwan

Chin-Hui Chen¹

Abstract

Using critical discourse analysis, this paper presents a reading of the ideological content of advertisements that attempted to introduce life-insurance products to over-50s in the Taiwanese market in 2007. In particular, the analysis draws on taken-for-granted cultural assumptions about older age and aging in the building of product images. The findings suggest that positive constructions of aging in this advertising discourse were commonly used to legitimate the advertised products, by linking them to consumer preferences for a ‘golden ager’ lifestyle. However, any positive effects of such constructions were arguably offset by ageist ideological assumptions underlying the product messages, which repeatedly highlighted medical exemptions, customer-eligibility issues, and affordability. Acknowledgement of the inevitability of death, and preparation for funeral expenses – which may be considered fundamental topics for life-insurance advertising – tended in the examined data to be spoken of euphemistically, or omitted altogether. The conclusion relates these findings to those of Western studies of promotional texts for ‘silver marketing’, as well as to theoretical work on the social meanings of aging as constructed in modern society.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, silver marketing, advertising, Taiwan, aging

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Introduction

The silver, mature or senior market, as these names imply, is a market segment distinguished from other segments in terms of age. Its increasing significance stems fundamentally from the dramatic growth in the number of elderly people in many developed countries. Older people are better off now than in previous generations due to growing disposable incomes derived from occupational pensions (Gunter, 1998). Moreover, it has been argued that over-50s' discretionary buying power could be greater than that of younger people (French & Fox, 1985).

There have been disputes over appropriate ways of addressing older customers in the process of defining them as targets of silver marketing, and about what marketing strategies could effectively boost their consumerist behaviors. As Woodward (1991) argued, the most dominant Western response to aging and older age tends to be repression or denial: evident, for instance, in the promotion of the use of skincare products (Coupland, 2003) and the alienation of the aging body (Woodward, 1991). A complementary, but not identical, trend in contemporary Western societies is the encouragement of the notion that the status of 'youth' can be enormously prolonged: the "I don't feel old" phenomenon identified by Thompson (1992: 23). Increasingly, as part of the aging process, individuals have to learn to manage a mind-body split (Biggs, 1997), i.e. an increasing conflict between a mind that purports to be eternally young, and an aging body to be neglected.

Yet, despite mainstream ideologies that regard age chiefly as a source of problems, it is inevitably salient in the attempt to define the target consumers of silver marketing – a task made more difficult by the fact that older customers, no more immune to such ideologies than other age-groups are, may not be pleased to be reminded of aging or their exact ages (Tréguer, 2002). Furthermore, the silver market comprises a great pool of consumers in both the Third Age, characterized by independence and an active social life without work or family responsibilities, and the Fourth Age, associated with physical or mental decline, lack of independence and eventually death (Laslett, 1991). How to communicate with and appeal to this diverse group of older consumers through advertising and other marketing discourses is therefore a challenging task.

Marketing researchers have attempted to provide several guidelines for marketing communication with the elderly, giving us a degree of insight into the kind of representations of older people the silver-marketing industry holds. According to Greco (1987), the language used and appeals made in 50+ advertising should remain simple, and should relate any new information to things that older adults feel familiar with, so as to capitalize on their long-term memory. As to the depiction of older customers, it has been advised that advertisers should place emphasis on certain qualities, such as usefulness, competency, and ability to cope, while avoiding negative portrayals that might make older people feel uneasy about their age (Gunter, 1998). Images of people somewhat younger than the actual consumers being targeted are regarded as more effective (Lunsford & Burnett, 1992), since older people are believed to have a younger cognitive age than their chronological age. Prioritizing youth-orientation in advertising messages is therefore highly recommended, and such a strategy is generally realized through the inclusion of attributes such as health, fitness, and what might be called internal youth (Tréguer, 2002). In the same study, marketing researcher Tréguer also proposed several rules for the practice of 50+

marketing: for instance, in terms of age categorization, to avoid stating the target customers' chronological age explicitly. Lövgren's (2012) research, which examined strategies for addressing older consumers, supported the use of euphemisms such as *golden agers*, *silver foxes* (suggestive of both cunning and sexual attractiveness as well as silver hair), or *mappies* (mature affluent pioneering person) in preference to other age-categorization terms such as *retired*, *pensioners*, *older* or even the fairly neutral *senior*. Tréguer (2002) has also advocated the foregrounding of harmonious intergenerational relations, and for baby boomers in particular, marketing strategies that invoke nostalgic sentiments by reminding members of this generation of their own youth. His other recommendations include the avoidance of portraying older people as spiteful, physically dependent, or in any way ridiculous, or as vividly displaying outward signs of older age or aging. In a study that focused on the presentation of visual advertising messages to the older market, Gunter (1998) also suggested that advertisements targeting older consumers should not include too much visual information, characters speaking too fast, or distracting humorous messages, due to the decline in older people's vision and hearing, as well the additional time they need for processing information (see also Schewe, 1989).

On the whole, the above-mentioned guidelines – though they might, in marketing researchers' eyes, be effective rhetorical strategies – work ideologically to repress and deny older age. What is noteworthy is that, as argued by Sawchuk (1995), many prejudices against the elderly are actually reinforced in silver-marketing literature. Nevertheless, prior research has offered little critical examination of how silver-marketing discourse could contribute to the perpetuation, or problematization, of older-age stereotypes. The aim of this paper is to fill this research lacuna.

1. Literature review

Rather than focusing on the effectiveness or potential effectiveness of silver-marketing content, linguistic scholars using discourse analysis have attempted to reveal the problematic nature of marketing and promotional discourses of products aimed at older people and/or at slowing the effects of aging (e.g., Ylänne-McEwen, 2000; Coupland, 2003; Coupland, 2007; Chen & Ylänne, 2012).

Ylänne-McEwen's (2000) critical discourse analysis (CDA) of silver-market holiday brochures in the UK identified a bipolar-ageist construction of older age: that is, one that simultaneously involves positive as well as negative stereotyping of older people. The author found that holidays for older customers were often named (i.e. *Golden Times*, *Golden Years*, and *Young at Heart*) using youth-oriented metaphors, defining potential customers in line with active and youthful images. The consumption of holidays as such was positioned as a lifestyle choice, or more specifically, an adventurous, romantic and enjoyable way of living. However, amid such images and attitudes, the same study identified secondary emphases on communalism, assurances of feeling at home, and arrangements for afternoon tea: implying presuppositions of dependence, insecurity, and reliance on daily rituals. In sum, Ylänne-McEwen can be said to have identified a hybridization of (arguably conflicting) ideological stances towards older age in the marketing discourse of holidays exclusively for the over-50s.

According to Coupland (2003; 2007), UK print advertisements for anti-aging skincare products also reveal ageist ideological presuppositions. Her CDA suggests that the marketing of such

products ideologically positions aging as a target – likened to illness – to be repaired, remedied and corrected through the use of battle metaphors. The notion of the *unwatchability* of old age, as proposed by Woodward (1991), was reinforced in Coupland’s data as a moral imperative of body management. This imperative, and the corollary imperative to remain young-looking, were addressed to male as well as female readers (Coupland, 2007). Stigmatization of aging underpinned the persuasive force of the skincare-product promotional material, in that signs of aging were pathologized; other discursive strategies employed included provoking fear of aging and relating masculine success to sexual attractiveness.

Chen and Yläne (2012) studied UK TV advertisements for over-50s life insurance that were broadcast in 1999, 2005 and 2008, and found that the positive ‘golden ager’ stereotype (Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994) was often drawn upon, both to construct a youthful customer image and as a narrative means of resolving aging-related problems. The same authors also found a heavy commercialization of intergenerational relationships, in which the operation of familial responsibility through monetary gifts (life insurance and the lump sum) are normalized and taken for granted. However, mortality – the fundamental issue underpinning all life-insurance adverts – was often euphemized, or mitigated through certain positive packaging strategies. When it came to age categorization, nostalgia was frequently invoked through references to a particular decade (i.e., the 1960s) that defined the boomer generation and the glory of their youth.

However, prior studies probing ideologies of aging and older age in silver-marketing discourses have been relatively few, and mainly conducted in the West. There is therefore a need to examine the extent to which variations can be observed in other cultural contexts, particularly Asian ones. Continuing in the direction set by Chen and Yläne (2012), this paper focuses on the advertising discourse surrounding over-50s life-insurance products, but in Taiwan, and compares its findings to Chen and Yläne’s findings about the UK. The results indicate that although Taiwan is an Asian country characterized by a widespread adherence to Confucianism – which tends to endorse aging as a source of wisdom and assigns older adults greater power – representations of older age and older people in Taiwanese life-insurance selling does not reflect this positive context. It is possible that Taiwan, as a highly developed country receiving intensive cultural impacts from the West under conditions of globalization, could be assimilating other countries’ cultural norms regarding what successful aging should look like (e.g., Chen, 2015; Mooij, 1998).

Specifically, Confucianism highlights the importance of paying respect to older adults (Ho, 1994); normalizes elderly people’s dependence on their offspring (Tobin, 1987); and promotes age-graded behavioral norms that define being over 60 as a life stage in harmony with both nature and destiny (Waley, 1938). In contrast to this, the social construction of aging in postmodern Western cultures is undergoing a process of deinstitutionalization and de-differentiation (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989). Age-specific role transitions receive less attention in the contemporary West than they did the past, and behavioral patterns and experiences associated with each life stage are less clearly defined and marked. Therefore, Western people tend to behave in a uni-age style. Moreover, due to an “I don’t feel old” phenomenon (Biggs, 1997; Thompson, 1992) whereby individuals have to learn to manage a mind-body split during the process of aging, there is an increasing conflict between the mind – claimed to be eternally young – and the aging body, to be neglected. All this being the case,

people in the West often view older age as a source of problems rather than as an indicator of life achievement and wisdom.

It may also be worth noting that Western influences may not be the sole or even the main cause of the weakening of traditional Confucian values in modern Asian societies, including Taiwan (Sung & Kim, 2000; Sung, 2001). Hence, this study is in part an exploration of whether advertising discourses aimed at the grey market in Taiwan are more expressive of “imported” Western views, or of a “home-grown” collapse of Confucian expectations about aging and older age.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling and data

Life-insurance products tailored specifically for people aged 50 and older were introduced to the Taiwanese market fairly recently, in late 2006. To conduct an ideological reading of older age, probe underlying age-related cultural norms, examine how target consumers are constructed discursively, and (most importantly) to observe how death-related topics were treated, the author examined four television advertisements for over-50s life-insurance products as broadcast in Taiwan in 2007. They promoted products provided by two life-insurance companies, Alico and CIGNA, both originating from the United States. The samples contained two spoken languages, Southern Min (a local Taiwanese dialect) and Mandarin Chinese, which were transcribed using the TLPA (Taiwan Language Phonetic Alphabet) and the Han-yu Pinyin system, respectively. Different fonts – i.e., bold italics for Southern Min, and plain text for Mandarin – were used to represent the two languages in the transcripts, which are included in full in Appendices 1 through 4.

These samples were obtained from recordings of Taiwanese TV programs that were made during two randomly selected hours in the morning, two hours in the afternoon and two in the evening once every six days in four randomly selected months (February, June, August and December) in 2007. (The same recordings were also used as data in another study on advertising representations of older people in Taiwan: for details see Chen, 2015). Repetitions of all of the samples collected in 2007 were also observed airing without alteration in subsequent years.

Four more TV campaigns selling the over-50s life-insurance products of the same two companies continued to be generated and collected in 2008, but in subsequent years, the number of such campaigns declined dramatically, and the new campaigns employed similar slogans and highlighted similar selling points as those observed in the samples chosen in this study. Hence, it was decided that only those sampled in 2007 would be dealt with here, in part to avoid comparing the “apples” of advertising language intended to quickly build vivid images of unfamiliar products (in 2007) against the “oranges” of advertising language used to sell products that older Taiwanese consumers already were acquainted with (in 2008).

2.2. Critical discourse analysis and ideological readings of advertising

Like all the previous studies reviewed above, the present research employed CDA as its main approach for decoding the ideological assumptions underlying the various communication strategies employed in advertising. As argued by Fairclough (2001: 71), “ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible”. In other words, the hidden power of media discourse derives mainly from the ideologies that are activated and taken for granted in the process of addressing an ideal subject position for consumers to take on (Fairclough, 2001). Ideologies can be powerful tools for naturalizing the social values that are drawn upon to justify the promoted products. This paper is particularly concerned about ageist and potentially ageist ideologies that are assumed to be true. As Coupland (2007: 40) maintains, advertising texts are persuasive because they “tap into pre-existing ideologies and stimulate concerns and aspirations consistent with these ideologies”. Ideological communication, as pointed out by van Dijk (1998), encapsulates manipulation, mind control and consensus drawn in the interests of those in power. If ageist ideologies are embedded in the advertising discourses of over-50s life-insurance products in Taiwan, they could be discovered via CDA, as discussed below.

CDA sees language use as a form of social practice and presumes dialectic relations between discursive events and the wider socio-cultural contexts in which they are produced (Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Because CDA has an explicitly sociopolitical orientation, its practitioners address issues such as gender/sexism (Caldas-Coulthard, 1993), racism (van Dijk, 1987), the discourse of politicians (Fairclough, 2001) and ageism (Coupland, 2007). As van Dijk (1994) puts it, the ultimate scholarly aim of CDA is not only to understand the world of discourse but also to change it. Critical discourse analysts are hence urged toward “empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs” (Bloommaert, 2005: 25).

This study follows the recommendation by Fairclough (1995, 2001) that practitioners of CDA should assume that every text simultaneously constitutes social identities, social relations and knowledge/beliefs about the world. His approach describes the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event, interprets the whole process of social interaction involved in the production and interpretation of a text, and ultimately explains how discourse works as a social practice. Fairclough (2001) has also proposed a useful framework for the ideological work of advertising: how advertising builds relationships between the advertiser and the audience, encourages the audience to draw upon pre-existing ideologies to establish a mental image of the product, and constructs subject positions for consumers to take on as members of consumer communities. This framework was adapted for the present analysis of TV advertisements for over-50s life insurance in Taiwan.

3. Results

3.1. The examined TV advertisements

Ads 1 and 3 were produced by Alico, and Ads 2 and 4 were produced by CIGNA. Ads 1 and 2 were broadcast to introduce the two companies’ over-50s life-insurance products. Ad 1 begins with a voiceover calling the attention of the targeted customers (clearly defined in terms of the

age range 50-75) to product information, and ends by suggesting that they call the customer service line for further information.

Ad 2 prepares the viewers to appreciate the highlighted product features by portraying, at the beginning, three older adults in three different scenarios. In the first, an older man overcomes rejection against his attempt to make an enquiry about life insurance; in the second, an older woman complains about her age-related decline in health; and in the third, an older woman undergoing bereavement (presumably, the loss of her husband), is expected to be in need of money by a guest for the funeral.

Ad 3, instead of having its celebrity presenter describe the product features throughout the advert, portrays a group of older people engaging in exercise in a park, showing their endorsement of the advertised products, which bring benefits to their lives that include being competitive with much younger people. Similarly, Ad 4 assumes that the portrayed older adults – and perhaps also the audience – have a fairly extensive knowledge and understanding of over-50s life-insurance products. It features a celebrity presenter and a group of older adults on a tour bus, ready to travel together. It focuses on a series of exchanges between the celebrity presenter and other older adults about the product, which eventually convince the group to perceive it as a means of access to a lifestyle ideally defined by traveling and a care-free older age (i.e., not becoming a burden to one's children).

Even though the specifics of the scenarios depicted in the four advertisements vary widely, repeated messages that construct the product images are common to all of them, and might work ideologically to reinforce negative stereotypes of aging. The following section will first describe the verbal codes found in the information about the product characteristics, and then interpret the assumptions they trigger, as well as the subject positions for older adults to take on that they imply.

3.2. Patronizing communicative conventions in the building of product images

The examined TV advertisements for over-50s life-insurance products were conventional, in that they highlighted product characteristics assumed to fill certain needs of target customers; yet, the specific needs in question were associated with, and therefore tended to reinforce, negative stereotypical perceptions of older people. Product messages repeatedly mentioned exemptions from medical tests, guarantees that customers would be accepted, and low cost. Arguably, a patronizing tone could be discerned, which could further color the aging process as a problem in the eyes of viewers.

Affordability and cost efficiency were the most highly emphasized product characteristics, with costs broken down into detailed monthly or even daily figures: see Extracts 1-5. The cheapness of the products, ranging from NTD 37 to NTD 98 per day (USD 1.15-USD 3.04 at the time of writing) was further highlighted via contrasts with the insurance cover received, which is described as “life-long” (*zhong shen*) in line 23 of Ad 2 and line 14 in Ad 4. Though focusing on low cost can be a useful strategy in advertising of all sorts, it can also raise concerns regarding the negative stereotyping of older people as enduring relative poverty or even outright deprivation as a result of their age.

Extract 1

- 12 siong o lok e si
 → 13 cit kang m bian ngoo cap kho tloh e ling po
 (Advert 1)
 12 What is the most acclaimed is that
 13 it costs less than 50 dollars a day

Extract 2

- 22 mei tian bu dao yi bai yuan
 23 jiu ke yi yong you zhong shen bao zhang
 (Advert 2)
 22 with less than one hundred dollars a day
 23 life-long cover can be possessed

Extract 3

- mei tian 98 yuan
 (Caption, Advert 2)
 98 dollars per day

Extract 4

- 14 Shi-Ying: mui kang m bian goo cap kho
 (Advert 3)
 14 Shi-Ying: less than fifty dollars per day

Extract 5

- 13 Liao-Jun: mei tian bu dao san shi qi yuan
 14 Liao-Jun: jiu you zhong shen bao zhang la
 (Advert 4)
 13: Liao-Jun: with less than 37 dollars a day
 14: Liao-Jun: then there is a life-long cover

Promises that customers and prospective customers would not be asked to reveal information about their medical conditions were also commonly made (lines 8-9 in Extract 6; lines 13-14 in Extract 7; line 4 in Extract 8; lines 10-11 in Extract 9). An association between older age and ill health or physical decline can be inferred from this; the typical customer is presumed to have concerns that his existing state of health may prevent him from approaching life-insurance companies. This could be regarded as patronizing, especially given that a target age segment ranging from 50 to 70 is thus homogenized into a single group that shares the same concern. This selling point could even come across as fairly odd, especially in Ads 3 and 4, whose older protagonists are visually depicted as very fit and active.

Extract 6

- 8 m bian giam chat sin the
 → 9 ma be bun li tit kue sia mih penn
 (Advert 1)
 8 there is no medical
 9 and no health question either

Extract 7

- 13 bu young ti jian
 → 14 bu wun jian kang zhung kuan

- 15 jue bu ju bao
- (Advert 2)
- 13 no medical
- 14 no health questions
- 15 never refuse your application

Extract 8

- 3 Shi-ying: link am cai ngia cuan kok te it tng? =
- 4 Ladies in the park: = shen ti hao huai dou ke yi bao de
(Advert 3)
- 3 shi-ying: do you know the first insurance policy in this country? =
- 4 Ladies in the park: = guarantees acceptance regardless of good or bad health

Extract 9

- 10 Liao-jun: bu yong shen ti jian cha
- 11 Liao-jun: a ma be kah li mng tang mng sai
- 12 M2: oh pi siao lian e be po hiam koh kha kan tan
(Advert 4)
- 10 Liao-jun: no medical
- 11 Liao-jun: no questions about this and that

Another highlighted point in the examined advertising data, similar but not identical to the ‘no medical’ promises, was customer eligibility. Product-naming strategies reflect the companies’ intention to prioritize this product characteristic. In Ad 1 (Extracts 10-11), for instance, the theme of guaranteed accessibility to the product is revealed immediately, via a caption with the product name *yi ding bao* in the opening scene. This literally means guaranteed acceptance: *yi ding* is a Mandarin adverb meaning “certainly and surely”, while *bao* is a verb that refers to the company’s action of underwriting the insurance policy. The same convention was also found in Ads 2 and 4, which both promoted a plan named *bao zheng bao*: a phrase also suggestive of promised acceptance, as *bao zheng* means to guarantee, promise or ensure. Such product names work to nominalize the promise or guarantee that older customers can access to the product without undergoing rejection, which might cause them to lose face. This nominalization also enables repetition, by which a verbal process is transformed into an advertising slogan (see Extracts 10 to 19).

Extract 10

- mei guo ren shou
- quan guo shou chuang
- **yi ding bao** chang qing shou xian
(Caption following line 2, Advert 1)
- American Life Insurance Company
- The first in the whole country to introduce
- yi ding bao** Evergreen Life insurance plan

Extract 11

- 3 cit thong tian ue
- 4 i ting po
- 5 cin kan tan o
- 6 mei guo ren shou yi ding bao
- 7 it ting ho li po
(Advert 1)
- 3 With a phone call

- 4 acceptance is guaranteed
- 5 really simple and easy
- 6 American life insurance yi ding bao
- 7 guarantees to let you take up the policy

Extract 12

- 6 Shi-ying and ladies in the park: yi ding bao (the product name)
(Advert 3)

Extract 13

- 10 Male3: yi ding bao (the product name)
(Advert 3)

Extract 14

- 16 Shi-Ying: cit thong tian ue
- 17 Shi-Ying: *it ting po*
(Advert 3)
- 16 Shi-ying: with a phone call
- 17 Shi-ying: acceptance is guaranteed

Extract 15

- 8 ren he wu shi dao qi shi wu sui de ren
- 9 kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao
- 10 shei dou huan ying
(Advert 2)
- 8 anyone aged between 50 and 75
- 9 CIGNA bao zheng bao
- 10 welcomes all

Extract 16

- 28 kan jian ren shou bao zheng bao (the product name)
(Advert 2)
- 28 CIGNA bao zheng bao (the product name)

Extract 17

- 4 all older characters: kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao
(Advert 4)
- 4 all older characters: CIGNA bao zheng bao

Extract 18

- 5 F1: ciah lau koh e tang po hiam kam u iann?
- 6 Liao-jun: *tong jian lo* ren he wu shi dao qi shi wu sui de ren
- 7 Liao-jun: tian ue sui ka kha
- 8 Liao-jun: po cing long po e tioh
(Advert 4)
- 5 F1: is it true that buying insurance is possible despite of being old?
- 6 Liao-jun: Of course. Anyone aged between 50 and 75
- 7 Liao-jun: make a call right away
- 8 Liao-jun: acceptance is guaranteed

Extract 19

- 24 ren he wu shi dao qi shi wu sui
- 25 bao zheng dou neng bao

- 26 kan jian ren shou bao zheng bao
(Advert 4)
24 anyone aged 50 to 75
25 is guaranteed to get
26 CIGNA bao zheng bao

As discussed in the Methodology section, above, the ideological and cultural resources that are drawn upon to construct product images can also contribute to defining the nature of the consumer community. Therefore, in ideological terms, the ads' emphasis on guaranteed acceptance (the product image) can be considered derogatory, insofar as it presupposes taken-for-granted social (or age-based) discrimination that older customers would normally come across (the customer image).

The product-naming strategy also projects an asymmetrical relationship between two participants: a giver (the insurance company) and a receiver (the customer). This relationship reflects the power the insurance companies have over their target customers, as controlling agents or gatekeepers of social resources that the latter presumably aspire to possess (constructing relationships). Thus, a promise or guarantee of acceptance, at the surface level, seems to be an appeal – or a privilege, as highlighted in Ad 3's caption *zhuang shu*: “only for ages 50-75”. Nevertheless, it may simultaneously patronize some target customers, by treating them as if they need to be specially assured of their eligibility, despite the fact that people in their 50s and 60s can still buy a broad range of life-insurance products that are not age-restricted or age-specific. In addition, the discourse of guaranteed acceptance is embedded with an ageist implication that older people are disenfranchised by the wider society, a society that includes even the otherwise well-intentioned producers of the examined advertisements. As a consequence, an association between older age and vulnerability may be perpetuated.

3.3. Stigmatization of older age as a legitimating device

The above discussion suggests that ageism is implicit in the examined advertising discourse. What will be presented in this section, however, is rather more overtly ageist: i.e., directly derogatory messages about older age in silver-marketing campaigns that serve to legitimate the necessity for the advertised life-insurance plan. This is especially evident in Ad 2.

Extract 20 (Ad 2)

- 1 M1: wei? Ting bu qing chu a ?
(M1 is on the phone but his call is cut off)
- 2 M1: ren lao le (M1 looks sad)
- 3 M1: mei yong le
- 4 M1: sher me dou bu cheng
- 5 M1: xiang mai ge bao xian
- 6 M1: yie bu cheng
- 7 Liao-jun: bie dan xin
- 8 Liao-jun: ren he wu shi dao qi shi su sui de ren
- 9 Liao-jun: kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao
- 10 Liao-jun: shei dou huan ying

English translation:

- 1 M1: hello? Can't you hear clearly?
- 2 M1: being old (M1 looks sad)
- 3 M1: is useless

- 4 M1: nothing can be done
- 5 M1: feeling like taking up an insurance policy
- 6 M1: also fails
- 7 Liao-jun: don't worry
- 8 Liao-jun: anyone aged between 50 and 75
- 9 Liao-jun: CIGNA bao zheng bao
- 10 Liao-jun: welcomes all

Ad 2 begins by presenting an older man (labeled M1 in Extract 20) enquiring about life insurance over the phone, and being rejected. In this case, explicitly derogatory views about older age – *ren lao le mei young le*, “being old means being useless” (lines 2-3) – were presented to contextualize, legitimate, and contrast with the advertiser’s promised “welcome” (*huan ying*, line 10) and “guaranteed acceptance” (*bao zheng bao*, line 9).

Extract 21 (Advert 2)

- 11 L1: aiya, kui sin ku na e cuan moo penn
- 12 L1: si cai si
- 13 Liao-jun: bu yong ti jian
- 14 Liao-jun: bu wun jian kang zhuang kuan
- 15 Liao-jun: jue bu ju bao

English translation:

- 11 L1: (sigh) why are there health problems all over the body
- 12 L1: really annoying
- 13 Liao-jun: no medical
- 14 Liao-jun: no health questions
- 15 Liao-jun: never refuse your application

The next communicative move in Ad 2 (see Extract 21) is to extend its negative portrayal of older age by presenting an older woman who is annoyed by her illness (lines 11-12). This image functions to legitimate the advertiser’s promise that its customers will be exempt from medical examinations and health-related questions (lines 13-14).

Explicit references to age-associated problems can be insulting. There could be some ways of mitigating the negativity conveyed in the above messages, such as to use humor – a common and effective coping strategy whereby the elderly deal with aging problems (Richman, 1977; Weber & Cameron, 1978). Given the availability of this and other options, the fact that the advertising producer still chose to utilize derogatory messages about older age suggests that such messages are socially sanctioned and considered unproblematic in Taiwanese society.

3.4. Discursive representations of death

Advertising discourses about life insurance provide a rich field for the exploration of socio-cultural views of death and funeral expenses: topics that deserve greater research attention (Coupland & Coupland, 1997). Views of mortality can be considered important aspects in the process of aging. Interestingly, the examined data contains hardly any references to ‘funeral expenses’ or ‘death’. The only exception is Ad 2, which includes bereavement among its themes.

Extract 22 (Advert 2)

- 16 G: ren zou le zong yao hua qian de
(Trying to give L2 money)

- 17 L2: xie xie ni bu young le (refusing to take the money)
18 L2: zheng de bu young le (sobbing)
19 Liao-jun: tloh sng hit kang kau
20 Liao-jun: lan ma e tang an sim li khui

English translation

- 16 G: after people are gone, there is always a need to spend money
17 L2: thank you. There is no need (refusing the money)
18 L2: really there is no need for the money (sobbing)
19 Liao-jun: even if that day comes
20 Liao-jun: we can also leave with peace of mind

Extract 22 is the transcription of a scenario in which an old woman (labeled L2 in the transcript) is offered money by a guest (labeled G) but refuses it. Both of them are dressed in black, and the woman is sobbing. The background is a dark indoor setting, presumably her home. Collectively, all of these elements imply that a funeral has just taken place, as it is customary in Taiwan to give the bereaved money for funeral expenses.

Nevertheless, euphemization can be observed in the lexical representations of death-relevant issues. For example, the presenter refers to the day we die as “that day” (*hit kang*, line 19), and rather than “to die”, the verbs used are *zhou le* (“have/has gone”, line 16) and “to leave” (*li khui*, line 20). In other words, the only sampled advertisement to include the notion of death represented it only indirectly, both visually and lexically. In the other three adverts, this topic was simply absent; and from a CDA viewpoint, the selection of what messages to exclude from a text may also be considered ideological.

Over-50s life-insurance plans, by their existence, remind their users that death is inevitable, and even potentially imminent. However, though mortality lies at the center of the product’s function, it is observably not a topic easily or comfortably dealt with. Therefore, advertisers resort to strategies of repression or euphemization to mitigate customers’ potential uneasiness. After all, death is still constructed as a taboo and cannot be too openly discussed – even in promotional discourses selling life-insurance products to older people.

3.5. The consumption of lifestyles as a legitimating device

Ads 3 and 4 legitimated their respective life-insurance plans by prompting viewers to perceive these products as paths to accessing certain lifestyles. The attributes of these constructed lifestyles include confidence, independence, fun, leisure, and physical activity, with the older adults in both ads being depicted as engaged in sports and travel (constructing positive images of customers). In other words, both advertisements contain explicitly positive aging – suggesting, moreover, that the protagonists are capable of acting young or even controlling aging process according to their own desires due to the consumption of the promoted life-insurance plans. These observations will be further elaborated below.

Extract 23 (Advert 3)

- 7 Shi-ying: siann mih po hiam?=
(The presenter, Shi-ying is featured posing the question to some older men who are playing baseball and labeled as Male 1, 2, 3, and 4. They wear their caps backwards.)
8 male 1&2: = rang wo men gen nian qing ren
9 male 1&2: xiang shou tong yiang de bao zhang

10 male 3: yi ding bao (the product name)

(A senior man, labeled as Male 4, is featured running base successfully and facing to the camera)

11 male 4: nian qing ren ke yi wo men dang ran ye ke yi

English translation:

7 Shi-ying: what is the life insurance policy? =

8 male 1&2: = which allows us like youngsters

9 male 1&2: to enjoy the same cover

10 male 3: yi ding bao (the product name)

11 male 4: youngsters can and of course so can we.

In Ad 3 (see Extract 23), older characters are portrayed in an overtly positive manner, as socially active (hanging out with friends), physically fit (playing baseball), and perhaps also acting young (wearing their baseball caps backwards). Arguably, these active and youthful images are presented to contextualize the product’s utility, i.e., to lead the audience to infer that the advertised insurance plan is relevant to the depicted lifestyle. Two of the older characters (here labeled as M1 and M2) claim that they enjoy the same protection or cover as younger people do (lines 8-9, Extract 23). At the semantic level, this informs us that older customers, like younger ones, can take up an insurance policy. At the pragmatic level, the target customers need to draw upon an entailment that, *without* the promoted life insurance, they could lack equality with younger people, or even lose social power as a result of attempts to compete with them.

In line 11 of the same advertisement, another point of comparison with the young is raised by another older actor who demonstrates that he is just as physically strong as younger men. This is implied through his baseball-playing skill and success. Interestingly, his point in line 11 that “youngsters can and of course so can we” could be construed as a comment on the preceding line (line 10), which presents the product name *yi ding bao* (“guaranteed to underwrite”). The integration of visual and verbal content in this particular scene further suggests the possibility of successful intergroup competition, embodied or perhaps even enabled by the possession of a life-insurance product that could stereotypically be perceived as excluding the old. The advertised commodity here becomes a solution for those older people who seek greater social power and/or struggle to maintain a youthful, or active identity.

Extract 24 (Advert 4)

1 Liao-jun: o ji san o pa sang

2 Liao-jun: huann ging tau tin lai iu lam a

...

13 Liao-jun: mei tian bu dao san shi qi yuan

14 Liao-jun: jiu you zhong shen bao zhang la

15 M3: lan la koo ho ka ti

16 M3: si se to bian chau huan

17 M3: kho lan ka ti lan ma e tan lai khi iu tai uan

English translation:

1 Liao-jun: older men and women

2 Liao-jun: welcome to travel together

...

13 Liao-jun: with less than 37 dollars a day

14 Liao-jun: then have life-long cover

15 M3: if we take care of ourselves well

16 M3: our children will not worry

17 M3: we can travel around Taiwan on our own

Similarly, Ad 4 (see Extract 24) portrayed a lifestyle of extensive travel (*huann ging tau tin lai iu lam a*, “welcome to travel together”, line 2) and implied that the choice of such a lifestyle was a consequence of the possession of the promoted life-insurance product. This is underscored by the connection made between “having life-long cover” (line 14) and a lifestyle that is independent (“on our own”) and leisure-oriented (“we can travel around Taiwan”) in line 17. The social meanings of the promoted life insurance also include the fulfillment of expected familial responsibilities (“take care of ourselves well”, line 15; “our children will not worry”, line 16).

In some instances, the target customers were encouraged to perceive themselves as the beneficiaries of the cover, whereas in reality such a position is occupied by their children or other dependents. For instance, Ad 3 (Extract 23) claims that its life insurance enables older people to have the same protection or cover as enjoyed by youngsters (lines 8-9). In Ad 4, policy holders only need to spend 37 NTD and then they can have cover or protection (*bao zhang*, line 14), which seems to imply that it is the policy holder’s own life and remaining future (“life-long”) that are being taken care of by the product. In other words, consumption of the advertised products assures the continuation of the ‘golden ager’ lifestyle, rather than being simply a means of leaving some money to your family after you die.

Ageism is commonly conceived of as prejudices and direct derogation. The very first definition of ageism, proposed by Butler (1969), involves negatively valenced indicators such as *old-fashioned*, *senile*, and *rigid*. However, this definition was later criticized as being too narrow because it overlooks the potentially harmful effects of idealizing positive aging and/or a culture of agelessness within consumer society (e.g., Bytheway, 1995; Katz & Marshall, 2003). The term *positive ageism* was therefore coined to describe the systematic favoritism shown to older adults with certain attributes, especially affluence, freedom, youthfulness and happiness (Butler, 1975; Bytheway, 1995; Palmore, 1999). The positive constructions of older age presented in Ads 3 and 4 could make implied ageist ideologies more difficult, though not impossible, to identify.

Conclusion

The initial wave of promotion of over-50s life-insurance products in Taiwan seems to have been closely linked to lifestyle choices (especially evident in Ads 3 and 4), and a parallel strategy can also be discerned in promotional discourses of selling holidays to older people (Ylänne-McEwen, 2000). This paper indicates that the consumption of over-50s life-insurance products, as discursively constructed in 2007 TV advertising in Taiwan, bore certain social and symbolic meanings that transcended its practical functions of defraying funeral expenses and ensuring loved ones’ financial security. The advertised life-insurance plans were presented as a means by which older customers would gain access to independence, confidence, youthfulness, or competitiveness relative to younger people. In keeping with the observations of Featherstone and Hepworth (2005), in a present-day society dominated by consumer culture, discourses of aging tend to revolve around the consumption of commodities and leisure. Consumer culture (Baudrillard, 1975, 1981; Featherstone, 1991) refers to the use of a product not simply for the sake of its utility, but also for its communicative and connotative meanings; and demand and supply often operate in relation to the construction of lifestyles. This tended to be confirmed by the advertising data examined in the present research: potential customers for over-50s life-insurance products in 2000s Taiwan were encouraged to believe that these products will allow

them to project their individuality, indulge their sense of adventure, and even have more options vis-à-vis the aging process.

Some instances of the explicit construction of positive aging were evident in the data. For instance, Ad 3 highlighted the physical strength of the featured older actors. However, because this depiction of physical fitness was made via comparison with younger people, youthfulness was reinforced as a status of aspiration. Furthermore, the “uni-age style” (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989: 144; Blaikie, 1999: 102) featured in some of the older characters’ behaviors – e.g., wearing baseball caps backwards in Ad 3 – demonstrates an attempt to blur age-based boundaries. Such representations emphasize liberation from chronological bonds or age-appropriate behaviors. All in all, the ideological stance of the depicted positive aging is not rooted in neutral acceptance of older age as it is.

The findings also revealed the presentation of older age as a problem in the examined advertising discourses. For the most part, positive aging was foregrounded and explicit, while ageist ideology was merely implied. Viewers were repeatedly directed to draw on cultural perceptions of older age as a stage characterized by deteriorating health, uselessness, weakening financial abilities, and declining social power. This approach to older age has precedents in other advertising contexts (Coupland, 2003; Coupland, 2007). In addition, the observed juxtaposition of counter-stereotypical images of aging with traditional societal assumptions about it is not a new strategy. For instance, as Ylänne-McEwen (2000) shows, over-50s holiday advertising in the UK is marked by the depiction of lifestyles associated with romance, adventure and enjoyment, on the one hand, and communalism, insecurity and dependency on the other.

A negative ideological stance towards aging can also be inferred from the product names of over-50s life-insurance products in my sample, all of which drew upon insecurity, and arguably, the customer’s inferior position relative to the power of insurance companies that are gatekeepers of aspired-to social resources.

In late adulthood, according to Erikson (1982), one should develop a sense of ego integrity that leads to an acceptance that one’s life has been meaningful and that death is inevitable – even though, at this stage, despair may still arise from the fear of death. However, from the point of view of advertisers, the topic of death remains taboo and is not so easily dealt with. References to death-related topics are therefore usually neutralized, euphemized or mitigated in advertising. Such repression of death in the media is not unusual: as Wernick (1995) pointed out, consumer magazines targeting older age groups in Western countries (e.g. *Modern Maturity* in the U.S., *Discovery* in Canada, and *Choice* in the UK) never featured columns addressing how to prepare for death, yet constantly perpetuated images of happy old age and the possibility of staying young. Even though acceptance of death plays an important role in psychological development in later life (Butler, 1963; Erikson, 1982; Peck, 1968), this topic is still treated as the most forbidden subject of all (Ariès, 1978). The talk of death was repressed in the examined advertising data, except in Ad 2 where bereavement was represented visually. This silencing of mortality is all the most surprising, given that (logically speaking) the acknowledgement of death should be the central idea justifying the consumption of life insurance. As Huang (1989) pointed out, Chinese perspectives on death and dying are reflected in the daily use of language. For instance, the word “death” or its synonyms are forbidden on happy occasions. Words that have a similar pronunciation to the word “death” (e.g., the number “four”) are used carefully in order to avoid

association with it. The first generation of Taiwanese advertising discourses to involve over-50s life insurance products appears to reinforce this cultural attitude. Fear of death in the examined Taiwanese commercials is embodied in the avoidance of funeral expenses as a purpose of the consumption of life insurance, and of death as an age-appropriate norm. This is in marked contrast to UK advertising for the same type of product which at least did not silence death (Chen & Ylänne, 2012).

Moreover, as discussed above in the Literature Review section, Taiwan has seen a weakening of Confucian philosophies that endorse the concept of filial piety and parents' dependence on their children at older age. This seems clearest in Ad 4, in which older adults are advised to maintain their independence by means of the life-insurance product; this closely echoes Chen's (2015) findings regarding the ideological focus of Taiwanese TV advertisements promoting health/medical products.

This paper has only examined advertising discourse relating to a particular category of products. Other silver-market products and services such as funeral services, stair lifts and bathroom alterations should also be taken into account in future research on advertising texts' ideological stances towards aging and older age. Additionally, the CDA approach used in the present research could be extended to life-insurance ads aimed at the general public, to clarify how and to what extent their discursive strategies differ from those aimed specifically at persons over age 50. Likewise, the arguments made here regarding the patronizing slant embedded in our sample's emphases on cost, medical exemptions, and eligibility can be further scrutinized, to establish whether it is specific to advertising addressed to older people.

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Appendix

Transcribing conventions:

Bold and italic: Southern min, otherwise Mandarin Chinese

Bold: emphasized words in the caption

(1.0) pause timed in tenth of a second

() description of nonverbal or contextual phenomenon

== continuous utterances, no interval between two utterances

? a question

Vertical ellipses indicate the omitted verbal and visual content which is about another type of insurance which is also provided by the same insurance company but considered irrelevant to the analysis in this paper

Appendix 1: Advert 1 Alico yi-ding-bao evergreen life insurance plan (1)

Spoken messages	Visual descriptions	Caption
(voiceover) 1 wu shi dao qi shi wu sui de peng you 2 zhong yao xun xi yao gao su ni		mei guo ren shou quan guo shou chuang yi ding bao chang qing shou xian 50-75 sui du xiang 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
3 <i>ci tong tian ue</i> 4 <i>it ting po</i> 5 <i>cin kan tan o</i> 6 mei guo ren shou yi ding bao 7 <i>it ting ho li po</i>	The presenter, Shi-Ying, a celebrity in Taiwan, is featured talking about the life insurance plan in a study, with a big book shelf in the background.	
8 <i>m bian giam chat sin the</i> 9 <i>ma be bun li tit kue sia mih penn</i>	The following words are shown: No health questions, no medical and 100% acceptance	Alico 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
10 <i>po hui cuat tui be khi</i> 11 <i>po ciong cuat tui be kiam</i> 12 <i>siong o lok e si</i>	The presenter, Shi-ying is shown again in the study, sitting at a desk.	bao fei bu zhang bao zhang bu jian Alico 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
13 <i>ci kang m bian ngoo cap kho tioh e ing po</i>		mei tian bu dao 50 yuan Alico 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
14 <i>ci tong tian ue</i>	An information pack is shown	Alico 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
15 <i>cu liau bian hui kia kau hu siong</i> 16 <i>hoo li coh cham kho</i>	The presenter, Shi-ying holds the information pack in hand	

Appendix 1 continue

Spoken messages	Visual descriptions	Caption
17 <i>sann cap kang lai bo buan i</i> 18 <i>bo tiau kiann cuan giah the po</i>		30 tian bu man yi bao zheng quan er tui fei Alico 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw
19 xian cai jiu da 080000 wu shi dao qi shi wu		mei guo ren shou quan guo shou chuang yi ding bao chang qing shou xian 50-75 sui du xiang 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw

Appendix 2: Advert 2 CIGNA bao-zheng-bao life insurance plan (1)

Spoken messages	Visual descriptions	Caption
(Lines 1-6: by M1) 1 M1: wei? ting bu qing chu a? (M1 is on the phone but his call is cut off) 2 ren lao le (looking sad) 3 mei yong le 4 sher me dou bu cheng 5 xiang mai ge bao xian 6 yie bu cheng	An old man (labeled as M1) is featured making a phone call in his house. After the call is cut off, he looks helpless and slightly sad.	
(lines 7-10 :by the presenter) 7 Liao-jun: bie dan xin 8 ren he wu shi dao qi shi wu sui de ren	The presenter, Liao-Jun (a Taiwanese celebrity), is featured talking about the product. The background is a number of mansions.	50 dao 75 sui 0800-000-813
9 kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 10 shei dou huan ying		bao zheng cheng bao 0800-000-813
(lines 11-22: by the old lady climbing the stairs) 11 L1: aiya, <i>kui sin ku na e cuan moo penn</i> 12 <i>si cai si</i>	An old woman (labeled as L1) is featured climbing the stairs with difficulties. She touches her painful shoulder and complains about her health.	
(lines 13-15: by the presenter, Liao-jun) 13 Liao-jun: bu yong ti jian 14 bu wun jian kang zhuang kuang 15 jue bu ju bao	The presenter, Liao-jun	bu yong ti jian bu wen jian kang zhuang kuang 0800-000-813 jue bu ju bao 0800-000-813
(lines 16-18: a conversation between G and L2) 16 G: ren zou le zong yao hua qian de (trying to give L2 money) 17 L2: xie xie ni bu yong le (refusing to take the money) 18 zhen de bu yong le (sobbing)	Another old woman (labeled as L2) is featured conversing with a guest (labeled as G) who intends to give her some money but is refused. Both of them are dressed in black. The old woman in this scene looks sad and cries. The background is a dark indoor setting, presumably her home.	
(lines 19-30: by the presenter) 19 <i>tioh sng hit kang kau</i> 20 <i>lan ma e tang an sim li khui</i>	A close-up of the presenter's face	0800-000-813

Appendix 2 continue

Spoken messages	Visual descriptions	Caption
21 wo jin nian wu shi wu sui 22 mei tian bu dao yi bai yuan	The presenter is featured talking about the product with the background of a number of mansions.	mei tian 98 yuan 55 sui nan xing jiao fei 20 nian 0800-000-813
23 jiu ke yi yong you zhong shen bao zhang		zhong shen shou xian bao zhang 50 wan 0800-000-813
.		.
.		.
.		.
28 kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 29 <i>po ciong phong phai</i> 30 <i>po ho i khing sang</i>		0800-000-813
(lines 31-32: male voiceover) 31 xian cai jiu bo 0800000813 32 CIGNA kang jian ren shou		bao zheng bao zhong shen shou xian zhuan an 0800-000-813

Appendix 3: Advert 3 AIG yi-ding-bao evergreen life insurance plan (2)

Spoken messages	Visual description	The caption
1 Shi-ying: hei cao 2 Ladies in the park: cao	A group of ladies are dancing in the park. The background music is light-hearted. The presenter, Shi-ying who is a celebrity in Taiwan approaches the ladies.	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
3 Shi-ying: <i>lin kam cai ngia cuan kok te it tng</i> ?=	The camera focuses on Shi-ying's face and his background is mild sun light and trees in the park.	
4 Ladies in the park: = shen ti hao huai dou ke yi bao de 5 yin fa zu bao dan	Those ladies dancing in the park say line 4 together.	shen ti hao huai dou ke yi bao
6 Shi-ying & Ladies: yi ding bao	Shi-ying and those ladies in the park display a telephoning hand gesture and say line 6 together	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
7 S: <i>siann mih po hiam</i> ?=	Shi-ying is featured with some older people who are playing baseball. He then asks them the question in line 7	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
8 Male 1&2: = rang wo men gen nian qing ren 9 xiang shou tong yang de bao zhang	Two older men (labeled as Male 1&2) are featured to respond to Shi-ying's question. They are playing baseball and they wear their caps backwards.	rang wo men han nian qing ren xiang shou tong yang de bao zhang
10 Male3: yi ding bao	Another man (labeled as Male 3) holding a baseball glove is featured facing the camera and displaying a telephoning hand gesture while saying line 9. He wears his cap backwards.	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw

Appendix 3 continue

Spoken messages	Visual description	The caption
(Male 4 succeeds in running base) 11 Male4: nian qing ren ke yi wo men dang ran ye ke yi	A senior man (labeled as Male 4) is featured running base successfully and then giving a comment in line 11. The man wears his cap backwards.	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
12 Shi-ying: <i>sia mih po hiam pe e</i> 13 <i>be pi kiau e kha cio</i>	Shi-ying is featured alone facing the camera	li pei jin jue bu bi ni jiao de shao zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
	An old couple are featured facing the camera with smiling facial expressions displaying a telephoning hand gesture	
14 Shi-ying: <i>mui kang m bian goo cap kho</i>	Shi-ying is featured facing the camera and displaying a hand gesture indicative of five	ping jun mei tian zui di bu dao 50 yuan yi bao er 20 wan wei li zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
	An old lady is featured with a little girl together displaying a telephoning hand gesture with smiling facial expressions.	zui di bu dao 50 yuan (yi bao er 20 wan wei li) zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
15 Shi-ying: <i>sann pue e i gua po ciong</i>	Shi-ying shows a hand gesture indicative of three	zuo gong cher zuo fei ji zuo jie yun yi wai bao zhang 3 bei (tou bao liang nian hou sheng xiao) zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
	A man playing tennis with a smiling facial expression displays a telephoning hand gesture.	
16 Shi-ying: <i>cit thong tian ue</i> 17 <i>it ting po</i> 18 chuan guo yin fa cu <i>sionn kai o lo e</i> 19 AOG mei guo ren shou <i>sionn kai ho</i>	Shi-ying and a group of older people are facing the camera	zhuan shu 50-75 sui 0800-00-5075 Alico www.alico.com.tw
20 Shi-ying: <i>a li kha a bue?</i>	Shi-ying and other older people display a telephoning hand gesture	
.	.	.
.	.	.
.	.	.

Spoken messages	Visual description	The caption
(voiceover) 31 ni hai cai deng shen me? 32 xian cai jiu da 33 0800005075 34 080000 wu shi dao qi shi wu		mei guo ren shou chuan tai shou chang chang yi ding bao chang qing shou xian 0800-00-5075 www.alico.com.tw 30 tian man man jian shang bu man yi bao tui

Appendix 4: Advert 4 CIGNA bao-zheng-bao (2)

Spoken messages	Visual description	The caption
1 Liao-jun: <i>o ji sang o pa sang</i> 2 <i>huann ging tau tin lai iu lam a</i>	Liao-jun (the presenter) gets on a tour bus and is warmly welcomed by other older people	kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
3 M1: wo you kan dao <i>li</i> di guang gao o	An old man (labeled as M1) on the tour bus recognizes Liao-jun and claims to know a commercial featuring Liao-jun. After this claim, all featured older people say the product name together.	
4 All older characters: kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao		
5 F1: <i>ciah lau koh e tang po hiam kam u iann?</i>	The camera turns to another old lady (labeled as F1)	
6 Liao-jun: <i>tong jian lo</i> ren he wu shi dao qi shi wu sui de ren	Liao-jun is on camera again.	bao zheng bao zhong shen shou xian kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
7 Liao-jun: <i>tian ue sui ka kha</i> 8 <i>po cing long po e tiah</i>		bao zheng bao zhong shen shou xian bao zheng cheng bao kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
9 F2: <i>kam u ciah kan tan ?</i>	The camera turns to an old lady (labeled as F2) on the bus.	kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
10 Liao-jun: bu yong shen ti jian cha 11 <i>a ma be kah li mng tang mng sai</i>	Liao-jun is on camera again.	bu young ti jian bu wen jian kang zhuang kuang kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
12 M2: <i>oh pi siau lian e be po hiam koh kha kan tan</i>	The camera turns to another older man (labeled as M2) sitting in the tour bus.	kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575

Appendix 4 continue

Spoken messages	Visual description	The caption
13 Liao-jun: mei tian bu dao san shi qi yuan 14 jiu you zhong shen bao zhang la	Liao-jun speaks to the older people on the bus	mei tian zui di bu dao 37 yuan 55 sui nan xing jiao fei 20 nian zhong shen shou xian bao zhang 20 wan kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
15 M3: <i>lan la koo ho ka ti</i> 16 <i>si se to bian chau huan</i> 17 <i>kho lan ka ti lan ma e tan lai khi iu tai uan</i> (someone says yes in the background and every one laughs)	Another old man (labeled as M3) on the bus makes a comment	kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
.	.	.
23 Liao-jun: <i>cit khuan ho khang e po hiam</i> 24 ren he wu shi sui dao qi shi wu sui 25 bao zheng dou neng bao 26 kan jian ren shou bao zheng bao	Liao-jun is facing the camera and speaking.	kang jian ren shou bao zheng bao 0809-067-575
27 all older characters: <i>kin lai kha o</i>	All older people on the bus are using their mobile phones to make phone calls	
28 Liao-jun: <i>bian hui e cu liao ma siong kia ho lin o</i>	Liao-jun speaks to other older people on the bus and has some paper documents at hand.	
29 all older characters: wei	All older characters are on the phone.	
(voiceover) 30 ma shang bao 0809 067 575 CIGNA kang jian ren shou		bao zheng bao zhong shen shou xian 0809-067-575

Assemblages of Syrian suffering: Rhetorical formations of refugees in Western media

Tiffany A. Dykstra¹

Abstract

As the influx of displaced people around the world continues to grow, the international community has yet to settle on a solution. According to Bülent Diken (2004), society is unable to determine whether the refugee is truly a worthy subject of human rights or simply a criminal, making it all the more important to analyze the conflicting representations of refugees in mainstream media. This rhetorical analysis examines discourses within highly read and referenced articles from Western (U.S. and U.K.) media sources during the first wave of media coverage of the violence in Syria during the fall of 2012 until the spring of 2014. Western media discourse surrounding the Syrian civil war and more specifically the refugee crisis can be understood as an assemblage of meanings that may account for the confused, contradicting, and sometimes complementary representations of Syrian refugees (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Puar, 2007). The competing discourses of refugee experiences reflect a rhetorical element of the state of exception, recreating conditions of bare life and precarity through discourses of disposability. This paper explores the texture and implications of three distinct lines within the Western media assemblage of the Syrian refugee that represent displaced people 1) as a dangerous burden, 2) as disaster and humanitarian *raison d'être* and 3) as a humanized subject. The analysis concludes with a reframing of the modernist, structuralist subject position of the refugee by reconceptualizing media representations as an assemblage to show how seemingly contradictory constructions can cooperate to perpetuate the refugees' experiences as sacred and disposable (*conventu sacer*).

Keywords

Postcolonialism, State of Exception, Media Discourse, Critical Rhetoric, Refugee

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the United States has been reluctant to accept refugees from Syria. Many provisions of the law on resettlement make it difficult for Syrian refugees to be granted permanent rights if they have not faced political, religious or sexual persecution, while many displaced people lack documentation (Gearan, 2013). Additionally, anti-terror laws in the US have created yet another hurdle, targeting Syrian refugees and in many instances preventing their migration altogether (Jordan, 2014). After the attacks on Brussels and Paris in November 2015, discourses prioritizing national security over humanitarianism have resurfaced with West Virginia legislators discussing plans to place refugees under surveillance, create additional delays, and allow state and local governments to have veto authority over resettlement plans (Troshinsky, 2016). Meanwhile, over 2 million people are living in refugee camps within Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, and Lebanon, while the United Nations estimates that 9.3 million more are facing desperate conditions and are in need of food, clean water, and secure living conditions (Zaracostas, 2014). It is estimated that over 270,000 people have died in the conflict at the point of publishing (Troshinsky, 2016). Although Western media outlets continue to look on as Syrians suffer, the conflict is constructed as an isolated regional concern, withholding criticism of the government’s response, specifically, US foreign policy on Syrian refugees. Tough questions need to be asked. Considering that the US accepted nearly 70,000 people as refugees in 2014, why is it that only 132 have been from Syria (United States Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015)? How are refugees being represented that might contribute towards inaction and apathy regarding the refugee crisis? How might Western media representations construct a view of the Syrian refugee that perpetuates problematic beliefs and colonial legacies?

Although this paper problematizes the discourse of humanitarianism, I have no intention of denigrating the benevolence of aid or diminishing its importance. Of course, food aid is critical to sustaining the life of refugees. However, the discussion about and benevolence of humanitarian aid must not end with simply keeping refugees alive, which is what Agamben (1995a) refers to as “bare life.” Even with sufficient calories to sustain their bodies, refugees continue to suffer within and outside of the camps. One in five Syrian refugee girls are forced into marriage with men they’ve never met, some as young as 10, in order to avoid sexual violence and to escape the dire conditions of poverty (Watt & Wintour, 2014). Many Syrian refugees are not granted work visas and are living off what little savings they may have. Furthermore, millions of Syrian children are deprived of adequate nutrition, education, medical attention and safety, while 10,000 more have died in the conflict (Chuck, 2014). According to Bülent Diken (2004), society is unable to decide whether the refugee is truly a worthy subject of human rights or simply a criminal, making it all the more important to analyze the representations of refugees in mainstream media that influence this important interpretation.

Focusing on articles published in the U.S. and in the U.K., this paper argues that Western media discourse surrounding the Syrian civil war and more specifically the refugee crisis, illustrates what Puar (2007) calls an assemblage of meanings that may account for the confused, contradicting, and sometimes complementary representations of Syrian refugees. In other words, a critical reading of Western media examines how these texts employ representations of refugees in order to simultaneously justify inaction and reify colonial legacies.

1. Media Representations

First, because this project views the rhetoric and representations of refugees as an assemblage, a wide variety of texts is required for a critique that explores the multiplicity of different representations of refugees within dominant media interpretations. The interpellated subject of the refugee is only one line within the assemblage, of which there are a variety of alternate conditions in which one can understand the self and others (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 130). Representations of refugees in Western media can be understood as occupying space within a multitude of subjectivities characterized by its rhizomatic structure. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, “an assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines” (p. 8). Thus, this paper explores the texture and implications of three distinct lines within the Western media assemblage of the Syrian refugee through representations as a dangerous burden, as the humanitarian *raison d’être* and as a humanized subject.

Journalism and media representations play an important role in sense making and popularizing ideology for mass consumption. “Both journalism and modernity are a product of European societies over the last three or four centuries. Both are associated with ...industrialization and imperial expansion” (Hartley, 1996: 33). In other words, rhetorical criticism of media representations can facilitate a larger critique of the colonial implications of modernity. Indeed, journalism attempts to present an objective view of reality, rather than acknowledging the multifaceted interpretations of reality that compose refugee assemblages (Bailey, 2009).

This paper examines representations of Syrian refugees within Western (U.S. and U.K.) media between 2012 and 2014. Textual representations of Syrian refugees was narrowed down to a set of articles that focus specifically on the refugee crisis, discounting articles that only mention refugees in relation to the civil war, the Assad regime, U.S. political intervention and other angles or topics that pertain to Syria.¹ Similarly, Puar (2007) discusses assemblages of the terrorist figure in Western media as a rhetorical formation, which cannot be concretized as a single subject, but rather is comprised of a moving set of discourses and conditions. Approaching the refugee as a similar type of assemblage in Western media means that identities are not simply subjects, they are spatially and temporally contingent collections that can be better understood as an intersection of various texts, representations and enunciations (Puar, 2007). In this paper I focus on Western media assemblages of the Syrian refugee, which require piecing together disparate discourses and “fragments of texts” that characterize Western media’s interpretations of the Syrian refugee during the ongoing civil conflict (McGee, 1990). Thus, glimpses of refugee assemblages can be seen by looking at the multiple and varied articulations of the refugee body that attempt to regulate it through constructions of humanitarianism.

¹ Lexis Nexis was used as the primary tool to index and sort the textual data, narrowing down the articles on Syrian refugees to 212 news articles from mainstream publications in the United States and the United Kingdom published between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2014. Data collection was limited to textual publications and television and radio broadcast transcripts were excluded. The inclusion of “Syrian refugees” in the headline or as the main subject of the article was used as criteria for inclusion in the analysis. Exemplar quotations were chosen that are representative or replicated throughout the data in similar ways.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This paper draws together two distinct threads of communication and critical/cultural literature, considering conversations in 1) postcolonialism and 2) necropolitics in the state of exception to sort through and complicate the multiple representations of Syrian refugees in Western media. In an attempt to resist replicating or reifying Western hegemonic interpretations of the Syrian refugee, postcolonial theory will supplement and inform a wider critique of the geopolitical complexities and colonial legacies impacting the Syrian crisis and the experience of Syrian refugees. Drawing from a tradition of postcolonial scholarship (Said, 1977; 1985; Bhabha, 1994; Mohanty, 1984; 2003) discourses of Orientalism, colonialism and xenophobia will be traced in the text and positioned within geopolitical and historical legacies of power.

Next, extensions of Agamben’s (1995a; 2005) concepts of the state of exception, homo sacer and bare life will provide a conceptual framework for critiquing representations of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, Mbembe’s (2003) concept of necropolitics is useful in discussing the implications of the representations and policy rhetoric that characterize multiple different interpretations of the Syrian refugee crisis.

A plethora of communication and interdisciplinary literature from a variety of approaches has taken on the subject of refugees and border rhetorics, which encompass questions of how citizens are constituted as subjects and how the other is limited from belonging. Concepts such as sovereignty, abjection and alienation have been useful subjects for rhetorical critics looking at the representations of bodies excluded from typical political life (Demo, 2005; DeChaine, 2009). The refugee has been represented in global media in a number of different ways. KhosraviNik (2010) identifies a number of discursive strategies that were used in British media to represent asylum seekers, such as aggregation, collectivization, functionalization as well as humanization or individualization as strategies for empowerment. The humanitarian discourse of compassion rhetoric can counter notions of the refugee as a “queue jumper” who cheats the system, as identified by Foye and Ryder (2011). Overall, the literature supports the idea that refugees are often represented through negative and dehumanizing rhetoric, which tends to denigrate the existence and rights of the refugee in non-native spaces (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil & Baker, 2008). However, this study makes two unique contributions to research focusing on refugees and postcolonial rhetoric, 1) it reframes the modernist, structuralist subject through the notion of the assemblage to show how seemingly contradictory constructions can cooperate to perpetuate the refugees’ experiences as sacred and disposable (*conventu sacer*) and 2) by problematizing benign humanitarian rhetoric to illustrate how it can conceal colonial legacies.

3. Theoretical Justification

Postcolonialism provides a theoretical basis for undoing epistemic structures “by writing against them, over them, and from below them by inviting reconnections to obliterated pasts and forgotten presents that never made their way into the history of knowledge” (Shome & Hedge, 2002: 250). From a discursive approach, postcoloniality can be understood as a historically situated relationship between “Westerners” and “Non-Westerners” that is accomplished through both discursive and organizational practices that implicitly and explicitly privilege Western norms and standards of enacting social change (Norander & Harter, 2011; Narayan, 1997). The

colonialist stance can be reproduced through Orientalist representations of Syrian society as backwards, violent and inherently primitive (Cloud 2004; Said, 1977; 1985). As the West attempts to write the history of refugees in the Syrian civil war, postcolonial theory invites us to dig deeper for alternative histories suppressed by the Western media's cultural narratives.

Postcolonialism is uniquely well suited to a critical analysis of the competing narratives and histories of Syrian civil war because it situates them within the processes that construct geopolitical arrangements, relations among states and organizations, and inter/national histories (Shome & Hedge, 2002). For example, the primacy of US interests can be distilled from rhetoric that attempts to disguise its agenda with humanitarianism. Additionally, it contributes concepts such as agency, self-reflexivity, and provides a theoretical framework that accounts for the interdependence of symbolic and material struggle in a global society.

The historical and geopolitical positioning of the Syrian conflict through a postcolonial lens facilitates a critique that can account for materiality within discursive systems of power (Prasad, 2003). For example, Syria has endured a history of conflict, occupation and colonization. A subject that receives little attention in Western media is the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, a region Southwest of Damascus that buffers the border between Israel and Syria. Although Israel has offered (limited) help to refugees, some Syrians are hesitant to accept help as the two countries consider themselves in a state of war (Weinthal, 2014). However, postcolonial theory complicates binary narratives the oppressed and the oppressor. Youssef Chaitani (2007) details the complex relationship between Syria and Lebanon, as well as their history of French occupation. Considering the historical influences in the region offers degrees of both complexity and clarity to the ongoing conflict in Syria and the representations and responses that characterize Western rhetoric. Western support for Israel and the colonial histories of the region makes it difficult for the Syrian opposition parties to accept aid and pursue the deterritorialization of Golan Heights while still remaining credible within all factions of Syrian nationalist groups.

Finally, postcolonialism opens up a discussion of alternatives to Western homogenizing characterizations of refugees. Alternative narratives may articulate a much different range of refugee experiences, creating the possibility for what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the third space. This type of "interstitial agency" is characterized by its denouncement of binaries and competing dualisms that naturalize hierarchies (Bhabha, 1996). By refusing to come down on either side of antagonistic social tensions, third spaces engender hybrid identities that destabilize dominant cultural narratives. For example, some stories that have garnered less attention in the West include Syrian refugees who tell stories about receiving healthcare, food and shelter, as well as building relationships with Israelis and Lebanese that they otherwise would have avoided (Weinthal, 2014). Amidst geopolitical tensions, hybrid strategies resist the performance of normative cultural roles by refusing binaries that assume superiority, objectivity and encourage selective segregation, isolation, and violence. By taking an historical perspective on humanitarian rhetoric and assemblages of the refugee within Western media, the analysis illustrates how the complex and contradicting representations justify both inaction and the expansion of Western networks of influence and control through humanitarian rhetoric in postcolonial regions like Syria.

Section four will first engage in a justification of the theoretical approach followed by a detailed discussion of Syria and surrounding refugee camps as they relate to the state of exception,

contextualizing the material conditions of bare life through a postcolonial analysis of the historical legacies of power affecting the region. Second, media representations of refugees as dangerous and burdensome are shown to emphasize the threat they pose to national security. Then this section illustrates the way humanitarian rhetoric can stand in for more sincere and empowering forms of assistance, while the fourth section both applauds journalistic attempts at humanizing Syrian refugees, while attempting to problematize the summation of their experience and citations of Western perspectives and voices of authority.

4. Postcolonial Camps of Exception

Agamben's (2005) concept of the state of exception is useful in interrogating the suspension of rights as a product of law, as is the case in the ongoing civil war in Syria as well as within refugee camps maintained via international law and non-governmental organizations. The state of exception can be understood not as a special kind of law itself, such as martial law or emergency powers, but as a “suspension of the juridical order itself” which also defines the limits or threshold of the law simultaneously (Agamben, 2005: 4). For instance, the state of exception has explanatory force in its application to existing refugee camps, as well as the general state of conflict in Syria as it has historically been used in times of revolution to uphold the constitution or governing principles that it also suspends (Agamben, 1995a; 2005). However, the exception also illustrates how inaction or complicity in human rights abuses and suffering is made acceptable under the pretense of sovereignty and security. For example, the suspension of rights in the war on terror, migration rights in this instance, continues to negate the human rights the war seeks to defend. The state can render individuals “homo sacer,” excluding them from the political realm of life (bios) that would guarantee their rights as subjects, reserving nothing for them except a state of bare life in which they are given only the basic necessities to keep refugees alive (zo) (Agamben, 1995a). Thus, the same laws that create a state of exception in the war on terror preclude the United States from legally accepting Syrian refugees and allow the conditions of bare life for refugees to persist.

However, Agamben takes a very structuralist perspective, which would assume homo sacer occupies a singular subject position which characteristically would discard the political value of their life. For instance, the state of exception has traditionally been used to describe the states encroachment of rights on citizens. For years, refugees were strategically constructed as terrorists to avoid acquiescing to requests for asylum (Jordan, 2014). However, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), offer an alternate way of conceptualizing the construction of homo sacer, as an assemblage or a multiplicity of subjectivities, hence, *conventu sacer*. The sacred assemblage of the refugee can be seen as both unworthy (burdensome, dangerous) and worthy of humanitarian gesture. Here, Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics illustrates how insecurity and scarcity become rhetorical weapons for distributing death among large populations, but in a way that is compatible with the rhetoric of humanitarianism. States can use class logic to justify the control over life in refugee camps as well as determining which populations should be allowed to live in scarcity and ultimately death (Mbembe, 2003; Foucault, 2008). Refugees are allowed access to only the most basic resources, keeping them barely alive, rendered *conventu sacer* in a state of bare life.

In sum, this paper will discuss and disrupt assemblages of the Syrian refugee in mainstream Western media by identifying some of its rhetorical lines and reading them against alternative interpretations. Postcolonialism provides a theoretical lens through which to contextualize and challenge Western representations. Additionally, Agamben's (1995a; 2005) concept of the state of exception and *conventu/homo sacer*, as well as Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics are used to discuss the implications of dehumanizing rhetoric. More specifically, a poststructural approach to the refugee as an assemblage problematizes Agamben's conception of *homo sacer*. Refugees are not singular subjects, they are interpellated as a multiplicity through media representations that are deployed in ways that construct them as a burden and a danger to society, at the same time imploring the reader to alleviate their guilt through humanitarian rhetoric and attempting to escape the dehumanization of statistics through self-representation.

Syrian Conflict and Sovereignty

Syria has a long and complex history of imperialism and occupation, not unlike its regional neighbors (see Chaitani's book, *Postcolonial Syria and Lebanon* for a more complete history). The refugees displaced by the Syrian civil war include a range of different ethnicities, religions and cultural groups. Prior to 1943, France occupied the land that is now Syria and Lebanon, although foreign troops remained in both territories for years (Chaitani, 2007). After Syria and Lebanon successfully ousted the French administration from their homeland, the countries underwent a process of urbanization and economic development in which the local economy and political system flourished. This is also around the same time that Syrian Arab nationalist became a more prominent. Shortly after, the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Today, generations of Palestinian refugees have lived and are now dying in Yarmouk, one of the largest unofficial refugee camps in a district south of Damascus (Evans, 2014). Although the stories surveyed for this study generally do not distinguish between different ethnicities, using the general term, "Syrian refugees" fails to acknowledge the differential treatment they receive. Palestinian refugees in particular face difficulties in being granted status as a refugee or asylum in neighboring countries. Lebanon and Jordan fear that taking on more Palestinians will escalate tensions with citizens and the state of Israel, leading to fierce competition among them (Surrusco, 2013). Yarmouk has been a site of continual violence throughout the Syrian civil war, as Palestinians are split between support for the Syrian Army and the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Undoubtedly, state violence has become an all too common occurrence in Syria, echoing Agamben's idea of the state of exception as a normative position of sovereign power. However, postcolonial theory complicates the notion of sovereignty as it is administered by one dominant group in power. Within postcolonial zones of exceptions, sovereignty resembles more of a horizontal network of partial sovereignties than a top-down hierarchy with one ruling nation state (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006). Imperial powers no longer need boots on the ground, settlers, or traditional legal sovereignty, they can be administered from a distance, influencing border control, governmental proceedings, economic decisions and so on. The increasingly ephemeral qualities of colonialism make it all the more important to understand how colonialism operates rhetorically to reinforce historical power relations. The Syrian civil war is an example par excellence of the complicated intersection of international and local power relations that occur in the "colonial encounter" (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 69). Quoting Walter Mignolo, "there is no modernity without coloniality because coloniality is constitutive of modernity" (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 67). In other words, modernity as a system of power relies on a hierarchy in which non-

European peoples and civilizations are seen as primitive, or lacking (Hardt & Negri, 2009). For instance, Syrian society is characterized as weak and deficient even before the civil war began. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (2014) explains that that war is compounded by a “state that suffered from poor governance, a weak economic base, and intense population pressures even before the civil war began” (Cordesman, 2014). Surrounding nations that are taking on refugees are discussed as “weak,” referencing their “inability” to properly deal with the Sunni and Shiite minorities in a region where “neighbors communicate by car bomb” (Onishi, 2013; Gardner, 2013). Within this narrative, oppressed populations must buy into the systems of Western modernity in order to rescue themselves from hopeless violence and instability. In this way, media discourse positions refugees as a symptom of primitive social arrangements that may only be addressed through modernity.

Modernity is rooted in the biopolitical regime and intricately connected to sovereignty. “The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security—this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself” (Mbembe, 2003: 18). In other words, the concept of sovereignty within the age of modernity relies on the construction of threats that can be justifiably exterminated. For example, Assad is a threat to the refugees and rebels, the rebels are a threat to Assad and the stability of Syria, and refugees are a threat to all. Mbembe defines sovereignty as consisting “of the will and the capacity to kill in order to live” or the power to decide on the state of exception (p. 18). Paradoxically, Western media representations of the Syrian crisis illustrate an important and unrecognized dilemma within Mbembe’s conception of modernity when forced to evaluate threats and distinguish between them. Op-Eds and news articles are forced to confront the question, which is the greater threat; the threat to national sovereignty or the threat to global governance? In other words, the West is in a double bind; advocating inaction out of respect for national sovereignty is complicit in a crisis at risk of “genocide” (Reuters Staff Writer, 2014). On the other hand, with Russia as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, intervention risks fracturing the international community in a way that threatens the efficacy of global governance mechanisms like the United Nations, an organization charged with both protecting sovereignty as well as upholding international law (von Eggert, 2012). Thus, the rhetorics of humanitarianism and sovereignty intersect in ways that work against traditional intervention, and instead endorse a humanitarian expansion.

Western media discourse legitimizes the sovereignty of extraterritorial intergovernmental networks of humanitarian aid organizations in order to resolve what Goldsmith (2013) calls the “illegal but legitimate” dilemma. Although the U.N. can legally intervene in a sovereign nation when the government fails to protect its citizens, it cannot do so without U.N. Security Council approval. To intervene unilaterally may be legitimate but it is illegal and would disable the West from acting against others who adopt an “illegal but legitimate” doctrine in ways deemed undesirable (Goldsmith, 2013). As London’s Financial Times explains, “the Westphalian principle of non-interference demands the world leave in place Bashar al-Assad’s murderous regime in Syria” leaving humanitarianism as the only legitimate option. In sum, Western media ends up being loudly in favor of intervening in Syria, while Western nations can be found “hiding under the bedcovers” (Stephens, 2013). Thus, it is especially critical that the rhetoric of humanitarianism is interrogated from postcolonial and poststructural perspectives.

Postcolonialism uncovers important silences in Western media representations of the refugee crisis, namely the inability to access land and resources in the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. After the war of 1948, Israeli-Syrian relations have never recuperated and are still considered to be in a state of war, although no large scale organized conflict has occurred. Israeli occupation and colonization of Syria has lasting effects on refugees who are not permitted to return to land that was once theirs, especially in times of conflict or instability. Although, colonialism has taken on new forms, Israel's enclosure of the Golan represents the continuation of old technologies of colonialism, specifically, the division of space, maintenance of boundaries, and the regulation via a "language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action" (Fanon, 1991, p. 39). For example, Israel is constructing a fence along the demilitarized zone that separates the Golan from the rest of Syria. The perpetuation of colonial divisions through force limits Syrian refugees agency and illustrates the power of the sovereign to "define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, 2003: 27). Pointing out these gaps or media silences is an important part of the postcolonial project to spur discussion from perspectives that are neglected or otherwise overlooked in mainstream discourse. Even within a paradigm of international non-intervention, political pressure on Israel from Western nations to relinquish the Golan could provide alternate solutions for Syrian refugees.

Levy (2010) argues that refugee conditions illustrate "the evolution of a new regime of neo-refoulement in which zones or camps are designated as anomalous. Refugees are not necessarily sent home, but they are left in equally precarious conditions. Extraterritorialization through intergovernmentalism describes the way that Western NGO's and aid organizations physically occupy and control sovereign territories within the framework of humanitarianism. While this is not necessarily colonization in the sense that one sovereign nation is annexing another territory, it does justify the multilateral occupation and cooperation through which refugees are managed. The confinement of refugees to camps of exception is represented and rhetorically justified through assemblages of the refugee as a burden and a threat, and the humanitarian *raison d'être*. Even rhetorical attempts to empower the refugee as a human may assist in the denial of political agency and limit their claims to rights within a framework of sovereign citizenship.

4.1. Constructing the Dangerous Burden of Refugees

This study finds that Western news outlets continue to enact a history of discursive exclusion and discrimination towards migrants and refugees, associating them with problems and criminality (van Dijk, 2005). Although some outlets maintain a neutral stance towards refugees, national security concerns have reverberated throughout Western media spaces, constructing one assemblage of the Syrian refugee as a dangerous burden to the countries that aid them. This is accomplished in two ways: first, through the rhetoric of natural disasters, which emphasizes the devastation refugees have on countries that help them and second, nationalist rhetoric that constructs outsiders as threats and terrorists.

First, the rhetoric of national disasters pervades articles on the Syrian refugee crisis. The increasing presence of refugees is characterized as a burden that is dangerous for the host countries, emphasizing the effect they have on the surrounding regions, rather than the suffering of the refugees themselves. Refugees are constructed as a "wave;" a "flood;" a "human tide" (Thompson, 2013); or a "human river" (Freeman, 2013) that "swamps" neighboring countries that cannot "absorb" them (Fielding-Smith, Guler & Aglionby, 2013). As one article reports, "the

peak week in November saw 20,000 cross the border. They are fleeing Syria by the metaphorical boatload. So many are crossing and sometimes recrossing the border that Lebanese officials aren't sure the exact size of the human tsunami gradually sinking their country” (Thompson, 2013). Other times refugees are described in terms of an earthquake or a fire spreading rapidly, “the epicentre of deadly violence is at its worst inside Syria but it is causing tremors that reverberate into neighbouring countries” (Jolie & Guterres, 2012). Rather than a disaster happening to people, people are characterized as if they are the disaster themselves. Simply being out of place, refugees are threatening to “ignite what the UN's Kelley is calling Lebanon's ‘tinderbox’” (Thompson, 2013). Not only is this dehumanizing, but it completely displaces the suffering of the refugees by prioritizing their effect on regional communities.

Second, many media reports use statements from people in power, such as politicians, that perpetuate nationalistic constructions of the refugee as a terrorist and a threat to security. For example, referencing Syrian refugees, Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Robert W. Goodlatte of Virginia asks, “with today's national security threats why would we ever willingly loosen our immigration laws to allow those who have helped terrorists game the system?” (Preston, 2014). Some refugees, who had simply sold food or provided minor aid to suspected terrorist groups, were classified as such and were denied asylum. Constructions of the refugee as terrorists rely on problematic threat rhetoric and security calculations that attempt to prevent any risk or possibility of vulnerability. The assemblage of refugee as terrorist erects a rhetorical fence of familiarity that seeks to isolate those who fit normative ideas of the American citizen and ward off all forms of difference.

Previous research has found that refugees are often portrayed as a threat and a burden, threatening the stability of the country they would inhabit, for instance putting pressure on housing, education and health systems as well as straining resources more generally (KhosraviNik, 2010; van Dijk, 2005). However, in light of the Syrian civil war, media discourse has focused on the threat of refugees bringing with them radical ideologies and violent skills. NBC News reports that, “foreign fighters returning home to the U.S., Britain and other countries after honing their skills in Syria's civil war are posing a “nightmare for security services,” experts and officials say (Austin, 2014). Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson earlier this month said that the U.S. government was “very focused” on the issue of militants returning to the country” (Austin, 2014). This rhetoric reflects and reproduces stereotypical xenophobic fears of refugees as radical extremists that form the blueprints for an engineered society of exclusion and otherness (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012).

Furthermore, the fear of difference takes on specific qualities; constructing otherness in the Syrian refugee crisis as a contagion. “They are people who are highly trained for violence and killing” is a pullout quotation in large bold letters. “Pantucci warned that even if those coming back did not intend to carry out a terrorist act themselves, they could have a radicalizing effect on young men who would be drawn to them or impressed by their battlefield heroics” (Austin, 2014). A Huffington Post's headline reads, “Syrian refugee camps may be a breeding ground for terrorism” (Driscoll, 2014). It is more than the refugee bodies that pose a physical threat, it is their psychological existence that has contagious qualities, threatening to pass the disease of radicalism and otherness onto whoever may come in contact with them.

This reactive rhetoric is what Svirsky and Bignall (2012) call the “strategy of immunitas” (p. 57), which cultivates an oppositional attitude that continuously seeks to cleanse the space of control. In other words, rhetoric is one of the “little machines” that individuals actively employ against the other, to reify historical boundaries of exclusion through paranoia and fear (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987). The theoretical value of the concept of immunity is that enriches and expands Agamben’s ideas on the state of exception by desubjectivizing the operation of exceptionality (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012). In other words, the addition of immunitary rhetoric moves the analysis beyond the individual bodies rendered homo sacer in physical zones of exception, to a broader focus on “the ways of life denied to us as a result of exclusionary historical processes”. (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012: 60).

Moreover, the immunitarian rhetoric that constructs refugees as a radical threat to national security reifies historical exclusion, both via US immigration policy as well as through the policies of our allies, specifically Israel. Xenophobic rhetoric actively reaffirms, in new ways, old colonial legacies that are historically constructed. For example, Israel has literally built a wall between the Israeli occupied territory of Golan Heights and the rest of Syria in response to the civil war. After Israel built a fence along the Egyptian border primarily to keep out migrants, the Guardian reports that “Israel is to build a huge steel fence along the boundary between the Golan Heights and Syria amid fears that the civil war could spill over or create an influx of refugees” (Sherwood, 2013). This is the “immunitarian cord” that keeps people apart, reaffirming difference as a threat to national sovereignty (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012: 62). Thus, rhetorical exclusion has real, material effects that assist in the maintenance of Israel’s parameters of colonial exclusion.

4.2. The Refugee as Humanitarian Raison D’etre

Another line within the assemblage of displaced Syrian people is that of the helpless, passive refugee that beg a humanitarian response. Indeed, refugees are often robbed of their property, employment, families, and disempowered in extremely significant ways. However, refugees are also resilient, determined, and resourceful. Constructions of the refugee as helpless should be viewed as merely one assemblage, and not entirely representative of their experience or possible experiences. Moreover, constructions of the refugee as unconditionally helpless and passive constitute a basis for unquestioned aid that renders refugees as the object of aid and not active participants. The refugee as humanitarian raison d’etre can stand in for more meaningful participation in their empowerment.

Daley (2013) explains how humanitarian assistance, “though of critical importance at times of emergency, has unexpected and adverse outcomes in the long term, some of which may be counter to effective integration or reintegration. Humanitarian action should be viewed as being complicit in the reconfiguration of citizenship and identity that is taking place in the region” (p. 909). Humanitarian assistance to refugees can function as a rhetorical cover that deflects criticism. For example, purveyors of aid are portrayed as generous, while refugees, because of their construction as helpless, passive victims, must be unquestionably grateful recipients, despite the inadequacy of aid. According to the Washington Post, “international relief officials say they are frustrated by the small number of refugees admitted, as well as the long waiting times and high security hurdles applicants must navigate for resettlement in the United States. But officials are reluctant to say the very small numbers making it to U.S. shores mean that the United States

isn't pulling its weight” (Gearan, 2013). In other words, the relatively small amount of aid donated by nation states permits the continuation of refugee’s exclusion from citizenship and the rights it affords the individual. The reintegration and recognition of refugees can be delayed or denied as long as “humanitarian aid” can substitute for more meaningful action.

However, the tropes within Western media presents refugees as obligations and burdens for others to help. Refugees are not only characterized as a natural disaster burdening host countries, but asylum seekers are consistently characterized as negative problems that government must deal with (KhosraviNik, 2010). For example, Fox News host Rachel Marsden (2014) writes, “what's the point of intervening in a foreign country under the guise of humanitarianism, or sending aid, if you're just going to end up importing its citizens en masse anyway? Isn't the whole idea to shape up the place so that its people can safely remain there” (para. 1)? Indeed, empowering refugees that are dispossessed of their homes, families, and belongings might be a seemingly more preferable option than granting asylum, however, this discourse frames asylum and humanitarian aid as mutually exclusive choices, in which accomplishing one should relieve the obligation to the do the other. Rachel Marsden is an example of a symbolic elite, whose discourse, although they may have limited policy or decision making power, aids in legitimizing perspectives on minorities and refugees in particular (van Dijk, 1993). Moreover, discourse that constructs refugees as natural disasters obviously imply that no country should willingly invite this upon themselves. Similarly, KhosraviNik (2010) finds that refugees are often reduced to a political issue, rather than framed as real people deprived of their human rights and ability to participate in their own empowerment and future.

Almost every article indexed for this study reports refugees in terms of statistics, in part because the refugee crisis is comparatively significant in terms of the size and scope of those affected. The number of people displaced by the conflict rivals the Rwandan genocide (Onishi, 2013). However, van Dijk (2005) found that statistics were used as a media strategy to connect concepts of criminality and foreign bodies. Similarly, media engaged in the homogenization of ethnicity and the use of statistics to aggrandize and aggregate the increasing numbers of refugees. Articles tend to refer to “Syrian refugees” as if they are a single homogenous group without important ethnic, racial, religious, and other differentiating facets of their identity. KhosraviNik (2010) calls these discursive strategies aggregation, collectivization and functionalization. The homogenization of refugees and the media’s failure to distinguish among them conceals the disparate treatment and ethnic divisions which divide them and determine who lives and dies. In one Guardian post, the writer acknowledges the statisticization of suffering stating, “now, inside the confines of the sprawling Zaatari refugee camp a few miles away from the Syrian border in north-west Jordan, he appears as a number, a statistic, his life a shadow of what it was. He seems to be wholly displaced – physically, geographically, socially and psychologically” (Tisdall, 2014). Attempts to capture the suffering of refugees through numbers and aggregation fail to humanize the experiences of the individuals that compose those statistics and may only exacerbate the perception of refugees as a problem.

Thus, “humanitarian gestures” indicate the threshold, in other words, when something becomes a catastrophe, at which point it requires a response (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012: 192). The miserable conditions that many refugees endure illustrates how nations and international non-governmental organizations give only enough aid to keep the majority of refugees alive. At times, reading Western media felt like a rhetorical “pat on the back” when reporting on donations or reforming

asylum restrictions, using self-congratulatory discourse to alleviate the guilt of other's suffering. Although Syria's regional neighbors are home to millions of refugees living in poor conditions, the Wall Street Journal reports, "the U.S. leads the world in refugee resettlement. In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the U.S. received 70,000 refugees from 65 countries, including more than 19,000 from Iraq. In that year, more than 1,340 Syrians already in the U.S. applied for asylum" (Jordan, 2014). The humanitarian gesture suffices to alleviate the guilt that readers observing the suffering of Syrian refugees. As the Guardian states, "I get tired of telling governments they 'must' do something, knowing perfectly well that nine times out of 10 they won't. This time I have a simpler conclusion. Before we go away on holiday. That's what I shall do when I've clicked the 'send' button for this column" (Ash, 2013, para. 13). This type of humanitarian rhetoric that concludes articles on the suffering of Syrian refugees may increase donations, which is certainly helpful to some extent, but if that leaves the public feeling satisfied without calling for any larger political solution, the gesture remains insufficient.

Biopolitical control of life is delegated to aid organizations, while the sovereign powers can focus on enacting and legitimating violence. Svirsky and Bignall (2012) explain that, "humanitarian organisations [. . .] can only grasp human life in the figure of bare and sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very power they ought to fight" (p. 185). Contrary to defensive claims that aid organizations are doing all that they can, abandonment can be seen as an active response, on the part of nations and individuals who have the means to do something yet choose not to (Svirsky & Bignall, 2012). This is the bare life of necropolitics (Agamben, 1995a; Mbembe, 2003). Life is made sacred in the sense that it can be taken without repercussion through neglect or outright violence. Additionally, refugees, like *homo sacer*, are excluded from political life, they have no rights to education, leisure, or freedom of movement. They are registered with aid organizations that decide their caloric intake, their access to communication, and the extent to which they can participate in their own life decisions. The assemblage of the refugee as the humanitarian *raison d'être* represent a state of bare life, or *zo*, in which they are given only the basic necessities to stay alive. Moreover, representations of refugees as a humanitarian emergency denies their political agency or voice, reifies the legitimacy of the state and the social hierarchies it endorses (Daley, 2003).

4.3. Humanizing Strategies

Western media assemblages can simultaneously humanize the refugee and reproduce their dispossession. Some articles use a "backgrounding" strategy that attempts to individualize refugees through profiles, anecdotes and quotations. For example, CNN writes about Abdel, whose personal story provides the basis for an article on the broader issues that refugees face (Dellorto, 2013). Although names are often changed to protect families from repercussions, assigning pseudonyms acknowledge the humanity and individuality of the person. Graphic representations via photographs and videos embedded into online editions are other ways that western media attempts to convey empathy and solidarity with refugees. Humanization and individualization are ways of resisting the normally negative representations of refugees in media through profiles, narratives and anecdotes of daily life (KhosraviNik, 2010).

Furthermore, self-representation of refugees offers one alternative to rhetoric that is homogenizing and disempowering (Cartner, 2009). Although narratives are usually told through the experience of the journalist, aid worker, or other Western position, the reader may get a

glimpse of the personal experiences of the refugee. For example, the incorporation of quotations can be humanizing. The New York Times reports, “I used to just be a child — now I’m the head of the house,” said the 17-year-old, who spoke on the condition that he not be identified to protect his family in Syria. “I need a budget and to manage my money. I never thought of that before” (Rudoren, 2013). However, the nameless refugee whose words are printed in the article is only identified by their age, location in Hama Province and gender. Bailey refers to this as the politics of naming, in which one culture is subordinated to the other. “The politics of representation of ‘naming and leaving unnamed’ seems to be part of the construction of a web of meaning by which one culture (Western) understand and subordinates another (non-Western)” (Bailey, 2009: 1). One of the ways cultures are otherized and subordinated is by rendering them voiceless and nameless, even while they are humanized through self-representation.

However, many quotations are followed up by summaries from the perspective of Western authorities. After the quotation above, another quotation is included, “when you talk to them about the future,” said Carolyn Miles, chief executive of Save the Children, “they can’t see beyond, frankly, the next day” (Rudoren, 2013). This type of discourse may attempt to construct the refugee as human in an effort to build empathy and overcome alienating statistical representations, however, the rhetorical effect is limited by the discursive positioning of Western authoritarian summations of refugee life.

Conclusion: Assemblages of Refugees

In sum, the confinement of refugees to camps of exception is represented and rhetorically justified through assemblages of Syrian refugees as terrorists and the humanitarian *raison d’être*. Even rhetorical attempts to empower the refugee as a human may assist in the denial of political agency and limit their claims to rights within a framework of sovereign citizenship. Furthermore, postcolonialism urges readers to look beyond the mirage of totalizing objectivity constructed by any one culturally situated perspective on the complex global conflict in Syria. By seeking out subordinate or invisible positions and histories, the Syrian refugee can be understood not as a single subject, but as an assemblage of conflicting, complementary and contingent positions. This is both theoretically and pragmatically productive. First, acknowledging the multiplicity of possible social positions occupied at certain times may provide a remedy to the immunological response characteristic of colonial social phobia. Theoretically, this paper contributes to critical rhetorical studies by extending Agamben’s material conditions of *homo sacer* and the state of exception to rhetorical spaces. The state of exception can be understood as both material and rhetorical, recreating bare life and precarity through the discursive construction of the refugee Other.

First, media silences conceal assemblages of the refugee that may otherwise open spaces for alternate understandings and implications of hybridity. Western media frequently report on how much aid is distributed, how much more aid is needed, the number of refugees in certain areas, and so on, however, what is left out is equally important. Although aid certainly saves lives, U.N. protocol notifies any regime, including the one they are fleeing, of their refugee status in addition to which borders they have crossed and when. For this reason, some individuals who would qualify as a refugee may not file for refugee status in order to protect their families. Their voices are not included in stories of humanitarian outreach in refugee camps. Even when media

strategies are intended to generate sympathy and donations, the implications of these discourses maintain the machinations of the humanitarian industry which both participate in and obstruct possibilities for strategic forms of resistance. On whole, reports that prioritize the role of governments, systems of international sovereignty, and non-governmental organizations as the only solution to the “refugee crisis,” fail to recognize the ways that the struggle against oppression and violence can occur outside these traditional structures and in our daily discourse and within media representations. Retelling stories such as the informal system of support that united Israelis and Syrians is an example of hybridity, which is a strategy or discourse that “opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58). There are alternative perspectives, untold stories, and unheard voices that may reverberate in other communities, but are not represented in Western media. Thus, media silences may overlook important forms of resistance, hybridity and oppression.

Refugees who live lives completely absent of humanitarian aid out of necessity and concern for their safety are invisible and their suffering is often unheard. Many rebel groups fighting against Assad avoid the acceptance of aid in fear that they will lose credibility and support with local Syrians who fear they may be ceding loyalty or control to Western powers. This is especially important because the US has supported Israel who has perpetrated colonial histories that have greatly impacted the region. The colonial legacies that mark Syrian’s memories and divide Syrian territory make it difficult for the Syrian opposition parties to accept aid and pursue the deterritorialization of Golan Heights while still remaining credible within all factions of Syrian nationalist groups. These assemblages exist, however they are often completely invisible through the lens of Western media representations.

Finally, Agamben (1995b) defends a modernist, structuralist position of refugee subjectivity, whereas this paper reconceptualizes the marked and sacred refugee as an assemblage, not as homo sacer, but as a sacred assemblage, or *conventus sacri/conventu sacer*. Further, this analysis illustrates how the state of exception is not only material, but also rhetorical. Western media assemblages of the refugee construct a rhetorical space of exception, which deploys representations of the refugee as terrorist and humanitarian *raison d’être* to justify their abandonment on the steps of the law. The confinement of refugees to camps of exception is represented and rhetorically justified through assemblages of the refugee as terrorist and humanitarian *raison d’être*. Even rhetorical attempts to empower the refugee as a human may assist in the denial of political agency and limit their claims to rights within a framework of sovereign citizenship.

Syria is in a state of continual instability that functionally permits the use of violence against all its citizens. Assad’s claim to power and his protest against outside intervention mirrors the definition of the state of exception as a legal civil war. Following the legal provisions of the Syrian constitution, the president may only be deposed through democratic vote, not by force. In this way, the law is a rhetorical tool that legitimates Assad and his right to restore order through any means necessary, that literally “allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries, but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben, 2005: 2). The state of exception can be understood as the “threshold between democracy and absolutism.” (Agamben, 2005: 3). Syria parallels this concept, as Assad was allowed to maintain power and was invited to participate in the Geneva talks in the name of ‘democratic’ government, even as it is upheld through totalitarian means. Paradoxically, this

means that Assad can justify suspending components of the constitution that protect citizens, in order to uphold the constitutionality of his presidency. This study has isolated three Western media strategies that participate in geopolitical systems of power, while contextualizing them through a postcolonial perspective. As complex global conflicts continue, it is increasingly important to critically identify and connect discourses and media representations of refugees with the material and historical systems of power that are responsible for their condition.

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The Rhetorical Use of Anecdote in Online Political Discussion

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Abstract

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This study reports how people in a Reddit thread used anecdote as a rhetorical device during the discussion about the result of the 2015 UK general election. As the Internet has developed rapidly, academic interest in online discussion forums has grown, although few studies have been conducted on the development process of online political discussion. In addition, the election result was not what pollsters expected, which triggered national debates about further financial cuts on welfare and civil sectors. The present study, therefore, focuses on a thread asking people to provide their reasons for the Conservative Party victory in the 2015 election in Reddit, a popular online discussion board in English. The study employs Gee's discourse analytical framework to explore the online discussion, with a particular focus on the use of rhetoric during the discussion. The analysis reveals that people attempt to defend and justify their voting behaviour in the election by providing an anecdote and by writing it in a similar style to academic writing. The result also indicates that anecdote might work as a rhetorical device to persuade others as to their voting reasons. These results suggest that the anonymity of the Internet might influence the use of rhetoric for users in justifying their voting.

Keywords

Political Discussion, Online Discourse, Rhetoric, Reddit, the 2015 UK General Election

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Introduction

The result of the 2015 UK general election was somewhat surprising. Although pollsters predicted that none of the parties would gain a majority (i.e., 50%+1) in the House of Commons (BBC, 2015), the UK Conservative Party gained 330 seats and became the majority party in the House (UK Parliament, 2015). However, given that there were a number of protests and strikes against the austerity of the Conservative government of 2010-2015, and given that the party advocated further cuts in welfare and the civil sectors during the campaign period, the result seems much more serious. In fact, after the election, one Reddit user launched a thread asking for reasons for voting for the party.

The Internet certainly is a popular sphere where people can discuss various topics. Discussion boards such as Yahoo, Reddit and 4chan are popular online forums. For example, Yahoo has numerous discussion groups; moreover, it offers its services in various languages, such as in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. Another popular forum, 4chan, attracts 680 million page views per month from the US, the Netherlands, Poland and other countries (4chan.org, 2016). While they can accommodate many kinds of discussion topics (e.g., hobbies, education), the political topics in particular have been popular for citizens to involve. In fact, there are a number of online discussions, such as a proposal for tax policy during the US presidential election campaign (Price et al., 2006), the policies of the European Union (Karlsson, 2012), and the 2008 US presidential election (Liang, 2013). As such, these forums have attracted academic interest concerning how people discuss political topics on the Internet.

Despite a large number of academic studies about online political discussion, there are not many studies looking at its insight. However, some studies report that a particular person or group dominates and manipulates an entire discussion forum (e.g. Hagemann, 2002; Karlsson, 2012). In particular, Hagemann explored an online discussion forum about politics in the Netherlands and found that only 25% of the discussion participants posted nearly 90% of the comments (ibid: 69). That is, a few people in the thread posted most of the comments there while others posted a few. Similarly, Karlsson (2012) found that particular groups use online discussion forums as places to push their own ideas and proposals rather than as a place to discuss issues raised there (ibid: 77). To this point, Hoffman et al. (2013) argue that some people use the Internet actively so that they can influence the political decision-making process. In other words, domination in online discussion forums could be an intentional tactic to impact politics. However, the studies by Hagemann (2002), Karlsson (2012), and even Hoffman et al. (2013) do not focus on the process of domination or the use of online forums. In fact, it is difficult to find any article exploring ways of manifesting opinion during online discussion, i.e. how the general public develops their political discussion on the Internet.

Drawing from the above background, the aim of this study is to explore how people discuss politics on the Internet. In order to achieve the research's purpose, this study selected a thread in the online forum Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com/>), where people discussed why they voted for the Conservative Party in the UK general election on 7 May 2015. It has attracted great interest as to why the Conservative Party won a majority in the election, since pre-election polls and exit polls indicated a different result (BBC, 2015). Taking the current election system in the UK parliament (first past the post: FPTP) and the number of protests against austerity under the previous

government (a coalition of the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties) into consideration, it is worth questioning why many people voted for candidates of the Conservative Party. Therefore, this research initially sets a research question (RQ) and two analytical questions (AQs):

RQ: How do people convince others about their voting reasons during online political discussion?

AQ1: How do people explain their reasons for voting for the Conservative Party?

AQ1–2: How do they describe the Conservative candidates or Members of Parliament (MPs) and, where possible, other candidates in their constituencies?

1. Literature Review

1.1. Online Political Discussion

As academic interest in online interactions has increased, the literature to date has attempted to explore how people negotiate their opinions during online discussion, in particular, in political discussion forums. For example, people have debated in online forums about the taxation policy proposed by President Bush in the US (Price et al., 2006), the policies of the European Union (Karlsson, 2012) and the 2008 US presidential election (Liang, 2013). Among these studies, Price et al. (2006) have investigated how an individual's opinion regarding a proposed tax policy emerges and changes during the discussion. While their results show that an individual's opinion changes through that individual's own argument, it was hard to find a relationship concerning how an individual's opinion affects another's opinion (ibid: 63). In other words, a person in the forum would produce his/her own opinion independently, although they had a chance to read others' opinions before posting his/her own opinion. On this point, it is arguably possible that such people might have obtained information from outside the Internet (e.g., newspaper, radio: Vaccari, 2013). However, it is almost impossible to investigate how people on the Internet obtain information from outside the Internet, as they do not normally show their information source.

Although Price et al. (2006) have attempted to explore how people negotiate their opinions during discussion, much of literature has focused on word use in online discussion forums, which could be termed 'incivility' or 'bad behaviour'. For example, online flaming, defined as a verbal attack with the intention to offend other people (Blom et al., 2014: 5) is a popular topic of studies. Lee (2005: 388–389) explains that flaming starts when a person ignores a suggestion about writing manners in his/her comment posted on an online forum. However, Lee (ibid) does not explain why users ignore such suggestions from other users. To this point, Blom et al. (2014) argue that a description such as "this editorial was written by a complete idiot" (ibid: 8) could be an example of online flaming. Although any word use can be an instance of flaming, it is often difficult to know or predict which particular word use will potentially trigger online flaming. For example, a comment which attempts to make a counterargument in a forum could be a cause of flaming or backlash among other users (McLelland, 2008). The issues with online interaction above imply that the nature of the Internet – anonymity – could play an important role, as it might be difficult to know whether an individual would use such an expression in offline interaction (cf. Nagy and Koles, 2014).

Despite the literature studying online flaming, above, there is a slight difference regarding the notion of incivility. While Papacharissi (2004) regards the use of offensive expressions as incivility, some studies specifically define the frequent use of racial expressions (e.g. Hughey and Daniels, 2013; McLelland, 2008), dominating a forum (e.g. Karlsson, 2012) and online bullying (e.g. Erdur-Baker, 2010) as incivility. For example, people may use racist language to prevent other people from expressing their opinion when they are discussing a technical issue (Anderson et al., 2014). Such behaviour may not be expected in a face-to-face interaction in some contexts, since it is deemed 'uncivil' (Papacharissi, 2002). However, such uncivil remarks might appear in a particular face-to-face context, such as at a football match. As such, people may need to know whether they can use uncivil remarks. Yet, as mentioned above, the anonymity of the Internet might be an obstacle to the understanding of the context in an online forum. In short, online anonymity might either directly or indirectly affect the dynamism of online interaction.

Although word use and the anonymity of the Internet are a popular topic among online discussion studies, the present study argues that these do not represent the whole spectrum of online discussion. In fact, studies exploring professional politicians' discourse have revealed how they engage in political discussion. Therefore, the next section will review these studies, with a particular focus on the use of rhetoric.

1.2. Rhetoric in Political Discourse

Although the studies above attempt to explore political discussion on the Internet, it is difficult to find studies which have an insight into online political discourse. In contrast, studies on political discussion in face-to-face contexts provide some insight into it. For example, Rapley (1998) explored how an Australian politician constructed her speech in Parliament. Rapley (ibid) found that the politician in question used rhetoric, putting herself in the centre of the “ordinal Australian” (i.e. ethos) – that is, she was a member of the general public who could be found in the street in Australia. At the same time, Rapley claimed that her rhetoric justified her credibility as a Member of Parliament (i.e., a professional politician) and that it legitimated her speech regarding questions about immigrants and multiculturalism policies (ibid: 342). This is how ethos work: she convinced audiences outside Parliament about her eligibility in speaking up about those issues (cf. Andrews, 2014; Leach, 2000). As such, a politician may use rhetoric to justify his/her legitimacy so that the general public in the politician's constituency and other fellow politicians will support him/her (van Dijk, 2008: 157–158).

Similar to the above study, Kienpointner (2013) found that the US President, Barak Obama, uses rhetoric to justify his political orientation – consensus and the integration of people – in his speeches. A major finding is that he uses self-criticism, i.e., accepting his own weakness, to appeal to audiences who are tired of being told a story of ‘super humans’ (ibid: 366). On this point, Andrews calls this type of rhetoric “the art of persuasion” (Andrews, 2014: 17) – namely, a method of engagement with the audience. In fact, although admitting weakness might raise the question of his own eligibility as the US President, it also successfully makes his orientation reasonable and “acceptable” (ibid) wherever people tire of hearing success stories (ibid: 361). In other words, it is considered that rhetoric may not work well to convince audiences in one context, while the same rhetoric will work in another context.

The above studies seem to raise a point to explore in online political discussion. First, politicians use rhetoric to convince fellow politicians or the public. As Kienpointner (2013) argues, the aim of the rhetoric used by President Obama is to justify his policies and convince others that his policies are acceptable. Similarly, this was the case with the Australian politician who attempted to justify her doubts about Australian multicultural policy by defining herself as the ‘ordinal Australian’ (Rapley, 1998: 341). These acts to convince others during discussion is called an act of persuasion (Wilson, 2003). According to Wilson, people in fact engage in convincing others when they interact with each other, whatever the purpose of the interaction is (ibid). For example, as mentioned, using an appropriate phrase in a speech given in a parliament (Rapley, 1998) can be seen as an act to convince fellow members that the speaker is the right person to do so. Therefore, it is worth asking the question: How do people in online forums convince other users? In other words: how do they use the “art of persuasion” (Andrews, 2014: 17) in an online environment? Moreover, how does their rhetoric contribute to the discussion in an online forum? The next section will examine this question further.

2. Methodology

2.1. Theoretical Background

Drawing on the previous chapter, this research will refer to the theoretical background of rhetoric. Rhetoric often appears during interactions, as it is understood as an “act of persuasion” (Leach, 2000) or convincing other people. The act of persuasion is commonly seen, for example, in political speech and the advertising of commercial products (ibid: 209). In political speech, a politician may use rhetoric to justify the legitimacy of a policy so that other politicians will support his/her policy (see van Dijk, 2008: 157–158). In the example of van Dijk, one politician justified a policy of further restrictions on immigration by emphasizing the risks brought by immigrants and the ultimate goal of the policy: how ‘harmful’ they were and how to ‘protect’ his country with ‘good’ people from them (ibid). While ideological remarks occur in this statement (e.g., ‘good’, cf. Baločkaitė, 2014), the rhetoric above is powerful since the position (or social role) of speaker is taken by a politician, making the claim credible. In other words, the rhetoric above might not be so powerful or convincing (if at all) if a member of the general public were to use it.

Credibility in rhetoric is called “ethos” (Leach, 2000: 214). Ethos is characterized by a person or author who advances a proposition (Andrews, 2014: 18), as argued in the example by van Dijk above. In addition, there are a further two concepts in understanding rhetoric: “pathos” and “logos”. Pathos is an appeal to people’s emotion (Leach, 2000: 214). For example, the phrase ‘immigrants are harmful and we need to protect our country with good people’ strongly appeals to emotion. The phrase basically contends a negative consequence (i.e., ‘bad people will dominate good people’) if they do not take the necessary steps against increasing numbers of immigrants (cf. Leach, 2000: 214). In contrast, logos indicates a proof as to how valid an argument is (Andrews, 2014: 18; Leach, 2000: 214). Logos indicates order of words or development of argument (i.e. logic). For example, referring to the actual number of gun crimes per year might offer a strong claim for increasing the number of police officers. As such, a provision of facts during the discussion could support one’s claim. All in all, ethos, pathos, and

logos can work to make a phrase convincing; however, it is important to know what context or situation applies behind an act of persuasion.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This research collected data from a Reddit thread which discussed the UK General Election of 8 July 2015. The dataset of this research is available in the thread titled: “People who voted Tory – why did you do it?”. The thread title is, in fact, a question for other users as to why they voted for the Conservative Party. In addition, the question also asks them to provide detailed reasons for their voting behaviour:

“Self-explanatory - I'm not asking in a snarky way, I am genuinely curious. Could you please explain your reasoning for voting the way you did? Thanks!
Edit: and please actually explain - don't just say "the economy"
Edit2: fame and glory!!”
(Thread creator)

This thread seems to have been created immediately after the election, since there is no exact postdate on the thread. In fact, no posts have an exact postdate; however, there is an indicator as to how old each post is based on the current date. For example, if it were 13 August 2015 today, a post made on 12 July 2015 would be marked as '1 month ago'. While there are approximately 790 posts in the thread, this study analysed the first 56 comments from the dataset, including the first post, to ask people to give their reasons for voting in the election. The word length of each comment varies from around 10 to 200 words. Due to the nature of Reddit, the entire thread is publicly open and visible; therefore, the dataset in this research is still visible and accessible. Again, the aim of the thread was to ask for the reasons why people voted for the Conservative Party and to ask them to explain their voting behaviour.

Based on the RQ and AQs (see Introduction), this research employs the analytical framework proposed by Gee (2011) to explore the use of rhetoric in the discussion. As Gee (2014: 11–12) argues, it is important to consider context behind interaction, since interaction is characterized in it. Notably, Reddit is highly anonymized website – it is almost impossible to know who users are (e.g. their occupation, social positions). Moreover, as argued in the section 3.1, political claims can be powerful when ethos, pathos, and logos are set; therefore, Gee’s analytical model seems useful to analyse these concepts, in particular how they appear and are supported in anonymized environment. Among the seven tools that Gee suggested to conduct discourse analysis (ibid: 22–25), this study particularly focuses on the concepts of identity, politics, and connection to highlight rhetoric in online discussion. In the model, “identity”, here, means a social position or role of a person (i.e., equivalent to ethos), while “politics” means a statement which a person wishes to manifest (ibid). In particular, politics here includes any supporting reason of their identity (ibid). Provided that political claims can be reinforced with credibility as discussed above, identifying one’s social position would indicate how credible their claims are. “Connection” in Gee’s framework indicates the order of a sentence to make sense of writing (ibid). In particular, focusing on connection might inform a method of logos (Andrews, 2014: 18) in rhetoric.

3. Result

The results of the analysis found that the users in the dataset explained their voting reason by providing an anecdotal story and constructing sentences in their post logically. However, they seemed to provide the anecdote to excuse about the result, as mentioned below. Moreover, they organize their comments in a similar style to formal writing which may be more common in academic and business settings, though not completely identically. The employment of a formal writing style in posts suggests that the users were trying to convince others by developing their arguments logically and linearly in their posts. In other words, formal writing might play a rhetorical role in the discussion. In addition, this strategy seems to make the anecdote more persuasive.

3.1. Use of Anecdote

To respond to the AQs of this study (see Introduction), this section describes how people justify their voting reasons. The study found that people provide an anecdotal story (i.e., information which other people may not have a chance to know) to defend their voting reasons:

“To me, it was down to a local issue. Our MP (tory) has stepped in a fair few times to give local events and causes a needed boost in a [sic] otherwise forgotten area.

Without him our town would of [sic] lost out on the new schools and facilities we desperately need, promised 15 years ago by Lab/Lib councils. Wasn't much information from the other candidates about what they'd do for local or in parliament except party snippets.

So sorry, I voted for someone who does his job well, unfortunately this was part of a national system/party I don't agree with.”

(User 1)

User 1 justifies his/her voting reasons by providing an anecdote (“Our MP (tory) has stepped in ... local events and causes a needed boost a [sic] otherwise forgotten area”), claiming he/she had to vote for a person whom he/she did not support (i.e., political identity: “So sorry, I voted for someone who does his job well...”). Here, the user presents an anecdote which explains how the Conservative candidate worked very well while other candidates did not. Moreover, ethos as a resident in an “otherwise forgotten area” is supported by the provision of anecdote. Such information is in fact difficult for people to know about (i.e., how candidates in other constituencies behave, and in particular how a candidate participates in a local event under the current UK election system). Therefore, the provision of such an anecdotal story represents its authenticity well, supporting his/her reason for voting.

A similar provision is also made during the discussion about financial cuts in the public service sector, such as National Health Insurance:

“I think out services [N.B. public service sectors] are suffering because of bad management and terrible procurement procedures. I was in the civil service for quite a few years, I saw deals where already overpriced equipment is delayed for years and the public purse forks out a few million for obsolete technology. And then thy go back to the same companies and consortium and sign another shitty deal that is late and over budget again and again. A number of non-jobs exist where people have been employed for years but there's no balls to get rid of them, along side over worked staff getting signed off

long term for genuine stress, and the consultants on a few hundred notes a day, and god knows why there were there, seemingly mostly wandering around in expensive suites and drinking coffee”.

(User 17's second comment)

User 17 firstly claimed that he/she was an ex-worker in the public sector (i.e., ethos). Having described himself/herself as an ex-worker in the sector, he/she then claimed that a problem with the civil service was not the amount of funds available to them but mismanagement in the workplace. In order to make his claim persuasive, he/she provided his/her working experience in the public sector and described it in detail (“I was in the civil service for quite a few years, I saw deals where already overpriced equipment is delayed for years...”). It needs to be emphasized that only User 17 and other public service workers are able to describe how their work was managed and how they felt about it. The information that User 17 provided (e.g., “overpriced but old equipment”, “overworked and non-worked staff”) is, in fact, invisible or else unavailable to people working in other sectors or workplaces. Therefore, it is considered that ethos as claimed by users is supported by exclusive information (see the section below for further discussion).

3.2. Use of Rhetoric to Convince Others

In addition to providing anecdotes justifying their voting reasons, it is worth focusing on the function of such justification. While users justified their voting reasons by telling anecdotes, these stories seemed to blame politicians or political parties as not working. For example, User 1 said:

“Without him [N.B. Conservative candidate] our town would of [sic] lost out on the new schools and facilities we desperately need, promised 15 years ago by Lab/Lib councils. Wasn't much information from the other candidates about what they'd do for local or in parliament except party snippets...”

(User 1)

User 1 clearly states that the Labour Party and the Liberal Democratic Party did not work for what the local town needed. In fact, User 1 later writes in the comment above that he/she voted for a candidate whom he/she did not really support. The reasoning here indicates a negative choice according to which he/she did not actually have a positive reason or motivation for voting for the Conservative Party. Moreover, similar reasoning can be found across the thread. For example, User 3 says:

“One of my main gripes with the TV debates in tandem with FPTP - Local representatives get chosen by national party affiliations.

They may lead their parties but they're not who's representing you, especially locally.”

(User 3)

This comment seems to accuse the current election system of user 3's voting reason. Under the FPTP system, a candidate is elected if he/she gains the largest number of votes in his/her constituency. In other words, it is possible that the number of votes for unsuccessful candidates be larger than the number of votes for the government. Therefore, User 2 says:

“Sometimes our system just doesn't give voters a decent option, and you have to make compromises.” (User 2)

User 2 argues that the election system (i.e., FPTP) places voters in a dilemma according to which they had to vote for someone whom they did not support. As argued above, the results of the FPTP system may not reflect the entirety of opinion in a constituency. Therefore, although a post by User 3 raised this substantial issue about the system - and it remains understandable - overall his/her comments seem to excuse the result of the election – it is not his/her fault that the Conservative Party won a majority in Parliament. In short, he/she seems to excuse the election result by seeking a cause resulting from an external factor which is beyond his/her control.

It is worth to note that users in the data set do not frequently use pathos. Although a comment by User 2 earlier indicates his/her emotion (“Even as an ardent lefty I fully sympathise with you about this.”), it seems uncommon to show their emotion in the comments in the thread.

3.3.A Well-organized Writing Style

The results suggest that the organization of posts can also work as a form of rhetoric, in particular *logos*. Some users would write their comments in a well-organized paragraph, developing their arguments in a linear (i.e., logical) order. The post below is an extract from a well-structured post:

“One of my main gripes with the TV debates in tandem with FPTP - Local representatives get chosen by national party affiliations. They may lead their parties but they're not who's representing you, especially locally. Incumbent Lib Dem here in Cardiff was pretty good had worked hard voted against student fees, held her seat for 10 years and worked with the community... she came to my door multiple times during the run up to the election, not a leaflet - her personally. But there was no way she was going to hold her seat in a largely student area. Luckily the Labour woman who replaced her also looks to be quite adept with good principles but she has no experience in government I didn't see her once, a small tree in flyers though. PR won't be enough to fix this, either get rid of TV debates (which I am sure many disagree with) or reform our system of government (another major problem).”
(User 3)

This post is structured in terms of “Statement” (what a writer wants to say), “Supporting Sentences for Statement” and “Restatement” (writing the Statement in the last sentence of the post) in linear order. User 3 states his/her main opinion in the first two sentences, i.e., that the election system is problematic (*viz.*, FPTP). The user then explains why he/she thinks in this way, although the explanation is anecdotal (e.g., “she came to my door multiple times ...”). In the final sentence, the user writes the statement but in a paraphrased way. While this style is commonly seen in academic writing (e.g., papers, reports, essays), this academic writing style can often be found throughout the thread:

“Thanks! There's going to be some unpopular opinions coming up: I felt the previous Lab government were over-spending whilst in power, and their softer approach to reducing the budget deficit with promises of investment this time round lead me to feel they still have a similar economic approach. Correctly or incorrectly, I think lowering / ending the deficit will make the UK more resilient and stable in the future, and I didn't feel Labour takes this as a primary driving concern ...”
(User 17's second comment)

This study found User 17’s comment above begins with an acknowledgement to another user (who asked User 17 questions about the issues) and the user’s answers to the question (N.B. the quotation above is shortened). Each answer was also structured in a well-organized way: statement, explanation, and either restatement or a specific point. Therefore, the comment is structured not only as an acknowledgement to answers but also each answer is organized so that a user can follow the comments logically.

4. Discussion and Limitations of this Study

The above result showed how Reddit users use their anecdote as rhetorical device during their discussion on voting reason in the UK general election. Under anonymized environment, they use their anecdotes to support their ethos (see section 4.1) and logos (see section 4.3) to manifest their voting reasons, while they do not appeal to pathos (i.e. emotion) of others. Drawing from discussions in sections 3.2, and 4.1 to 4.3, this study argues that Reddit users showed their voting reason as follows: they support their voting reason (i.e. ‘identity’ in Gee’s framework) with anecdote (‘politics’) by writing in a linear way (‘connection’). Moreover, findings of this research could be fitted into the literature in many ways. First, although the literature has found that online discussion tends to involve aggressive words or phrases (‘flaming’: see Papacharissi, 2004), this research found that some people attempt to persuade others without using such phrases. Instead, users discussed the voting reason in a seemingly moderate manner, which is something unreported in previous studies. Second, the literature to date has explored how professional politicians justify their statements (e.g. Kienpointner, 2013) but not how the ‘general public’ justifies its opinion. Third, although it is still possible that the dataset in this study may include a post from a professional politician, the anonymity of the Internet masks such identifiable information, making it invisible. Therefore, the results have some limits to its generalizability.

As shown in the Literature Review section, the studies exploring online political discussion tend to observe verbal attacks and the use of offensive words during discussions. However, the results of this study do not witness the exchange of such words, instead observing the provision of anecdotes and persuasion in well-organized paragraphs (in some cases). This writing style is similar that of professional discussion, in particular academic writing (e.g. organizing through an opening sentence, supporting sentences and restatement), being well-structured and organized (Swales and Feak, 2009: 45). However, users do not include reference lists, citations (e.g. ‘author-date’) or abstracts, which would be included in academic writing (i.e. proof of claims: logos). Moreover, there are often grammatical mistakes (e.g. lack of a subject or verb) and conversational phrases used in posts. The lack of these elements and grammatical mistakes in Reddit posts would partially support Crowston et al. (2010), who claim that it is almost impossible to establish conventional rules (such as academic genre) in online writing. While their posts do not provide academic-style ‘hard evidence’, they use their anecdote as their proof of claims. In particular, given that Reddit is one of the UGC websites (where people provide its content: OECD, 2007), and given that the demographics of its users are not known, this study argues that writing style in the thread might reflect its (potentially) complex demographics among users. However, in reference to the previous studies, it is still impossible to know the exact reasons for writing in such a way in this context.

In addition to the organization of the writing (i.e. ‘connection’), it worth mention how people use rhetoric to persuade others. For example, a study by Atkins (2015) found how professional politicians use their position (i.e. ethos: ‘identity’ in Gee’s model) in the party to persuade fellow politicians; however, people in the Reddit thread used anecdotes (i.e. logos: ‘politics’) to justify their reasoning. While it is understandable that people in Reddit cannot refer their social status to convince others, their use of rhetoric is complex – while they claim their ethos, they organize their comments in a linear way. The cause of this complexity could be rooted in the anonymity of the Internet (see below).

It is worth emphasizing how people provide their logos (i.e. anecdotes) to justify their voting reasons. While their use of anecdote identifies their voting reasons with an external factor, it is interesting to note how people excuse about their behaviour in face-to-face settings on the Internet. In fact, Hipp et al. (2015) found a similar result in their exploration of online narratives about rape in the field of psychology. The results Hipp et al. saw that people seek to absolve their responsibility for their behaviour (i.e. rape) to victims and justify their sexual assault. Although Hipp et al. admit that the users’ demographics in Reddit might reflect the general population (i.e., it includes those who do not commit sexual assault), it is still notable that they excuse their behaviour in online forums (ibid: 3-6). While it is not possible to assert that online users normally excuse about their offline behaviour on the Internet, the results of Hipp et al. (ibid) and this research might imply a characteristic feature of online discourse.

Despite the provision of their ethos supported by their anecdotes, it is worth emphasizing the impossibility of validating or confirming the genuineness of this information on the Internet. This is the most challenging issue in online interaction research, since it is almost impossible to track down each online user. Although it is claimed that the demographics of Reddit users are close to the general population (Duggan and Smith, 2013), the claim apparently does not reflect the complete background of Reddit users, as the study by Duggan and Smith surveyed online users in the US who were older than 18 years old. Indeed, there are many types of online discussion forums of which anonymity is less strong than others. For example, Moodle, which universities often use for interaction between their students and staff, is not so anonymized that demographics of its users are clearer than Reddit. However, Reddit does not provide background information of its users – they need to interact each other without knowing others. While it is impossible to claim that anonymity definitely influences the discussion style in the thread, the Internet is certainly a unique place for people to discuss political topics.

There is a need to explore why people are able to discuss things in a moderate manner. Just as the reviews of the literature found a general trend of flaming during online discussion, it is necessary to carry on a further investigation of such discourse. Although this is only a suggestion, it would be beneficial to studying the relationship between people’s general perceptions of the Conservative Party and their policies, particularly their financial cuts in welfare.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that people persuade others by using ethos and anecdotes when organizing their posts in a similar way to academic or professional writing. The organization of the comments guides readers (i.e., the users in the thread) to understand individuals’ voting

reasons in the general election smoothly, since it works as rhetoric to persuade other people. This step-by-step writing style might make users' claims seem legitimate and persuasive. In addition, the study also found that people use anecdotes to justify their political identity and to describe the candidates in their constituencies. While the reference to a personal, anecdotal story is considered as supporting a user's claim about his/her voting reasons, such claims become more powerful within a well-organized structure.

As discussed above, the rhetorical organization of comments in the online forum suggests that the anonymity of the Internet might influence what kind of rhetoric people need to employ during the discussion. In particular, people cannot know how candidates in other constituencies work (i.e., beyond their own local areas) unless people in that area disclose such information. Since the Internet is a relatively anonymous environment, they may need to structure their comments thoroughly so that other users can be convinced by their comments. As such, in an anonymous environment, people do not have any means to see whether their claims or evidence are genuine; nor do they know what kinds of people other users are. Therefore, the interactions taking place on the Internet can be very different from those in everyday life.

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Migrants' Children Aged 15 – 17 Position Themselves in Circles of Belonging

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Abstract

Israel belongs to the group of countries known as “migration countries”, and is the destination of international migration particularly from the neighboring continents for which Israel is a developed country with prospects for work and livelihood. These work migrants play an important role in the Israeli economy; however their presence also creates a social complexity connected with the character and multicultural balance of the local society. The aim of this study is to describe how migrants' children aged 15 -17 born in Israel from migrant worker parents and who study in both non-formal and formal educational institutions position themselves in circles of belonging different from their personal circle to the social one: Home, neighborhood, school, and Israeli society. The point of departure of this study was not only absorption and integration but the nature of the interrelations between migrant children and their living environment. An analysis of the research findings reveals that the migrant children are part of a multicultural and multilingual mosaic in the heterogeneous Israeli society who position themselves clearly and directly as happy and love their circles of belonging: their home, neighborhood, school and Israeli society. We found a difference in positioning among the three circles of belonging: the informal, home, neighborhood and society and formal one - the school. The migrant children position themselves as loving the three informal circles of belonging and just half of them position themselves as loving school. Perhaps this difference indicates that there is a difference between interactions at school and informal environment interaction. It is advisable to check the characteristics of the informal environment interaction and learn from it.

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Keywords

children, migration, society, positioning, language

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“You can’t be special or different since we’re all different, so there’s no discrimination; no racism there is less than any school that I know because everyone is different. Nobody thinks that they are better than the others, we each come from a different country each with a language of their own.”
(T. 16 years old, Tel Aviv)

Introduction: Migration

Israel is among a group of societies in the world known as “migration countries” and is the destination of international migration for both Diaspora Jews and work migrants, especially from the neighboring countries for whom it is a developed country with good prospects for work. Their presence however, creates a social complexity stemming from the character and multicultural balance of the local society (De La Pergolla, 2012).

The term migration denotes, according to its definition transition and changing of the physical, social and cultural environment of a person or group of people known as migrants. Although the theory of cultural shock does not apply to all migrants, migration may represent not only a change of geographic abode, leaving the country of birth to another country but also an intercultural transfer characterized by drastic changes in the lives of migrants moving from country to country such as adaptation to new social and cultural systems, dealing with employment problems and with emotional and psychological aspects arising from their transfer and so on. Regarding the Israeli society, the fact that most migrants come from Africa and Asia causes them dialectical tensions and difficulties arising from differences between culture and education in the country of origin and the norms of culture and education in Israel. The intercultural encounter between veteran inhabitants¹ with migrants usually involves significant political ramifications for the establishment, has educational, cultural, occupational, political implications for society as a whole and even has psychological and mental effects on the migrants themselves (Hayim, 2013: 174 – 175).

Mass migration as a modern phenomenon began towards the end of the nineteenth century and continued throughout the twentieth century. The last decades of that century saw the migration of around 140 million work migrants in the world and this trend continues and grows. Special characteristics led some scholars to refer to it as transnational migration (Pries, 1999; Kemp & Reichman, 2008). This theory sees migration as containing a number of indexes: demographic, political, economic, cultural and familial in addition to transferring from one country to another. According to this approach the migrants preserve their connections between their country of origin (Source society) and their new country (Destination society). On the other hand, this approach does not disregard the macro aspect of political, economic, familial and other structures within which migrant communities conduct their lives.

The new developments in technology communication and transport have enabled this preservation of contacts between past and present communities. Transnationalism redefines the interrelations between geographical and cultural spaces and decreases the need to assimilate and

¹The veteran inhabitants are people born in Israel and who have the Israeli nationality.

become rooted in the new place. (Ben-Rafael & Sternberg, 2009; Lev- Ari, 2009; Ravhon & Lev-Ari, 2011).

Work Migration

Work migration is a multidimensional complex phenomenon. It took on new meanings and significance with the development of global capitalistic economies based on international flow of capital, goods and work force (Kemp & Raijman, 2003).

A most powerful motivation for work migration is the great gap in wages and social benefits existing between developed and less developed countries. From this approach, poorly as well as well-educated people from poorer countries generally manage to find in developed economies unskilled temporary manual jobs without professional specialization or training and with no proficiency in the local language (Amir & Gotlib, 2005). In this framework, the work migrants earn very low wages in terms of the country they migrated to but these wages are nevertheless significantly higher than those customary in their country of origin. From another approach, work migrants who moved to access high level jobs with high wages; however, the latter form a smaller group than the former.

Work Migration in Israel

At the beginning of the nineties Israel's borders opened up for work migrants who are outside the normative accepted perception of Jewish immigration, and gradually hundreds of thousands of foreign workers began arriving to Israel. They came mostly from Europe (mainly from Romania), Asia (mainly from Thailand, China, and The Philippines), Africa (mainly from Sudan and Eritrea) South America (mainly from Argentina). Some of them held visas whereas others had no visas or permits and ever since then hundreds of thousands of people the majority of whom constitute a significant workforce employed in construction, nursing and domestic help (Bar-Zuri, 1999; De La Pergolla, 2012). This massive increase in the number of work migrants in Israel created a transformation especially in the large cities where migrants were seen everywhere: in the central streets, recreation sites and educational facilities. After a few years the presence of work migrants became part of the local scenery especially in the large cities. They established joint communities lacking legal status. Their central stronghold nowadays is the area of the central bus depot in Tel Aviv transforming it from an area with numerous shoe stores into a cosmopolitan enclave where the offices of most Israeli organizations for the welfare of the migrants may also be found (Schnell, 2007).

De La Pergolla (2012) claims that one of the major problems among work migrants concerns marriage, bearing of children and the acquisition of permanent legal status for their children who were born in Israel in the absence of which they face the threat of deportation from the country.

The objective of this article is to describe how children aged 15 -17 born in Israel from migrant worker parents and who study in both non-formal and formal educational institutions position themselves in circles of belonging different from their personal circle to the social one: Home, neighborhood, school and Israeli society. Indeed, from interviews conducted with volunteers in non-formal education came out a picture of poor, complex, hostile and challenging living reality for migrant's children. This reality caused us to be interested in children's lives, and to examine

how they position themselves in circles of belonging different from their personal circle to the social one.

Our study focuses on 18 youths aged 15 – 17 who come from migrant families and who constitute the senior level of the formal and non-formal educational framework in South Tel Aviv. In this article we chose to focus on these youths because we observed that they serve as role models for younger children. In addition, those teenagers will soon leave the formal education system and will have to integrate independently the Israeli society.

We first present our analytic framework, then the data collection, and our findings.

1. Discourse analysis and positioning

Discourse analysis is an area of research rooted in the discipline of traditional linguistics; it focuses on the use of language in a given social context in order to identify and describe interpersonal communication phenomena and social processes, namely: discourse depends on the social reality in which it occurs. Thus discourse analysis reflects activities, significance and systems outside the sphere of the discourse itself (Sarel, 2006; Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary branch overlapping with various areas of research such as: sociology, philosophy and anthropology emphasizing interrelations between language and society (Kupferberg, 2010).

Positioning is a dynamic concept of social science: sociology and social psychology, designed to convert the static concept "role" in to a dynamic alternative that allows change and development. Positioning refers to an inter-personal dimension defined as the way in which discourse participants position themselves in relation to others. (Davies and Harre`, 1990; Langenhove and Harre`, 1999). The term refers to the interpersonal dimension and is configured so that all the narrators in the discourse place themselves in relation to others.

The approach adopted for the study of positioning stresses the connection between the two terms positioning and role. The speaker positions himself or the addressee in a relevant role at a given point of discourse (Weizman, 2008, 2012). This approach is based on Goffman’s perception (1974) according to which every person fulfills a number of roles in his daily interactions and dealings with the social world surrounding him, in contacts with his family members or with others in his immediate vicinity etc. The speaker in a discourse has two roles: a social role for example, son, father, politician or physician and a discursive one for example, a person asking replying or explaining. In accordance with these roles the speaker positions himself and the other discourse participants as having either obligations or privileges as part of their roles. Positioning is always reciprocal and relative: a positions b. and in this way also positions himself relatively to b (Weizman, 2012).

Following Hepburn and Wiggins (2007), the study focuses on spoken discourse analysis and examines through language how migrants children aged 15 – 17 position themselves and present feelings, thoughts and modes of coping in the Israeli society. Through their discourse, children share their experiences in different settings, and this allow to shed light on these. Language

resources are means for positioning belonging in the area of syntax morphology and semantics such as the use of figurative language, verbal and syntactical repetitions, the use of rhetorical questions and of connotation laden words etc. (Segal, 2008).

2. Data Collection and Context Description

The children conduct their daily routines within the following circles: They wake up at home, go to school, at the end of their school day get to their neighborhood non-formal educational activity: either youth center or Scouts movement and return back to their homes in the evening.

The distinction between formal education and non-formal education in the Israeli society is related to the voluntary principle. In other words, participation in non-formal education frameworks is not committed to the children, so they decide whether to join it and always have the possibility to leave it when they wish to do so. In contrast participation in formal education is compulsory for all children in Israel in from the age of three.

The first three circles relate to the way the children position themselves in the physical locations where their daily routines take place. The fourth circle "Israeli society" relates to the way they position themselves vis a vis culture, traditions, norms of conduct and interaction with Israeli youngsters of their age in the absorbing society. The point of departure of this study was not only absorption and integration but the nature of the interrelations between migrant children and their living environment.

The volunteers in the non-formal educational practices held activities to introduce children to the characteristics of the absorbing society's culture while at the same time preserving the culture and traditions of the country of origin, all this in order to reduce their sense of estrangement and alienation and to strengthen their integration. The volunteers have sometimes to face the antagonism of the neighboring Israeli population who refuse to cooperate and to accept the presence of migrants and their children in the neighborhood. They also have to contend with the difficulties caused by quarrelling members of the group, with expressions of racism and cursing among the various groups of children in the educational practice and in addition with a fear of an encounter with Israeli children; migrant's children claim being treated as foreign, different and strange:

"As to the matter of stigmas, people always talk about migrants and forget that they are humans" (Y., volunteer);

"The neighbors oppose the children, [...] curse them [...] I teach them not to react, to turn around and walk away" (D., Scouts group leader).

The migrant youngsters' direct reports shed light on their conceptions and experiences concerning themselves, their neighborhoods and Israeli society.

Our study is a qualitative one combining quantitative data as well. The mix methods allow for triangulation of data thus aiding in the validation of data, the reinforcement of the interpretation and in contributing to the authenticity and validity of the research. It has a phenomenological character studying phenomena in specific contexts and environments. The use of this high quality research method enables to reveal how people derive meaning from their experiences (Smith,

Flower & Larkin, 2009). This method enables first hand collecting of data and a meticulous and precise testing of the participants’ understanding of the of the phenomenon they are involved in (Langdrige, 2007; Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009). This research methodology involves first hand reports of experiences and also takes into account the researches influence on the data, their collection and their analysis. This study is situated in the functional paradigm which supposes linkage between language and context and studies the uses of language in a given social context (Schiffrin, 1994).

The research data were collected by means of two methods: the first quantitative – questionnaires of utterances composed in line with the four circles of belonging: Israeli society, the school, the neighborhood and the home. The questionnaires contain twenty- five utterances each classified according to Leikert’s scale from “agree very much” to “do not agree” as well as open ended questions. The students were also asked to relate to each of the utterances. The second – qualitative method - semi structured, in depth interviews conducted with each of the children, the structured part was intended to collect biographical information such as their living conditions, and environment, their daily schedules and the way in which they position themselves in various circles of belonging. In the second part of the interview the children told of a good experience and a less pleasant one they underwent. Each of the researchers separately analyzed the interviews and the personal experiences of the children both categorically and thematically and identified the linguistic means of positioning. A joint debate to establish reliability followed. We have chosen to focus in this study on a specific small and unique population of migrant children studying in various educational settings in Southern Tel Aviv. This case study helps to shed light on the experiences of these children.

The formal framework is the multicultural, multilingual "Bialik Rogozin" school whose teachers constitute a central anchor in the lives of their students, enabling them to develop their personal potential and providing them with opportunities to acquire education and life qualifications.

The non-formal frameworks in South Tel Aviv are the "Kadima Youth Center" and the "Eitan" group of the Scouts movement.¹ Those two function with the help of young volunteers as part of their "Service Year".² Their purpose is to prevent the neglect and deterioration of the migrant children as a result of loitering, dropping out of school and spending much time without adult supervision. From the children's point of view, these non-formal frameworks participate to create a loving and protecting living environment providing them with food, assistance with their studies, various leisure activities as well as personal and emotional support. It should be added that most of South Tel Aviv residents are migrants, and therefore the living environment is perceived by children as safe and loving, contrarily to other neighborhoods where they feel alien and different, and are exposed to expressions of hostility and racism. Therefore they often prefer the safe and familiar environment:

¹ These two frameworks are considered as non-formal educational practices, because the children choose to voluntarily reach them. Parents pay a nominal amount of money and at any moment they can leave.

² Service Year is a year in which high school graduates prior to their enlistment in the IDF volunteer for social, community, educational activities. These activities are carried out in various frameworks emphasizing educational activities in socially disenfranchised and weaker suburban areas.

"Out of the neighborhood the children frighten a lot because they look different, they are foreigners, they have a sense of fear and talk about it aloud" (A., volunteer in Youth Center).

According to the young volunteers in the non-formal framework the number of participants in the older age group is declining since they are more independent and spend time outside their neighborhood as well. It is therefore important to have them remain active in their groups thus empowering them to have a positive effect on the younger generation to take part in decision making and to potentially be able to lead the migrant community in Israel and bring about changes:

"This year we had really great meetings of fun and camaraderie and we were successful in convincing the senior members to return to the group. We enable the children to be guidance counselors. This really helps them develop. One of them is a counselor in my group and he steers forty children who listen to him and follow him [...] we need to empower them, develop group leaders from among them so that they are able to act independently and we will only accompany them. They are a strong group" (Y., 18, counselor at the youth center).

We are well aware of the fact that our study deals with a specific and small population. In spite of their small number it is important to us to describe this group, its uniqueness and its specific contexts and to point out the youngsters' viewpoints in their social and local context in South Tel Aviv at the time they belong to the senior level.

The limited size of our sample does not exclude the fact that in a broader social context there may be groups with similar characteristics, thus our findings may explain wider social phenomena than our research does. The important insights arising from our study may be projected to other populations of youngsters from migrant families both in Israel and in other parts of the world.

The uniqueness of our study lies not only in the context of the living environment of South Tel Aviv, not only the population of youths from migrant families but also the specific period of time in which it was conducted, since social realities change as time passes. We did not find studies conducted in the past five years relating to populations of 15-17 year olds from migrant families.

3. Analysis of findings

3.1. The first circle – the home

The concept of "home" in this article refers to the physical residence, family composition of migrant children and the connection with parents and other family members.

Family make up

The data from the interviews indicate that all the migrant youths interviewed bore first names, customary in their countries of origin, given to them by their parents. They all reside on a permanent basis in the area of the bus depot in the south of Tel Aviv in two to three room apartments. The average age of their parents is forty five and their occupation was either nursing

or domestic help. Only three cases where the fathers were employed also as electricians, a cook or as a driver for a moving company were found.

An examination of the extended family data found that thirteen migrant children positioned themselves directly as living alone with their parents, without relatives and five positioned themselves as living in close proximity to their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The reasons are varied, according to the stories of migrant children:

“My siblings are not here. My mother had them there. I have a stepsister from the same father not from the same mother, they are all in Sierra Leone [...]. Here, in Israel we have a child that we have adopted after his mother died. He has no father; he is at the youth center.” (N. fifteen years old);

“My sisters were born here and went back with my father [...] My whole family is there and here only friends. There is no family, just me and my mother.” (Z. 15 years old).

Characteristics of children of migrant families are different from most Israeli families (Israeli citizens), because mostly some family members (like parents, siblings, cousins) were forced to return to their country of origin or to another country. The result is that these children do not live like normative Israeli families (mother, father and children) and sense an absence of extended family members.

Language

The dominant language among the migrant families from Africa and the Philippines is English as national language and among the families from South America Spanish as national language. In eight families it was reported that the second spoken language was that of the country of origin: Swahili, Madingo, Kirau Philippine, Tarangile and in other eight of the families it was reported that Hebrew is an additional language spoken mainly for parents:

“my mother is twenty years in Israel and doesn’t know Hebrew (H. 16 years old); “We speak English, Hebrew so so, because my mother doesn’t understand so much”. (Y. 15 years old);

“Mother doesn’t speak Hebrew well, when I speak to her it helps her to learn.” (K. 16 years old).

In their communication with their parents the children prefer to speak in the language of origin. On the basis of Tannenbaum’s (2003: 44) claims that a situation in which a child acquires the new language while at the same time preserving their mother tongue is an ideal situation reflecting the existence of a close and secure relationship between parents and child¹, our results suggest that the surveyed migrant’s children maintain a positive, coherent and close knit atmosphere in the family, they maintain the traditions, beliefs and cultural values of their cultures of origin.

¹ Namely, a child feels sufficiently secure to acquire the new language while at the same time feels a need to preserve the language of the parents mainly as mode of communicating with them.

Furthermore, the fact that fifteen of the migrant children were positioning themselves directly as communicating with parents in their original language or in Hebrew for personal needs, family, social and institutional issues. Tannenbaum (2003: 41) argues that the young generation acquires the new language easily resulting in them becoming guides, interpreters and representatives of their parents in their dealings with Israeli authorities.

Contacts at home

In this article, the term "home" refers to the physical residence, family composition and the relationship between children and parents and other family members.

The migrant's children who were positioning themselves directly as holding positive interactions with parents and friends, as loving their home, are not ashamed of it, see it as meeting place, arrive there after school, rest there, watch television, eat and invite their friends there.

The interviews contain five personal stories connected with the first setting –the home, and deal with maintaining family unity and acceptance of parental authority. The first three stories told of family unity during a family trip to the country of origin. The children emphasized that they were looking forward to meeting the members of the extended family and were happy to meet most of them. The family visit to their relatives in the country of origin left a positive and powerful impression on them, and they reported having had moving and pleasant experiences. The sense of family unity was associated not only with happy occasions of family trips but also in events connected with sadness and painfulness resulting from the opposition of the state authorities.

(A) "I visited abroad with the whole family. In Ecuador [...] we were a month and a half during summer vacation. I finally saw that part of the family; we went on trips to all kinds of towns and visited a lot of families, first time for all of us. We all went. [...] Last year when my cousins were supposed to come here they didn't get in in the end. Arrived in the airport in Israel but they were turned back, my father and aunts. [...] there was a court in Jerusalem, and at the end they did not return them. It was sad; I remember that there was an evening that we all stayed together all night. They came a family, two cousins and grandmother" (M. 16 years old)

(B) "The fact that I met my grandmother in Ivory Coast before she died. We didn't talk so much because I didn't know her, and then a day after I came back then she died. I felt it was good that I met her. When I met her she was sick [...] she was on the bed all the time. [...] in the Ivory Coast I played with children all kinds of games, and it was great also when I saw my big sister. It was great to see my family. I haven't seen my family a long time, most of the time I played with them. I remember only that we played. It felt great, because it's fun to know new people that know my family." (A. 15 years old)

(C) "My mother and father fought, I was approximately three years old. I didn't know what to say to him because he was drunk. When we visited for the first time my family I was with my mother. I saw only my brothers and my grandmother and my aunt, not my father. We were there a month. I didn't want to go back because it was great to play with my brothers. We went to the mall." (S. 16 years old)

(D) "My birthday - but at the end it was a bad ending, until my mother upset me. She wasted my money on a refrigerator and washing machine. I got a thousand and something money from everybody as a gift. I wanted to keep the money for something that I'll want, shoes, clothes, but my mother wasted my money on a refrigerator and

washing machine. I was furious, upset. I said to her: "why did you waste my money? This is my money". She said that she will buy me what I want, so I bought, but I don't remember what it was." (Y. 15 years old).

(E) "I wanted to go to a modeling agency my parents did not let me, because I wanted to be and they did not allow. I was furious, angry, mad a whole week I didn't speak to my mom. That's a lot. Many told me that it's fitting for me to be, so I wanted to try. My mother said that it's with swimsuits and she doesn't want me to be like this. Only about swimsuits she said, that in our culture it's not good to be like this. I didn't speak about it at all to my father." (G, 15 years old).

The stories are dynamic, the children used in their descriptions and many active verbs of motion and action: we left, visited, played, went, met, the use of dynamic verbs creates an atmosphere of an active vacation filled with varied pleasant experiences. The use of the first person plural creates a feeling of unity and cooperation. In order to emphasize the pleasant experiences in the country of origin the children used in many situations the words "great fun" (*Keif* in Hebrew). The repetition of certain words whether jointly or separately has a role in the discourse and interaction between speakers.

Norrick (1987) presents a model for the classification of the various repetitions in a discourse. One of them is repetition connected with understanding to assure the addressee's accurate comprehension. In the above stories, spoken narrative discourse, we find repetitions of the word *Keif* (fun) the object of this repetition is to describe the pleasant feeling of the addressors in the course of their visits and to expose their personal voice following the family visits.

Three of the stories contain a structure aimed to contrast between life in Israel, its local culture and personal needs with life and culture in the country of origin. In the first story (A) the contrast is expressed through the family's wish to unite and meet with the family and the political restrictions preventing the family's entry. On the one hand my cousins were supposed to come to Israel, came to the airport in Israel.

On the other hand did not enter, did not go through and were deported.

In the fourth story (D) the contrast is hinted in the differences of the child's needs versus those of his mother. The boy like others of his age wants to enjoy the money he has received as a birthday gift and to spend it on himself whereas his mother chooses to use the money for household needs:

On the one hand – the child: something that I will want: shoes, clothes.
On the other hand – the mother: wasted my money on a refrigerator.

In the fifth story (E) we found a contradiction between the girl's wishes to model stemming most probably from exposure to advertisements on the media featuring children and youngsters, and the mother's position representing a traditional outlook preserving cultural values and norms customary in her country of origin:

On the one hand – the girl: I wanted to go to a modeling agency.
On the other hand the mother: In our culture it's not good to be like this.

The fact that the children chose a personal story to present events contrasting different wishes indicates that they live in a state of conflict that is realized in events vis a vis the state, their parents and in respect to the local culture.

The children position themselves as living in a conflict between self-fulfillment and living in a foreign country in another culture.

3.2. The second setting – the neighborhood

The neighborhood concept in this research includes two non – formal closely located and neighboring entities: the "Shapira" Youth Center and the "Eitan" group of the Scouts Movement. Their school "Bialik Rogozin" Campus which is about a 15 minute walk away from the neighborhood where they live is not considered to be part of the neighborhood.

The children arrive to the youth center at the end of their school day, receive food, emotional support and various educational enrichment activities counseled by pre military service volunteers. The "Eitan" Scouts group is a multicultural group consisting of Israeli (born in Israel) children, migrant children, new immigrants, refugees and others.

Bram, Lomsky-Feder and Ginzborg (Bram, 2010, Lomsky-Feder et al., 2010) dealt with the issue of immigrants' visibility, meaning the way in which the receiving society recognizes the existence of migrants and accepts their identity. According to them, "visibility agents" are civil servants and social workers working with migrants and can promote their recognition and acceptance within the receiving society. According to this definition the youth center and Scouts' group staffs are "agents of visibility" that form and define the migrant children's social field of vision and they endeavor to advance their visibility within the Israeli society.

Attitude towards the neighborhood

From the data concerning the second setting – the neighborhood, we learn that migrant children position themselves as having a positive attitude towards the neighborhood: loving their neighborhood, feeling that they belong to their neighborhood, are active in it and create their friendships in it.

Twelve children position themselves directly as participating in neighborhood activities: meet with friends, participate in sports, study for tests, are active in enrichment classes and group activities and conduct personal conversations with young volunteers. Moreover, the migrant children position themselves as free to choose whether or not to participate the activities:

"we only sit and talk" [...] "On the field those who are up for it play all the others just watch." (T. 16 years old); "I don't participate in afternoon activities." (W. 16 years old).

Furthermore, the interviews indicate that in the youth center the migrant children position themselves as receiving ethical and moral guidance, assistance and personal treatment from their young volunteers:

"I'm here with D. (young volunteer) twice a week: [...] I do my homework here." (L. 15 years old);

"I wish they'd listen more [...] more personal conversations." (G. 15 years old);

"In one case a volunteer made a child realize his musical tendencies: I met the volunteer three years ago and thanks to her I know how to play music." (Z. 17 years old).

The question: would you want to meet Israeli friends (born in Israel) in the neighborhood was answered affirmatively by half of the children and negatively by half. This finding indicates that half of the migrant children position themselves as different from the general Israeli society, and maybe that they don't believe that they can be seen by the Israeli children in the neighborhood or that they are not interested in being seen.

The children belonging to the former half position themselves as capable of meeting Israeli friends their age. We would like to point out that those migrant children who indicated their wishes to be in contact with Israelis are those who got help from the young volunteers, the "agents of visibility", and engaged in activities outside their immediate neighborhood: volunteering to firefighting, membership in a sports club, studying in a school outside the neighborhood or participating musical ensemble:

"The Israeli friends, I know them from the young volunteers. Their small brothers are my age so I met them. They came here so we met." (G. 15 years old);

"I have Israeli friends because I volunteer at the fire station." (H. 16 years old);

"At Lady Davies school they all accept me, I am happy there. I was pleasantly surprised. They broke all the stigmas about the ones from the North (of Tel Aviv)." (T. 16 year old).

Neighborhood Friends

Fourteen of the migrant children position themselves as having many friends from school, from the youth center and from the scout movement, as loving their social environment and as loving hanging out with friends:

"Every day after school coming here at seven o'clock until ten and a half and go home. We meet at the Scouts, especially in the neighborhood." (M, 15 years old);

"Meet at school, in youth center, mostly we meet here and at school." (N, 15 years old).

Four of the migrant children position themselves as not having any friends in the neighborhood. We will indicate that they live far from the youth center: "I don't have anyone from my neighborhood. My friends are from the youth center." (K, 15 years old).

The personal interviews reveal that all the migrant children position themselves as receiving sympathetic attitudes:

"When my father was sick [...] the neighbors came to help. They cared for us to see if everything was all right. They called for an ambulance. My mother didn't know that you pay for an ambulance [...] I felt they cared about us [...] It felt good that the neighbors

helped me. My mother returned in the evening. They then expressed concern but did not help physically". (L. 15 years old).

L. positions herself as part of her from neighborhood. L.'s story indicates that the neighbors' help in times of distress was not taken for granted, and it may have even pleasantly surprised her and given her a feeling that they are not invisible to their neighbors who relate to them and consider them as important enough to support them and help them cope.

Moreover, the migrant children position themselves directly as those to whom support and encouragement from young volunteers and friends are important.

"Sea to sea on the Scouts trip, this was a very hard trip and everyone encouraged the other [...] the young volunteers support and encourage, showing that they care about us caring about each other." (G. 15 years old);

"last year they took us from the after school care facility to the "Adventure Park" [...] that was the day I enjoyed most with my friends. It was a good day for me I felt happy with my friends. We had fun together." (Y. 15 years old).

In their personal stories the migrant children position indirectly their friends, the young youth center volunteers as giving them important support and emotional encouragement and care. The children's selection of words from the semantic field of "care and support": 'they care about us', 'they support and encourage us', 'because of them I know' proves that migrant children need to feel that someone cares about them that those around them understand their emotional, social and physical needs, and attempt to assist, support and encourage.

3.3. The Third Setting – the School

The "Bialik Rogozin Campus" school is located in the southern part of Tel Aviv and includes: a primary division, an elementary division, and a secondary education division. Its student body is multicultural: children of veteran Israelis, Israeli Arab children, children of new immigrants, migrant children and more.

School Atmosphere

Nine of the migrant children position themselves as loving school, having fun there and enjoying affirmative attitude and the rest position themselves as enjoy it less:

"I have fun. Our class is small. Each has a style of their own. This year we are united we had a meal together." (N. fifteen years old);

"Class I don't like, I feel all alone in that class, it's boring there. I am there (Bialik Rogozin Campus) since second grade and it's boring, the place is too closed." (S. 16 years old).

The migrant children position themselves as aware that from first up to twelfth grade they study in a different organizational structure and different social fabric than a state learning environment which is divided according to age groups thus generating natural heterogeneity. They learn of

their otherness through their contacts with various local Israeli factors, their young volunteers, trips with the Scouts, non – formal education meetings.

Children’s Attitude

Sixteen of the migrant children position themselves as feeling that school provides them with a protected and accepting environment in which they are liked by their friends:

"I love the break time because I am with my friends." (Y. 15 years old);

"my friends make me feel fun. I like talking to them." (B. 16 years old);

"we are good friends, if someone hits you, they will help you. If you don’t have lunch they will give you." (L. 15 years old).

The migrant children position their friends at school indirectly as those who are there for them in case of trouble: fighting, didn’t do homework, didn’t bring lunch.

Teachers’ Attitude

Thirteen of the migrant children position themselves as being loved by their teachers:

"my homeroom teacher Y. since she cares. She likes to listen, if you need help you can turn to her and she’ll always help you." (M. 16 years old);

"the teacher thinks that I am very smart that you will do well in your studies, she always says that but I don’t know if she really means it. I feel that I’ll succeed because I want it." (G. 15 years old);

"I liked her because in those days I was problematic, I changed because of her, she helped me change." (T. 15 years old);

"T. he is the teacher I have most fun with." (T. 16 years old.).

As migrant’s children describe their relationship with their teachers they position themselves directly as getting personal attention from them. They position their teachers externally and indirectly as a dominant factor that fosters learning. They supervise, deter and constitute a bridge to future success and knowledge. Teachers are seen by the children as responsible for their failure or success. Those of them who form personal contacts with their students, who give them the feeling that they care and who promote their belief in themselves and in their ability to realize their personal and scholastic potential are the generators of changes leading to success. On the other hand teachers who are indifferent, less involved and insensitive to the children diminish their motivation for success:

"If I would study with him I would not flunk, I would understand him. Now I study with an annoying teacher, she is my homeroom teacher. I asked her to help me but she didn’t listen to me." (G. 16 years old); "The sports teacher he is nice to me. He helps me in everything. I have an anger issue so he helped me. He taught me how to control it like breathing. I do it." (W. 16 years old).

The schoolteacher is a key figure for educated life and success for the children. They turn to them for help not only in solving problems connected to their studies, but also to cope with problems in other areas of life. The personal component of the teacher's character is therefore very dominant to the migrant children. When describing their teachers they naively paint an optimal figure capable of teaching, being a friend, laughing, helping, understanding and promoting success in life.

"When I was in the sixth grade [...] I received a certificate of excellence. This made me realize that the teachers notice me I felt warmth in my heart when you know that there are those teachers who pay attention to you." (D. 15 years old);

"Yesterday the teacher gave marks and I got a 100 in biology. It felt great, lots of fun." (J, 15 years old);

"first time I felt confident about myself on a test [...] the teacher helped me at the study center, gave me stuff to think about." (N. 15 years old).

The stories indicate the use of a "cause and effect" logical structure. The "Cause" describes what the teachers did: "paid attention" "told me" "helped me" "didn't give up" "teaches good", resulting in successful school work, namely the children's success is the result of the teachers' actions the children understand that the teacher's personality and their success are connected.

It is important to note that in the children's stories they position their parents externally and indirectly as people to whom academic success is important, but who can't help:

"I was upset that one day I simply got a bad test. My teacher said, do a makeup exam my mother didn't even know about it." (T. 16 years old);

"They also help me there with my homework and at home they don't because they don't know Hebrew." (A. 15 years old);

"I now want to show them that I can. I don't want to let my parents down. I want to show my parents that I will succeed the second semester". (N. 15 years old).

3.4. The fourth setting Israeli Society

Most of the migrant children (14 out of 18) position themselves as loving life in Israel. This finding reinforces the positive positioning expressed by the children in their various settings of belonging: home, neighborhood and school. We have also found that about a half of the children position themselves as wishing to resemble Israelis and want to become part of Israeli society in the future.

Berry (1997) notes that migrants relations with the local population in the target country can have different forms: assimilation, integration or minor differ. According Ravhon & Lev-Ari (2011) an assimilation process occurs when migrants agree to give up past traditions and accept customary norms and patterns in the target country. Rogni (2012) points out that many migrants are not assimilated into the local population even after many years.

All the migrant children position themselves as part of Israeli society and as knowing when the State of Israel was established, as familiar with Israeli music, as taking trips in Israel and as very familiar with Israeli holidays:

"I am familiar with these holidays but I don't celebrate them. At home we celebrate Christian holidays in school there is reference to Jewish holidays too, to those of the Muslims and to the Christian ones also".(M. 16 years old);

"at school we celebrate Christmas, Easter and in church also." (J, 15 years old);

"On "Rosh Hashanah" [the Jewish holiday] the whole family gets together party food and music, we celebrate Muslim holidays, all the holidays."(G. 15 years old).

An examination of the fourth circle of belonging – Israeli society found that fourteen of the migrant children position themselves as loving the life in Israel. Half of the migrant children position themselves as wishing to resemble Israelis and want to become part of Israeli society in the future. All of them are familiar with the symbols of the state and its cultural characteristics. Furthermore, half of the migrant children position the Israelis indirectly as open and tolerant towards them.

Conclusions

An analysis of the research findings reveals that the migrant children are part of a multicultural and multilingual mosaic in the heterogeneous Israeli society who position themselves clearly and directly as happy and love their circles of belonging: their home, neighborhood, school and Israeli society.

The people working in the circles of belonging of the migrant children: young volunteers in youth center and scout, school teachers, neighbors in the neighborhood, their friends and other volunteers, consider it very important to cultivate the physical environment in where children live, and to improve their emotional well-being and to improve their academic achievements and success.

We found a difference in positioning among the three circles of belonging: the informal, home, neighborhood and society and formal one - the school. The migrant children position themselves as loving the three informal circles of belonging and just half of them position themselves as loving school. Perhaps this difference indicates that there is a difference between interactions at school and informal environment interaction. It is advisable to check the characteristics of the informal environment interaction and learn from it.

The home is the personal circle in which the children position themselves as loving their home and their families. In addition, the migrant children position themselves as filling the function of mediating and being in charge of interacting with the Israeli establishment on behalf of their non-Hebrew speaking parents and as living in a conflict between their personal needs and the local culture, and between life in their country and culture of origin as represented by their parents.

The neighborhood is a non-formal circle in which all the migrant children position themselves as loving their neighborhood as receiving recognition and visibility from the people in the neighborhood and from the young volunteers at the youth center and at the Scouts. This interaction enables them to topple the boundaries of youth center and neighborhood, to achieve visibility and recognition from local Israelis and to express positive outlooks towards them.

The school is the formal setting where just half of the migrant children position themselves as loving school. These findings indicate that the children study in a school that accords to their visibility a central role and aims at turning their negative visibility into a positive one. We believe that multicultural, pluralistic, humanistic approach curricula should be promoted by the national education system. These curricula may enhance the positive visibility of the migrant children and contribute to strengthening their self-confidence and self-image.

Israeli society – Most of the youngsters from the migrant families (14 out of 18) positioned themselves as loving their life in Israel and as being familiar with Israeli culture while a half of them expressed their wish to go on living in Israel as permanent residents. We found a difference in positioning between the three non-formal circles of belonging – the home, the neighborhood and Israeli society as a whole and the school which is a formal educational setting for the migrants. The majority of the migrant youths positioned themselves as loving the non-formal settings very much but only a half of them positioned themselves as loving school, the formal educational setting, possibly indicating a need to reexamine the various interactions at school and peer learning versus activities carried out in the counterpart non-formal settings such as youth center and Scouts. The migrant youngsters have nevertheless indirectly positioned the people in the various circles of belonging, including in the school, the young volunteers at the youth center, Scouts counselors, school teachers, their neighbors and friends as those caring for them and for their physical surroundings, as those who are concerned with their scholastic success and with their wellbeing.

These findings surprised us because this portrayal of reality in south Tel Aviv runs counter to that presented in the media, in the interviews we have conducted¹ and in various other studies of migration focusing on political, cultural and economic aspects of the adult labor migrant community.

Wurgaft (2006: 146) in her book describes the realities of life among the migrant as rife with distress persecution and injustice. In one of its chapters titled "Children as Hostages" she recounts that whenever the Tel Aviv Municipality or the Messilah organization personnel wanted to draw the attention of public figures to the work migrants' plight they would take them on a tour at make-shift nurseries operating in private apartments in southern Tel Aviv. The sight of the toddlers huddled in tiny apartments filled with baby food and diaper odors would always leave a bad impression.

Furthermore, a study conducted by the Knesset's Research and Information Center on the conditions of children of asylum seekers and work migrants (Nathan, 2010: 6), found that the

¹ We have conducted interviews with Hagay Herzl, the head of Year of Service and Seminars Sector of the Defence Ministry, with Eyal Glass, General Manager of "Kadima" youth centers network, with Yael Ben Moshe, Pedagogical Manager of "Kadima" Youth centers and with the young volunteers at the youth centers.

absorption of migrant children in the school system in regard with compliance with its rules was fraught with difficulties. Many were truant with their parents' consent, they were often dressed in clothes unfit for the weather, had difficulties with their studies, caused behavior problems or came to school without the proper equipment. Government agencies such as the education department find it difficult to communicate with the parents and assist the families since parents are not able to speak Hebrew.

The young volunteer counselors report that the migrant youths feel a sense of alienation and foreignness: "they teach me what profound racism is [...] They know that they are strangers and they feel it every day of their lives (A. a young volunteer at the youth center, 2015); "There's a lot of racism and they experience it very intensely [...] they are different, so it will be very difficult for them, they look different, speak different and sometimes behave different" (N, a young volunteer in the Scouts movement, 2015).

These reports are full of negative descriptions of a poor, complex violent environment whose residents are subject to hostility and racism and who are constantly threatened with deportation. Contrary to those impressions the migrant's children interviewed for our study spoke of their positive experiences and reported a supportive, nurturing, protective and caring environment.

In our opinion one of the causes for the dramatic gap between the reality depicted in studies and the media and that described by the migrant kids is the age of the subjects. In the studies described above the focus was on adults who emigrated from their countries of origin to Israel and were forced to face hardships of assimilation, earning a living, legal position etc. in a hostile environment. Conversely our research examined Israeli born youths aged 15-17 of work migrant parentage who were not faced with uprooting migration or absorption problems. They are familiar with Israeli reality and culture, live in a supportive environment and express their wishes to integrate in it.

An additional factor we think, is the political changes concerning work migrants and their children that took place in the country. In 2008 Kemp and Reichmann published their book 'Workers and foreigners' in which they examined the political process of the regularization reform concerning the status of children of migrant workers. In it they claim that in 2006 there was a shift in government policies and the then Prime Minister Olmert declared that "Israel will lose its moral image if it shirks its responsibility towards weak populations, including migrant workers 'children living and growing up in our midst, who love our country and want to be a part of it".

This policy gives the youths an opportunity to become a part of Israeli society as independent adult citizens. Currently they are given the opportunity to enlist in the IDF, to be part of the Year of Service program and to volunteer to various other educational projects. It is perhaps the knowledge that conditions have changed and that they now may be able to integrate into Israeli society that gives them hope and enables them to see their life in the South Tel Aviv in a positive light.

It could also be that participating in the formal and non-formal educational opportunities in Tel Aviv which gives these youngsters the proper conditions for personal growth, for acquisition of education and for social and cultural development led them to regard their lives as promising and avoid descriptions of racism discrimination poverty and distress.

An additional factor to consider is the possibility that they wanted to placate and satisfy us as researchers namely, they said what they thought we would want to hear and not the whole truth.

The significant gap described may testify to the complexity of these children's lives. On the one hand the youngsters try to lead "normal lives" devoid of racism, discrimination and hardship in an environment that protects them from early in the morning till late in the evening surrounding and enveloping them with teachers, volunteers, activities, meals, and various social events giving them physical and emotional support and on the other hand there exists a reality of a neglected physical environment with an ever possible risk of deportation hanging over their heads.

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On Becoming 'White' Through Ethnographic Fieldwork in Ghana: Are Ideas Imperial by Course?

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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana, and the growing number of studies on “sanism” (or psychiatric oppression), this paper revisits outstanding methodological concerns around privilege and power, body and space, language and the liminality of social categories, as a platform to reconsider the insider/outsider debate. It ponders openly, and hopefully collectively, the implications of expanding research interests, so, too, the very circulation of ideas, against what the author is analytically describing as the experience of becoming “White.” The article focuses on questions that fieldwork exposed about researcher identity and “belonging,” not least the risk of essentialism. In effect, it seeks to demonstrate the ethical and epistemological dilemmas that arise from giving account, toward a more sensitive way in academia, relationship building, and solidarity work—where, when, how, or whether, critical ethnography can relinquish, reimagine, or altogether transform its dialectical tensions without undermining ends of resistance?

Keywords

Ethnography, colonialism, biopolitics, identity, Mad Pride

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Introduction

In the wake of my return from ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana, I seized every opportunity to discuss my research findings, albeit preliminary and in the most careful strokes. It would follow worthwhile, so early into organization and analysis, to elicit feedback, otherwise brainstorm, that which I had been considering on the curious emergence of “Mad” activism some eleven thousand kilometers away from the unceded Coast Salish territories that I troublingly occupy, even call “home” or Vancouver, Canada. But the more I teased apart the data, the more I reflected on my experiences, the more I engaged with the journey and the qualitative interviews that I had conducted, the more I became consumed by such outstanding methodological concerns as privilege and power, body and space, political and ethical responsibility, indeed, “the very existence of ethnography as an imperial endeavor” (Clair, 2012: 19). The thoughts have grown to rage—my head so full, spiraling tirelessly with frustration, anxiety, often resentment, or the worse being despair (and its miscreant twin on integrity). There has simply been no way for me to “bracket” these emotions for later, as encouraged to do, and focus on transforming the field to text, however beyond these lines. They have shifted my thinking too radically. They are my ethnography—Ghana, the precursor.

Of particular interest have been “the rhetorical force of culturalist arguments” (Crosson, 2014: 22) and their translation into the sharply bounded dichotomies of insider or outsider. “The issue of researcher membership in the group or area being studied” is not a new phenomenon, of course (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009: 55). In 1972, American sociologist Robert Merton framed the debate along the lines of a conflict or disjuncture in what German philosopher Martin Heidegger had previously described as the “public interpretation of reality” (cf. Kusow, 2003: 592), with the inadequacies of “insider” standpoint thwarted on account of vested loyalties and those of an “outsider” falling peril to the classic image of a “neutral” field scholar, “just sitting around” (Pigg, 2013: 127), observing and recording, in effect, gazing—that passivity, perhaps lassitude, removed, decontextualized, ominously uncontested. Prefiguring the Combahee River Collective (1977) and intersectionality studies more explicitly, Merton (1972: 24) went on to point out that we occupy a “status set” at any given time insofar as he recognized the interactions of social markers within, between, or across one another. The postmodern circles of the 1980s brought “greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power” (Angrosino, 2005: 734). This has continued to put much emphasis on the importance to qualify oneself as researcher to the communities of study, furthermore to reflect upon positionality over the research process and, by extension, the dynamic or collaborative nature of the field, including that which may be implied for “Truth” claims, representation, authorship, and that ethnographic trademark of “culture” (Coffey, 1999).

The concern that I raise is the fundamental ramifications that insider/outsider bears on identity politics and (postmodernist) moves away from essentialism (or objectivity in any sense). I sift what I am analytically describing as the experience of becoming “White” to problematize researcher disclosure and belonging, if not the very circulation of ideas, in this age of unprecedented mobility, liminal roles, changing mediators, and shared resources. My intentions are not to undermine the value of reflexivity in the pursuit of knowledge, but rather grapple with its near impregnable grip now, a quarter-century later, over critical scholarship and the “constellations of meaning” (Young & Meneley, 2005: 1), nay, oppressive structures that have developed at the institutional level as a result. Ergo, I contend that our practice of insider/outsider relations is well contrary to the ideals of academic freedom and as much a

part of “the ugly politics of class, racism, colonialism, and sexism” (Young & Meneley, 2005: 1) upon which rests the notoriety of ethnography at the turn of the twentieth century. Buried within such preoccupations of researcher “identity” are concomitant struggles of power, themselves fraught in fragmented categories, be it guised, negotiated, flattened, or frozen. They heed inner contradictions, our rolling complicity in the violence of modernity (Nabbali, 2015), withal the technologies of difference qua project of eugenics (Joseph, 2015).

To be clear, this paper examines the questions that fieldwork exposed about my position as a researcher and on the ethics of knowledge production. I begin with the challenges already indicated which drew especial attention to the contrived, and deeply political, asymmetries carved into the academe (Young & Meneley, 2005: 7). Second, I canvass the feminist literatures that have sought to disrupt the “practices of power” (Smith, 1978) through the presentation of first-person accounts and the co-reflection of experience (Burstow, 2005). Here, I am referring to standpoint and intersectionality theories, toward a situated or embodied knowledge-building tradition. I argue, then, that the assumptions shaping these models efface the complexities of selves, like research, running altogether paradoxical to their entry. Significantly, they collude with dominance and operate as micro-aggressions (Badwall, 2016). At stake is both my own sense of understanding and ethnographic “currency” (read: epistemology).

A byproduct of the work is a brief and stylized overview of “sanism” (Perlin, 1992, 2000), sometimes used interchangeably with “mentalism” (Chamberlin, 1978), although the analogue has been cautioned of late (Fabris, 2012; Poole, et al., 2012). Terms much like other “isms,” they describe tenuous prejudices against people whose minds are judged of pathos, “ill logic, reason, or wisdom” based on select interpretation of behaviour and attitudes (Fabris, 2012: ix), systematically sanitized “in an effort to prove that the golden road to recovery will reveal itself—but only if you take your medication and listen to your mental health care providers” (Costa et al., 2012: 89), the economic keystones of a multi-billion dollar psychopharmaceutical-industrial complex (Murray, 2009). To make a case against resources fuelling this single narrative (Badwall, 2016), therefore, to erode “spirit-breaking” and socially divisive tactics (Deegan, 1990), I conclude on the promise of Mad Pride. By no means exhaustive, I glean from history, happenings, but primarily, personal communications with veteran activists and other participants of the Canadian “scene,” that Mad Pride is at once a bridge for resistance as well as a theoretical praxis for social movement research integral to decolonization and subsequent true democratization.

1. Marking Maps, Charting Currents

From the outset of their revolutionary expositions, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (2007: 64) noted “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” It would take more than 150 years for cultural critics of the charged atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s to turn to the task of unpacking the implications on our metropole, both on “our vehicle for thought (language) and the content of thought (concept)” (Eichler, 1988: 5). Ethnographers would follow these questions of power with concerns around the ethics of knowledge production (Armbruster, 2008: 4). Over the next decades, they would bare the heavy politics that had gone into making the field. Central lay the “borders that separate self from others and [researcher] from natives,” no less their servitude or interconnectedness with wider systems of inequality (Young & Meneley, 2005: 7). Condemning earlier conventions of ethnographic fieldwork as “a form of Eurocentric ventriloquism” (Elie, 2006: 57), “wittingly or unwittingly, as smokescreen or apology” (Farmer, 2005: 26), even “handmaiden to

imperialism” (Fergusson, 2007: 2), efforts would be staunch to advance the discipline as a “cultural project” (Geertz, 1973), always “situated, partial, local, temporal, and historically specific” (Coffey, 1999: 11).

The ethnographer as author(ity) remains perhaps the most flagrant discomfort with “objectivity,” standing in harsh contrast to “the researched subject as a voiceless ‘other’” (Armbruster, 2008: 7), “rhetorically apprehended” or else denied (Echeruo, 1993: 7). The power exerted in “capturing” the “ethnographic present,” and its inherent risk of impressions forever netted to that time, cannot be gorged (Young, 2005: 212). There is no better example than in *The Invention of Africa*, first surmised by Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe (1988), and since rearticulated by American anthropologists Paulla A. Ebron (2002) and James Fergusson (2007), among others. Ethnography is one of many sites to have circumscribed the continent south of the Sahara Desert as a homogenous anomic whole (Fergusson, 2007: 2). An area of 48 countries, some 800 million people, and more than a thousand languages, or a sixth of the global linguistic diversity (Bowden, 2008), etched in popular imagination to “primitiveness” (Tomaselli, 2003: 869), “simple societies” (Fergusson, 2007: 2), “ethnic wars, famine, and unstable political regimes” (Ebron, 2002: 2), effectively, “a symbol of fear, evil, and death” (Mbeki, cf. Meredith, 2005: 677). “There is no description of Africa that does not involve destructive and mendacious functions” (Mbembé, 2001: 242). It is this blanketed, dystopian “Africa” that has been juxtaposed, or made antithesis, to other parts of the world in the politics of nation- (and subject-) “building,” themselves, economic “reforms.” Accordingly, and in cue with Edward Said’s seminal critique of *Orientalism* (2003), the ethnography of Africa has held canonical to the development of the concept of “modernization” and ensuing (neo)colonialism, what is being attended as imperialism today, when State powers no longer seek presence but “how deeply they [can] alter people’s perceptions,” so, disrupt traditional modes of knowledge production, resulting in exploitation more or less from afar (Taiwo, 1993: 891).

Interrogating our “textual attitude” (Said, 2003), that academic imperative to textualize, has established across critical studies as the “Crisis of Representation” (Marcus & Fisher, 1986). This discursive cynicism, at the least skepticism, foregrounds the limitations of textualism, including the ways in which intertextuality can reduce as much as appropriate individuals like total communities (Tomaselli, 2003: 859). Ethnographers, for their part, have undercut authority with probes not just about the role of the researcher but also proper research relations. “You can’t do ethnography without embodied attention to the symbols and practices of a lived space” (Madison, 2005: 401). It is, unvaryingly, the entering and active participation in that lived space, an “existential space” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007: 18), which sprout to meaning. Whatever representations stem are nothing short of “something made” by the researcher (Geertz, 1973: 15) and the flux or messiness “when your body must move and adjust to the rhythms, structures, rules, dangers, joys, and secrets” (Madison, 2005: 401) from “both within and outside of the academy” (Young & Meneley, 2005: 7).

To wit, the cover of texts has broken open. The spine, cracked. Fallen has the modernist tendency to protect “us” from having to deal with the (push)penning of “them” into the abyss (Tomaselli, 2003: 856). That us-them, self-other, researcher-subject/object/project has given way to a new kind of methodology—the valuing of perspectives (Rinaldi, 2013, para. 8), what “we might rename as mindfulness” (Pigg, 2013: 6), otherwise an improvisation (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007), if not rejection of the “methodologization” of fieldwork tout court (Casteñeda, 2006: 100). At crux is the principle of “dialogue,” aspired from Indigenous pedagogics to deflate colonial modes of knowledge production and divest privileges as possible (Sefa Dei,

2009; Tuhiwei Smith, 2012; Wane, 2008). An exchange in its right demands the commitment between a basal two, a trust and reciprocity, polyphonic by esteem. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to learn from, and learn to use, the “standpoints” not previously, easily, or legitimately textualized (Harding, 1991: 277). The stories handed down over generations have marked life for important teachings disembodied from—oft threatening to—the growing corpus of “science” since before the “Enlightenment” (Daly, 2005: 13). “Accounts of ‘real’ world do not, then, depend on a logic of ‘discovery’ but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation’” (Haraway, 1988: 593). In dialogue so dwells the potential for resistance—the mobilization of voices, a sense of numbers, strength, inertia, collective memory, continuity, and ultimately, survival. Implicit is a saliency for “most First Nations peoples [who] traditionally come from an oral society” (Qwul’sih’yah’maht, 2005: 242). A similar inference can be drawn for diaspora (Berg, 2011) and the diasporic condition (i.e. refugees, exiles, migrant workers, trafficked victims, and other displaced or homeless peoples) which is said to “epitomiz[e] a postmodern existence of border crossings and life on the margins” (Conquergood, 2013: 89).

2. Stand. Point. Up and at ‘Em!

“By granting that there are other vantage points in research, indeed by holding that the neutral vantage point was an illusion all along” (Rinaldi, 2013, para. 8), wryly likening it to “the god trick” (Haraway, 1988), critical feminists have been instrumental in responding to Marxian analyses of the ruling ideas with standpoint theory. The concerted works of Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith, for instance, have reevaluated mainstream—no, “malestream” (1974: 7)—theoretical formulations as construed through abstraction, rather than accrued from situ and its intimacies. This has “generate[d] ideology, not knowledge” (Smith, 1990: 48), proving largely toothless to the (de)(re)organization of structure and agency. The “male subtext” has pervaded “the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural,” such to intersect and direct, palpably stifle or dispossess, individual relations with the “everyday world,” extending from administration to academia, employment, law, citizenry, as well as the media (Smith, 1990: 6). The “practices of power” have been conceptualized perhaps most cogently by Smith (1978) in the case of “K,” a young woman whose lived experience was reiterated, even stripped of domestic abuse, to serve the language of “serious mental illness” and make actionable through “treatment” (read: professional intervention).

The breadth of psychiatry stands telling of the social and physical consequences of an echelon underwriting “in its endless incarnations and points of application” (Menzies, et al., 2005: 1). Spurious, it most certainly is to have a shifting array of diagnostic checkboxes, if not “based on value-laden [thus, discretionary] definitions” to assess (Ussher, 2005: 23)—most recently updated in 2013 with a fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* or DSM-V. Late-nineteenth century constructions of “hysteria,” then “warranting” hysterectomies, found sole targets in women that cannot be understood as anything other than patriarchal, puritanical measures for transgressive (gendered) behaviour (Kempe, 1982; St-Amand & LeBlanc, 2013). Her “failure to be a ‘paragon of domestic virtue’” (Labrum, 2005: 60), for seeking to marry outside of familial purview or for planning a career away from the home (Newnes, 1999), for becoming pregnant out-of-wedlock, for her “talkativeness and [related] violations of conventional feminine speech” (Labrum, 2005: 60), and for a short while in the twentieth century, for masturbation (Coppock & Hopton, 2000: 94), have all been “factors” in the process of “pathology,” objectification, submission, committal, and control. The atrocities weighted against women have only exacerbated since the 1930s under the aegis

of “help” and the welfare state (Caplan, 2005: 118), dovetailing with the development of insulin-shock, electroshock, and psychosurgical procedures (Hudson, 1987).

In Canada, electroshock “therapy” continues to be administered on women two-to-three times more often than men (Arscott, 1999; Burstow, 2006), nearly half of whom are over the age of 60 years old, many above 80 alarmingly enough (Kroessler & Fogel, 1993; Weitz, 1997). It is also the “treatment” of choice for expecting mothers (Health Canada, cf. Shimrat, 2013); whereas British psychiatrist William Sargant and clinical director Eliot Slater dared recommending that psychosurgery, most widely in the form of prefrontal lobotomy, be used for those women “who may owe her illness [sic] to a psychopathic husband who cannot change and will not accept treatment” (cf. Showalter, 1985: 210). Their textbook, though dated to 1972, unabashedly renders the manifestation of social conflict, here, of unequivocal (acknowledged) violence, onto women as their personal responsibility. Worse, it can be forced upon them, notwithstanding testimonies of trauma, pain, and suffering (Chamberlin, 1978; Findlay, 1975; Millett, 1990; Shimrat, 1997). Lest the additional challenges and vulnerabilities akin to the destruction (err, mutilation) of brain tissues and connective nerve fibers (Andre, 2008; Anonymous, 1948; Bentall, 2009; Breggin, 2008; Moncrieff, 2008; Squire & Slater, 1983; Weitz, 2013). “That psychiatry ... is the only profession allowed to incarcerate people who have committed no crime” (Burstow, 2013: 80), for which it has been shown to condemn women to compulsory admission at a higher rate than men (Sheppard, 1991), raises mammoth questions around civil liberties and equal rights.

The war on women does not stop at the doors of the wards. Oftentimes, it ends on the streets (Dear & Wolch, 1987) “with lifelong impairment and sometimes with horrifying accidental death” (Fabris, 2011: 18). The last four decades so have been marked as Canada increasingly pursues a neoliberal agenda and “general policy of deinstitutionalizing patients” (Morrow, et al., 2008: 1). Cost-containment, urban densification, its soaring market prices, uneven investment patterns, and constitutive disenfranchisement, what Noam Chomsky (1999) has poignantly quipped *Profit Over People*, have culminated to greet the displacement (said, “reintegration”) of ex-psychiatric inpatients into the community with no viable options for supportive and affordable housing (Capponi, 1992; Finkler, 2014; Krupinski, 1995). Further, it has led to counter- (cum sanist) campaigns from neighborhood groups to the tune of “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) (Teelucksingh, 2002). Such an environment has been ripe for the psychopharmaceutical revolution (Moynihan, et al., 2002; Shorter, 1997; Whitaker, 2010), complete with “a surge of ‘outpatient committal’ laws,” which surfaced in Canada in 1993 and have been admonished by psychiatric survivor and scholar Erick Fabris (2011: 97) as “chemical incarcerations.” This is when outpatients can be legally ordered to subject themselves to “‘antipsychotic’ (major tranquilizers), ‘antianxietant’ (minor tranquilizers), and ‘antidepressant’ drugs ... whether or not they refuse medication or act aggressively,” bolstering the power of psychiatry in society with the mandate of police to enforce these arrangements (Fabris, 2011: 4).

The entire project of “community mental health care” has been a “tragic farce,” according to venerable antipsychiatry activist Irit Shimrat (2013: 144). The community so invoked in these ostensibly “progressive” models of “reform” is deemed “both means (the response of choice; the caring, restorative community) and end (membership, inclusion),” but operates as a “revolving door” to medical (individualistic) discourses of recovery (Morin, et al., 2005: 127-8). “To take charge of our bodies and minds [is to hone] the emphasis on private solutions [and] work against social change” (Morrow, 2013: 328). It is to imbue, not with patterns of repression, but biologism. “Norm violations” signal deviance just as they are the entry for

psychiatry (Chesler, cf. Tomes, 1994: 354). That is, they are characteristically framed as a product of “faulty” brains, defective genes, or hormonal theories of “imbalances.”

With respect to women, the very existence of “premenstrual tension” (PMT) or “premenstrual syndrome” (PMS), the more hefty “premenstrual dysphoric disorder” (PMDD), of “postpartum depression” (PPD), which has now been “neutralized” in the DSM-V to “depressive disorder with peripartum onset,” and of menopausal “episodes” around depressive, panic, or personality “disorders,” are derived from expected (“normal”) life transitions of the female reproductive system (Becker, 1997; Burt & Rasgon, 2004; Maartens, et al., 2002; Marsh, et al., 2008; Ussher, 2005). Noteworthy is the absence of consistencies on the prevalence of “symptoms” across populations to suggest the “proneness” of women to psychiatric aberrancy, thus, their overrepresentation on the whole (Chandra & Chaturvedi, 1989; Coppock, 2008; Davar, 1995). Neither is there widespread agreement on the amelioration among women when hormonal cycles are “managed” (aka “re-balanced”), say, with estrogen replacement during menopause (Campbell & Whitehead, 1977; Coope, 1981; Pearce, et al., 1997), or in cases of those who have been hysterectomized (Heinrich & Wolf, 2005). Still, women are dispensed double the amount of psychiatric drugs than men each year (Baum, et al., 1998; Robinson, 2002). They have been found more likely to take multiple prescriptions at once (Domecq, et al., 1980). As would follow, they have more adverse reactions to the mind-altering neurotoxins (Burstow, 2005), not least, a disproportionate risk of drug dependency (Coppock & Hopton, 2000) and tardive dyskinesia (van Os, et al., 1999; Yassa & Jeste, 1992), stigmatizing the body unmistakably from having a psychiatric history with “the tongue becom[ing] quite loose and you have a lot of drooling [and uncontrollable] movement of the mouth and facial muscles, as well as sometimes the hands or legs. [And] you can’t get rid of it. There’s no cure. It’s something you live with for the rest of your life!” (Anonymous 2, interview, June 23, 2008).

Suffice to say that psychiatry “is a story of a possible *iatrogenic* progress at work, of an otherwise normal person being made chronically sick by diagnosis and subsequent treatment” (Whitaker, 2010: 30, emphasis in original). Puzzling is its indebtedness to the creation—whence protection, upkeep, and arguably, acceleration—of a “modern plague” to specialize and intervene (Whitaker, 2010). “As common targets ... in a patriarchal colonial society” (Fabris, 2011: 156), and something of the clutch or operant of “the epidemic” (Whitaker, 2010), so the backbone of its political economy, women have long played a central role in critiques of psychiatric hegemony and its disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1978, 1979, 1991). The knowledge that they have created over centuries, particularly from first-person accounts and the co-reflection of experience (Burstow, 2005), continues to lend itself to larger discussions around power, feminist consciousness, through revisionist approaches to health, medicine, science, and the body (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Turner, 1997). It is outside the purview of this paper, however, to canvas their contributions in depth, like the many constituencies (sometimes contentious pursuits) toward radical alternatives. There are many who have with great insight (Burstow, 2005; Chamberlin, 1990; Diamond, 2013, 2014; Everett, 2000), often anchoring North American action to Elizabeth Packard and her publications during the 1860s (Appignanesi, 2008; Geller & Harris, 1994; Hubert, 2002). She is well-known for having protested against being “legally kidnapped and imprisoned three years simply for uttering ... opinions [that] conflicted with the Creed of the Presbyterian Church,” ultimately those of her preacher husband at a time when no law existed to shield “a wife from a husband’s power, and no man dares to take the responsibility of protecting [her]” (cf. Packard, et al., 1994: 59, 65). While Packard has also been slated for holding pejorative views of some fellow inmates at the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane, we are reminded

that this distancing effect was demanded through the “long court battle in order to gain custody of her children” (St-Amand & LeBlanc, 2013: 42), as it arguably remains in family court judgments today (Savvidou, et al., 2003; Seeman, 2012). Packard dedicated her twenty years after liberation to the plight of women and the “absolute despotism” or “Inquisitions,” as she put it, of the American government, for the vast majority of those persecuted through psychiatry have been women (cf. Packard, et al., 1994: 62-3), much like the “regime of terror” that took various names across Europe over centuries (Barstow, 1994). Packard’s brazen standpoint witnessed to fruition the passage of 34 bills to protect women from undue internment (St-Amand & LeBlanc, 2013: 42), effectuating a “sociology for women” far before Smith’s (1987).

3. Talking Back to Each “Other”

While “women’s distinctive experiences [have] bec[o]me important ingredients in the attempt to set the record straight ... the simple addition of women to the research process [neither] seemed adequate” (McCall, 2005: 1775). For Black feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the preponderance to standpoint devoid of the “interlocking nature of oppressions” introduces new methodological problems. The dual, if nuanced, marginality of Black women is “not a trivial difference in a racist society” (Clarke, cf. Lorde, 2007: 10), “complicated by age, class, accent, education, national origins, region, as well as sexuality,” ability, and religion (Twine, 2000: 9). Such a “matrix of domination” (Hill Collins, 2000: 222) renders futile—limiting (McCall, 2005), reductionist (Butler, 1993), and exclusionary (Young, 1997)—to start justice work with gender or any one feature of the human cosmopolitan. Intersectional approaches, as formally coined by Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), respond to the lacuna of contemporary feminism, including its “white-centricity” (Liska, 2015), by focusing our attention on the varying amounts of penalty and privilege that cross every life (Hill Collins, 2000: 220).

Intersectionality has been heralded as “one of the greatest gifts” (Belkhir, 2009: 303), even “the most important contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall, 2005: 1771). In striving to pay credence to myriad subjectivities and material conditions (Creese, et al., 2009: 607), it offers a theoretical and political resolve to the isolated (categorical) ways in which issues of oppression have previously been discussed (Davis, cf. Carastathis, 2014: 304). That, racialization makes for resounding pitch in the relationship between women and psychiatry, seems hardly needing to expound—hitherto lacking from critical scrutiny till late (Adebimpe, 1981; Daley, et al., 2012; Fernando, 1984; Gorman, 2013; Jackson, 2002). The co-organization and intergenerational implications of war, colonialism, migration, so, processes of (re)settlement and juridical surveillance, network fragmentation, as well as precarious or low-wage labour, are bound up in the narratives of struggle and “maladjustment” core to (psycho)pathologization, security, detention, and management otherwise. Perhaps most pernicious, social work theorist Brenda LeFrançois (2013: 112) has exemplified, is how a mother who was “scooped” (abducted) from her family as a child on a First Nations reserve in Canada, deemed unsuitable to care under virulent “assimilationist” policies, and placed into the compulsory residential school system (bar of traditional knowledges and interactivities), might call upon child protection services “looking for support,” in turn, opening the door to the psychiatrization of her adolescent daughter, if not removal from the home, unbeknownst of alternative approaches to parenting, which would have been modeled for her had she remained within the community herself.

It is less “the notion that racism is more evident in psychiatric practice than elsewhere in the mental health system” (Patel & Fatimilehin, 1999: 63). LeFrançois (2013: 115) makes clear that “benevolent” institutions “feed off each other” to produce and reproduce the rigid (ahistorical) formulations, those insidious boundaries that threshold (lineate, essentialize) “respectability,” by virtues, the “other.” Rather, “the very construct of mental health is in itself Eurocentric and systems based on such constructs have inherent biases” (Patel & Fatimilehin, 1999: 63), withal “respectability” and the “other.” “Peel back the nuances in description, the rules of sentence structure, to a structural motif of presence and identity to be found in formal logic” (Fabris 2011: 25). “The expression ‘losing one’s mind’ invokes loss or absence” (Fabris, 2011: 25); it is the negation of experiences, their invalidity. Follow people labeled accordingly and “they’re not thought able to put together a sentence. Or, if the sentence is put together correctly, grammatically correctly, it’s not going to make any sense” (Fabris, cf. Nabbali, 2013: 185).

Confronting similar “linguicism” (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013), Vietnamese filmmaker and literary critic Trinh T. Minh-ha (1987) has reflected on the (institutionalized) policing of “Third World” women in (feminist) scholarship. “She has been warned of the risk she incurs by letting words run off the rails, time and again, tempted to gear herself to the accepted norms” (Minh-ha, 1987: 5). To submit to “the standard” of language and syntax, “the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice” (Minh-ha, 1987: 6), or have it “dissed” (Fordham, 1999) as “improper” (Chrisomalis, 2015), as “intolerant” (Anzaldúa, cf. Kang, 2014: 177), perhaps as “ranting” (Neale, 2008)—in sanist ontology, “through the marking of a person as ‘not-there’” (Fabris, 2011: 26), to be spoken for. “Difference is not difference to some ears but awkwardness or incompleteness. Aphasia. Unable or unwilling?” Minh-ha (1987: 6) questions only in the rhetorical because she knows that it does not matter. Affixed to the story of any disorder, “transgressions” (here, unwillingness) are nail-to-coffin, “evidential,” “symptomatic.” For “the power to control language,” prophesied Sir Winston Churchill on receipt of an honorary doctorate at Harvard University in 1943, “offers far better prizes than taking away people’s provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the *mind*” (cf. Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013, n. pg., emphasis added).

4. Hypothesis Null

Emancipation is fundamentally unimaginable if staked over distinct junctures, lest the trop of “pure strands” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004: 76). We retain not only prioritized growth, a propensity to hierarchy, but also, the eugenical (“othering”) thinking from which derives, for instance, “race, ability, mental illness, as they were all products of a project delineating conceptualizations of undesirability based on perceived blood or genetic ranking and classification” (Joseph, 2015: 16). Correspondingly, Hill Collins (2000: 225) posits, we are obliged to address the confluence of experiences as mediated “in one historically created system” to resolute rights-based discourses at every level. The potential of intersectionality to become that “nodal point” (Lykke, 2011) or “basis for cooperation” (Maj, 2013), with the sweeping numbers and committed aggregates for meaningful change, has been well noted.

Writing from the United States on “pluralistic feminism” before intersectionality was named, Argentine philosopher María Lugones (1987) forged the metaphor of “‘world’-travelling” to (re)script those, much like herself, who are “outsiders to the mainstream,” with enormous value in the spirit of “loving” and “learning,” on mutuality and solidarity—on coexistence. To travel for Lugones (1987: 3) is the “necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the

mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to the other constructions of life where she is more or less ‘at home.’” It positions her in the “borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 2012), a space between differential powers, “among the most fertile grounds for understanding the structure of society in general,” while fostering subversive discourse and coalition-building more significantly (Harrison, 2008: 44). Hill Collins (2004) echoed the epistemic privilege of Lugones’ protagonist, drawing parallels with Black domestic workers who have historically moved from their families to that of the employer, before channeling it herself through the concept of “outsider-within.” She encouraged Black women scholars to embrace their unique standpoint as having access to decentered Black feminist thought from the ranks of the university, thereby, attending to the knowledge claims with *some* of the credentials (“merit”) not previously afforded.

“We might extrapolate, then, that positionality functions as a sufficient condition for reflexive research” (Rinaldi, 2013, para. 15). Reflexivity, in the Giddensian sense, concedes “the self” (so, agency) as recursive of social structures (Giddens, 1991; Rinaldi, 2013). Of course, this underpins the interpretivist movement in ethnography, most recognizably in the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) and the literatures aforementioned that advocate for the active incorporation of researcher(s) in analyses given the political power of “writing culture” (viz. their direct shaping of it). Coupled with the urgency marked by anticolonial and feminist observations, ethnographers took serious representation such to transform the methodological altogether. They advanced an explicitly “critical” genre of research, interested in the fork of social taxometrics (Anderson, 1989: 264). The overriding premise is that theory and action cannot be separated.

“At home” research, or “insider” status, becomes highly regarded by way of “lived familiarity” (Griffith, 1998: 361), chiefly in terms of access to information and the “trustworthiness” of the interpretations discerned from the information gathered—overall, what has been framed as the “authenticity” of the ethnographic account (Kusow, 2003). “A question that has nagged much feminist ethnography is: if we accept that there is no essential category called ‘Women,’ and if we accept that women are differently situated and so have different perspectives, can a female ethnographer truly understand the experience of the female ‘other’?” (Sylvain, 2005: 35). “At this particular juncture in gender studies, any scholar who neglects difference runs the risk of having her work viewed as theoretically misguided, politically irrelevant, or simply fantastical” (Davis, 2008: 68). But “when multiplication [of experiences] doesn’t equal quick addition” (Hancock, 2007), “how native is the native [researcher]?” (Narayan, cf. Young & Meneley, 2005: 7) “Why do political communities that are founded on liberation ideologies fall into this trap?” (Diamond, 2014: 200). “Isn’t it time the connection between women’s studies and the women’s movement is fully recognized?” (Lees, cf. Griffin, 2005: 1)

5. Alien(nation), or, the Problem is/in Identity

I remember the days—the every days—when I would cry over my hair. Going to a hairdresser was a nightmare, so my father would spend hours after his unrelenting, typically overtime workday straightening it for school in the morning. My mother, I think it is telling now in hindsight, would outright refuse. She would emphasize just how lucky I was to have big curly hair, how people spent a whole lot of money at salons trying to get big curly hair. But it did not matter what she said to me then, I would still pout about “what Dad *did* to me!”

Under the heat of the blow-dryer, and pain of that round brush, Dad would try to reassure me with tales from his 1969 immigration to France after the Algerian Revolution, of the bleaching and straightening that he did of his own mane as a way to fit in, as a way to blend in, as a way to disappear, as a way to “survive.” Never getting into the rife politics of place, nor ongoing struggles in Algeria from 132 years of French strangulation and its “civilizing” mission of those “people they considered barbarians,” at best, an uncompromising policy of “assimilation” (Ahluwalia, 2010: 25), I understood—as I understand—not to pass judgment on him for the steps that he chose to take at that time. So destructive were the colons, I would eventually learn, that the “native” (Arab, Berber, Muslim) population decreased from 3 million under “restrained occupation” in 1830 to 2.5 million a short decade later (Ahmed, n. d.). This is said to have marked the ascendancy of “total conquest” (Gallois, 2013) before being formalized by 1887 as French “subjects” through the *régime de l’indigénat*, a set of laws (legal violence) specifically “aimed at breaking down tribal structures” and organizing the appropriation of Algerian lands (Dunwoodie, 1998: 19). Above all else, Algeria assumed France’s foreign reputation and interest (Boariu, 2002: 174); “a great monument to the glory of our country,” wrote Alexis De Tocqueville in 1837, some years prior to holding office as French Minister of Foreign Affairs (cf. Ahluwalia, 2010: 24). France would push on with “the most venal forms of engagement” (Gallois, 2013: 12), creating a two-tier system of *pieds noirs* (settler-colonial) heteronomy and command (Balch, 1909: 544). Only a “very small percentage of urban French-educated [read: assimilated] indigenous males [would] effect the passage from subordinate status of *indigène/colonisé* to the supposed equality of citizenship offered by the republic to the *évolué*” (Dunwoodie, 2006: 69, emphasis in original).

As time passed, as I got older, people started to come up to me at all kinds of events, in all kinds of spaces, with all kinds of sweet words. I started to embrace my big curly hair—and more, and more, and more, and more. It was only when I moved to the west (incidentally, Left) coast of mainland Canada that it hit me: the love for my locks was an exoticized one, just another form of “othering.” In Vancouver, the attention came generally as question, oftentimes even paired with gestures: “*what* are you?” I could not sum such encounters. “I mean, where are you from?” “Toronto,” I would reply with confidence, whereas today, I accost a more troubled articulation of the shared territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Nations under Imperial Canada (Edgar Heap of Birds, 2006). “No, but where are you *really* from?” Stillness. “What’s your *race*?” Starring. “Can I touch *it*?” Bewilderment. “I... I... I just want to feel it!” as their hand may be in full swing toward my head. “The texture ... it’s ... well, is it real?” “But you put product in it, right?”

Stop. Fast-forward to my arrival at Kotoka International Airport, on a temporary (F-1) Visa as part of a research affiliation with the oldest university in Ghana. It would be during this dry season of Harmattan, when the northeast trade winds of my ancestors blow from the Sahara Desert and engulf the subtropical region in a particle haze (Gocking, 2005: 2), that I would awake nothing other than “obūroni” (Christaller, 1933: 54; Dolphyne, 1996: 17). Elsewhere is the (mis?)spelling “òbūròní” (Bosiwah, et al., 2015: 5), “obruni” (Pierre, 2013, p. 76), and “obroni” (Utlely, 2009, p. 74), all to connote a singular-noun for “White Man” in Twi (Asante), the most widely spoken dialect of the Akan linguistic group, itself making up a dominant 47.3% of the total country population (Bosiwah, et al., 2015) and used as a second language by many others (Dolphyne, 1996). This is especially the case in the most cosmopolitan part of Ghana, around the coastal capital of Accra, where I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork and where “Akanization” is said to have gone furthest, despite trepidations among the Ga-speaking people in particular, who have traditionally inhabited the region (Gocking, 2005: 10).

Afore 1874, perhaps it bears mentioning, Ghana comprised of many independent states, kingdoms, even empires, lying five degrees above the equator along the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, and stretching inland over rainforests to the savanna (Gocking, 2005: 2). These were merged into one territory “through a series of treaties of ‘friendship’ and forced annexations,” to be proclaimed the Gold Coast under British rule (Buah, 1998: 1). The 234,540 square kilometers of what is the present-day Republic took final shape after World War I, when approximately a third of the German colony of Togoland was ceded by mandate of the League of Nations (Buah, 1998: 1). The other two-thirds was transferred to France, delimiting each of Ghana’s three frontiers with previous French colonies: Togo to the east, Burkina Faso to the north, and Côte d’Ivoire to the west. However, a relatively small number of people in Ghana speak French, “even in the border areas. The few who do are young people who learned it in school” or migrant, maybe seasonal, workers from neighbourlands (Kropp Dakubu, 2015: 166).

Inherited from the colonial era, English has remained the official language since independence in 1957, although its distribution and development vary polemically by community and sub-communities (Kropp Dakubu, 2015). This has long wielded (uneven) political and economic pressures, in “extreme cases, of denationalization” (Teye, 2008: 49). A local Pidgin English, or pidgin-like speech, has evolved informally to connect interlocutors as necessary. “Multilingualism in south-eastern Ghana, especially around Accra and what could be called its hinterland” is a matter of course not exception (Kropp Dakubu, 1996: 8). Ga, Akan, and (Pidgin) English configure the cityscape on whole, with Hausa (closely related to Arabic) “often heard in Islamic enclaves known as Zongos” (Henaku, 2011: 4). Studies do not seem to agree on the number of active languages in Ghana, but most put it “between 40 and 50-odd, depending on your criteria for counting” (Kropp Dakubu, 1996: 3). Nine languages have government-sponsored status, divided over the ten administrative regions (Gocking, 2005: 1) and an official population of 24.66 million (Bosiwah, et al., 2015).

Now, I make no oblivion that my “whiteness” in Accra was entirely removed from (phenotypic) impressions of fair or lighter skin per se. I understood—as I understand—that *obūroní* was operating on (relative) privilege, one that I could not hide, from my orthodontic smile, to the clothes that I wore, to the English that I spoke, to the level of formal education that I had, to this opportunity of travel... in a plane... across borders... with a passport... computer... return-ticket... etcetera... etcetera... It would soon take on an aura of research. I would brave to broach the word. Discussions were surprisingly welcomed; pensive but encouraging, challenging while lively and illuminating. *Obūroní* came to defend as synonymous to “foreigner,” at least so it manifests in the public domain. Indeed, I have read it to mean:

someone from “aburokyire” ... “the land beyond the horizon” (borɔ: horizon; akyire: back/ behind). (Bosiwah, et al., 2015: 2)

I have also read the reverse, that *aburokyire* is compounded from *obūroní*:

Etymologically, the word can be said to consist of two forms, *oburoni* and *nkyi*. *Oburoni* is the Akan word for “white man” and *nkyi* refers to “homeland,” so *aburokyiri* is the white man’s homeland. As the Akan got exposed to the fact that there are other white people than the British [colonizers], the concept was extended to cover the continents of Europe, America, and Australia. (Fretheim & Amfo, 2008: 187, emphasis in original)

Obùroní has morphed to apply to the Black diaspora, as it has “to Ghanaians returning from abroad who are perceived to be affluent and are often derided as dressing, walking, talking, and acting White” (Pierre, 2013: 77). Significantly, it can be adorned to one’s child or family member of distinguished (celebrated) stature, likewise, shared between lovers as “me broni” (to be corrected from Pierre’s “mi bruni”) (Appah, email, August 8, 2015; Owusu, 2009; Pierre, 2013). “In terms of beauty, the whites are generally considered to be beautiful. So, even a dark beautiful lady is sometimes likened *òbùròní*” (Bosiwah, et al., 2015: 5, emphasis in original). “Ghanaians do not, as is sometimes claimed, intend any racist insinuations by this” (Utley, 2009: 74), but they are effectively servicing a bifurcated state (Pierre, 2013), the consolidation of colonial consciousness, so its tokenized relations—to “us,” from “them.”

“I learned about power not so much because I was studying it, but because I had it” (Sylvain, 2005: 32). With every sunrise, I turned a Fanonian page. “The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves,” I could hear the Martinique-born luminary repeat from his annals of guerilla insurgence (Fanon, 2004), having joined the Algerian nationalist movement much like my uncle at its outbreak in 1954, neither bearing witness tragically to formal decolonization eight years later, what turned out to be “one of the longest and bloodiest wars” in the post World War II period (Evans & Phillips, 2007: 54). My “whiteness” (read: privilege) in Ghana sunk intolerable. I could not swallow “the front of every queue; [to be] given immediate attention in any government office” (Sylvain, 2005: 32), or that time, when I accompanied a contact to a chockfull medical clinic and the registration clerk scurried almost on cue to the next room, returning with a lone chair to offer me. I tendered it kindly to another. Never mind making a stink of her “hospitality,” may well, a product of circumstance, an employer (read: institutional) expectancy. It resonated “under the yoke of inferiority complex ... a deep scar” that has not vanished, an endemic disease (Akordor, 2013: 7).

No wonder some [Ghanaians] (especially the ladies) bleach to become like the whites. (Bosiwah, et al., 2015: 5)

If it is not foreign, it is not good. Even the foreign comes with various classifications; it is best if it comes from Britain, Germany, France, or the US. (Akordor, 2013: 7)

The local production of a historical politico-economy, I could not escape (Pierre, 2013: 71). This is not to imply that I wanted to escape it, as parceled in the superficial by that return-ticket looming in my suitcase. I wanted to overthrow it, in the absolute.

Stop. Fast-forward again to a little over a year ago when I attended an international conference on intersectionality research, policy, and practice, with an opening keynote by Patricia Hill Collins no less. A colloquium on the closing afternoon canvassed the academic wellbeing of racialized students. The moderator was sure to introduce the four panelists, in addition to her self and a thought-filled digression as to why she chose to wear a sari that day. She closed by asking that “non-racialized” folk please leave the room after the presentations during what will be a changeover to roundtable discussions. I felt my stomach knot with apprehension. A flood of fury. A visceral reaction despite the otherwise provocative speeches made by the students and much else the moderator had contributed. The panel, in its entirety, was among the highlights of the conference and I would not want that to be missed.

As I got up to leave, the colleague sitting next to me screeched “Where are you going? You’re totally racialized *enough*, you should stay!” Meanwhile, she was getting up herself. “Where are YOU going? If I’m racialized ‘enough,’ you most certainly are too!” There is a long

history of systemic discrimination among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, recognized under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The *Indian Act* slates separate governance to “Status Indian,” so, too, the federal provisions that it confers. What has transpired is a byzantine web of imposed (settler-colonial) “rules” such to “superficially decide who is and who is not ‘authentically Indian’” (King, cf. Fitzgerald, 2015: B2).

Non-status Indians who identity themselves as Aboriginal, with ties to their ancestral homelands, cultures and histories, may find themselves excluded from land claims, treaties, and other similar agreements ... On the other hand, concepts of Indian status can cause those ineligible for Indian status to question their own claim to Indian identity, and bring up questions of legitimacy. (Crey & Hanson, 2009, n. pg.)

The problematic nature of “Indianness” in Canada is further imbued with intrapersonal conflicts that have been warped by extant poverty and the (intergenerational) affects of “assimilation.” “Any identification with Native people,” alerts Mi’kmaw sociologist Bonita Lawrence (2004: xii), juxtaposing her own “mixed-blood,” off-reserve, working-class past, might have stood “in the way of our survival as a family” at a time when the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* did not exist and residential schools were enforced. “It is out of these experiences of belonging and not belonging” (Lawrence, 2004: xiv) that my friend concerned her “entitlement” to stay behind, or risk upsetting the dynamics of the roundtable.

I honestly could not help but be struck, then like now, by the irony of the identity politics that we were trying to negotiate at a conference on intersectionality. Another woman nearby, a Black American Assistant Professor whom I was only introduced to afterwards, must have caught our hesitance because she sharply whispered, “Really, who’s non-racial?!” Of course, “at the genetic level, there is more variation between two individuals in the same population than between populations” (Garrod, 2014: 43), debunking any biological basis to “race” as a quotient of human categorization “by some notion of stock or collective heredity of traits” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992: 2). The tale around my hair underscores the fluidity, malleability, insatiability, therefore, failure of (phenotypic) markers toward boundary constructions, let alone in a single country (e.g. between Toronto and Vancouver) than across continent (e.g. from Canada to Ghana). It should also be clear how “one may classify themselves as a member of this or that [group] will differ extensively and rely on the particularities of the social system in which they [are in]” (Garrod, 2014: 45). Just as muddled, the reliance on “ethnicity” as more “politically correct” holds the parameters for its boundaries so heterogeneous that it nullifies its own aims, “ranging from the credentials of birth to being born in the right place, conforming to cultural or other symbolic practices, language, and very centrally behaving in sexually appropriate ways” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992: 4). “The recent trend in the forensic literature has been to use the term ‘ancestry’ instead of ‘race,’ with no change in the underlying concept, so that determining continental origin has been substituted for color terminology” (Albanese & Saunders, 2006: 282). The confusion remaining, how ancestral do we get? How many layers do we add? “How do we classify mulattos? If one drop of black blood is enough to become black, why not the reverse?” (Swynghedauw, 2003: 439).

Regrettably, my friend was not convinced. But I was encouraged that another woman, seemingly “non-racial,” joined the roundtable. She did, however, “status” herself almost as a preface, benchmark, or “quality check,” to her first contribution. In turn, I voiced my discomfort with the moderator’s request and pondered who else may not have been as brave.

It is not that I wish to trivialize the density of “race” in Canadian society, as elsewhere, when racially motivated police brutalities pervade our news (Comack, 2012; Mack, 2014; Wortley, 2006), against the concentration of marginalized communities (and their notoriously impoverished living conditions) a couple of blocks from my doorstep in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (Culhane, 2009). “Canada’s poorest postal code,” this inner-city neighborhood is pointedly strung five square-kilometers between Chinatown and Oppenheimer Park (Culhane, 2009: 160), what was Japantown before the Federal Government had decreed the removal of all people of Japanese descent residing within 160 kilometers from the Pacific Coast following the attack on Pearl Harbor (Kinoshita, 2014). They were to be interned, or, “chosed” deportation (Kinoshita, 2014). Some 22,000 individuals in total, over half of whom had been born in Canada (my partner’s father inclusive), were forcibly dispossessed of their properties so as to fund the camps themselves, which lasted four years longer than World War II and were silenced until 1988 when a written acknowledgement was finally issued by then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney along with “token compensation for the wrongs done,” never to be undone (Kinoshita, 2014: 137). But “if as [American biologist Joseph L.] Graves notes, ‘a crucial part of the battle against the legacies of the social construction of race is to get across the message that biological races do not exist and that these types of correlations are spurious,’” then it does answer troubling for scholars who understand this datum to employ “race” at all (cf. Garrod, 2014: 43). We should be especially vigilant where the overarching drive is to forum (intersectional) knowledge *production* and resistance. “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2007: 112).

6. Under the Big Tent

I think to have understood—so I want to understand—that the moderator was calling for a safe-space to examine issues of privilege, much in the way that *obūroní* conceived of privilege in Ghana. Still, “power inheres in the ability to name and what we call ourselves has implications for political practice” (Epstein, 1992: 241). “Science” has played a historical role in this sorting and ordering of “*like with like*” (Boyle, 1999: 75, emphasis added), indeed classification schemes, such “to legitimize and explain existing social inequality between ‘races’” (Castagna & Sefa Dei, cf. Garrod, 2014: 44).

One justification for the enslavement of African peoples was viewing Africans as “sub-human” species, *like* cattle. They supposedly did not have the “same” capacities for language, communication and culture as their European oppressors. (Castagna & Sefa Dei, cf. Garrod, 2014: 44, emphasis added)

In a similar vein:

psychiatric [labeling] gains its professional and social [capital] by presenting itself as equivalent to medical diagnosis. This is achieved, not least, by using the language of medicine to talk about behaviour and psychological experience [as readily identifiable, thus, meaningful or scientific patterns of phenomena]. (Boyle, 1999: 76)

Taken-for-granted, the practice of diagnosis can lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the “sick role,” theorized by American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1951), also well associated with the school of interactionism (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963; Scheff, 1984). To label, as with any function of language (symbols and words), is to create, impart, or attribute images and concepts through which derives social impressions and scaffolds relations. Psychiatric “diagnostics,” *like* racial “hierarchies,” work to obscure the highly heterogeneous criteria

(otherwise, “symptoms”) for grouping. Moreover, they may “spoil” (stigmatize or devalue) the identity of an individual, who must then “confront and be affronted” by the subsequent reactions of others (Goffman, 1963: 137).

That’s what the really nasty psychiatric words are all about: they are justificatory rhetoric, labelling [sic] a package “garbage,” it means “take it away!” “Get out of my sight!” etc. That’s what the word “Jew” meant in Nazi Germany: it did not mean a person with a certain kind of religious beliefs ... [I am afraid that] psychiatric diagnostic terms mean exactly the same thing; they mean “human garbage,” “take him away,” “get him out of my sight!” (Szasz, 1974: 460)

“There is no system of racism or ableism or mentalism that is ever distinct or separated from this history” (Joseph, 2015: 16), hellbent on achieving some “normate” or whatever has come to fashion the quintessential human being within that setting (Garland-Thomson, 1997: 8), including the (unwritten) standards by which we are expected to live (Cresswell, 2005: 1673). “Mental health, criminal justice, and immigration systems have also been historically bound to each other” (Joseph, 2015: 16). Canadian criminologist Anna Pratt (2005: 1) has framed detention and deportation as “the two most extreme and bodily sanctions” of imperial enterprises such as Canada, where the death penalty has been abolished since 1976. By enforcing boundaries and borders, “these systems, the professionals that practice within them, and the knowledge regimes that form their discursive fields” rely on “identification,” regardless of agreement or consent, to deny or cast out the “undeserving” or “undesirable” (Joseph, 2015: 17).

“The community of people who take issue with psychiatry” continue to fight pitched battles over the right to *self*-identification (Burstow, 2013: 89). They have carefully crafted a lexicon of “refusal terms,” outlined by radical feminist therapist Bonnie Burstow (2013: 84), to actively subvert its imposing language, so the imagery and symbolism that is embodied or conjured up (Reaume, 2002). There remains great tension within this movement:

Some reject psychiatry completely. Some see it as legitimate. Some allow allies to join. Some reject non-survivors. (Burstow, 2005: 247)

A (nearly) annual festivity was launched in Toronto in 1993 by members of the West End Psychiatric Survivors as a way of coalescing “the left and the right and the people without a clue, and also address[ing] the incredible shame and hesitation that people feel because ... of psychic degradation” (Anonymous 2, interview, June 23, 2008). Over 100 people gathered at the Parkdale Library that September afternoon and marched to the far west wall of what was then the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, and today, the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (Reaume, 2008). At the time, it was unknown that the wall had been built on unpaid “patient” labour, first in 1860 and reconstructed in 1888-89 (Reaume, 2006). The rally was followed by a vigil to honour all whom perished on these grounds, enclosed by such institutional barriers, the very fruits of *our* loins. The irony is alarming—ongoing. The event concluded with entertainment, refreshments, frolicking, and fun. It “was such a success,” gaining media attention and pursuance (Fabris, interview, July 4, 2008).

From a day of activities, “Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day” expanded to a full week’s worth of theatre, music, film screenings, poetry readings, processions, memorials, and seminars (Reaume, 2008). Parades resumed in 1998 and were moved from early Fall to July, usually on or around July 14, to align itself with Bastille Day for historical purposes (Nabbali, 2010; Reaume, 2008). Reflecting the debates over nomenclature and similar programs surfacing the

globe, the Toronto celebration became known as “Instance of Resistance” in 2000, “Psyche Survivor Pride Week” in 2001, and since 2002, “Mad Pride” (Reaume, 2008).

Indeed, I would argue that [madness] is a useful term for critics to retain insofar as it problematizes the pathologizing implications of phrases such as “mental illness.” In particular, the term allows cultural critics to shift their critical focus from marginalized individuals to questions of institutional and social madness. (Harper, 2005: 463)

It’s saying, “Come, join us, make a statement! You don’t have to have seen a psychiatrist to be here. You don’t need to be on Zyprexa or Prozac. Perhaps, as a result of wealth or some semblance of togetherness or whatever else it is shrinks stay away from, you’ve managed to elude the system. Whatever it is, whatever your story, if you see the oppression, if you are or could be included in that oppressions, celebrate Mad Pride!” (Anonymous 1, cf. Nabbali, 2010: 27)

Effectively, even affectionately, Mad Pride is “inviting people into the tent who weren’t invited before” (Reville, interview, June 19, 2008). It “doesn’t try to separate between those who agree with some aspects of psychiatry and those who don’t” (Fabris, interview, July 4, 2008). Rather, it recognizes that “people aren’t necessarily encountering psychiatry in the same way” (Bach, interview, June 30, 2008). But “*everyone* is in jeopardy” when we pathologize difference (Burstow, 2013: 89, emphasis in original). As such, we compromise the liberties of self-expression, thus, of being—non-violently, non-aggressively, with pride, dignity, and respect.

“Being psychiatrized, or being perceived as mentally ill, has consequences in the world we inhabit,” both material and nonmaterial, which often vary by context and access to privilege, love, and supports (Diamond, 2013: 73). Mad Pride speaks up against “psychiatry as a form of oppression, as White Supremacy and patriarchy” (Anonymous 2, interview, June 23, 2008). It rejects marginalization and longstanding mores, “pointedly exposing the pernicious underbelly of what is passing as innocent” (Burstow, 2013: 84).

Are some of us, any of us, just machines that need to be re-tooled for the perfect future? I mean, that’s [what we seem] to be saying, “Eugenics is just fine! Correcting people’s lives by force is just fine! ... We’re not only going to restrict you, police you, we’re going to go fucking medical on your ass!” (Fabris, interview, July 4, 2008)

Anti-oppression movements may have lessened the medical pathology based on racialization or gender. However, the experience of being psychiatrized continues to be pathologised as a condition requiring a cure. (Overboe, cf. Wolframe, 2012, para. 1)

Truly a commingling of solidarity, Mad Pride not only brings people together from different social and political viewpoints, “it also give[s] people an opportunity to develop a sense of themselves” through the organizings, as well as the provisions, of a safe/supportive environment to explore, engage, and embrace the expanse of humanity (Anonymous 2, interview, June 23, 2008).

I think reaching into the other communities, especially the “normal” community, the non-psychiatric survivor community, is really important ... [T]hose links can kind of help us out of some gulags that they put us in” (Fabris, interview, July 4, 2008)

Conclusion: The Prolegomena to Debate

Research, as a source of knowledge production and representation, is intertwined with performances of power (Ebron, 2002). “The ethnography of Africa [reveals] not that the human world is ruled by powerful objects, but that, all of the world, even the natural, bears traces of human agency” (Fergusson, 2007: 74). Throughout this paper, I have followed on the scholarship of critical theorists before me, leaving them to converse almost directly between each other, in order to synthesize against my own experiences that “nothing fits; *nothing is fixed*” (LeFrançois, 2013: 110, emphasis added). We learn, too, from Kahnawake Mohawk educator Taiaiake Alfred and the histories of “assimilation” (read: eugenics), including that of psychiatry, how “imperialism is inherently a process of homogenization, culturally and politically” (cf. Sium & Ritskes, 2013: II). The point being, quite right, that “few aspects of my identity, as I understand them, have simple words to make them speakable,” neither within an intersectional paradigm, nor would I want them to (LeFrançois, 2013: 110).

In this current of digitism, where “papers” trail us like never before, medias interconnect, context’s forgotten, time’s ignored, when a single sound-bite may run wild, reconfiguring even the hardest-to-tell stories into 140 digestible characters, self-disclosures write complicity with identity politics (Nabbali, 2015: 4). Disability circles have discussed it as painful and invasive (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Erevelles, 2011; Rinaldi, 2013; Samuels, 2003), as fractious (Clark, 2007), misleading (LeFrançois, 2013), or potentially threatening (Titchkosky, 2007). Through gender studies, we concert it to be a precarious moment of “coming out” (Abramovich, 2014). We also hear, in testimonies of torture, or trauma of any kind, a re-victimization of graphic, complicated, and emotionally raw experiences (Macías, 2016). Inseparable from violence, I have mapped positionality and reflexivity, and their platter of “ready to wear” (or -chew) tags (Robertson, 2002: 788), as historically couched in a normative standard, the eugenical thinking at cross with anti-essentialist stances (LeFrançois, 2013; Rinaldi, 2013).

My reflections have emerged from my own shifting, ambiguous, or contradictory encounters with identity. They mark a moment in the research process that demands for decisions about how to represent what we are studying, and why. There are no short risks for research participation (Costa et al., 2012; Richer, 1988; Tomaselli, 2003). Hence, the academy has developed what it maintains to be a series of protocols to pin down or constitute (ethical) roles and responsibilities in field sites and relations. Attention (and critique) has focused on informed consent (Sylvain, 2005), confidentiality (Scheper-Hughes, 2001), reciprocity or competing interests (Frank, 2000; Young & Meneley, 2005), as well as the politics of language (Fabris, 2011; Minh-ha, 1987), textualization (Geertz, 1973; Marcus & Fischer, 1986), grant allocation (Lindow, 2001), and peer reviews (Bocking, 2005). But, of course, the ethnographer “is as much acted upon as actor” (Lambek, 2005: 233). Our selves hold their own vulnerability to unethical dispositions, additionally so where (translocal) unfamiliarities can cultivate isolation, distance, even danger. Positionality and reflexivity are inevitable slippages in research, much in the way that they have come through this paper. They prompt a place in space and elicit relationships and responses organically (not, a priori). “Empathy is not identity” (Armbruster, 2008: 13), but neither is it a guarantee “at home” (Kusow, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, giving an account is seldom ours alone. All interview participants quoted here were asked, first upon recording, and again, before dissemination of the results,

whether to adopt a pseudonym to disguise the extent of published output as possible.¹ With the exception of Anonymous 1, they chose to use their real names as another avenue for “talking back” (Morrison, 2003). It is relevant to note that Anonymous 2 approached me in the afterwards with qualms explicitly over the potential impact to loved ones.

Psychiatric survivor and educator PhebeAnn Wolframe (2012) has argued for discussions of sanism in existing curricula across disciplines. Indigenous, gender, queer, and ability studies have entered the classroom over the decades, so, too, throughout the university, gaining access to funding resources and scholarly journals, which can influence other works and academics (Lindow, 2001: 144), indeed, disseminate alternative voices more widespread, toward a polity attune—if not, actively resisting—the perpetuation of “scientific” forms of oppression that might not have been experienced first-hand (Wolframe, 2012). Careful not to dismiss the increasingly hostile climate for the arts and humanities, Wolframe (2012) advances her call to action as part of the “project of inclusivity,” echoing the sentiments of *Mad Pride* as I have come to appreciate them, in turn, to be conceived as a counter-project to eugenics. Methodologically, her framework has evolved from standpoint and intersectionality theories, whereas I hope to have added to the alarms of having to provide a (meta)narrative to pedagogical praxes altogether. An address that, I regret, has achieved only one of two folds: towards democratization, not necessarily decolonization by way of access.

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¹ The research from which these exchanges are drawn was conducted during my tenure as a graduate student in Critical Disability Studies under the remarkable tutelage of Geoffrey Reaume at York University, Toronto, Canada. No incentives were offered to encourage research participation, besides the provision of a copy of the final manuscript (Nabbali, 2008, 2009). All participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the project at any time, up to the final stages of data analysis, for which a specific date was provided. The informed consent was photocopied for their personal records.

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